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# enrichment

Enriching and equipping Spirit-filled ministers

Fall 2008

## Proclaiming

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a Christian  
Worldview** 26

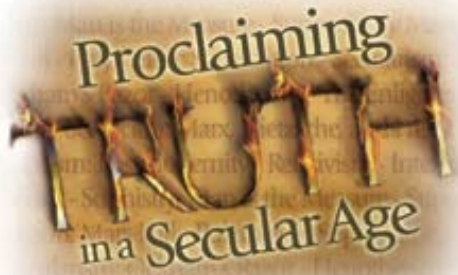
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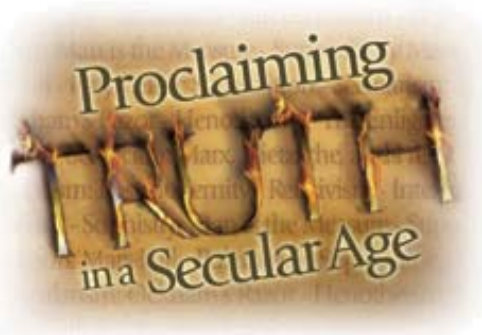


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Challenges to happy, loving marriage and family relationships are not just for the people

who sit in the pew. They also affect the lives of those who stand behind the pulpit. If your ministry marriage is broken or semi-broken, you are in great company. Some of the most successful ministers in North America have terrible marriages. Instead of model marriages reflecting well on Christ, ministry marriages are fighting for survival. Families pictured inside front covers of church directories or displayed as staff in brochures appear happy and healthy. Off of the brochure and back in the bedroom this is seldom reality. Clergy families are not always as they appear. They are in trouble.

This issue of *Enrichment* journal is filled with insightful and compelling articles and interviews that communicate practical ways to fireproof your marriage and family relationships. Read stirring articles by Henry Cloud, Don and Jodi Detrick, H.B. London, Gary Oliver, Dennis Rainey, Dale Wolery, George O. Wood, and others.

## enrichment

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### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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### ADVERTISING/PROMOTIONS COORDINATOR

Steve Lopez

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Connie Cross

### GRAPHICS/DESIGN

Design Services

### PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE EXECUTIVE PRESBYTERY

George O. Wood (general superintendent), C. Dan Betzer, L. John Bueno, Warren D. Bullock, Douglas E. Clay, Richard L. Dresselhaus, Douglas E. Fulenwider, L. Alton Garrison, J. Don George, Nam Soo Kim, John E. Maracle, Jesse Miranda, Jr., John M. Palmer, H. Robert Rhoden, Zollie L. Smith, Jr., Clarence St. John

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## Proclaiming Truth

### Defining Truth

**The beliefs of our current culture affect how we share the gospel.** In the past much of the American culture was rooted in Judeo-Christian values. These values were the hooks on which people could more easily hang the principles of God's Word. Today, for the most part, these hooks are gone, and we have few societal moorings with which to initially connect a person to our message.

The beliefs that have removed these valuable hooks include: relativism, compartmentalization, pragmatism, and tolerance.

**Relativism** states that no absolutes transcend culture and time. Relativists believe truth changes over time. Truth is not defined by an infallible God, but by a person, culture, and community.

**Compartmentalization** results when everyone decides on his own what is right and wrong. People establish their own set of ethics for each compartment of their lives. This facilitates living with blatant contradictions between one's persona and one's private life.

**Pragmatism** teaches that truth is whatever works for you. Adherents no longer base truth on the timeless principles of God's Word, but on what feels right at the time.

**Tolerance** is the one value embraced by a worldview that rejects absolute truth. Everyone's beliefs, values, lifestyle, and perception of truth claims are equal. There is no hierarchy of truth. Your beliefs and my beliefs are equal; all truth is relative.

Christianity stakes a claim to absolute truth — from the inerrancy of Scripture to Jesus being the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Those outside the Kingdom, however, view the Great Commission as intolerant because it implies that another person's beliefs are inferior to ours.<sup>1</sup>

### The Cheese Keeps Moving

In the book, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, by Spencer Johnson, one of the mice observes, "Change happens. They keep moving the cheese."<sup>2</sup> This is the feeling pastors may have when they are attempting to get a handle on current culture and philosophy.

### Understanding Truth

Some truth is revealed rather than attained. Secular humanism elevates the human mind at the expense of divine revelation. Much of spiritual truth is revealed to the inner man when Christ becomes Savior and Lord.

### Proclaiming Truth

It is one thing to preach the Word of God to people who already value biblical truth. Today, however, pastors and their congregations meet people who have little or no knowledge of biblical truth and values. Their initial exposure to the gospel is countercultural to their beliefs and lifestyle. In fact, the gospel is usually offensive to them. Our leverage against their defensive mind and sinful behavior is the presence and power of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God draws people to the truth, convicts them of their sin, and reveals Jesus as the Answer to their helplessness and hopelessness. We are to proclaim the Word, but only the Spirit of God can reveal it to a hardened heart and defiant mind.

### Living the Truth

Truth for the follower of Christ is more than an intellectual assent; it is a lifestyle. Our passion for the person and presence of Jesus compels us to live in the truth. Before people will listen to our message, they expect to see:

### Transparency

We are to live so people can see who we really are. What they see must be what they get. But even more than seeing *into* us, they must also see *through* us, and see Christ living in us.

### Authenticity

"Walking the walk and talking the talk" is essential to being an effective leader. Even when someone does not initially agree with your perception of truth, he will observe whether or not you live what you proclaim.

The "men of Issachar ... understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). God is on your side. He is present to help you discern your environment, reaffirm your calling, and empower you with His Holy Spirit.

This issue of *Enrichment* presents one of our most philosophical and intellectual discussions. With the help of outstanding authors, we hope to help you better understand your culture and context and become even more effective in proclaiming the truth of God's Word. 🌟

### NOTES

1. Rob Cowles, "Understanding the Times." *Vital Ministry Magazine*, May/June 1999, 60–62.
2. Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1998).



**GARY R. ALLEN, D.Min.,** is executive editor of *Enrichment* journal and director of the Ministerial Enrichment Office, Springfield, Missouri.



THE CULTURE CHRONICLES

Oprah's GURU



David Bates

With 49 million fans tuning in to her talk show every week, Oprah Winfrey has cultivated an enthusiastic audience for her latest venture: promoting Eckhart Tolle and his book, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. Calling it "one of the most important books of our time," Oprah used it to kick off a free 10-week online seminar with Tolle, a Canadian spiritual teacher and New Age writer. He advocates global pursuit of a "spiritual awakening" that he believes is the "next step in human evolution."

Oprah's partnership with Tolle, along with her promotion of televangelist Marianne Williamson's *Course in Miracles* and Rhonda Byrne's mega best seller *The Secret*, have only intensified her wide-reaching spiritual influence. ☺



The Shack

A self-published novel entitled *The Shack*, by William P. Young, is stirring

up controversy in evangelical circles. More than 500,000 copies have sold in just a year. The story, which the author calls a *parable*, is about a man who meets the three persons of the Trinity in a rural shack for a long theological conversation. God the Father takes the form of a black woman, the Holy Spirit is an Asian woman, and Jesus is a Middle-Eastern man.

Fans call it *profound, life changing, and brilliant*. Critics cite its deconstructionist bent

and some questionable theology.

Bloggers have widely posted a YouTube clip of popular pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church, Seattle, Washington, denouncing *The Shack*. He believes the book contains idolatry, goddess worship, and modalism.

Not to be deterred, mainstream publishers and Hollywood film studios are said to be knocking on *The Shack's* door. ☺



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YOUNG PASTOR

Find Your Jethro

Moses had Jethro, Paul had Barnabas, and Timothy had Paul.

Some young men chafe at the idea of hearing advice from the older generation. They view these people as relics and as out of step with the dynamic and organic ministry landscape.

But every young pastor would benefit from having a relationship with an older minister. This seems to fit with the Bible's model of leadership passed down through the generations.

Moses was wise to heed Jethro's counsel and alter the leadership structure in Israel. Paul stuck to Barnabas his first years as a Christian and forged bonds with church leaders who had been skeptical of his conversion. Later, after Paul endured his share of ministry failures and victories, he mentored a young pastor named Timothy.

When I began my ministry at Gages Lake Bible Church, God brought a wise, older pastor, who had decades of experience leading churches, into my life. He had a gentle wisdom and encouraging spirit that helped me navigate through the unknown territory of leadership.

Joshua Harris, one of my favorite authors and preachers, says this about his relationship with C.J. Mahaney, "It was God's grace that led me to realize as a young man that I needed a mentor to advise and train me in ministry. And it was God's grace that prepared a godly older man to be that mentor."

Young pastors need to prayerfully seek a mentor who can help shape their understanding of people and ministry, and their approach to the Word. I also encourage older men to ask the Lord to give them opportunity to train a young person for ministry — someone in whom to invest their wisdom gained from a lifetime in the Lord's service.

Such cross-generational relationships only help us serve the body of Christ and ensure continuity of servant leadership for God's people in the years to come. ☺

DANIEL DARLING is author of *Teen People of the Bible: Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith and Tragic Failure*. Visit <http://www.danieldarling.com>.



**Ministers are in a glass bowl.** The many eyes can cause them to feel that others are examining every aspect of their family life, whether their spouse works or stays at home. It seems that many employed parents appease their guilt from not spending time with their children by indulging them. Rather than giving presence, they give presents. Today, about two-thirds of American homes have dual breadwinners.

Many parents, however, are making a conscious commitment to devote their limited at-home hours to their children — teaching, playing, and nurturing. In fact, according to a new book, *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life*, the trend is less housework in lieu of more time with the children. The book reports that today's men are becoming more involved in sharing housework and parenting than men did generations ago.

At <http://www.thebostonchannel.com>, a 2007 survey of 685 parents revealed that 62 percent claim they spend more time with their children than their parents spent with them years ago. If these statistics are correct, housework may be suffering but children are not, because working parents — married and single — are spending more time with their children. 🌐

**BRENDA NIXON**, Mt. Vernon, Ohio

## MINISTRY ON THE HOMEFRONT

# God Bless Our Mortgaged Home

## FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

# The Creation of an Alphabet To Produce a Bible

**Ulfilas, a fourth-century bishop**, was determined that northern tribes, known as Goths, would have a Bible in their own language. His main obstacle? Gothic existed only as a spoken language. Undeterred, he created a Gothic alphabet of 27 letters that he borrowed from Greek and Latin. The task of translating and teaching the Goths to read took him more than 30 years. Eventually Ulfilas completed the entire Old and New Testaments. He excluded 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, which, according to tradition, he feared were too warlike for the flammable Goth temperament. Although the Gothic language disappeared by the seventh century along with Ulfilas' Bible translation, his work is significant because Ulfilas' translation provided a key link between the ancient and medieval world.

## Best-selling Book For decades, the Bible has consistently been the world's



**best-selling book.**

Between 1815 and

2002, for example, an estimated 6 billion Bibles were printed. Best-selling versions are the New International Version and the New King James, both of which sell millions each year. Other popular versions are the New Revised Standard Version, King James Version, and the New Living Translation.

**VICTOR PARACHIN**, Tulsa, Oklahoma

## Don't ever talk to me about attendance numbers again!

My wife's exasperation over my mood swings caused by low Sunday morning attendance forced me to seek a more biblical definition of ministry success.

I discovered that **God's priority for a minister is to pursue intimacy with Him.** Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33, NKJV). This confirms that one of a minister's top priorities is to know God's will and display His character. True ministry success rests on this foundation. Then I found that **God defines success as faithfulness, and God rewards faithfulness.** All who are consistently obedient God sees as equally successful, whether they serve in obscurity or minister on the world's stage. God rewards

obedience, not prominence.

I also realized that **a minister's greatest success may not come through his own efforts, but may come through the ministry of those whom he empowers.** Barnabas stands as a shining example.

## UP-WORDS

# SUCCESS in Ministry



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Barnabas sought out Paul and sponsored his ministry. Over time, Barnabas slipped into relative obscurity, while Paul became the greatest missionary-evangelist the Christian world has ever known. Like Barnabas, current-day mentors seek to equip others because they see them as supplementation, not competition. Perhaps the greatest potential for increasing ministry success is to enable the ministry of others.

With these three principles as my new measure of success, I can remain confident and at peace. I no longer have my moods controlled by the ups and downs of Sunday morning attendance. 🌐

**JACK AIKEN**, Eagle River, Alaska

### NOTE

- Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



THE HIM BEHIND THE HYMN

# Here He Is To Worship

When Tim Hughes was turning 16, he had more on his mind than just getting his driver's license. This pastor's kid in Birmingham, England, had a passion for writing poetry and melodies for expressing worship to the Lord in his personal devotions. Gradually his confidence in his composing grew and at 19, he was sharing some of his own choruses while leading his dad's congregation in worship.

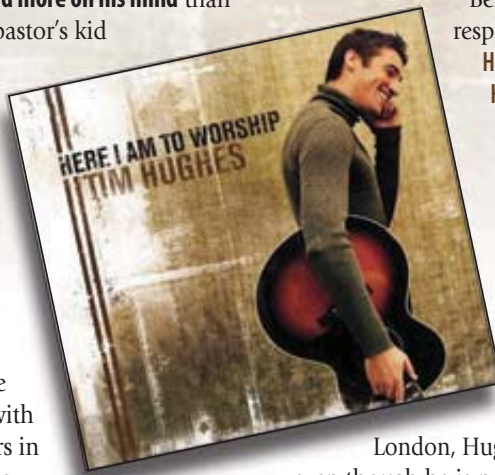
When Hughes was 21, he was a student at Sheffield University. While studying and maintaining his walk with the Lord, he purposefully spent hours in his dorm room in personal devotions.

"As I meditated on Philippians 2 where the apostle Paul talks about imitating Christ's humility, I was struck by all that Jesus gave up to walk on the earth and to die on a cross. I was overwhelmed by the glorious victory He achieved for us and the fact He has now risen and ascended."

Thinking over the truths of Christ's incarnation, Hughes opened his heart in worship, and wrote:

GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

Light of the world,  
You stepped down into darkness,  
Opened my eyes, let me see  
Beauty that made this heart adore You,  
Hope of a life spent with You.



Before long, he penned a refrain, a personal response that seemed to flow.

Here I am to worship,  
Here I am to bow down,  
Here I am to say that You're my God.  
You're altogether lovely,  
Altogether worthy,  
Altogether wonderful to me.

*Here I Am To Worship* caught on. Since then, Hughes has also written *Beautiful One* and *Consuming Fire*. He has found his own voice in the praise and worship community. Serving as worship leader at Holy Trinity in Brompton, near

London, Hughes is considered a veteran worship leader, even though he is not yet 30 years old.

"I've discovered, as a songwriter, that I'm constantly journaling and jotting down thoughts and ideas," Hughes says. "It might be from a talk or a key phrase that a theme arises. It might be from a book, a film, a conversation, or through reading the Bible that lyrics and ideas come to mind. I write down different thoughts and melodies and then find a way of pulling them together."

With that perspective, Hughes is here to worship and write worship songs for the foreseeable future. 🎵



Photos.com

NOTES & NUGGETS

## Invest Time in People

**M**inistry is about people and touching lives. Pastors need to invest in people in little ways.

Greet people as they leave church or meetings. Try to recall a special need or connection to each person. Comment on how people look or on work they have done. Smile and show enthusiasm when you greet each person. Connect to current events and needs in their lives. Ask if they have a special prayer request. When the few remaining people begin to leave, take time to pray with someone.

Send notes to families or team members. Write a personal note of encouragement to

someone each week.

Express appreciation to workers. Be kind to your staff. Take a few minutes to ask about their day and their life. Thank them for giving their best efforts.

Invest in your family. Be in the moment with your loved ones. Rejoice over accomplishments and pray over needs. On a busy day, take a few minutes to call home and ask how things are going. Relax, play, and spend time with them.

Smile as you answer the phone because smiles come through in your greeting.

Listen with your heart and your eyes as people speak. 🎧

KAREN H. WHITING, author and speaker



## WHAT IN THE WORLD

# Let's Hear It For HUGS

**A new law in Illinois prevents**

**teachers from hugging students.**

It even keeps classmates from offering an empathetic hug to each other. My reaction? One word: *Pathetic*. The reason is that hugging is considered an expression of affection and such expressions are too risky in public places. Can you believe it?

While hugs can be inappropriate at times, in the language of love they are a necessary expression that conveys friendship.

*A hug can be the difference between failure and success.*

*A hug can signal just hang on when you can't stand the stress.*

*A hug can warm a grieving heart when sorrow chills the bone.*

*A hug can calm a frightened child or widows all alone.*

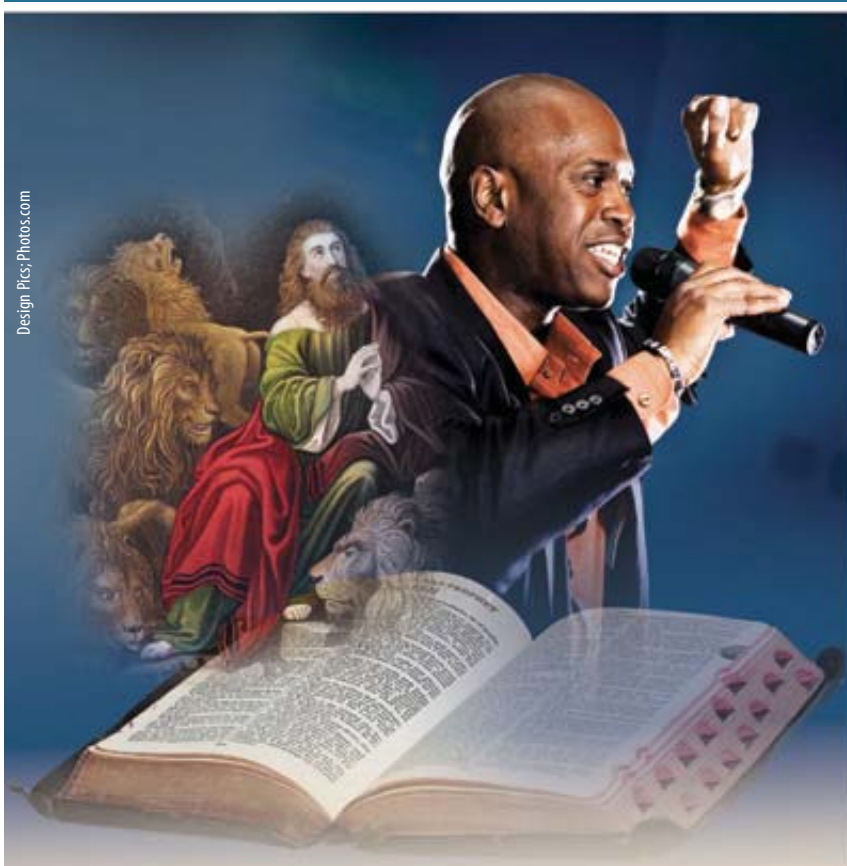
*A hug can mean affection, but mostly just conveys*

*compassion, empathy, concern, and friendship on gray days.*

Can you hear me singing (with apologies to Nancy Sinatra)?

"These arms were made for hugging,  
But that's not what they'll do,  
Not if you live in Illinois,  
To hug at school they'll sue."

**GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS**, Mercer Island, Washington



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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

# Stories Are More Than Entertainment

The term *postmodern* symbolizes a void left by the demise of a previous epoch. However one describes the results of this significant shift, one obvious result is a radically different cultural paradigm. For preachers, this means facing a problem — their congregations' increased biblical illiteracy. The recovery of storytelling as part of preaching is one way to capture the congregation's attention because the language of *story* creates the reality of authentic life.

But preachers must do more than creatively retell Bible stories. In a world of broken people with their own accounts of pain and suffering, stories often become a point of identification that turns hearers inward.

The preacher must remember that personal experience is not self-interpreting. The primary task of the preacher using biblical story is not entertainment, but to offer meaning that has eternal dimensions. Both Old and New Testament stories focus on people in covenant with God. These stories speak powerfully to a postmodern world characterized by individualism, yet seeking communal values and communal meaning. John Stott says the task of preaching is to provide a bridge of meaning between the biblical story and contemporary experience. Biblical stories can be a powerful vehicle in this difficult challenge.

**BYRON D. KLAUS, D.Min.**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri



istockphoto

**FROM BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS**

# To Tell the Truth

Millennial churchgoers want to be heard. Are boomer pastors listening?

**“Actions speak louder than words”**


is a proverb that finds great resonance in the interactions between teenagers and adults. Teens are less concerned with what adults know than with how they care for them. This is, in part, because of the helicopter-parenting phenomenon. If, in fact, millennials (Gen Y) are the most coddled generation in modern history, their worldviews are largely egocentric. Thus, they place high value on their ideas and opinions.

Entrepreneurial success largely shapes a boomer pastor’s worldview. A boomer pastor believes one must earn the right to speak. Ideas and opinions compete for primacy in a quasi-Darwinian, survival-of-the-fittest

struggle. Achievement of position or influence by virtue of one’s success means that the leader’s opinion matters most.

It does not require an intellectual leap to understand how conflict might arise when you mix these generations (among others) in a church. Until church leaders demonstrate how much they care, they will never be effective in speaking the truth in love to their millennial parishioners. Once again, they will need to earn the right to speak. Only this time it will require them to listen.

Brandon Scott, a millennial guest columnist for the *Kansas City*

*Star*, says, “Getting young people to attend church isn’t about trying to be the coolest church in town. It’s about listening to our ideas, letting us be involved in all aspects of the church and simply taking us seriously as intelligent human beings.” 

**NOTE**

1. <http://www.kansascity.com, 10/12/07>.



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**LEADERLIFE**

## Preaching “Without”

**T**he secularization of our society has not occurred overnight. Theologians have expressed deep concern over this phenomenon and its impact on biblical preaching in various epochs of American history. Conflicts surrounding our independence as a nation, struggle with slavery, and growth as an industrial nation have all confronted preaching with huge challenges. In the mid-20th century, theologian H. Richard Niebuhr commented that the impact of secular society on the American pulpit had resulted in preaching typified by “a

God without wrath that brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a Cross.”

Strategies of communication in today’s secular society need serious attention. However, regardless of the era we may be living in, preaching has minimal impact unless it becomes embodied in the life of a congregation. The truth of what is preached is given visibility and validation by a congregation whose participants have had their lives transformed by the truth of the gospel.

What we preach and how we preach have always been important pieces of communicating the gospel. We live in an era where these crucial dimensions need to again flesh out the observation made by Leslie Newbiggin when he said, “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic (interpreting agent) of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” 

**BYRON D. KLAUS, D.Min.**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

**NOTE**

1. As quoted by Charles Van Engen in *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991).

**RANDY C. WALLS, D.Min.**, director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri



UTHTRAX

# Cushy FAITH



— the Cross. So if you think you're signing up for a cushy faith and get the nailed-to-a-tree kind of faith, then you cannot help but feel like there was a little bait and switch going on."<sup>2</sup>

Are we teaching the whole gospel to our teens, or do we share only the easy parts? Do they understand that faith often requires sacrifice or goes against one's feelings?

A teen will make the decision to become a Christ follower. That is necessary for intrinsic faith. But when hard times come, it is difficult to derail a young adult who knows what he believes and why. Meanwhile, too many are walking away from what they never understood in the first place. ☺

**NOTES**

1. Dale A. Matthews and Connie Clark, *The Faith Factor: God, Medicine, and Healing* (New York: Viking, 1998).
2. Margaret Feinberg, "Inside the Anger of a Generation," North American Mission Board, <http://www.hurchplantingvillage.net/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=iiJTKZPEjH&b=849683&ct=1722593> (accessed March 10, 2008).

Are we teaching the whole gospel to our teens — or do we share only the easy parts?

**Dale Matthews, in *The Faith Factor*, defines two basic types of religious orientation** — extrinsic and intrinsic.<sup>1</sup> Extrinsic are those who ask what their religion can do for them, while intrinsic ask what they can do for their God. Extrinsic seek protection, eternal security, and status. If God does not

come through, then their faith has not paid off. Intrinsic have deep-seated authentic intimacy with Christ. They pray and read the Bible, and the way they live and treat others is affected.

What does this have to do with teens? According to twentysomethings, everything.

One anonymous young adult, quoted in "Inside the Anger of a Generation," said, "I am not convinced that one of the spiritual laws — that God loves you and has a plan for your life — was interpreted very well by its hearers. That statement, by its very nature, conveys an idea of cushiness, or maybe an unstated promise that everything will turn out well. In fact, though, Jesus says, 'Follow me,' and then heads straight for a pile of wood and nails

## RU a SUPER COMMUNICATOR?

**Most teens are super communicators.** They keep in touch with friends and family by using cell phones, texting, instant messaging, blogs, and social online communities.

Is your youth ministry a super communicator? Or, do you still send newsletters to old-fashioned mailboxes? A printed calendar or newsletter isn't personal. It's archaic, at least to youth.

According to a report in Pew/Internet, 64 percent of online teenagers ages 12 to 17 engage in at least one type of content creation.<sup>1</sup> Teens are posting pictures and music, blogging, interacting socially with their 1,765-plus friends in online social communities, and posting funny and serious videos on YouTube and GodTube.

Content creation is not just about sharing creative output; it also involves participating in conversations fueled by that content.

This is a good reason why it is important to become a super-communicator youth ministry. An online, interactive presence allows you to connect with the teens who attend each week, but also the teens who are on the fringe, struggling with their faith, or those in the community who do not go to church or know God.

You can create an online presence many different ways. One is to create a blog site: a combination blog and Web site. Wordpress (<http://www.wordpress.com>) is free and user friendly. It is different from other sites because it allows you to create a blog and add additional pages, such as a calendar page, link page, or a resources page.

You may feel intimidated, but this is a great opportunity to tap into the creative minds of the super communicators in your youth group. Form a media team to develop fun videos or

documentaries on current issues to add to the blog. Ask writers in your youth group to write devos, poetry, songs, or testimonies. Post questions of the day, or Scripture, or links to helpful Web sites.

Becoming a super communicator opens the doors of your youth church, providing information, encouragement, and unlimited possibilities for ministry. ☺

**NOTE**

1. Amanda Lenhart, "Teens and Social Media," Pew Internet and American Life Project, [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/230/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/230/report_display.asp) (accessed April 23, 2008).



**T. SUZANNE ELLER** is an author and a youth sponsor at First Assembly of God in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Contact her at [tseller@daretobelieve.org](mailto:tseller@daretobelieve.org). See real teens sharing real life stories at <http://www.daretobelieve.org>.



**POLITICS AND THE CHURCH**

# Political Correctness in the Pulpit

In a survey conducted by H.B. London, Jr., pastoral ministries vice president for Focus on the Family, pastors were asked what they thought about political correctness in the pulpit. The results are as follows:



	YES	NO
Do you know what you can and cannot do from your pulpit without putting your 501(c)3 standing in jeopardy (politically speaking)?	83%	17%
Do you often make political or issues-related statements from your pulpit?	41%	59%
When you address issues such as abortion, homosexuality, ballot initiatives or "get out the vote," are you ever criticized?	31%	69%
Does your church board (deacons, elders, etc.) give you carte blanche to make or address political or moral issues without their consensus of opinion?	86%	14%
Do you feel the open pulpit is the place for you to make politically laced comments?	36%	64%
If you do make said comments publicly, have you paid a price for the statements you have made?	29%	71%
Would you allow a voter registration table to be set up in your church foyer?	82%	18%
Have you distributed "voter's guides" within your church body?	79%	21%
In a public sermon, would you be open to challenging the IRS guidelines related to what you can say or do as a 501(c)3 organization (a type of civil disobedience)?	46%	54%
Do you most often agree with the political issues addressed by Focus on the Family Action?	97%	3%

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DISCLAIMER: This *Pastor's Weekly Briefing* survey was only intended to poll our readership and the corresponding results are simply a representation of those readers who chose to respond to it on May 2, 2008. They do not in any way represent an authentic scientific or statistically acceptable population/sample of any kind and should not be considered official. Any reprint of this survey and results must contain this disclaimer.

## CRY OUT AMERICA! A PATRIOT DAY PRAYER GATHERING



On Sept. 11, 2008, our nation will pause to remember the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. As part of Awakening America, Christians across the nation are commemorating this

significant day in our history by praying for America and the lost people of this country.

In each of the 3,141 counties in the United States, during the noon hour on Sept. 11, Christians will gather at their county courthouse to pray for their community, their lost friends and family, and for the spiritual condition of our nation.

Awakening America Alliance is providing great ways for churches and communities to become involved. Free resources — promotional material, event schedules, fliers, general prayer resources, and links to helpful Web sites — are available at <http://www.awakeningamerica.us>. Also, the Web site offers a sign-up area that will connect believers to organized activities in their communities.

**CORRECTION**

In the article "From Day One!" in the summer 2008 *Enrichment*, the statement on page 84 should have read: "To support 300,000 national pastors with only \$100 per month would require \$360 million annually." *Enrichment* apologizes for the error.



# Threatened by the Masses

Recently, I have heard many Christians grumble about the changing demographics of their communities. It is clear that anti-immigrant sentiment is growing in the United States.

Should pastors wade into the mechanics or politics of immigration policy? Probably not, but they need to set a tone in their churches.

The question is: How will the body of Christ respond to the growing numbers of ethnic people who are moving to our cities, towns, and suburbs?

Will we react with disdain and anger? Or, will we view these changes as opportunities to share Christ with the nations?

In the Great Commission

we are told to go into the world and preach the gospel. Now, the world is coming to us. Perhaps God is giving the American church opportunity to reach the nations without changing its zip code.

Anti-immigrant attitudes can run deep. People are tuning into talk radio, watching television, and reading political blogs. They come to church armed with statistics, facts, and mangled theories that reflect their distaste for other people and cultures.

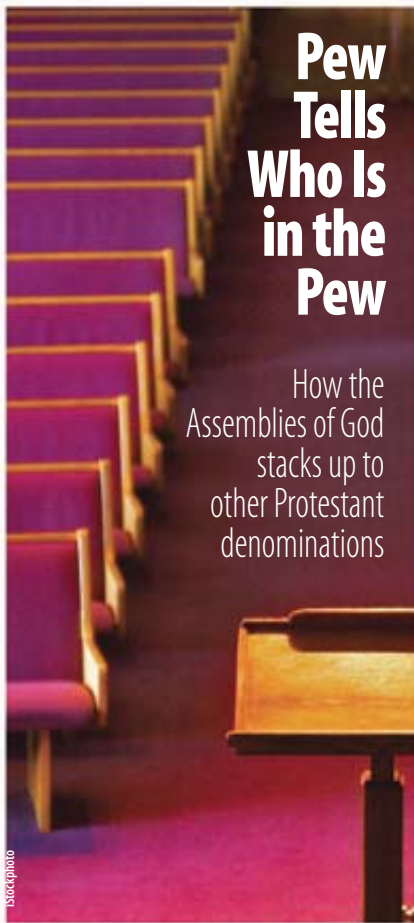
The pastor must take the lead. Ministers need to rise above nativistic fears. Our churches must be open to people of all cultures and races. We need to preach reconciliation.

Here contemporary politics and the Scriptures collide. God does not favor Americans more than He favors people of other countries. Christians need to reflect God's love and open their hearts and doors to immigrants so they can meet our Savior.

**DANIEL DARLING** is author of *Teen People of the Bible*, *Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith*, and *Tragic Failure*. Visit <http://www.danieldarling.com>.







## Pew Tells Who Is in the Pew

How the Assemblies of God stacks up to other Protestant denominations

**T**he Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, based in Washington, D.C., conducted a landmark survey that provides a demographic breakdown of the 1.4 percent of the population that attends Assemblies of God churches.

Overall, AG churchgoers are poorer, less educated, more Southern, not as geriatric, more feminine, more likely to be married, and more ethnically diverse than most other Protestant bodies.

According to the study — the 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey — 24 percent of Assemblies of God adult adherents have less than a high school education. This ranks the AG 22nd out of 25 Protestant groups in a tie with Seventh-day Adventists. Only the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) and Church of God in Christ have a higher ratio who did not graduate from high school. The AG also tied for the third lowest rank (with COGIC) in members with a college degree: 8 percent (although an additional 4 percent have a post-graduate degree). In the college graduate classification, the AG is ahead of only Church of God (Cleveland) and independent Black Baptist churches.



The report indicates that 41 percent of AG followers make less than \$30,000 a year. Only five of the reporting Protestant faith groups have a higher tally of low wage earners. Conversely, just 8 percent in the AG are paid \$100,000 or more annually, tied for second lowest.

AG attendees are more likely to be married (64 percent) than 21 other Protestant groups, higher than all but Church of the Nazarene and nondenominational charismatic and evangelical congregations. The survey says 12 percent of AG adherents currently are divorced or separated.

AG laity is less likely to be white (72 percent) than all except African Methodist Episcopal, COGIC, and Seventh-day Adventists. At 19 percent, the AG has more Latino congregants than two-dozen Protestant groups — except for Seventh-day Adventists.

The AG is tied for the fourth lowest total of parishioners 65 and older at 12 percent. The AG has 14 percent of adult attendees less than 30 years of age, 41 percent in their 30s and 40s, and 33 percent ages 50 to 64.

Although eight denominations have a higher percentage living in the South, the report indicates that 46 percent in the AG are from the region. It says 24 percent live in the West, 19 percent in the Midwest, and only one in 10 in the Northeast.

Pew states that 57 percent of AG attendees are women, seventh highest among the 25 denominations.

## Pentecostals Gaining Across Religious Landscape

**Pentecostal and charismatic adherents aren't just in Assemblies of God**, Church of God in Christ, Foursquare Gospel, or other fellowships that emphasize the baptism in the Holy Spirit and gifts of healing, according to recent research by The Barna Group.

A decade ago, 3 of every 10 Americans called themselves Pentecostal or charismatic, according to the firm in Ventura, California. Now 36 percent claim the designation, including roughly half of those also considered evangelical, born-again, or Protestant. In addition, 36 percent of Catholics are Pentecostal or charismatic.

While only 16 percent of the nation's white Protestant congregations fit the category,

two-thirds of African-American bodies are Pentecostal or charismatic. The orientation is gaining the most strength among ethnic minorities.

"It is not surprising that the Pentecostal community in America is growing, nor do we expect it to stop making headway," says company founder George Barna, who supervised the research.

Overall, charismatic and Pentecostal congregations have less education and earn less than those not embracing their tradition. Operating budgets of such churches average around \$136,000 a year, \$13,000 less than congregations that eschew speaking in tongues. Likewise, Pentecostal and charismatic pastors receive an annual compensation package worth \$42,000. This is \$5,000 less than other churches give their pastors. Seven out of 10 non-Pentecostal senior pastors have graduated from a seminary, while just under half in a Pentecostal church have, Barna reported.





## Money Easier To Donate Than Time

**Americans have a looser grasp on their pocketbook than their pocket watch,** according to a new national survey.

The poll, conducted by Minneapolis-based Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, shows that 52 percent of Americans believe it is easier to give money to charitable causes, compared with 30 percent who would rather donate their time. Another 16 percent found equal satisfaction in giving dollars and time.

The survey indicates that age, income, education, and employment status all affect giving. For instance, 58 percent of people 65 and older prefer to write a check, compared with 44 percent of young adults (ages 18 to 24).

Young people are more than three times as

likely as seniors to believe that donating time is better than writing a check.

Those who earn more are more likely to favor giving dollars than time. The survey shows that 56 percent of those earning \$75,000 or more a year believe a financial contribution is easier, compared with 45 percent of those making less than \$25,000. Slightly more men (53 percent) give money than women (50 percent). Women, by a slight margin (31 percent to 29 percent), prefer to give time.

"There's an emotional, visceral connection to volunteering that just cannot be duplicated by writing a check," says Brad Hewitt, Thrivent Financial senior vice president of charitable

programs and volunteerism.

An earlier study by the company found that two-thirds of those who have volunteered in the past year attend religious services at least weekly. ☺



## Don't Despise the Small-town Church Plant

**More than 15,000 communities are without an Assemblies of God congregation,** and Steven M. Pike, director of the Church Multiplication Network, believes there are opportunities to plant AG churches in many of them.

"We must find creative ways to reach them because of their geographic isolation," says Pike. He notes that one-third of Americans

**Small-town churches have the potential to influence a sizable chunk of the population.**

still live in rural areas.

In some areas urban or suburban churches have implemented an innovative strategy. They have adopted small-town church plants and help pay the pastors' salaries.

Few rural church plants have a full-time pastor because

the church cannot afford to pay his salary. Subsequently, many small-town ministers are

bivocational. This helps them earn a living and gives them another venue to reach people in the community.

Rural churches may face many challenges, including a smaller pool of potential lay leaders, an aging population, and a depressed economy. But Pike says changing technology creates new opportunities for growth, such as ethanol production in Iowa or the discovery of oil reserves in Colorado.

Rural communities are no longer isolated from some urban problems. Pike says illegal drugs and Internet temptations can be as prevalent in small towns as in inner cities.

An advantage small-town churches have is the potential to influence a sizable chunk of the population. Pike says most people in a city of 1 million will not know about a megachurch of 10,000. But a church of 50 in a town of 500 has 10 percent of the population.

"Small churches shouldn't have an inferiority complex," Pike told *Enrichment*. "They can have a big impact on the community."

AG Statistician Sherri L. Doty reports that 14 percent of AG churches are in rural areas or villages of fewer than 1,000 people. Another 32 percent are located in towns between 1,000 and 9,999 people.

Overall, the Hartford Institute for Religion Research says 177,000 churches, or 52 percent of the total, are located in rural areas. ☺



Photos.com/istockphoto

We must be more concerned about results than means.

## One Size *Does Not* Fit All



**GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P.,** is general superintendent of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.

I cannot remember who made the following statement, but it resonates within me: "The Holy Spirit at work is like a great river, cutting a fresh channel, going wherever He wishes. Sometimes that disturbs us, as Christian flood-control experts. We do not like the way the Holy Spirit moves. We like to dig a channel, line it with concrete, and say, 'Come, O river of God. We have dug the channel. Flow through it according to our desires.'"

An examination of Assemblies of God churches shows that there are varieties in style, governance, meeting times, facilities, and communications. We are not lining the channel with concrete and demanding that the Holy Spirit flow within any particular form.

For example, the New Testament shows that churches differ from one another. I will use the Jerusalem and Antioch churches as a lens through which we can look at ourselves.

### The Jerusalem Church Model

The Jerusalem church represents an effective model for reaching its culture. Today, we would

call it a traditional, but vibrant Pentecostal church.

**It was experiential.** The charter members had been with Jesus. They were in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost. They received Spirit baptism. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Miracles of healing, protection, and deliverance occurred in their midst; along with persecutions.

**It was expanding.** How many churches of 120 could absorb 3,000 new converts in a single day? The Jerusalem church did, and its members did not complain that they no longer knew anyone. The 120 took responsibility to disciple the 3,000. They probably had 120 home groups, with 25 to a group. But they did not stop growing at 3,120. Day by day believers were added to the church (Acts 2:47); then 5,000 men (Acts 4:4); and from there, the church went from addition to multiplication (Acts 6:7).

**It was also exclusive.** I do not use the word *exclusive* in a pejorative context. If they were going to effectively reach their culture, they had to respect cultural boundaries. These



boundaries included keeping kosher and other traditions of the Law. In fact, when the apostle Paul came to Jerusalem on his last visit, he sponsored four men who had taken a Nazarite vow. These vows concluded with animal sacrifice (Acts 21:17–26). That event shows that 25 years after the Cross and the Resurrection, the Jerusalem church still went to the temple and participated in all the rituals.

The Jerusalem church saw itself as a fulfillment and continuation of Judaism. Repentance, faith in Christ, and water baptism were only new requirements added to the former requirements for relationship with God. Peter's experience at Cornelius' home placed the first wedge in the culturally exclusive theology of the Jerusalem church.

### The Antioch Church Model

The Antioch church shared the same essentials of faith as the Jerusalem church. They were not less Spirit-led and Spirit-filled. They, too, were experiential and expanding, but their approach to culture differed.

Antioch was a much different urban environment from Jerusalem. It was the world's third largest city behind Rome and Alexandria, with an estimated population of 500,000. In this cosmopolitan city, Jew met Gentile, Greek and barbarian rubbed shoulders, and the west of Mediterranean culture met the east of Syrian Desert culture. It was a city of sports; chariot race teams and partisans competed for the super bowl of their day.

It was also a city of immorality mingled with pagan religion. Legend had it that at the Groves of Daphne Apollo fell in love with Daphne, pursued her, and she turned into a laurel tree. The great temple to Apollo built on the site had 1,000 priestess/prostitutes who reenacted the pursuit of Apollo in the gardens and villas of Daphne with worshipers.

Antioch was not much different from popular American culture — pagan, multicultural, sports crazy, and obsessed with sex.

Antioch was also part of the world that God so loved. In this different setting, the Antioch church took on characteristics different from the Jerusalem church.

### Different Leaders

Acts 11:19,20 gives the two sources of leadership and explains how the gospel came to Antioch. First, Jerusalem Jews scattered because of persecution and came to the Jews of Antioch. Second, some of those who were scattered from Jerusalem were not Jerusalemites, but were from Cyprus and Cyrene. These individuals began to speak to the Greeks, telling them the gospel. When many people believed and turned to the Lord, the Jerusalem church finally sent Barnabas to them.

Choosing the right person to send was a critical and important decision. (Whom you put on committees is vital.) "When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and *encouraged* them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts" (Acts 11:23, italics mine).

Barnabas realized that he needed help, so he "went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and *taught* great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:25–28, italics mine).

Luke gives the reason Barnabas sought out Saul in the two verbs used for ministry: *encouraged* and *taught*. Barnabas probably had an exhortative, encouraging kind of preaching ministry. But he knew that a more substantive approach to the faith was needed to lay a foundation under the newfound faith of the Antioch believers. Thus, Luke uses the word *taught* only after Saul's arrival. Barnabas' example shows us that we need to look for others who can join us in ministry and complement our deficiencies.

Luke lists other leaders in Acts 13:1: "Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch)."

Barnabas was the bridge leader between Jerusalem and Antioch, but he was not in primary leadership in Jerusalem, while the four other Antioch leaders had no role in the Jerusalem church. One leader, Paul, was a headache to a large segment of the Jerusalem church. In short, the Antioch leaders would not have been well-received as leaders in the Jerusalem



*The church needs to allow the spiritual glue to bind people together, so what we have in Christ is greater than any differences that may divide us.*

*We must be careful not to adopt prideful attitudes in the way we do church. If there is any boasting, let it be in the Lord.*

church because of their cultural views on the inclusion of Gentiles.

### Different Language

Jerusalem spoke Hebrew; Antioch spoke Greek. Jerusalem kept kosher; Antioch ate cheeseburgers with bacon.

What is a *language* in our culture? Consider the following languages:

- Music.
- Dress.
- Service times.
- Church architecture.
- Form of worship.
- Forms of church governance.
- Tradition.

The modality of bringing Jesus to the culture shifts with the culture while the eternal message of the gospel does not change.

Hotly criticized by the old Maoists, Xiaoping's famous response was, "I don't care if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice."

The apostle Paul took the same approach concerning how we communicate the gospel to various cultures: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

In the Assemblies of God, we must be more concerned about results than means. Are people being saved, being baptized in the Spirit, living in the Spirit, and becoming fruitful disciples of Jesus? If so, then we do not need to concern ourselves with pastors and churches that may do things differently from a past generation.

### Different Attitude

The Antioch church never assumed the suspicious attitude that the Jerusalem church had toward the conversion of the Gentiles. We would understand if the Antioch church had said, "What have we to do with Jerusalem? They never sent us missionaries. The first disciples to Antioch came because of persecution, not intention. Furthermore, they only spoke to fellow Jews, not to us. Diaspora Jews from Cyrus and Cyrene told us the good news of Jesus. So, we do not owe Jerusalem anything."

But, that was not their spirit. They did not begrudge the Jerusalem church for not having directly sent missionaries or assistance. Instead, they determined they would send missionaries to the unreached world, and financial assistance back to the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:30). They also welcomed prophets (anointed preachers) from the Jerusalem church, including Agabus. They did not insist that the Jerusalem church do things their way.

What a model for the Assemblies of God. The problems we experience regarding changes of style in local churches occur when Jerusalem tries to become Antioch, or Antioch tries to become Jerusalem. Here is how to wreck a church. Make major changes that: (1) are abrupt; (2) are without congregational education or involvement; (3) are without love; and (4) are without respect for the spiritual characteristics of the church.

The Antioch church did not adopt a conde-



DesignPics

Acts 2:42 applied to the Antioch church just as it did to the Jerusalem church, and it needs to apply to us. The key is retaining apostolic doctrine and experience, and being flexible on the rest.

When Mao Zedong was leader of China, he imprisoned Deng Xiaoping as a *capitalist roader*. After Zedong died, Xiaoping became China's leader and instituted capitalist reforms that have fueled China's resurgence today.



scending or superior attitude toward the Jerusalem church, nor did it break fellowship with Jerusalem. Instead, love ruled the day. When the saints in Jerusalem needed help, the church in Antioch shared with a generous heart.

Our culture today tends to be fragmented and broken into isolated units. The church needs to allow the spiritual glue to bind people together, so what we have in Christ is greater than any differences that may divide us.

## Conclusion

We must be careful not to adopt prideful attitudes in the way we *do* church. If there is any boasting, let it be in the Lord. We need to avoid an attitude that says, "My way of doing church is better than yours." We need to make room for diversity of calling in our Assemblies of God family.

It takes flexibility to accommodate change. It is the nature of Spirit-filled people to seize the moment and move into uncharted waters, confident that where the Spirit guides, He provides.

Change is difficult. A passenger in a taxi tapped the driver on the shoulder to ask him a question. The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus, drove over the curb, and stopped just inches from a large plate glass window.

For a few moments everything was silent in the cab, then the driver said, "Please, don't ever do that again. You scared the daylights out of me."

The passenger, who was also frightened, apologized. He said, "I did not realize that a tap on the shoulder would frighten you so much."

The driver replied, "I'm sorry; it's not your fault. Today is my first day driving a cab. For the last 25 years I drove a hearse."

Some people are threatened by change. We need to feel threatened if the change leads us away from our anchor in Scripture. But we need not fear change when we follow the example of the apostle Paul who used all means that he might win some.

The challenge before us is to respect our diversity in unity. We will have unity when we follow steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayers, and have genuine care and hospitality toward one another (Acts 2:42).



The Lord would not be pleased with the balkanization of the Assemblies of God. The term *balkanization* comes from an area of the world — Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo — where ethnicity and culture collide. *Balkanization* means to break up into smaller and often hostile units.

This term must not apply to the church. My prayer is, "Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken."

The Latin phrase on our American currency is *E Pluribus Unum*, meaning *out of many one*. As the Assemblies of God, we will not do well if we are *pluribus* — each going his own way. Nor will we do well if we are *unum*. God loves variety. That is why He made us all different. But when we gather to do the Lord's work, we can accomplish much more if we join our hearts and hands.

At times, people criticized Billy Graham for being inclusive of other believers. He replied with this poem:

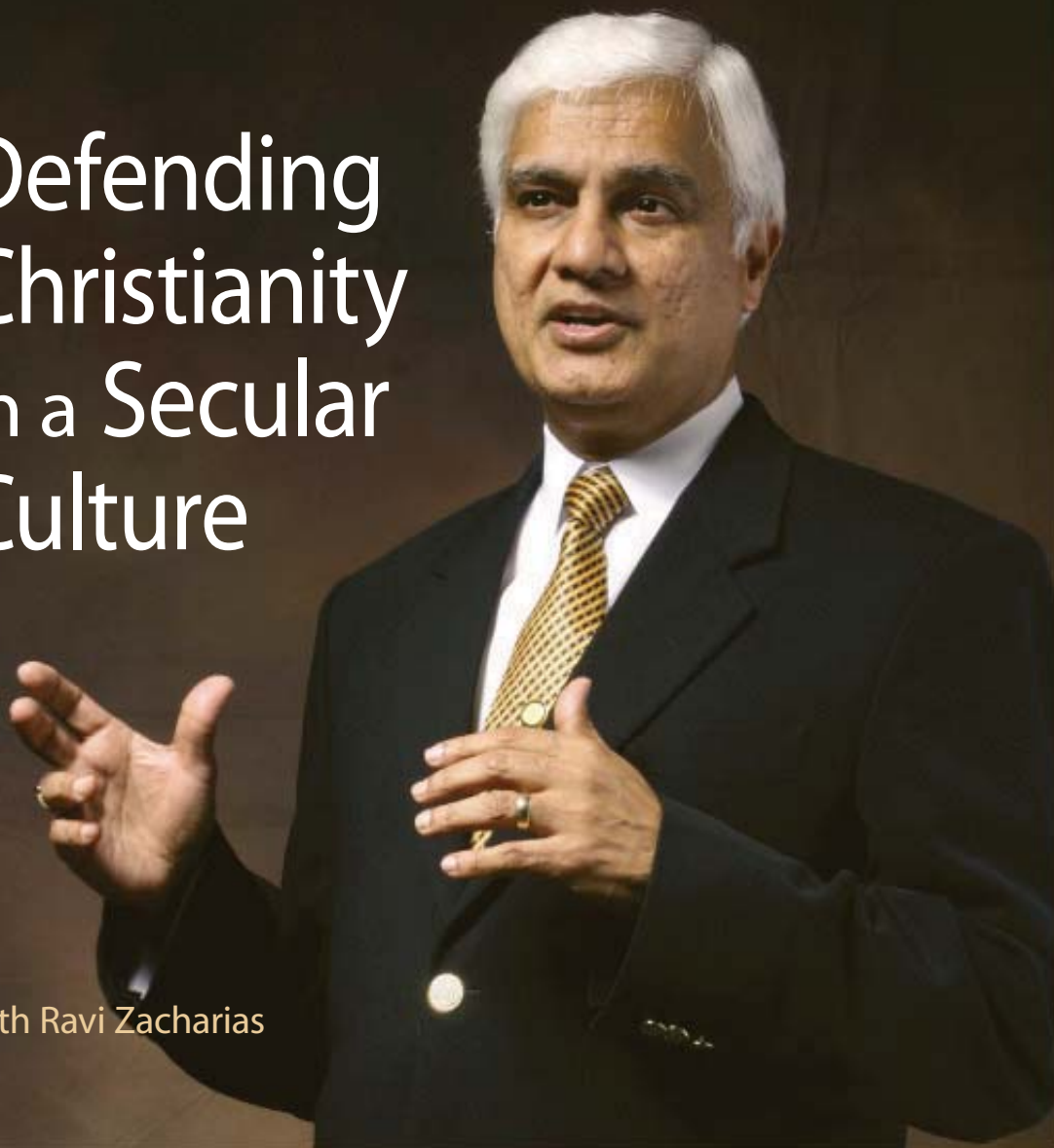
"He drew a circle that shut me out,  
Rebel, heretic, a thing to flout;  
But, love and I had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle that took him in."

May we be charitable enough with the grace God has given us to draw circles that take people in rather than walls that shut people out. 🙏

*God loves variety.  
That is why  
He made us all  
different. But when  
we gather to do  
the Lord's work,  
we can accomplish  
much more if  
we join our hearts  
and hands.*

# Defending Christianity in a Secular Culture

With Ravi Zacharias



**A**ttacks on Christianity and the church are rampant in today's society. Unbelievers once revered the church and its teachings, but today they scorn them. Films such as *The Da Vinci Code* and organizations such as The Jesus Seminar attack the credibility of Jesus and the Bible. But how do Christians answer these attacks on Christianity?

Few are as familiar with these attacks as is Ravi Zacharias, president of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. For 36 years, Zacharias has traveled the globe engaging atheists, defending Christianity on secular campuses, and proclaiming the truth through his writings and daily and weekly radio broadcasts.

Zacharias talked with *Enrichment* journal's Associate Editor Richard L. Schoonover and discussed the issues

facing culture and the church and how pastors and their congregations can respond to these attacks.

## What is destroying the moral and spiritual foundation of today's society?

**Zacharias:** I believe a convergence of many factors has taken place. Much of education in the 1960s came unhinged from any moral absolutes and ethical values, to wit the book, *Excellence Without a Soul*, by Harry R. Lewis. We have seen this happening the last 40 years. There have been many voices alerting us to this. But more than just a philosophy took over; a mood took over.

First, secularization generally held that religious ideas, institutions, and interpretations have lost their social



significance. People liked the idea of a secular society and a secular government. But in terms of moral values and ethics, they never checked into the internal assumptions of secularization that made it wide open to almost any view on any subject. Beginning in the 1960s, the moods of secularization ultimately led to society's loss of shame.

Next is pluralization, which sounds like a practical and worthy idea; and in many ways, it is. In pluralism you have a competing number of worldviews that are available, and no worldview is dominant. But smuggled in with pluralization was the absolutization of relativism. The only thing we could be sure of was that all moral choices were relative and there was no point of reference to right and wrong. This resulted in the death of reason.

Last is privatization, which is an accommodation to the religiously minded. If secularization and pluralization were going to hold sway, what does society do with the large number of people who are spiritually minded?

Being spiritually minded was okay as long as people kept their spiritual beliefs private and did not bring them into the public arena. The irony of this was the fact secularization — which had its assumptions on absolutes and anything of the metaphysical nature — was allowed into the public place. In fact, its very trust was to bring it into the public place. But anyone who believed in a spiritual Essence, an Ultimate Reality, and the fact there were transcendent absolutes that needed to be adhered to was told to keep those beliefs private. That ultimately paved the way for the loss of meaning.

These three moods — secularization, pluralization, and privatization — brought about loss of shame, loss of reason, and loss of meaning. How was this authoritatively pontificated in the social strain? This is when philosophy stepped in, the moralizers against morality came in, and political correctness came in. These gave society some parameters that allowed it to expel the moralizing from outside the secular realm.

As a result, everything became pragmatic. Philosophers and naturalists stepped in. In this new century, we have lost all definitions of what it means to be human, and what sexuality, life, and the home are all about. We are on the high seas, battling the storms of conflicting worldviews without a compass.

### **A shift is taking place in today's society toward Christianity and the church. Explain.**

**Zacharias:** The shift that is taking place is very calculated. Eastern religions are protected in today's society because to critique Eastern religions is seen as culturally insensitive and prejudicial. But the Christian faith, which is the target of Western culture (but people have forgotten that it came from the East), is now the dartboard. Society can attack any aspect of Christianity.

In the recent presidential primary race, it was fascinating to notice how pundits described Mike Huckabee as a former Baptist minister. The Judeo-Christian worldview is the target of the Western media. The media is the single greatest destroyer of the notion of absolutes and of the Judeo-Christian worldview, the only worldview that could justify the existence of a nation like America. They wish to stigmatize the Christian in a way that they do not need to say anything else. When I am overseas, I see these attacks in articles in the

Western newspapers and in the journalism on television.

I just returned from Thailand and Singapore. Every mall I walked through in those countries was playing Christmas carols. One of the world's tallest Christmas trees was in

Central World Plaza in Bangkok, Thailand. Christmas trees and Christmas decorations filled the streets of Singapore and carols were playing there. In America, Christians wonder whether they can even do this anymore without someone questioning whether they ought to acknowledge Christmas in the marketplace.

What has happened? The Judeo-Christian worldview has become the pariah stepchild of worldviews and is being attacked while other worldviews are respected, revered, and recognized as part of history and the culture of other nations.

### **What is the basis of this calculated attack?**

**Zacharias:** I am not sure I can pinpoint it, but I think the symptoms of cultural decay were clear from the 1960s onward — changes in beliefs regarding sexuality, and the right of a child to live in its mother's womb. Those in the forefront of popularized Christianity took on these issues. These Christians were then attacked because society viewed them as inhibitors to progress and the freedom of other worldviews.

The Christian faith, which is the target of Western culture, is now the dartboard. Society can attack any aspect of Christianity.

The media does not realize how inhibiting some Eastern religions would be if they held sway in our society. For some reason, they think Christians are fair game, and they can attack the Christian worldview.

Another reason for this attack is the conflicts that came on the moral landscape. Those who questioned this moral degeneracy were seen as coming from the Judeo-Christian worldview, and they had to be silenced. Allah, Samuel Harris, and Daniel Dennett were saying that inhibitions and prejudicial views on sexuality have come to us from the Christian worldview. Therefore, the Christian worldview is the enemy to be taken out.

**There is a proliferation of books and movies, such as *The Da Vinci Code* and organizations such as The Jesus Seminar, that are attacking the biblical and historical facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection? Why?**

**Zacharias:** I do not think this is accidental, and I do not think this is the end. Some of these will come and die natural deaths. They carry a limited shelf life because people have tried these tricks before.

When philosophy and naturalism attacked the Christian faith and theistic worldviews in general, they started with an attack against the classical arguments of the existence of God. The cosmological argument — which argues from causality — states that everything that comes into being could not have caused itself, and had to have something else to cause it. But there cannot be an infinite regress of these causes. Ultimately, you must stop at one uncaused being. Since nothing physical in this world seems to be uncaused, the only way to have an uncaused being is for that being to be spiritual. The cosmological argument went in the convergence of other

lines to prove the existence of God.

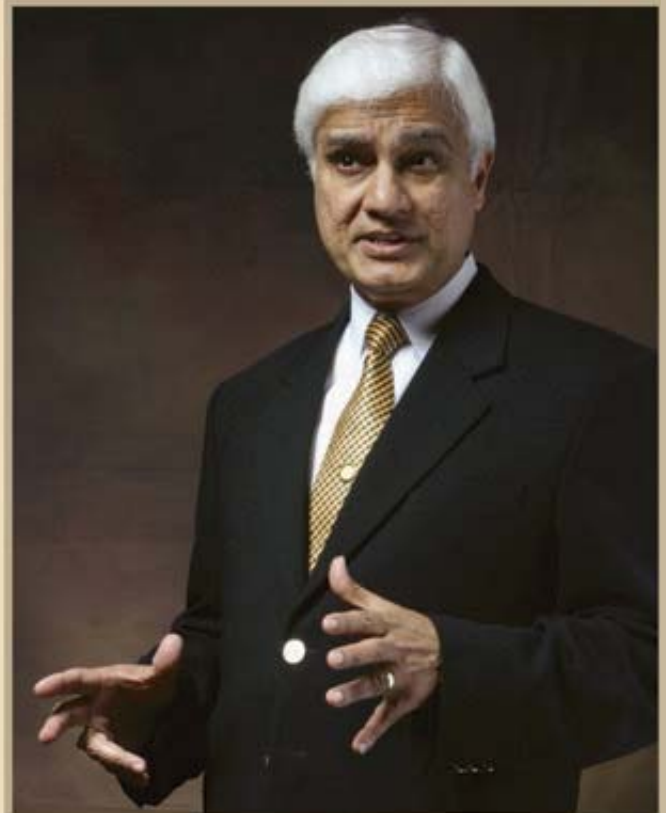
Suddenly, naturalists entered the fray and said, "Why does everything have to have a cause? Because everything has to have a cause, and itself would be the cause, therefore, it is self-defeating." This is a complete misstatement of the argument.

No one has said everything needs to have a cause. What we said was that everything that comes into being needs a cause, and nothing physical is uncaused.

Everything has an explanation outside itself. That is how the argument should go. But somehow, David Hume, and others in the 1700s, challenged the causality argument until people grew tired of hearing it.

Then, we have the teleological argument that argues not simply from design, but to design. Any time you see intelligibility, a specified complexity, or an intelligent effect, you assume it had an intelligence and a cause behind it. Then naturalists proposed a random, subatomic world, and argued against purposeful design. Thus, the design argument no longer works.

Naturalists, however, were not able to take on the moral argument. No matter how much they argued against it, there was always that sense of a



**If you can make a Jesus who is just like us and immoral, then that argument is buried, too.**

moral impetus within humanity. People could not act as if there were no moral oughtness. But reason alone does not lead you there by the atheist's own admission. John Mackie and especially Kai Nielsen, a well-known atheist from Canada, said, "You cannot really rationally argue for compelling moral oughtness in society. Maybe pragmatically, but rationally you cannot."

So, the moral argument was a thorn in their side. How could they do away with it? If you can make a Jesus who is just like us and immoral, then that argument is buried, too.

Naturalists took on the cosmological argument. I do not think they did



damage to it, but they think they did. They also think they damaged the teleological argument. They, however, could not escape the moral argument. So, books — *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Gospel of Judas*, and *The Gospel of Philip* — came into vogue. These Gnostic writings were supposed to show that Jesus had some private moral issues. If they could sustain this perception, they could do away with the moral argument.

It is amusing that they never went to the *Quran* or the *Gita* to look for moral flaws in the key personalities represented there. They would have found enough ground to show what the moral problems were. Instead, they attacked the Christ of the Scriptures, who is so pure, so pristine, and so demonstrative of everything that is pure and good. *The Da Vinci Code* taught that maybe Jesus had a secret life with Mary Magdalene. Some recent writings and recent findings have claimed more. If Mary Magdalene were everywhere these books claimed she was, she must have been superhuman. Otherwise, how could she be found in so many places at the same time?

### Why is the deity of Christ under attack?

**Zacharias:** If people can devalue the gospel concerning the deity of Christ, then they have taken the gospel away from us. If they can attack Christ and make Him look like whom they want Him to look like, then they are taking away the ultimate authority.

### Why is religious pluralism not philosophically possible?

**Zacharias:** Religious pluralism is a belief system that sounds good, but does disservice to all religions. All religions are exclusive. Even naturalism, which poses as irreligion, is exclusive. Every religion has its starting points

and its deductions, and those starting points exclude. For example, Hinduism has two non-negotiable beliefs: karma and reincarnation. No Hindu will trade these away.

In Buddhism, there is the denial of the essential notion of the self. Buddhists believe that the self as we understand it does not exist, and our ceasing to desire will be the cause of the end of all suffering. If we deny these premises, we devalue Buddhism.

Naturalism teaches that anything supernatural or metaphysical is outside the realm of evidence and purely an opinion, not a matter of fact. Islam believes that Muhammad is the last and final prophet, and the *Quran* is the perfect revelation. If we deny those two premises, we have denied Islam.

In the Christian faith, we believe Jesus is the consummate experience of God in the person of His Son, and is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. We cannot deny these premises and continue to be Christians.

The question is not whether these are mutually exclusive. The question is which one of these will we deny as being reasonable and consistent? Which one of these will we be able to sustain by argument and by evidence? We can have pluralism in cuisine, clothing styles, accents, and other things. But if pluralism means ideational relativism and the destruction of the law of noncontradiction, it is absolutely unlivable and unthinkable.

### It seems some of these different views lack the same degree of logical consistency found in Christianity.

**Zacharias:** Right. In fact, even some of the great sages of these other worldviews agree. Mahatma Gandhi, in one of his writings, stated that he

wished some aspects of his own belief system could be permanently erased because so much of it was nonsense. Even Gandhian sages will tell you that. Much of what is in one of the early sacred Hindu writings, *Veda*, is irrational and unacceptable. We would consider some of the behaviors and practices of Muhammad in his own personal life reprehensible if someone practiced them within our culture today. Then compare the whole idea of God in His self-existence and in the very notion of moral rightness.

The denial of desire is the foundation of Buddhism, which is the only way that leads to the lack of suffering. Yet, the principal reason people give the Dalai Lama prominence is for the freedom of Tibet. I am for that. I agree that he needs to acquire political freedom, but why does he even desire political freedom if he is the quintessential representation of the ultimate Buddha? At times, there may be surface, polarized views neither of which are absolutes nor can be coalesced in some way. But when there is a systemic contradiction, the system destructs.

Another example is karma. If every life is a rebirth, and every birth is a rebirth, and every birth is a rebirth of previous karmic practices, what was being paid for in one's first birth? You cannot have an infinite series of rebirths or you would not be in this birth. Starting from now, go backwards. This is what led to the conversion of one of my closest Hindu friends. He said it simply did not make sense. He had to have a first birth. What was he paying for in his first birth? He said, "If I go to the bank, every bank manager will tell me what my indebtedness is, what I owe. What sort of system is this where I have no clue about what I owe

and how many births it will take for me to pay it back?"

### **A secular mindset has invaded the church. What is the result of this for the church?**

**Zacharias:** A secular mindset is manifested in some forms — not all forms — of the emergent church. This is a dangerous phenomenon, and some of its protagonists undervalue its end results. When you think that every generation tends to move away from the previous one, some forms of the emergent church today are flirting with the extinction of the gospel, at the heart of which is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Two things have happened in the secular mindset. First, secular-minded people do not take the church seriously because the church is not answering their questions. Second, those within the church are timid and unable to sustain the supernatural side of their beliefs in a highly naturalistic world.

What remains, then, in this kind of religious belief system is a spirituality that does not need to defend itself because it is purely a private thing that does not moralize or pontificate for anyone else. It becomes a feel-good, be-quiet, and get-a-better-state-of-mind-at-the-end-of-the-day religion. Moral absolutes? One revelation from God who has moral boundaries for us? No, that becomes untenable. So the church, when it did not respond to the secular mindset and did not prepare its own people, became secularized. In the end, it became spirituality without truth, and experience without objective reference.

The average church member today is unprepared and ill-equipped to face the attacks that are coming at us full-force. We are leaving our young men and women who are attending

universities as lambs led to the slaughter. We have fought symptoms, like the issues of the Second World War. We were shooting at rubber dummies while the real attack was taking place elsewhere.

### **How can pastors better prepare themselves and their people to respond to the attacks on Christianity and the critical issues facing Christians today?**

**Zacharias:** One of the most difficult positions to hold in the Western world today is that of a pastor. My heart goes out to them. I do not know how they keep up. The competition for the attention of their people is immense: The attack on the visual, the constant distraction of many voices, the challenges of those with huge budgets to keep people in their pews over those who do not have recourse to huge budgets, the incremental growth of knowledge, the incredible vitriolic nature of these attacks, the youth in their challenges and struggles with their finances, and other experiences. It is difficult to keep up with these challenges that are unparalleled and unprecedented in history.

My sympathy for pastors is intense. When I visit churches, I feel for them. I pray for them. As itinerants, ministry is a little easier because we can become specialists in what we do. Pastors are still expected to be generalists.

How does a pastor cope with these attitudes regarding Christianity and the church? Pastors need to do their best to study and understand the issues before them and their people. They need to work within their comfort zones of response and not be afraid to admit when they are outside of their reach. They have access to books, CDs, debates, seminars, and tapes in which specialists ably deal with apologetic material.

One of the biggest failings of people such as Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris is the fact they are not biblical scholars, even though they have taken on the Scriptures in some areas. For example, Sam Harris attacks the Virgin Birth as having no basis in the Old Testament because Isaiah uses the word *alma*. This shows how little he knows about the Hebrew text and what the word possibilities are. Rather than admitting his lack of knowledge, he took it on.

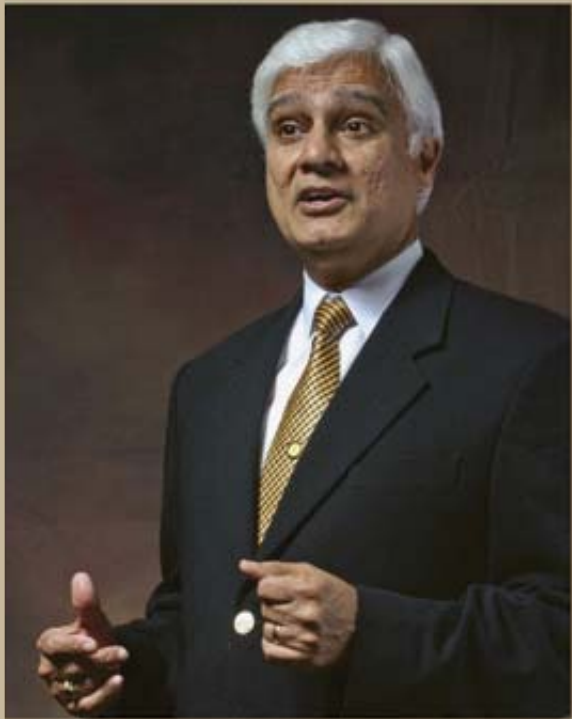
Pastors need to say, "I am not a neuroscientist. I do not understand all the implications of genetic engineering, but I know Christians who do. Here are their books." Pastors need to bring in these speakers and their material, and interact with the experts.

This is why our ministry began in 1985. People hardly knew the word *apologetics*. We had to explain it. Today, our staff is about 125 globally, based in nine countries. We cannot keep up with the invitations. We have to turn down more than 90 percent of them. Our goal is to expand more for the sake of the gospel and to come alongside the church. This is what we want to do. I hope more ministries will spring up that will assist churches and strengthen our young people and our leadership.

### **What do you say to a pastor who says, "Apologetics is just philosophy, and we do not need that. All we need is the Bible"?**

**Zacharias:** I desperately wish it were that simple. When pastors believe and teach, "all we need is the Bible," they equip their young people with the very line that gets them mocked in the universities and makes them unable and even terrified to relate to their friends. If pastors want their young people to do the work of evangelism — to reach their friends — that line will not get them anywhere. Even the





Religious pluralism is a belief system that sounds good, but does disservice to all religions.

Bible that Christ gave us is sustained by the miracle of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection gave the Early Church the argument that Christ is risen: We saw, we witnessed, we felt, and we touched. The apostle Paul defended this gospel. He went to Athens and planted a church there. In Ephesus he defended the faith in the school of Tyrannus. We also need to become all things to all people.

If a pastor says, "All we need is the Bible," what does he say to a man who says, "All I need is the *Quran*"? It is a solipsistic method of arguing.

The pastor is saying, "All I need is my own point of reference and nothing more than that." Even the gospel was verified by external references. The Bible is a book of history, a book of

geography, not just a book of spiritual assertions.

The fact is the resurrection from the dead was the ultimate proof that in history — and in empirically verifiable means — the Word of God was made certain. Otherwise, the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration would have been good enough. But the apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19: "We have the Word of the prophets made more certain ... as to a light shining in a dark place." He testified to the authority and person of Christ, and the resurrected person of Christ.

To believe, "All we need is the Bible and nothing more," is what the monks believed in medieval times, and they resorted to monasteries. We all know the end of that story. This

argument may be good enough for those who are convinced the Bible is authority. The Bible, however, is not authoritative in culture or in a world of counter-perspectives. To say that it is authoritative in these situations is to deny both how the Bible defends itself and how our young people need to defend the Bible's sufficiency.

It is sad that some people think a person who asks, "Why the Bible?" is being dishonest. This is a legitimate question.

Last week, I was in India. I met with the president of India, and then I had meetings with some key men and women who hold the highest places in society. They are India's tycoons. My driver was a Muslim man. Every time he introduced himself, he would

give his name and say that he was a Muslim. So I introduced myself, "I am Ravi Zacharias. I am a Christian."

On the last day, I sat down with him with a Bible in Hindi, and we talked. Before that hour was over, he bowed his head and received Christ. He had numerous questions on how God could have a Son. People had told him that the Bible was corrupted. He was honest. He needed to know why the Bible is authoritative and can be trusted. He gave his life to Jesus Christ. What a wonderful way to end a 3-week journey, with my chauffeur — a man in his twenties — who bowed his head, wiped away his tears, and prayed to receive Jesus Christ.

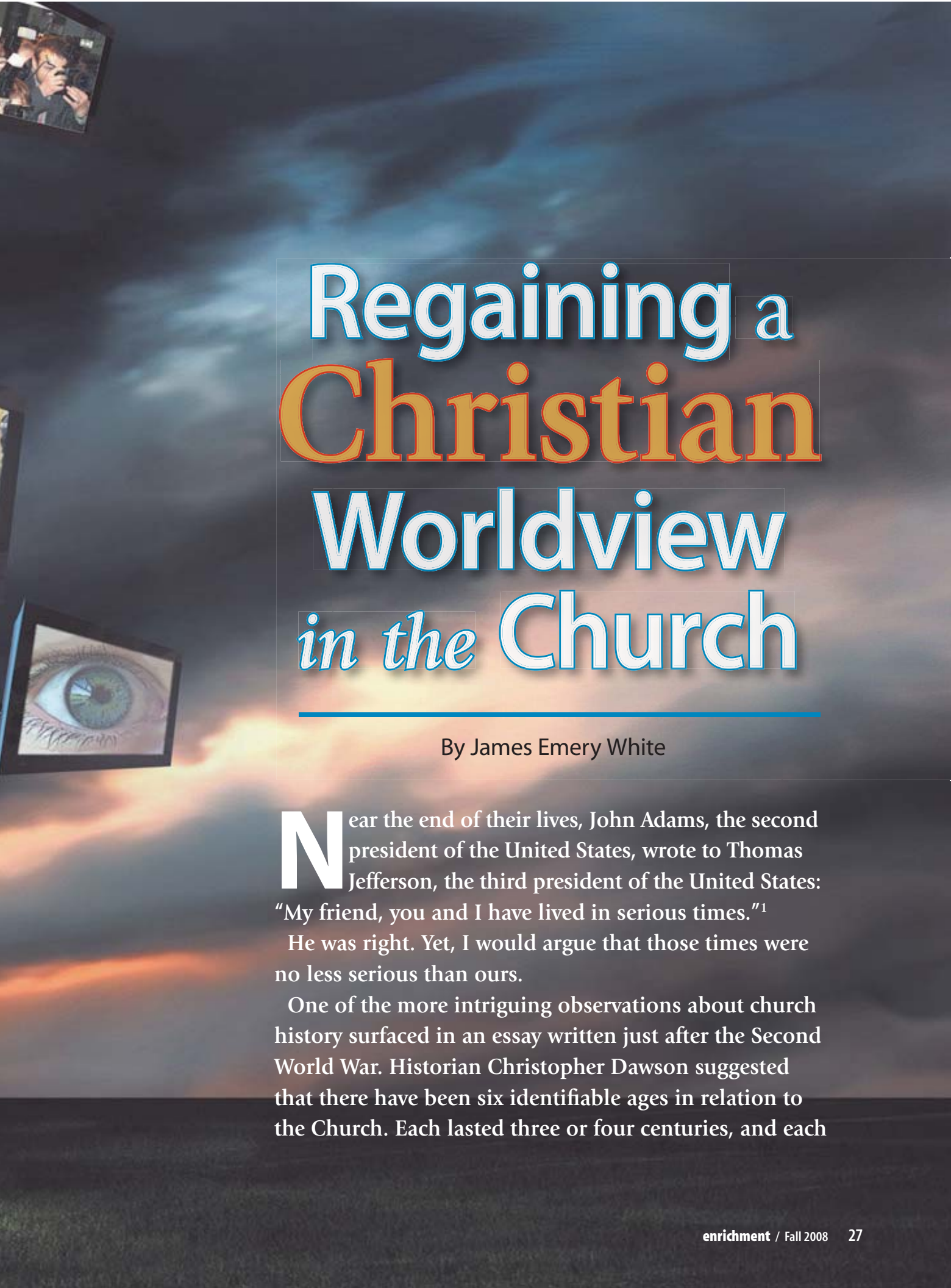
### Please share a final thought with our readers.

**Zacharias:** I commend you for doing an issue on truth. Readers need to know that we cannot place Christianity beside scorching naturalism. Naturalists are not holding back. Their antithetical guns are blazing. For the sake of the truth, for the sake of the gospel, and for our calling in this time in history, it is imperative that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts and all our minds and equip our people to do so. This fierce and vast battle does not need to intimidate us. Not everybody can argue at a level to reach a Bertrand Russell, but God does put people into our paths who are at our level. Let's thank God that the church has people at different levels who can take on everyone. We need to know that the gospel is simple enough to reach a little child and sophisticated enough to reach the finest minds, such as those of Augustine and Paul and others throughout history. 🌟

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# Regaining a Christian Worldview *in the* Church

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By James Emery White

**N**ear the end of their lives, John Adams, the second president of the United States, wrote to Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States: "My friend, you and I have lived in serious times."<sup>1</sup>

He was right. Yet, I would argue that those times were no less serious than ours.

One of the more intriguing observations about church history surfaced in an essay written just after the Second World War. Historian Christopher Dawson suggested that there have been six identifiable ages in relation to the Church. Each lasted three or four centuries, and each

followed a similar course. He contended that each of these ages began and ended in crisis. The heart of each crisis was an intense attack by new enemies — within and without the church. These attacks, in turn, demanded new spiritual determination and drive by the Church.<sup>2</sup> Without this determination and drive, the Church would have lost the day.

Dawson accounted for six such ages at the time of his writing. I believe we are now standing at the beginning of another. This is why a Christian mind — informed by a biblical worldview — is more critical than ever. Here is why.

### The Second Fall

*There has been a second fall.* In the first fall, God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In the second fall, we returned the favor. In today's world, most leaders of science, commerce, education, and politics, no longer operate with any reference to a transcendent truth — much less God.

This is a new and profound break with the history of Western thought and culture. Even in times and places that might have been called *pagan*, true secularism in today's sense was unknown. Whether it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the gods of Greece and Rome, people assumed there was a world beyond the one in which they lived, and they lived accordingly. It would have been alien to anyone's thinking to begin and end with themselves *alone* in terms of truth and morality. The second fall changed all of that. We now live in a deeply fallen world.

Even if one wanted to prove that this is not the case, it is universally recognized that an entrenched secularized subculture is the primary influence in the American educational

system, the media, and the upper echelons of the legal system. These are the epicenters of culture and the means by which culture creates and disseminates values and ideas. These epicenters are fiercely influential and control the institutions that provide the official definitions of reality.

The Supreme Court — not God-given revelation — is shaping and guiding our sense of right and wrong. The educational system — not the family — is shaping values and socializing our children. The media — not the church — is forging our sense of identity and community.

While this is a serious time, it is also a momentous time, a time of opportunity, largely because the world is feeling the sickness of this disease. We have a crisis of values. We need values, but do not have them, and are divorced from any means of finding them. There is a lack of vision. There is nothing calling us upward to be more than we are beyond ourselves. We have empty souls, and everything we have built apart from God has proven inadequate for human experience.

We are experiencing a world that is operating apart from God, but cannot. It is breaking down. This is the world's great crisis. We are not plagued by the first part of Nietzsche's famous claim — that God is dead — but increasingly by his second, lesser-known assertion — that we have killed Him. Out of this crisis comes the true challenge of the modern world that Nietzsche also articulated: "How shall we, the murderer of all murderers, comfort ourselves?"<sup>3</sup>

### The Postmodern World

At the heart of the postmodern condition is a growing sense that something new is beginning to

take hold of our culture, something different from the modern world created by the Enlightenment. But this is not so much the end of modernity, as it is *exhaustion*.<sup>4</sup> Whether art or politics, literature or music — it all seems tired.

The currents of postmodernism seem to reflect the morning after a hangover. We seem to be trying to sort out the night before so we can get a handle on the day at hand. In the midst of this hangover, at least three primary reactions are taking place.

### A changing view of reality

Our view of reality is changing. There is a growing conviction that what we think we know is vague and separate from ultimate truth. We cannot really see the world as it is because no one is truly objective. You cannot stand outside your own context — including experiences, biases, and historical-cultural current — and be free to make unconditioned observations.

This is more than saying, "That's your opinion." It is the idea that *everything* is opinion. As Walter Truett Anderson entitled one of his books, *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*.<sup>5</sup>

### A changing view of truth

What has happened to truth? Some believe there is no such thing as truth. This is the second change postmodernism is bringing. Since everything is simply perspective, postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty argued that the goal is to *talk* about things but not arrive at any *conclusions*.<sup>6</sup> Today, there is skepticism toward any story that claims to be *the* story. If the bias of the Enlightenment was that we could know everything, the disposition of postmodernism is that we cannot know *anything*. If we do, it is not transcendent truth.





We live in a day of both peril and promise because this new openness to the spiritual is indiscriminate.

### The search for the spiritual

Where does this leave the soul? Empty, but at least sensing it. This is the third change that people feel in our day. Pitirim Sorokin, founder of Harvard University's department of sociology, noted that civilization tends to swing in one of two directions: toward the material or toward the spiritual. One is rational or scientific; the other is theological and spiritual.

The medieval world was a spiritual world. From the Enlightenment forward, we have lived in a rational, scientific world. The postmodern shift is toward the spiritual. It seems people are rediscovering the validity of faith. This is why books narrating spiritual journeys are best sellers, spiritual themes run throughout contemporary music, and films and television increasingly explore religious ideas and settings. People are interested in spiritual things. They are asking

spiritual questions, and they are beginning to see that many of their deepest needs are spiritual in nature.

Author Douglas Coupland expresses it well: "Here's my secret: I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God — that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love."<sup>7</sup>

We live in a day of both peril and promise because this new openness to the spiritual is indiscriminate. It can be Wicca or Kabbalah, Mormon or Islam, and many are increasingly sensing *all of the above*. Today, people are more open to spiritual matters than ever, yet an

extraterrestrial, an angel, or a spiritualist will serve as well as a minister.

### Reaching Out

As church leaders, what do we need to be doing? In my book, *Serious Times*, I discuss the importance of four things:

- Deepening our minds — forging a biblical worldview wielded by a Christian mind.
- Developing our souls — being so formed in Christ that we have something to offer to the world that it does not already have.
- Answering our vocational calls — following God in the adventures of faith, and taking our place in the great redemptive drama.
- Aligning with the church — whose enterprise is the great revolution set in motion through Christ for reclaiming the world.

Of the four, we may be least likely to take our own minds to task.

## A Christian Mind

When Jesus summarized the command from Deuteronomy 6:5, He said we were to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our strength. He then added, "And with all of our mind" (Luke 10:27). Jesus wanted there to be no doubt that when contemplating the comprehensive nature of life commitment to God, we should not forget our intellect.

But we must not reduce His command to intellectualism. It goes

**If ministers are to avoid becoming absorbed in the surrounding culture, they must take a stand through the renewing of their minds.**

deeper than that. The biblical vision concerning the role of the mind is at the heart of the renewal of character and culture. In the Book of Romans, Paul said: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The Greek verbs are in the present imperative, challenging us continually to *go on* by refusing to conform to the patterns of the world, and by letting ourselves be renewed by the transforming of our mind. The Phillips' translation reads: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould."<sup>8</sup> Even better is Eugene Peterson's *The Message*: "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking."<sup>9</sup>

Christian leaders must not become so adjusted to their culture that they fit into it without thinking, embrace it without discernment, mirror it without conscience, and enable it without challenge. Pastors must

retain the prophetic voice because people tend to be imitative by nature — to adapt and conform to their surroundings. Only two forces shape people: the world, and the will of God. If ministers are to avoid becoming absorbed in the surrounding culture, they must take a stand through the renewing of their minds.

As a man "thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV).<sup>10</sup> Harry Blamires states: "There is no longer a Christian mind." A Christian ethic, a Christian practice, a Christian

spirituality? Yes. But not a Christian *mind*. Mark Noll has noted that the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.

The National Study of Youth and Religion, a research project directed by Christian Smith, professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame and Lisa Pearce, assistant professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, catalogued the demise of a Christian worldview *among Christians*. While most U.S. teenagers identified themselves as Christian, the "language, and therefore experience, of Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, and heaven and hell appear, among most Christian teenagers in the United States ... to be supplanted by the language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward."

Principal investigator Christian Smith writes, "It is not so much that

U.S. Christianity is being secularized. Rather more subtly, Christianity is either degenerating into a pathetic version of itself or, more significantly, Christianity is actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith."

Smith and his colleagues call this new faith *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*. This belief system holds that God demands little more of people than to be *nice*, and the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself. This system teaches that people do not particularly need God in daily life except to resolve the various problems that come their way (a "Divine Butler" or "Cosmic Therapist"). Regardless of religious convictions, beliefs, or commitments, good people go to heaven when they die.

When Mark Noll wrote about the scandal of the evangelical mind, his lament was largely that Christians were not using their minds. Smith's research reveals a more frightening scenario — the loss of the basic content of Christian thought and belief. Yet, thinking in light of God's existence and His self-revelation is what it means to have a Christian mind.

Flannery O'Connor refers to herself as a *Christian realist*. This reflects her conviction that she lives in the presence of certain theological truths: the doctrine of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption. These are not matters of subjective belief for her; they are part of reality, as solid as the laws of physics.

This is at the heart of the leadership challenge. We must consider the big issues of our day in light of our faith. This is important because we often succumb to compartmentalization instead of having an integrated worldview that addresses the entirety of life. A compartmentalized mind



# The Greatest Danger Facing the Church

I believe that, more than anything else, the church is imperiled by its own failure to teach, to believe, and to live out the great truths of the Christian faith in a way that pleases God. This is true not only of theologically liberal congregations — which essentially abandoned the Bible long ago — but also of too many evangelical churches and institutions. When “truth stumbles in the public square” (Isaiah 59:14, NRSV),<sup>1</sup> when the church succumbs to the larger culture’s trivializing of life’s greatest questions, then the gospel and all the truths of the Bible go unheeded. People lose their way and call good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20). As Jeremiah lamented, “Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips” (Jeremiah 7:28).

The cultural indicators are clear. Religious involvement is high, but spiritual discernment is low. Knowledge of God is scarce. Occultism and gratuitous violence fascinate millions and are common fare on television, in popular music, movies, video games, and even children’s books. Immorality is evident and taken for granted at every level. Forest rangers ignite massive forest fires. Huge corporations ignore ethics for the sake of selfish profit. Serial killers terrorize us. Teenagers go on homicidal sprees in our schools — and commit suicide in record numbers.

Although America is threatened by deadly terrorism, it refuses to get deadly serious about God, the soul, and matters of eternity. Many just want life to return to normal when *normal* — designer religion, materialism, crass sensuality, and relentless entertainment — is precisely what God wants us to repent of (1 John 2:15–17). Even after September 11, 2001 — and even among supposed Christians — moral and religious relativism stills runs rampant. (Teenagers have been the hardest hit.)

Our pluralistic society has deceived many Christians into believing that all religions lead to God. But Scripture points to the contrary (Exodus 20:1–3; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5,6). Many Christians take up yoga, ignorant of the fact it is a Hindu spiritual practice. Biblical illiteracy is staggering — even when more Bibles and study tools are available than ever before.

Given the erosion of biblical truth, the church is in peril of losing its saltiness and snuffing its light (Matthew 5:13–16). But who else can explain, defend, proclaim, and apply the gospel of Christ if not Christ’s own followers? Who

else can offer an objectively true, reasonable, ethical, and truly liberating worldview to our religiously confused and ethically corrupted culture? Who else but Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe (Colossians 1:15–20), can call people to repentance, forgive their sins through His sacrifice on the Cross, justify them before God, and empower them for true spirituality, faithful obedience, and world-changing service?

We must recover the truth of the gospel. And we must obey it — come what may. The gospel is only good news when the bad news of sin against a holy God is rightly taught. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*: “It is after you have realized that there is a Moral Law and a Power behind that law, and that you have broken the law and put yourself wrong with that Power — it is after this and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.” If the church speaks with a muted voice concerning sin, it cannot speak in the name of Christ, the only Savior from sin (John 3:16; 14:6). Christians cannot accept relativism — in ethics or in religion (Exodus 20:1–17).

Salvation comes only through the grace of a loving and just God revealed in Scripture and through the perfect life, atoning death, and death-defeating resurrection of His divine Son. This gift is received by faith alone in Jesus alone (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5). There is no other gospel (Galatians 1:6–9). And this gospel summons followers of Jesus to be disciples (not spiritual consumers), to submit to His lordship over all of life (Matthew 28:18), and to be transformed through the renewing of their minds and the offering of their bodies as a living sacrifice in God’s service (Romans 12:1,2).

The greatest danger facing the church today is the loss of the truth and power of the gospel. There is no greater loss. 🌀



**DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS** is professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, where he heads the Philosophy of Religion Masters program. He is the author of 10 books. He can be contacted at Douglas.Groothuis@denverseminary.edu. Used by permission of the author.

## ENDNOTE

1. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version/Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America — Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, c.1989. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

separates life into distinct categories — job, family, a quiet time, the business section of the newspaper, and AOL — *all without integration*. As a result, our thinking in one area never informs our thinking in another.

A person who thinks this way can be a Christian, but not reflect on science or technology in light of his faith. Or even worse, *never considers* reflecting on science and technology in light of his faith. As a result, he seldom considers issues related to bioethics in light of what the Scriptures say regarding the nature of humanity or the doctrine of creation. Instead, he lets CNN tell him what a particular technological breakthrough will mean for the quality of his life, marvels at this progress, and then privately ponders whether he will be able to afford the procedure.

When people compartmentalize, the world of technology becomes distinct from the world of faith. It is the same with the worlds of film, literature, economics, and politics.

Many Christians never integrate these areas with thoughtful reflection from a Christian worldview.

*Worldview* is a key word. The term suggests more than a set of ideas by which one judges other ideas.<sup>11</sup> Instead, one's worldview provides a way to engage the vast range of human thought and creation from a Christian perspective. As Jonathan

## A pastor's teaching and preaching must demonstrate a biblical worldview wielded by a Christian mind.

Edwards contended, the basic goal of any intellect is to work toward "the consistency and agreement of our ideas with the ideas of God."<sup>12</sup>

For example, consider the question: Where did we come from? We have a limited number of answers at our disposal: We came about by chance (the naturalist's contention); we do not really exist (the Hindu response); or God spoke us into existence. For

Christians, the answers to: Where did we come from? and Who are we? provide a foundation for thinking that no other answers can provide. Because God created people, each person has value, meaning, and purpose. Someone above and outside of our existence stands over it as authority. This concept changes your leadership.

Because of the value of each person, Martin Luther King, Jr., could write these words from a Birmingham jail: "There are two types of law: just and unjust. ... A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. ... Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality."<sup>13</sup>

King's argument was based on the worth God gives each person regardless of what other people might say. King laid claim to a law above man's law. No other worldview could have given King the basis for such a claim.

A pastor's teaching and preaching must demonstrate a biblical worldview wielded by a Christian mind. He must help people think about today's questions from a Christian perspective, and how their faith applies to these questions. Discipleship of the mind is as important as any other kind of discipleship. I wrote *A Mind for God* so pastors and leaders could have a primer to use for discipleship in their churches. Pastors must become active readers, learners, and thinkers to help people develop a Christian worldview. Much of this worldview begins with basic *literacy*.

### Christian literacy

In the late 1980s, E.D. Hirsch burst onto the cultural scene with his idea of *cultural literacy*. He detailed the importance of having a core of background knowledge for functional literacy and effective national communication.<sup>14</sup> Hirsch ignited a









Before a pastor can contend with culture, he must first ground himself in a sound and vibrant Christian theology.

national debate concerning the nature of education and the meaning of literacy. People asked questions about what was needed to form the content of such knowledge, and whether education can be reduced to such things. Nevertheless, the central thesis remained: There are certain things we need to know.

A body of knowledge lends itself to cultural literacy — and even further, to Christian literacy.<sup>15</sup> This is why professors teach certain things, and then proclaim, “You will need to know this for the test.” Within education there is an inherent understanding that certain facts need to be known, certain books need to be read, certain lives need to be studied, certain events need to be remembered, and certain ideas need to be understood. So, what are these things?

### **Biblical literacy**

The Early Church felt the need to identify what people needed to know from the earliest days. Luke, along with Matthew, Mark, and John, felt it was critical to record the *central* teachings and life events of Jesus. Furthermore, John acknowledged: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books

that would be written” (John 21:25).

Beyond the Gospels, it is important that our core of knowledge includes: Why God gave us the Scriptures, the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, the seven letters to the churches, the wisdom of the Proverbs, the great theological treatise of Romans, the evangelistic thrust of John’s Gospel, and everything else within the Canon.

The starting point of our education — or commitment to learning — is biblical literacy. This is arguably where the church has done its best, where we must recognize the spiritual gift of teaching, and where Christians have most devoted themselves as students. Nevertheless, we are always one generation from biblical illiteracy.

### **Historical literacy**

Beyond biblical learning, we need to know certain significant events in Christian history.

History is the story of God’s activities in, and dealings with, the world. To ignore history is to be condemned to repeat it. More specifically, to ignore history is to ignore the world in which we live, the people who have shaped it, and the events that have brought us to where we are.

History is walking back through time, listening to its better minds. It is

easy to imagine that the issues of our day did not exist before our day, but this is a mistake. Many people have wrestled with these issues before. It is well worth our time to explore these wrestlings, or else we will cut ourselves off from the wisdom and insight that have gone before us.

What events in Christian history — and their significance — do we need to know? Historian Mark Noll suggests the following: The Fall of Jerusalem (70); the Council of Nicaea (325); the Council of Chalcedon (451); Benedict’s Rule (530); the coronation of Charlemagne (800); the great schism between the Eastern and Western Church (1054); the Diet of Worms (1521); the English Act of Supremacy (1534); the founding of the Jesuits (1540); the Conversion of the Wesleys (1738); the French Revolution (1789); and the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910).<sup>16</sup>

### **Theological literacy**

Beyond biblical and historical literacy is theological literacy. The Bible gives us God’s revelation, history shows how some of the better minds have wrestled with it, and theology assembles and applies these areas to the great questions of life and the spiritual formation of believers.

Theology has traditionally organized





# Loving God With Our Minds

**A**fter I returned from a sabbatical, I shared with the pastors in the Rocky Mountain District that I had read several books during my time away. I called attention to one book I found especially stimulating. It challenged Christians, especially Pentecostals, to not be afraid of using their intellect. In a letter to our pastors I stated, "This is a dangerous book that may challenge some in leadership and also laity who have unknowingly adopted the philosophy that 'the dumber I am, the more the Holy Spirit can use me.'"

Someone questioned my statement. The person asked if I was implying that God only used educated people. He then told of a godly man he knew who only had an elementary education, but yet God used the man mightily.

Of course God can use anyone — He will even use an ass (Numbers 22, KJV) if He needs to. But the point is this: I believe if this brother — who only has an elementary education — refuses to love God with his mind and intellect and refuses to learn, grow, and study, he will miss much of what God has for him. I believe his eventual effectiveness will be cut short. Tragically, I know people who are uneducated and proud of that fact. They see this as a special badge. God always resists pride, whether it is about academic prowess or lack of it. But the point is this: God wants all of us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind.

Paul exhorted Timothy: "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). The NIV reads: "Do your best to present yourself as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

The word translated "study" is *spoudazo*. It is used 11 times in the New Testament. It speaks of hard work, diligence, effort, study, exerting oneself, zeal, labor — all in the context of handling God's Word.

My challenge to Pentecostal ministers and students

is simply: Part of passionately loving God is a desire to use our mind to study, to stretch ourselves intellectually, to begin and finish endeavors that may require some level of academic rigor, to exert ourselves in the study of God's Word and other disciplines that can help us lead more effectively.

You have heard the adage, "I'd rather be a fool on fire than a scholar on ice." No one wants to be dry in his walk with God. But Pentecostals have for too long bought into the lie that if you pursue academics, if you desire to study diligently, you will lose your passion for the things of God.

Am I saying that God prefers those with a college education? No. I've met college graduates who are idiots, and I've met people without formal theological education who are brilliant — who have exhibited *spoudazo*.

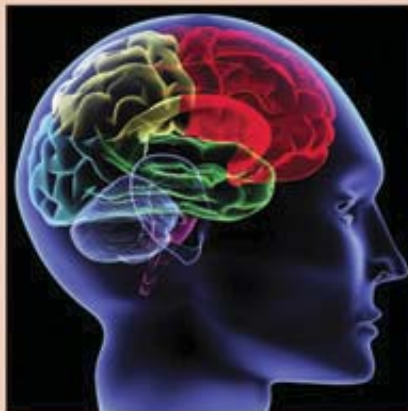
I believe the best learning preparation for life, and especially for church leadership, is a 4-year degree at an Assemblies of God college or university. Yes, an AG college is expensive and their church leadership programs are difficult and require academic rigor. But I hope that our future church leaders are

willing to make sacrifices and work hard so they can build a solid foundation for their ministry.

I applaud Christian liberal arts education. I am convinced that the Assemblies of God can provide the best training for church leadership, but also world-class education in every discipline. Why not? Why should we limit the power of the Spirit of God to help us love God with our minds?

Yes, without God, our intellect will fail us. And yes, without God, our intellect can lead us astray. We desperately need Him in all aspects of our lives.

I challenge Pentecostal leaders and laity to renew their commitment to love God with their mind and to study to show themselves approved unto God.



**G. ROBERT COOK, JR., D.MIN.**, is executive vice president of the Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education, Springfield, Missouri.



itself into 10 categories: the existence, nature, and attributes of God; revelation (the inspiration and authority of Scripture); creation and providence; humanity/human nature; original and actual sin; the person and work of Christ; human nature, sin, and grace; the person and work of the Holy Spirit; the Church; and the end times.

It is important to explore and understand each of these areas of theology. For example, we say we believe in the God of the Bible, but what kind of God is He? A caring God or an indifferent God? We say we believe the Bible, but in what way? Is it truth without any error or a somewhat reliable guide that may not be completely trustworthy? If we hold to its inspiration, do we mean *inspired* in the sense of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, or something more? We say we believe in creation and that God made us in His image. What does that mean? Where is this image located? When does life begin? What gives it value?

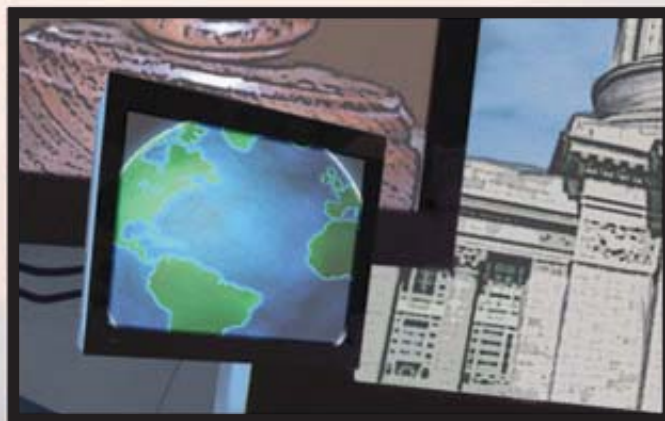
These are theological questions. Before a pastor can contend with culture, he must first ground himself in a sound and vibrant Christian theology. This is why theology was called the queen of the sciences throughout the medieval era. Christians understood that no other field of study, no other topic held greater worth.

### Becoming Literate

Talking about learning and getting an education are two different things. Where can a person take a course in

Christian theology or church history? One answer is that churches must rise to the educational challenge.

Churches are increasingly developing a community college feel to their educational ministries. Mecklenburg Community Church offers an institute that provides new courses each quarter: Christian theology, Bible 101, church history, or book studies. Such learning opportunities are vital and complement the learning from



**Apart from a Christian mind, the myriad of worldviews contending for our attention will either take us captive, or we will fail to make the Christian voice heard above the din.**

weekend and midweek services, and from small group experiences.

Many seminaries offer branch campuses and extension centers in key population centers throughout the United States. Even more are using the Internet to offer distance-learning programs that include audio lectures, printed study guides, lecture outlines, study questions, and a bibliography for further reading. Some Web sites allow significant interaction between students and between students and instructors.

### A Battle of Ideas

Make no mistake about the nature of our contest and the foundation on which all transforming leadership has stood — Martin Luther King, Jr., William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or St. Patrick. As John Stott says, "We may talk of conquering the world for Christ. But what sort of conquest do we mean? Not a victory by force of arms. ... This is a battle of ideas."

This was Paul's concern when he wrote to the Corinthians, reminding them that: "We do not wage war as the world does. ... We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

This is the double-edged threat of our day. Apart from a Christian mind, the myriad of worldviews contending for our attention will either take us captive, or we will fail to make the Christian voice heard above the din. Either way, we must begin to think or lose the fight.

In 1995, Thomas Cahill wrote his provocatively entitled book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. "Ireland," contended Cahill, "had one moment of unblemished glory ... as the Roman Empire fell, as all through Europe matted, unwashed barbarians descended on the Roman cities, looting artifacts and burning books, the Irish, who were just learning to read and write, took up the great labor of copying all of Western literature."

Missionary-minded Irish monks later brought back to the continent what the

Irish had preserved on their isolated island, and refounded European civilization. That, Cahill concludes, is how the Irish saved civilization.

Cahill's study contains more information than meets the eye. Beyond the loss of Latin literature and the development of the great national European literatures that an illiterate Europe would not have established, Cahill notes that something else would also have perished in the West: "The habits of the mind that encourage thought." Why would this matter?

Cahill continues his assessment: "When Islam began its medieval

Never before have the habits of the mind mattered more. As Winston Churchill stated in his address at Harvard University in 1943, "The empires of the future will be empires of the mind." Oxford theologian Alister McGrath notes that Churchill's point was that a great transition was taking place in Western culture with immense implications for all who live in it. The powers of the new world would not be nation-states — as with empires past — but ideologies. Ideas, not nations, would captivate and conquer in

## The starting point for the conquest of the world would now be the human mind.

expansion, it would have encountered scant resistance to its plans — just scattered tribes of animists, ready for a new identity." Without a robust Christian mind to engage the onslaught, the West would have been under the crescent instead of the Cross.

the future. The starting point for the conquest of the world would now be the human mind. Yet, in the Christian realm, there are surprisingly few warriors.

Christians have too often retreated into personal piety and good works. One BBC commentator stated, that

Christians have too often offered mere feelings and philanthropy. Speaking specifically to the challenge from Islam, he added that what we needed was more hard thinking applied to the issues of the day.

That is how leaders will bring about renewal — real renewal — not only for us but also for our culture. 🍌



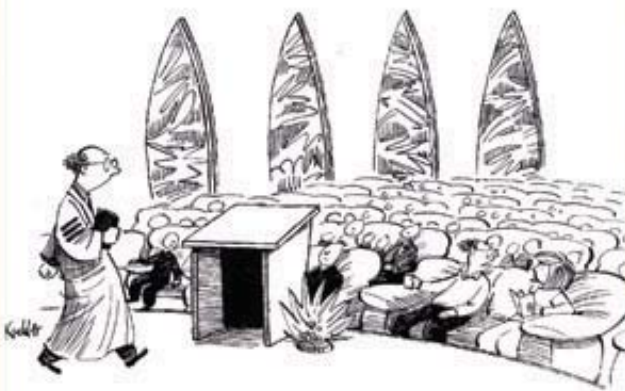
**JAMES EMERY WHITE, PH.D.**, founding and senior pastor, Mecklenburg Community Church, Charlotte, North Carolina; professor of Theology and Culture at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte; founder and president of Serious Times (<http://www.serious-times.com>), a ministry that explores the intersection of faith and culture; and author of more than a dozen books, including *Serious Times* and *A Mind for God*.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

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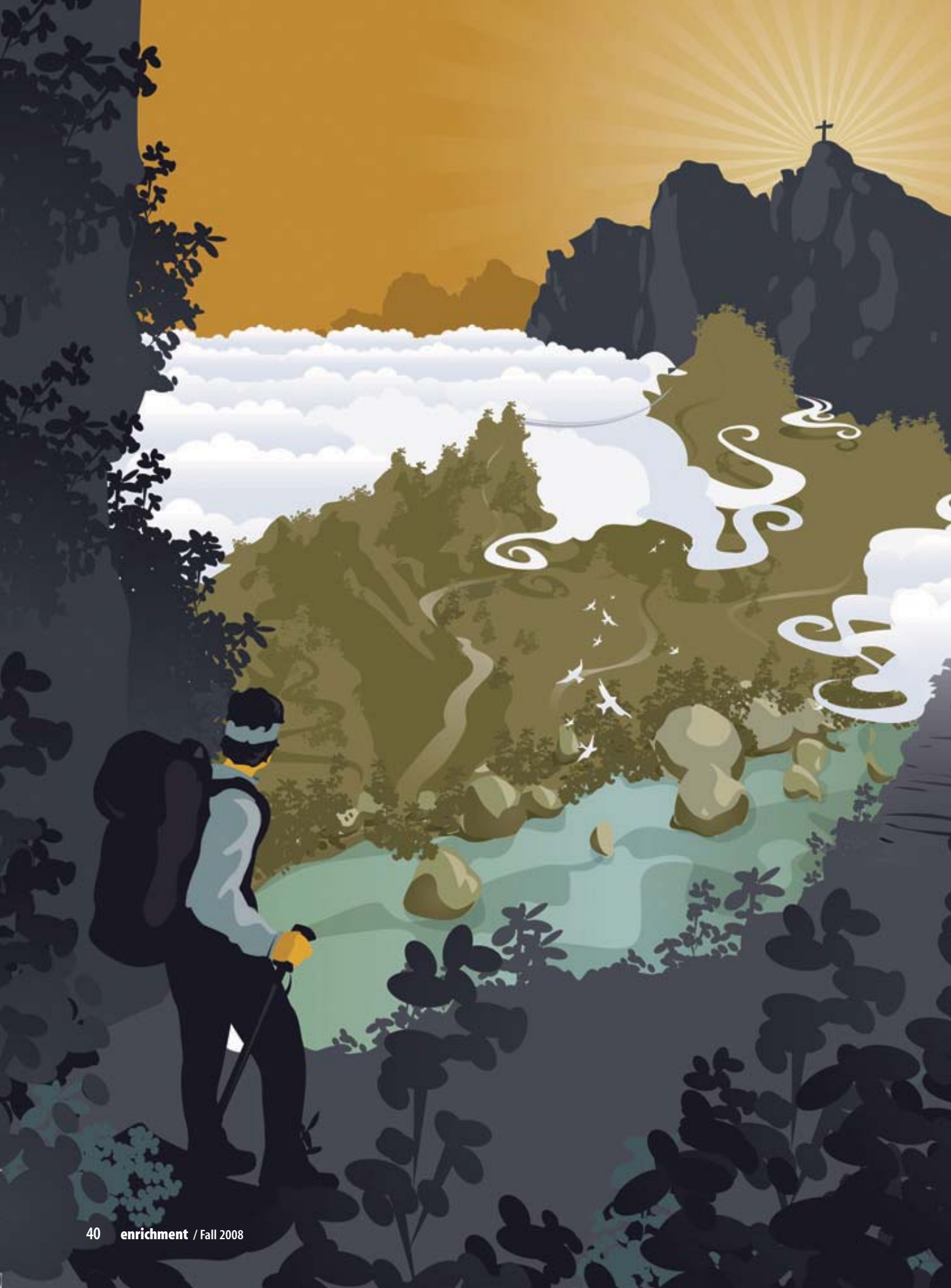
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**"Okay, sure, the soft leather pews are nice. But what's a guy gotta do to get a fresh cup of coffee around here?"**











# Following a Unique Christ in a Pluralistic Society

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BY PAUL COPAN

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**H**ow can pastors and other Christian leaders encourage those entrusted to their care to handle pluralistic challenges?

*How do believers respond to the attacks from a pluralistic society? What are some of the common errors by those who espouse pluralism? If Christianity is the exclusive source of salvation, how do we respond to the question concerning those who have never heard the gospel? Paul Copan deals with these issues in his article on pluralism.*

The gospel is no stranger to religiously pluralistic environments.<sup>1</sup> The disciples first proclaimed the good news throughout the religiously mixed Mediterranean world with its many gods and temples, Greek philosophies, and emperor worship. Today's religious pluralism, however,



# Following a Unique Christ in a Pluralistic Society

offers an appealing approach to liberal democratic Western societies by claiming that all religions are equally capable of salvation or liberation, none being superior to another.<sup>2</sup> This agrees with educator Allan Bloom's analysis of our culture: "Conflict is the evil we most want to avoid."<sup>3</sup>

Isn't it arrogant to proclaim Jesus as God's unique revelation in the face of other religions? As feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether

## Describing Religious Pluralism

According to some pluralists, the different religions are simply different manifestations of the Ultimate Reality or the Transcendent — God, Brahman, the Tao, Nothingness. Like a three-dimensional hologram, the film or picture underneath projects a different image depending on the angle and distance from which one observes it. So, one person might view the same underlying Ultimate Reality

on in utter ignorance" and "prate about an elephant not one of them has seen."

John Hick, perhaps the most notable religious pluralist today, calls for a Copernican revolution of religions. Cosmology has shifted from a Ptolemaic geocentric (earth-centered) view of the universe to a Copernican heliocentric (sun-centered) one. Similarly, we must replace a Christocentric view — the triune God's revelation in Christ as central with all other religions revolving or orienting themselves around it — with a God/Reality-centered view, in which all religions, including Christianity, revolve around it.

Beginning with philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), thinkers have distinguished between three stages of religious development: First, ancient preaxial religions are characterized by being tribalistic, mythical, nature-bound, and primal.

Second, axial-age religions arose in two stages: (1) significant *saving* or *liberating* ethical-religious ideas emerged in India (ritual-to-philosophical—or Vedic-to-Upanishadic—Hinduism, and then Buddhism); China (Confucianism, Taoism); and the West (Zoroastrianism, prophetic Judaism, Greek philosophy) around 800 to 200 B.C. (2) Then, springing from Judaism, two offshoot Abrahamic religions — Christianity and Islam — arose.

Third, the more pluralistic postaxial religious thinking around 1600 to 1800 (rooted in a departure from established religious authority during the Enlightenment) affirms that there are "different ways of experiencing, conceiving, and living in relation to the ultimate divine Reality that

## Pluralism is much more suited to our individualistic, consumer-oriented, buffet-style approach to religion that says, "I'll take some of that; no, I don't like that."

declared, "The idea that Christianity, or even the biblical faiths, have a monopoly on religious truth is an outrageous and absurd religious chauvinism."<sup>4</sup> At the popular level, Oprah Winfrey once said on her show: "There are millions of ways to be a human being and many paths to what you call 'God'; . . . there couldn't possibly be just one way."<sup>5</sup>

Now, we can readily agree with the benign, descriptive fact of pluralism — that many religious beliefs exist. The more dangerous, evangelism-threatening pluralism, however, takes on a prescriptive tone: "It is true — and therefore you need to believe — that all religions are capable of saving or liberating." In such a view, the claim that Jesus is unique is narrow-minded and imperialistic — a relic of the colonial age. Pluralism is much more suited to our individualistic, consumer-oriented, buffet-style approach to religion that says, "I'll take some of that; no, I don't like that."

different from another person. Or religions could be compared to gold or silver (representing the underlying Ultimate Reality). These metals can be (1) solid, shaped, and polished; (2) a molten liquid; or (3) a rough, unrefined ore (representing the various world religions).

We are told, "All roads lead to the top of the mountain." Another analogy speaks of six blind men from India (think: Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Confucian, and Taoist) who touch an elephant. Each touches a different part of the elephant and draws a dogmatic conclusion about what an elephant is based on his limited experience (a wall, snake, spear, tree, fan, and rope). An observer of their debate thinks their rigid beliefs are comical. (*For a fuller explanation of this analogy, see the sidebar "Tolerant or Intolerant?" on the facing page.*) Applying this picture to "theologic wars," poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816–87) wrote of religious disputants with their exclusivistic claims: they "[r]ail



## ►► Tolerant or Intolerant? Are All Beliefs Equal and Valid?



In 21st-century Western culture, we live in a context of spiritual longing. But this spiritual openness does not always translate into people following Christ. People have a dizzying array of options when it comes to religion. The culture around us believes all religions are equally valid. It seems bizarre to people that someone would claim that only one way is the truth and the only truth.

In my experience, people usually have three motivations in dismissing the idea that Christ is the only way to God. We need to be able to deal with each of these. The first objection is that it is *intolerant* to believe that Christianity is true. It may help to define *tolerance*. *Tolerance* is the willingness to accept or *tolerate* someone or something, especially opinions or behaviors that you may not agree with, or people who are not like you. In other words, I only need to tolerate other religions if I disagree with them. If all paths lead to God, I do not need to be tolerant since I agree with all religions and views.

The irony is that religious people on all sides suffer in this paradigm. Whenever anyone attempts to make all religious groups say the same things and to suppress the diversity that exists, he marginalizes and paints orthodox believers as *intolerant*. In reality, the move to homogenize and relativize is itself intolerant of the real views of different religions. If I believe that Christ is the only way to God, I can still be tolerant by showing respect to those who disagree with me.

The second motivation behind dismissing Christ as the only way to God is that this claim is perceived as *arrogant*. How could we be so arrogant as to say that all other religions are wrong and

Jesus is the only path to God? People often use the parable of the elephant to illustrate how arrogant Christians are: Blind scribes are touching different parts of an elephant. One is holding its tail, and saying, "This is a rope."

Another is holding its front leg, and saying, "No, this is not a rope. It is a tree trunk."

A third person is holding its trunk, and saying, "You are both wrong. It is a snake."

The moral of this story is that all religions are like those men. They were each touching a different part of ultimate reality. Therefore, Christians are arrogant when they claim that only they have the truth.

As we consider this illustration, we discover two main differences between the person telling the story and the people in the story. The first difference is that the scribes touching the elephant are blind and the narrator can see.

The second is one of perspective. The blind scribes are near the elephant, but the narrator is standing back and has the full picture. The breathtaking claim the storyteller makes is that Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, and Muhammad are all blind, but I can see. *They* had a small perspective, but *I* see the full picture — all ways lead to God. The question is now: Who is the arrogant one?

It is just as arrogant to claim that Buddha, Muhammad, and Jesus were wrong in their exclusive claims, as it is to say that Jesus is the only way. The issue, then, is not about who is arrogant or not, but what is actually true and real.

The third motivation concerns *exclusion*. How can you exclude all other religions? Jesus said that He was the way to the Father, but I cannot follow Him because I do not want to be an intolerant person

who excludes others. Again, we need to think carefully about this because, in reality, whatever position we hold, we exclude some views. Even the person who believes that all ways — including Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Stalin, and Osama bin Laden — lead to God excludes the view that only some ways lead to God or only one way leads to God. In the same way, the average person in the West would probably want to exclude some of the extremists, such as Hitler or Milosovich. He may believe that only some ways lead to God, such as the five main world religions. This excludes the view that all ways lead to God or that only one way leads to God. And the Christian who says, "I follow Jesus because He said that He is the only way to the Father," excludes the view that all ways or some ways lead to God. Every view excludes some. The issue is not who is excluding people but, again, what is true and real.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). There are many possibilities here. Perhaps He was a genuinely good person, but He was deluded; He was sincere, but wrong. He believed He was God and misled people because, in reality, He was mentally imbalanced. Perhaps, He *knew* He was not God, but still went around telling people He was the only way to God, in which case He was a sinister character. Or, He was who He said He was and is the only way to God.



**AMY ORR-EWING** lives in London and is training director at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Trust, where she oversees the Trust's apologetics training program. She is author of *Is the Bible Intolerant?*

transcends all our varied versions of it," as Hick affirms.<sup>6</sup>

Hick does not naively insist that "all religions are basically the same." They cannot all be true in what they affirm because of their massive fundamental

4:157,158). If Muslims are correct, then the Christian faith crumbles (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

All the world's religions differ significantly concerning the nature of Ultimate Reality (a personal God;

responding to this Ultimate Reality. Its reality is different from the experience of *It*. This resembles what philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) asserted: We cannot have direct access to the noumenal realm (the thing in itself), but only to the phenomenal realm (as it appears to us). Yet this view raises questions about how Kant or Hick could know that this thing-in-itself or the *Real* is unknowable.

Another aspect of religious pluralism is that all the world's religions are equally capable of bringing salvation or liberation. Salvation is the transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, and no particular religion has a monopoly on such a transformation.

Religious pluralists often claim that producing morally upright saints is evidence of the realization of liberation in different religions. Major world religions produce moral fruits in their devotees, such as treating others how they would want to be treated. Christians have Jesus or Mother Teresa; Hindus, Mahatma Gandhi; and Buddhists, the Dalai Lama. No religion has the moral high ground over another.

## Responses to Religious Pluralism

Christians maintain that the Christian faith is true and that the sacrificial death of Jesus is the basis of genuine salvation. Thus, other religions cannot deliver genuine salvation. Where other religions disagree with Christian revelation, at that point they are in error. This view is particularistic or exclusivistic, but all religious truth-claims are exclusionary. Before addressing problems with religious pluralism, we need to consider four things.

First, all truth is God's truth — whether within the Christian faith

## While Christians, Jews, and Muslims share an Abrahamic faith, this does not mean they are equal.

differences. Buddhism's Dalai Lama puts it plainly: "Among spiritual faiths, there are many different philosophies, some just opposite to each other on certain points. Buddhists do not accept a creator; Christians base their philosophy on that theory."<sup>7</sup>

By definition, truth excludes something — error or falsehood. Christians and Buddhists cannot both be right on this matter because either God exists or He doesn't. Muslims and Christians cannot both be right about Jesus' death. Muslims reject His death on a cross (Sura

an impersonal, undifferentiated consciousness; or Nothingness); the human condition (sin, ignorance, or craving/desire); its solution (salvation, enlightenment, or the elimination of desire); or the afterlife (personal enjoyment of/separation from God, reincarnations or rebirths followed by personal extinction). All religions are not "basically the same." Sophisticated pluralists will recognize these genuine, irreconcilable differences.

For Hick, religious belief is the result of culturally conditioned attempts to arrive at the Ultimate Reality. The

nomadic Muslim Tuareg or the Krishna devotee will be oriented to *the Real* through the filter or *baggage* of his particular religious and cultural background. Religious beliefs are true in the sense that they are oriented toward the Ultimate Reality, but false in another, because of cultural conditioning. There are different ways of conceiving, experiencing, and







or outside it. In Acts 17:22–28, Paul cited pagan (Stoic) thinkers who spoke of God as the Creator and Sustainer who is not contained by human temples. We also need to pay attention to commonalities and bridges with other religionists by affirming God-originated truth when we come across it. Buddhists or Confucians believe in honoring parents or in religious freedom; Muslims maintain that an eternally existent God created the universe. Christians can work together with Muslims and Buddhists in opposing tyranny and oppression throughout the world. Because all people are God's image-bearers, Christians can affirm that the poor or illiterate need to be helped without making basic aid or education contingent on receiving the gospel.

**Second, non-Christians who believe Christians are narrow-minded for believing in Jesus' uniqueness need to remember that Christ spoke of it first.** Non-Christians who are offended by claims that Jesus is the only Savior need to know that this claim originated with Jesus; Christians did not make this up (for example, John 14:6; compare Acts 4:10; 2 Corinthians 5:19). The critic must ultimately contend with Jesus' own authoritative and staggering identity claims.

**Third, religious dialogue requires equal respect, not equality of belief.** Here is a common interfaith scenario: Christians are invited to prayer breakfasts, dialogues, and panel discussions. They are told, however, that they cannot pray in Jesus' name or mention Jesus' uniqueness because this might offend Jews or Muslims. But isn't that restriction offensive to

Christians? Why is it permissible to offend Christians but not Jews and Muslims? Christians do not know how to pray except in the name of Jesus. So a Christian invited to such events needs to be allowed to pray as a Christian, not as a Deist to some generic deity. In dialogue, he needs to graciously speak as a Christian rather than accept a lowest-common-denominator approach in discussion.

While Christians, Jews, and Muslims share an Abrahamic faith, this does not mean they are equal. So if discussants approach the religious roundtable assuming religions are equally legitimate and true, they are not doing so as Christians, Muslims, or Hindus.

Religious dialogue must begin with the equality of persons, not belief. Participants can discuss their individual views and experiences openly, and all sides can benefit from empathetically listening to clarify views and to prevent the creation of caricatures and stereotypes (James 1:19).

**Fourth, religion, including idolatrous conceptions of God within Christendom, may prevent people from knowing the living God.** As with many religious leaders in Jesus' day, religiosity may hinder people from salvation and encountering God. In India, I have witnessed Hindu festivals in which people cut and gouge their bodies. Rather than being happy as they are, many live in bondage to evil spirits, oppressed by karma, bound by superstition, and paralyzed by fear of death. One Muslim convert to Christ declared, "The more I see of the world's religions, the more beautiful Jesus appears to me."

## Religious Pluralism's Problems

With these preliminaries in mind, let's consider religious pluralism's problems.

**First, religious pluralism eliminates the possibility of specific, historical divine revelation.** Religious pluralism seeks to begin from the ground up by observing what goes on in mosques, churches, synagogues, temples, and Sikh gurdwaras. Many pluralists believe Jesus was just a God-conscious person who did not rise from the dead. His later followers ascribed divinity to Him, as some of Buddha's followers did to Buddha. The pluralist, if correct, ultimately undermines the historic Christian faith. Jesus is one of many legitimate ways of finding salvation or liberation.

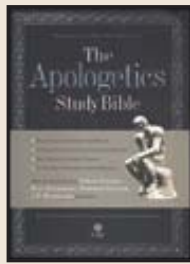
According to orthodox Christianity, God begins with particular persons and events — Abraham or the Incarnation. He does have the universal in mind, seeking to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3). Like ripples from a stone tossed into a pond, the Christian mission to the world flows from the Incarnation; it offers salvation to all through God's enabling Spirit. Pluralism, however, leaves us with a property-less, content-less Ultimate Reality. How do we need to respond to *It*? Do we need to love *It*, or pray to *It*, or just live ethically? Can we know *It* even exists?

**Second, religious pluralism is logically just as exclusivistic as the Christian — or any other faith.** The pluralistic-sounding Dalai Lama has declared that Tibetan Buddhism is "the highest and complete form of Buddhism."<sup>8</sup> "Only Buddhists can accomplish"<sup>9</sup> what is necessary for liberation. It seems, however, that religious pluralism is just as

non-neutral and exclusivistic regarding the status of religious truth-claims. The religious pluralist believes that his view is true and that the exclusivist — whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist — is wrong in rejecting pluralism. The pluralist believes he has a virtue the Christian or Muslim does not. Pluralism implies that Christians need to abandon belief in Jesus' deity, atoning death, and resurrection — beliefs pluralists take to be literally false and simply inspiring metaphors or symbols. Though the Christian faith is a particular exclusivism, religious pluralism is a generic exclusivism: if the pluralist is correct, then the central doctrines of the world's great religions are false.

While pluralists may appeal to analogies such as roads that lead to the tops of mountains or blind men touching an elephant, we could ask how they know that each religion's road leads to the top and why those who disagree are wrong. How is it that they have the correct vantage point? Besides, these analogies do not prove a point; they only illustrate it. If Jesus is the only way, we could then *change* the analogy to one that is more appropriate. For example, religions are like a labyrinth or a maze with only one way out. Here Jesus proves to be an advantageous starting point. Jesus claims to reveal God to us and to direct our destiny, which is bound up with our response to Him personally. Jesus himself steps into the maze of our miserable human condition and guides us to salvation and grants us hope.

**Third, even if religious belief is largely shaped by geographical and historical circumstances, this fact in itself does not guarantee religious pluralism's truth.** Pluralists raise



## The Apologetics Study Bible

Ted Cabal, General Editor (Holman Bible Publishers, 2,024 pp., hardcover)

**All too often believers feel battered and helpless to answer skeptics and critics. God, however, has entrusted the scholars of the church in our generation with the greatest wealth of biblical, theological, philosophical, historical, and scientific knowledge in history.**

*The Apologetics Study Bible* brings together in one resource the work of biblically faithful exegetes, historians, archaeologists, theologians, philosophers, and scientists — and all this work is wedded to the Bible. The distinctiveness of *The Apologetics*

*Study Bible* is its notes and articles appended to the biblical text at relevant points. Notes consist of commentary written by biblical scholars that relate specifically to apologetic issues raised by scriptural texts. Also related to specific biblical texts are over 50 examples of "Twisted Scripture." These explanations treat those instances where portions of the Bible have been misused by various religious movements.

*The Apologetics Study Bible* is a valuable resource for all Christians. It would make a wonderful gift for high school graduates.

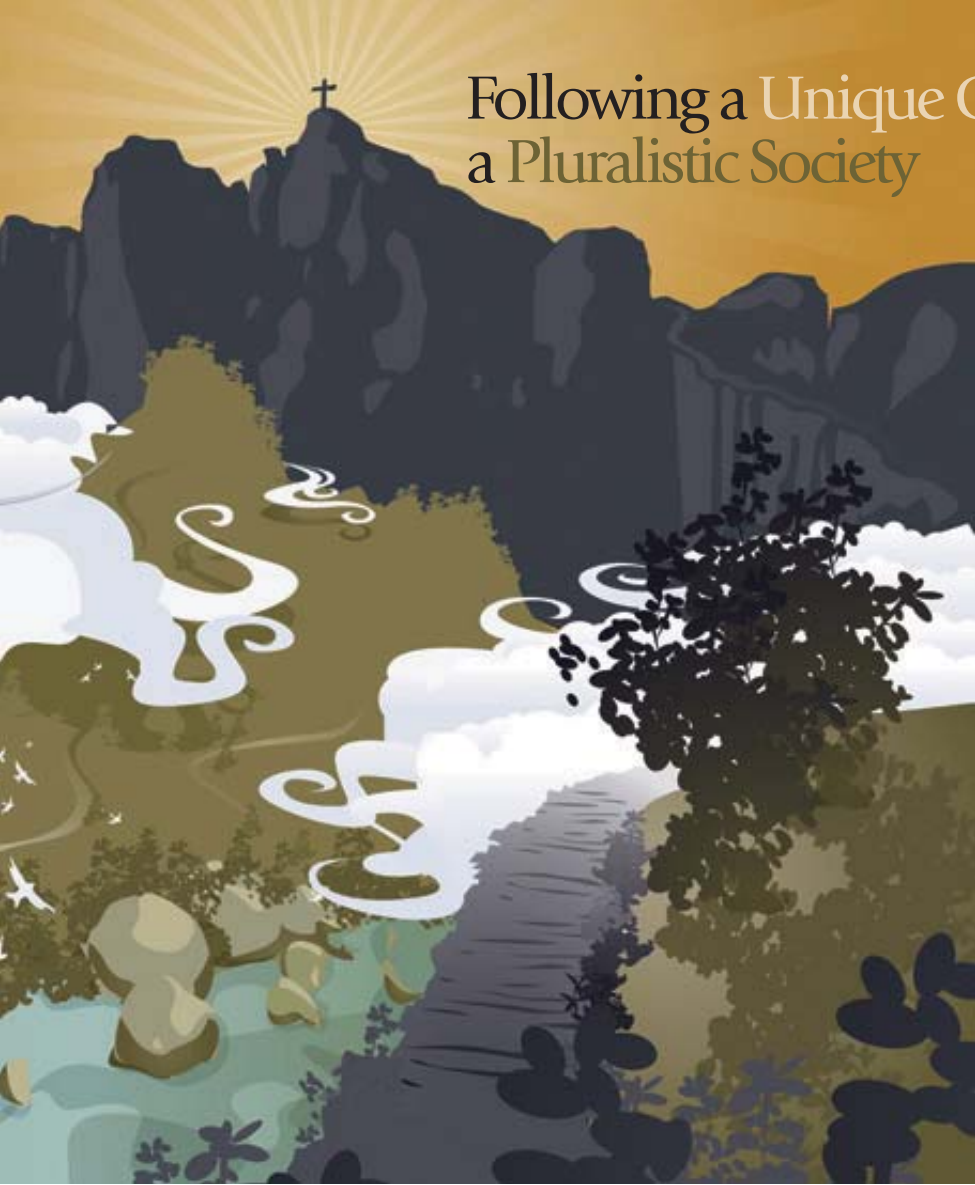
the geography objection: "If you had been born in Saudi Arabia, you would likely be a Muslim — or if in India, a Hindu." Though statistically true, this reasoning hardly proves the pluralist's point.

The geography of a belief neither establishes nor neutralizes its truth. While a Marxist, monarchist, or conservative Republican would likely have joined the Hitler Youth had he grown up in Nazi Germany, we do not conclude that all political systems are equally legitimate (perhaps, say, because they move persons from self-centeredness to *political*-centeredness!). Independent reasons exist for preferring certain forms of government

over others.<sup>10</sup> We could say the same about morality: just because some groups of people grow up holding that cannibalism or terrorism or racism are morally justifiable, we are right to stick to our guns by rejecting their problematic moral perspective. Our belief in objective moral values and human rights isn't threatened by the fact that others grow up thinking differently.

The same applies to beliefs about ultimate reality and the human condition: We rightly reject profoundly incoherent beliefs. We correctly question claims that depend heavily on phony documents or the character of a charismatic, womanizing charlatan

# Following a Unique Christ in a Pluralistic Society



who founds a religion — even if his followers are morally decent people. If the Christian faith more readily explains many features of the universe and of the human condition than various Eastern religions or other secular alternatives, then its greater plausibility should not be trumped by the geographic objection.

Hardly neutral observers of the religious landscape, pluralists who reject Jesus' bodily resurrection or His remarkable authority claims as historically reliable are taking a gamble. Not only would Jesus' radical uniqueness completely undermine pluralism, but orthodox Christian tradition is also buttressed by strong historical support. Indeed, the Christian faith is virtually unique

among the world religions in that it is rooted in history and thus makes crucial claims historically verifiable (e.g., Jesus' death and resurrection).

In addition, we can turn the tables on the pluralist: If he had been born in Madagascar or medieval France, he

## Pluralists who reject Jesus' bodily resurrection or His remarkable authority claims as historically reliable are taking a gamble.

probably would *not* have become a pluralist!<sup>11</sup> If all religions are culturally conditioned attempts to get at the Ultimate Reality, then pluralism is just as culturally conditioned as Christian or Hindu beliefs.

How then has the pluralist risen

above his cultural conditioning to see things more clearly than the rest of us? Does the religious pluralist think he is just another blind man touching his part of the elephant? No. He takes the view of the onlooker who sees the entire elephant and thinks the blind men are foolish because of their narrow-minded dogmatism.

Fourth, a religion's moral fruitfulness is not necessarily the ultimate test of its legitimacy. How do we explain moral atheists who help their neighbors but reject the transcendent and even strongly oppose traditional religion as delusional and full of false promises? Should pluralists carry on religious dialogue with them — and to what end? What about religions that include ritual human sacrifice or racist beliefs? Are these legitimate, culturally conditioned attempts to arrive at Ultimate Reality?<sup>12</sup> Ironically, pluralists like John Hick and Paul Knitter affirm an *impersonal* Ultimate Reality (which is also affirmed in many Eastern religions), but how can It be the basis of *personal* virtues such as kindness and compassion? A personal God — especially the intrinsically relational triune God — makes better sense of such virtues.

If no observable moral difference exists between adherents of these different religions, then the common pluralistic conclusion — that all the great religions are equally capable of saving — isn't more obvious than the conclusion that it is *not* the case that



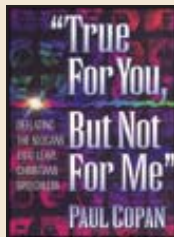
all these religions are equally capable of saving. In fact, it is reasonable to conclude that we have no idea whether all religions are or are not equally capable of saving.<sup>13</sup> Being an agnostic, not a pluralist, is the more reasonable position.

**Fifth, the Christian's motivation to live humbly, gratefully, graciously, and self-sacrificially is connected to Jesus' authority as God's Son.**

Such motivation will lose much of its force if, as the pluralist contends, Jesus was a mere man. If Jesus is not God incarnate, this denies historic Christianity's claims and seriously undermines our devotion to Christ. This is a pragmatic consideration, but the Christian faith is bound up with historical events such as Jesus' death and resurrection. If these never occurred, then Paul urges us to consider hedonism since a mere earthly hope in Christ is delusional (1 Corinthians 15:32).

**Sixth, if Jesus is God's Son, this effectively undermines religious pluralism.** Despite the points listed above, pluralism could logically still be true. However, if Jesus is God incarnate, then pluralism is false. Jesus was not just another great religious teacher. Consider: (a) *He was different from the founders of other great religions.* Jesus made unique claims that no other world religious leader made — to forgive sins, hear prayers, be the Judge of all, be always present with His followers, give rest to one's soul, have authority over angelic/demonic beings, and receive worship. By contrast, Muhammad would have thought Jesus' personal claims blasphemous; Buddha was a metaphysical agnostic as was Confucius.

(b) *The earliest Christians — fiercely monotheistic Jews — bore witness to an*



## “True For You, But Not For Me”

*Paul Copan (Bethany House Publishers, 192 pp., paperback)*

“Well, that may be true for you, but it's not for me” is the rallying cry of our culture. It's one of many popular sayings put forward with no evidence:

“All religions lead to God.”

“Who are you to judge others?”

“Jesus was just another great religious leader.”

“Christians are so intolerant.”

Most Christians are left grasping for a response, and the conversation moves on without them. *True for You, But Not for Me* is a ready-reference handbook for answering our culture's latest objections to Christianity. It features:

- brief answers to each argument.
- readable explanations on each subject.
- helpful introductory material to sets of similar anti-Christian slogans.
- study questions for individual or group use.

Copan wrote *True for You, But Not for Me* to “make a case for the existence of objective truth and morality and to defend the claim that Jesus is indeed the unique and sole Savior of the world.”

This book will help pastors and their church members provide a concise response to society's slide into relativism and religious pluralism.

*exalted Jesus who shared in the divine identity.* The Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4) declares that there is one Lord [Yahweh], but Paul affirmed that the one Lord is Jesus Christ who is Creator of all and the Source of our existence (1 Corinthians 8:6). The first Christians even prayed to Him (Acts 7:59; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

Jesus' first followers believed He shared the divine identity and attributed the honors, titles, actions, and prerogatives of Yahweh to Jesus. The New Testament writers affirmed this without dispute. Such a conviction, buttressed by Jesus' own resurrection from the dead and

post-mortem appearances, vindicated those authoritative claims — that in Him the kingdom of God, the new exodus, and the new creation had come. If there is salvation outside of Christ, then Jesus' redemptive mission as Israel's and humanity's representative was ultimately a misguided failure. And contrary to Jesus' Gethsemane impressions, the bitter cup could have been removed from Him.

In the end, religious pluralism will not let Jesus be Jesus. If it did, it would undermine itself.

**The Question of the Unevangelized**  
If Jesus is the unique Savior, what

about those who have never heard of Him? A simple answer is that our good and wise God has the question of the unevangelized figured out and will not act unjustly. If Jesus is truly God's incarnate Son, the "question of the heathen" is secondary. We need to begin with what is clear and then work out the implications from there. If Jesus has reliably revealed God to us, we can even take an agnostic position: "I don't know the answer to this challenging question of the unevangelized, but I do know a trustworthy God who has acted dramatically and remarkably in Christ, and this true, life-changing message must be proclaimed. Presumably this God is not caught off guard on such matters." In considering the plight of the unevangelized, it is appropriate to ask: "How do the unevangelized respond to pervasive Spirit-promptings and the divine clues already available to them?" God will not judge unjustly (Genesis 18:25).

Besides the agnostic and commonly known exclusivist or particularist views,<sup>14</sup> consider the following variants.<sup>15</sup>

## Inclusivism (wider hope view)

While God's grace in Christ is the actual (ontological) basis for every person's forgiveness, inclusivists insist that knowing about Jesus of Nazareth (epistemological) is not necessary for salvation. Christ's death is ontologically (actually) necessary for salvation, not epistemologically necessary. Those dying as infants and the mentally handicapped have not done anything to incur God's judgment and thus — many Christians agree — will still be saved. And Old Testament saints such as Abraham and David who cast themselves on God's mercy were saved by what Christ would one day accomplish even though they did not know Jesus (Hebrews 10:4, compare 9:13,14).

Despite its merits, however, inclusivism has been criticized: (1) It's over-optimism about untold multitudes who cast themselves on God's mercy seems to go against Paul's negative assessment of the human condition in Romans 1 through 3. (2) Inclusivism does not address the problem

that many people do not respond to general revelation, yet respond to the preaching of the gospel — which is not surprising since the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16). (3) Inclusivism still has its own question of *injustice* to deal with. Many could complain that they were born in the wrong place at the wrong time,

having only natural revelation, while others who no more worthy were born in a time and place where they were able to hear the gospel and be saved. That is the problem inclusivism has been trying to solve in the first place.

## Postmortem evangelism

Some Christians believe the unevangelized — even the mentally handicapped and those who died as infants — will have a postmortem opportunity to personally encounter Jesus, hear the gospel, and either embrace it — and enjoy God's presence — or reject it, and be removed from God's presence. The offer of salvation is not limited to an earthly existence. While this is an intriguing possibility, however, this view is sometimes based on highly disputed biblical passages (for example, 1 Peter 3:18–22).

## Accessibility<sup>16</sup>

I am taking for granted that our good, wise God has a universal loving intent toward everyone and that He is not willing that any perish but find salvation (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; compare John 3:16,17); Jesus is the potential Savior for all people, and the actual Savior for believers (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:2, compare 2 Peter 2:1). The fact God commands all people to repent — not simply a selected subset of them (Acts 17:30) — shows that God makes available to everyone His initiating (prevenient) grace. Salvation is accessible to all people.

Also, no person is born at the wrong place or time. Salvation is accessible through God's pervasive initiating grace to whoever accepts it. Though most resist the light of God's general revelation (Romans 1 through 3), this graciously given knowledge is



adequate for people to turn to God and be saved — based ultimately on Christ's redemptive work (as with Old Testament saints). God's "righteous judgment" will render to each person according to his deeds — "to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:5–7, NASB).<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps God, knowing what free creatures would do in every possible world He could create, created a world in which the maximal number of persons would be saved and the minimal number of persons would be condemned. Despite the workings and wooings of God's gracious Spirit, many would freely resist God in any world in which God placed them — whether or not they heard the gospel. Those who are lost in actuality are those who would be lost in any world in which God placed them. Despite God's grace toward them, their freely self-created condition of transworld depravity would prevent them from embracing God.

But why should God refrain from bringing as many as possible into His family simply because others, such as the prodigal's older brother, refuse to enjoy the festivities? God is not unjust or unkind if the people He created freely refuse His grace. So why should He be blamed? What if, in the end, we learn that no person who, having rejected the light of revelation that he did have, would have believed had he received more? No unevangelized person is (justly) condemned simply because he would have freely rejected God's salvation no matter what possible world he might have been placed in, but because he rejected God's saving grace in his actual circumstances.

While this view may not be *the* resolution to our problem and another view on the unevangelized may well be true, its logical possibility suggests the defensibility of God's just, merciful character toward everyone. Yet, this issue ultimately goes beyond making inferences from scattered biblical verses and themes to the basic matter of trusting in a good God to do no wrong. Can the covenant-making, salvation-desiring God, whose self-expression — Jesus of Nazareth — died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2, compare 5:19) be trusted with such perplexing questions? *Can't we trust God, who loves all without exception and desires their salvation, to do His utmost so no person who truly desires salvation is prevented from experiencing it?* We should not think about the unevangelized apart from God's character, motives, and good purposes.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, God has ways of revealing himself to Cornelius-like figures (Acts 10) who have not yet heard the gospel. In a remarkable affirmation of Yahweh's working among the nations, Yahweh asks Israel, "Are you not as the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" and "Have I

## How can pastors and other Christian leaders encourage those entrusted to their care to handle pluralistic challenges?

not brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9:7, NASB). Angelic messengers might appear or, as is being reported with increasing frequency, Muslims (or adherents to other religions) in remote areas may have visions of Jesus and find salvation.<sup>19</sup> God is able to do far more than we can ask or imagine — even

when it concerns the unevangelized. They are in good hands with Him.

### Conclusion

How can pastors and other Christian leaders encourage those entrusted to their care to handle pluralistic challenges? By exposing those whom they are guiding to pluralism's doctrines and spiritual dangers through sermons, ongoing training, seminars, and reading groups. This is an urgent task because those in America who profess to be Christians are increasingly becoming less biblically literate (see "Regaining a Christian Worldview in the Church" by James Emery White on page 26). In fact, those who view Christian beliefs as *preference-based* rather than *truth-based* are growing in number.

Many people have a buffet-style spirituality, picking and choosing what they like rather than what is truth. This view is called syncretism.<sup>20</sup> As the Barna Group notes, "Our continuing research among teenagers and adolescents shows that the trend away from adopting biblical theology in favor of syncretic, culture-based

theology is advancing at full gallop."<sup>21</sup> When people buy into religious pluralism, this negatively affects the church's evangelistic task.

Furthermore, pastors must remind Christians that their faith is not only unique because of its emphasis on God's initiating grace in the person of the incarnate Son of God or in the identity claims Jesus made for



himself, but also because its many claims can be *verified* in history/ archaeology and science. As we train Christians to communicate their faith, we must tell them why the

seem to be abandoning development of their minds and the objective truth of the gospel.

To challenge the Christian's mind, we must make our people aware of

## As we train Christians to communicate their faith, we must tell them why the Christian faith is true — why they need to be *Christians* rather than Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims.

Christian faith is true — why they need to be *Christians* rather than Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims.

While the Spirit ultimately gives us assurance that we belong to God, we must give our churches the available *public reasons* for belief in Christ. Those under our care need to have the conviction that if certain events, such as the Resurrection, did not take place, then the Christian faith is finished (1 Corinthians 15:13–19). We are not Christians because our faith gives us a sense of joy and purpose, or because we enjoy good fellowship and potluck dinners. We are Christians because the Christian faith is *true*. Paul says if the Christian faith is not true, then we are preaching a lie and are to be pitied. In saying this, Paul utterly rejected the buffet-style spirituality of today.

Pastors must train Christians to love God with all their minds, to build listening and loving relationships with non-Christians, to ask questions and engage ideas, and to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Ironically, we are living in a remarkable time with a wealth of resources with which we can make a ready defense for the Christian faith. But we are also living in a time when professing Christians

resources such as the *Apologetics Study Bible*,<sup>22</sup> along with many others.<sup>23</sup> These are basic places to start. As pastors, we must address these pressing concerns — all with a reliance on God's help. ☪



**PAUL COPAN, PH.D.**, Palm Beach, Florida, is Professor and Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University. He is the author of *True for You, But Not for Me, That's Just Your Interpretation* and *How Do You Know You're Not Wrong?* He is editor of the *Apologetics Study Bible, Passionate Conviction*, and *The Rationality of Theism*. He is president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.

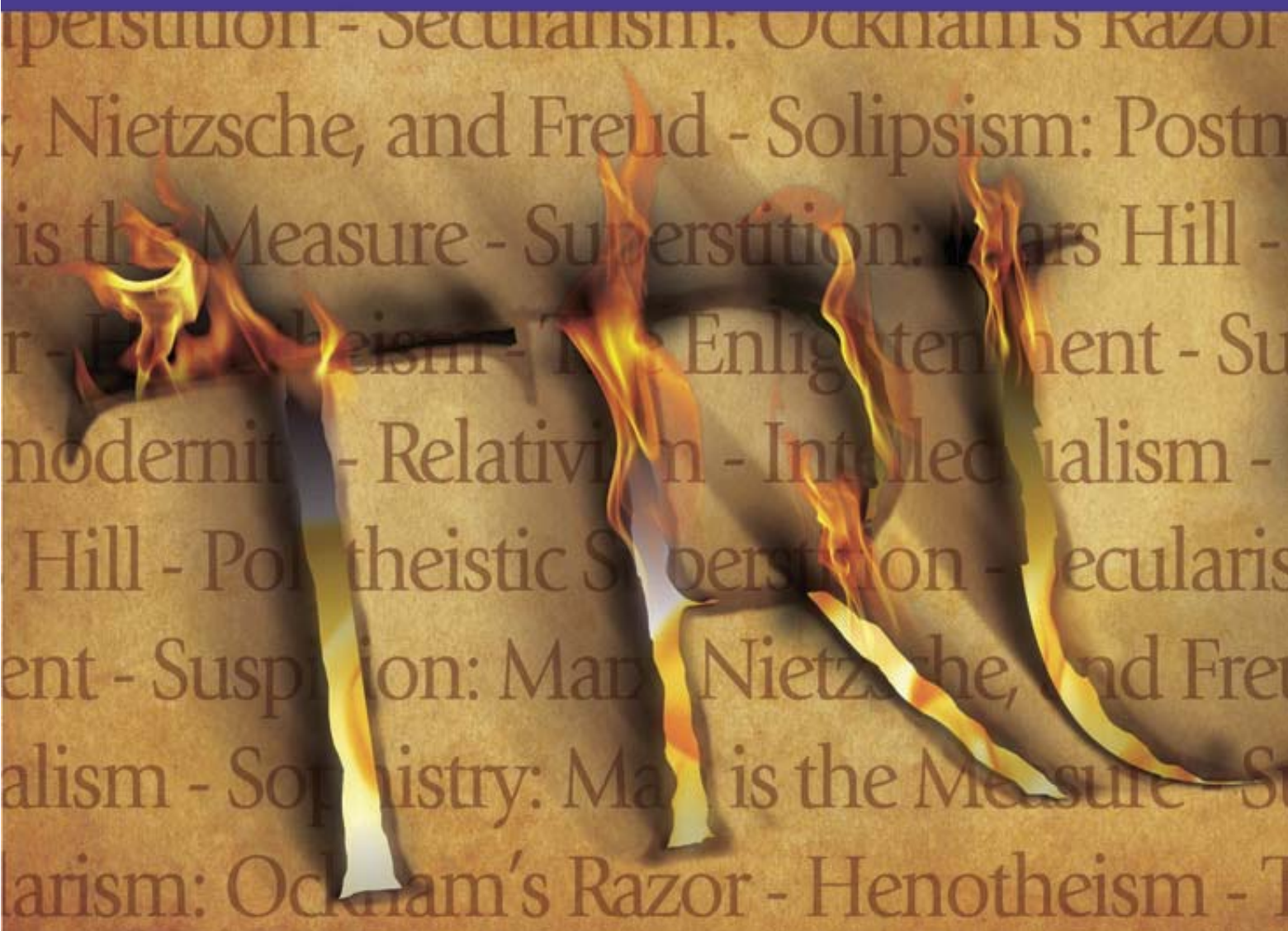
To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

### NOTES

1. This article is adapted from a chapter in Paul Copan, *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007).
2. A helpful overview on religious pluralism is David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2002).
3. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 228.
4. In John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 141.
5. This statement was aired on the *Oprah* show (Harpo Productions), Thursday, February 15, 2007.
6. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 235, 236.
7. Dalai Lama, *Kindness, Clarity and Insight* (New York: Snow Lion, 1984), 45.
8. *Ibid.*, 51.
9. In José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *The Bodhgaya Interviews* (New York: Snow Lion, 1988), 22.

10. Peter van Inwagen, "Non Est Hick," *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 213, 214.
11. Alvin Plantinga, "Ad Hick," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (July 1997): 295–302.
12. Roger Trigg, *Rationality and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 56, 57.
13. Paul Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 149.
14. *Exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist* are three standard categorizations that are not always helpful and can overlap. Depending on the context, these terms need further nuancing. For example, a Christian exclusivist should not hold that truth cannot be found outside the Christian revelation, and a Christian inclusivist believes that Christ alone is the basis of anyone's salvation. Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001).
15. See John Sanders, ed., *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995). See also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2003).
16. See Part 5 in Paul Copan, *True for You, But Not for Me* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998). On this, I follow the work of William Craig.
17. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).
18. William Lane Craig, "Is 'Craig's Contentious Suggestion' Really So Implausible?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22/3 (July 2005): 361.
19. Pauline Selby, *Persian Springs: Four Iranians See Jesus* (London: Elam Ministries, 2001). See also David H. Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way: Journeys of Faith* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Authentic Media, 2005).
20. See my discussion of syncretism in "Challenge No. 6: People Should Be Free To Pick and Choose What They Believe About Jesus," in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).
21. The Barna Group, "Americans Draw Theological Beliefs From Diverse Points of View," *The Barna Group*, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=122> (accessed January 16, 2008).
22. Ted Cabal, ed., et al., *The Apologetics Study Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2007). This book has articles by Chuck Colson, J.P. Moreland, Norman Geisler, Josh McDowell, and many other able defenders of the Christian faith.
23. The following Web sites are useful. Apologetics resources can be found at Leadership University, <http://www.leaderu.com>; Tektonics, <http://www.tektonics.org/>; from philosophers/apologists such as William Craig, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org>, <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/>; Gary Habermas, <http://www.garyhabermas.com/>; J.P. Moreland, <http://afterall.net/citizens/moreland/>; Paul Copan, <http://www.paulcopan.com>. I have also written several popular-level books that attempt to address practical questions skeptics ask. Access these at my Web site.





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# Pentecostal Ministry in a Relativistic Culture

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BY MICHAEL J. BEALS





Dave Danielson

**H**ow firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

I surrendered my life to Christ when the creative migration toward contemporary Christian music was just gaining momentum. Because this shift had not fully transpired, during my early years as a believer I was infused with the power and richness of the great hymns of the church. Do not get me wrong: I do not want to go back. I love the diversity, energy, and creativity of contemporary worship. Still, I received a gift that I wish today's believers shared more broadly.

Beyond the clear sense of God's presence and our expressive responses to His move among us, these hymns grounded me in the doctrines of the faith. Working together with biblical preaching, these hymns helped

build a firm foundation for my faith. In particular, and long before Rick Warren's important restatement of this truth in *The Purpose Driven Life*, hymns taught me: *It's not about me.*

When truth becomes *about me*, I become a relativist. If I gather with others of like persuasion and the horizon of truth is our shared convictions, then we are relativists. How many of us have had someone respond to our statements about the truth of Scripture with the phrase, "That's true for you." This is *relativism* — the belief that truth functions locally. For many, the standard of right and wrong, truth and error operates only within the mind of a person or in the agreements of a group. For them, there is no objective, transcendent system of truth or morality on which they base claims and to which everyone is ultimately accountable.

Relativism is a particular form of unbelief that is pervasive in our culture. It presents formidable challenges to the presentation of the gospel as the unique revelation

of God to humanity and as the only hope for eternal life. Relativism predisposes people to suspect, if not outright reject, such an exclusive message. But there is more than a message at work.

The power of the Holy Spirit transcends our limitations to communicate enduring truth and penetrates false systems of thought with illumination and conviction. As Pentecostals, I believe God has raised us up “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).

Relativism, by definition, cannot be countered by an approach to Christian witness that is rooted in rationalist intellectual triumphalism. Truth is more than objective; it is incarnate in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our primary task is to win people to Christ, not arguments.

In his book, *Distorted Truth: What Every Christian Needs To Know About the Battle for the Mind*, Richard Mouw warns Christians to avoid the temptation to seek “cheap rhetorical victories over unbelief.” By this he

refers to the tendency Christians have to highlight the contradictions of non-Christian belief systems to demonstrate the superior coherence of Christianity. For example, how many of us have sprung this trap on an unsuspecting relativist:

## Relativism, by definition, cannot be countered by an approach to Christian witness that is rooted in rationalist intellectual triumphalism.

Relativist: “What bothers me about Christianity is that it is so judgmental. I believe there is no single truth or set of rules that applies to everyone everywhere. Truth and morality are relative to the culture or group in which they operate.”

Christian: “So what you are saying is that there are no absolutes.”

Relativist: “Yes, that’s right.”

Christian: “None at all?”

Relativist: “None.”

Christian: “Well, that’s an absolute right there.”

This approach may win points in a debate, but it does little to win a person’s heart.

To this end, Mouw believes it is important to probe beneath the surface of error to explore the sources and consequences of these false systems of thought.

Churches today operate in the relativist context of a broader culture that is at best suspicious of authoritative claims to truth or morality, and

at worst considers these claims to be primary sources of evil and oppression in the world.

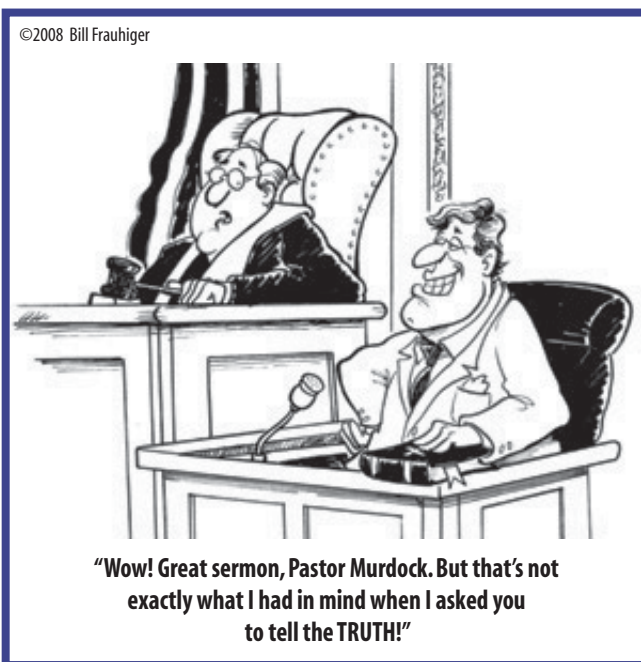
How did we get here?

Is relativism a contemporary phenomenon? Is this the intellectual and moral change in direction Justice

Robert Bork referred to as *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*? Or is relativism a perennial manifestation of human fallenness that remakes itself in every generation? I believe the latter to be the case. To understand and meet the challenges that relativism presents for this generation’s Christians, it is valuable to trace relativism in its various historical expressions.

### Sophistry: Man is the Measure

The Greek philosopher Socrates was called a *midwife of ideas*. He approached instruction by engaging in a form of dialogue that revealed the subjectivity and weakness of his opponent’s knowledge and logic. Socrates was convinced that persons committed to reason would discover the standards of objective truth — external to themselves — and by living out these truths, the good life was possible. The Sophists were among Socrates’ most bitter opponents. These philosophers denied the superiority of any single, objective standard of truth or goodness. Rather, they internalized the reference point within the person. The Sophist philosopher, Protagoras, declared, “*homo mensura*” (man is the measure); truth is relative to the person making the claim. This legacy of the sophists is etched across the landscape of history and has lost none of its potency. Today, people





in all walks of life twist or abandon the truth for the sake of preference, pleasure, or profit.

### Superstition: Mars Hill

Another powerful form of relativism is polytheistic superstition. Paul encountered this in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). Seeing the city full of idols, Paul’s “spirit was being provoked within him.” As he ascended Mars Hill, he observed the number and variety of deities the people worshiped and used this diversity as a springboard for evangelism. Among the available options, Paul declared there was only one real choice.

The belief that people select who or what they will worship while accepting the validity of other options is called *henotheism*. In the renewed interest in spirituality that is part of today’s postmodernism, henotheism is alive and well. For this reason, it is

important that we clearly distinguish between our respect for all people and our acceptance of their belief system as true. A god of one’s own choosing cannot deliver him from sin or satisfy the deep longings of his heart.

### Secularism: Ockham’s Razor

As civilization in the West emerged from the medieval period, a growing movement — *The Enlightenment* — identified all forms of religion as superstitious and irrelevant. This period paved the way for the secularism of the Modern era.

A critical implement in this push to excise religion from the intellectual landscape was a theory developed by a medieval Franciscan friar and scholar named William of Ockham (c. 1287–1324). Reacting to the complexity and abstraction of theological and philosophical analysis, Ockham proposed a method of simplification

now known as *Ockham’s razor*. Stated in its popular form, “All things being equal, the simplest explanation tends to be the correct one.”

By the 16th and 17th centuries, a growing number of Enlightenment scholars were seeking to detach intellectual progress from the authority of the Church and Scripture. Ockham’s razor helped them make the cut. The result was a split between science (the realm of objective facts) and religion (the domain of subjective *values*). Only statements deemed rationally valid or empirically verifiable were considered factual and, therefore, true. This fact/value split had broad-reaching implications. In the sphere of civil justice, for example, one could factually define stealing as taking another’s property without permission. As such, it was a disapproved behavior because it was against the common good. But according to this new way of

## That’s Just Your Interpretation

**W**e’ve all heard the saying, “That’s just your interpretation.” We hear it everywhere. Perhaps we’ve heard it in the midst of a conversation about moral issues, such as abortion or homosexual behavior, as they relate to the Bible. Those who try to express their view might be told, “That’s just your interpretation of the Bible.”

So, how might a thoughtful person respond?

- Gently ask, “Do you mean that your interpretation should be preferred over mine? If so, I’d like to know why you have chosen your interpretation over mine. You must have a good reason.”
- Remind your friend that you are willing to give reasons for your position and that you are not simply taking a

particular viewpoint arbitrarily.

- Try to discern if people toss out this slogan because they don’t like your interpretation. Remind them that there are many truths we have to accept even if we don’t like them.
- If someone doesn’t believe that there are any legitimate interpretations, then playfully say, “That’s just your interpretation of my interpretation!” He assumes that he has correctly interpreted your view and that it differs from his.
- Some interpretations are better than others, and to see this is simply not a matter of interpretation.
- “There are no facts, only interpretations” is a statement that is presented as a fact. If it is just an interpretation, then there is no reason to take it seriously.

Often the motivations that people have when they say, “That’s just your interpretation” is that they don’t want to argue or be a cause of bad feelings. Tolerance is good; and while the motivation is right and good, this is indifference, which is the enemy of true respect and tolerance. Genuine tolerance means that we accept people as people, whatever their beliefs and lifestyles — Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, New Agers — people of all religions, and none. So people have the right to disagree with us, but we still respect them.

**SOURCE:** Paul Copan, *That’s Just Your Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). Used by permission of the author. © Paul Copan, 2001.



thinking, stealing could no longer be considered wrong against any standard of transcendent value because many rejected an appeal to religion as a basis for morality.

### Suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud

By the 19th and early 20th centuries, the hope of inevitable progress that people believed could be realized through science and technology gave way to isolation and despair. The secularizing forces of modernity had tried for some time to have it both ways — affirming the existence of

failed to give an adequate account for many things from the origin of existence to the longings of the human spirit. Postmodernism, then, in part, is living among the ruins of modernity. Many of the social and intellectual structures are still visible, but they are decaying remains of promises not kept.

Postmodernism comes with its own form of relativism: *solipsism*. Solipsism is the belief that the self is “the most real thing” (James Sire). Truth, morality, and the world itself may be out there, but what matters most is how I embrace truth, rules, and the world and make them my own.

## The distinctives of Pentecostal ministry are uniquely and divinely suited to penetrate the resistances of those who reject the possibility of absolutes: whether truth or Him who is the Truth.

objective knowledge while denying a transcendent Source of truth. The center would not hold, however, and the erosion of confidence proceeded in earnest. Among others, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud — known as the *masters of suspicion* — posited the modern belief that design and order in the universe were possible without the existence of a Designer. The natural order of the human heart and human society was oppressive and chaotic. People realized their full humanity only by bringing order to the chaos — by violent means if necessary.

People or nations who had the power to enforce their will constructed and imposed justice, along with truth and morality. Relativism had come of age.

### Solipsism: Postmodernity

As the 20th century proceeded, the foundations of modernism crumbled (Diogenes Allen). Secularism had

In postmodernity, people cluster in groups around common goals, beliefs, or behaviors, but they also move in and out of multiple communities and adapt their language and lifestyle as contextually appropriate. This is not new in itself, but life among the ruins grants unprecedented permission to reject having a core self and adopt a *situational identity*. As a consequence, the church may remain a significant community with which to affiliate, but it is by no means exclusive (or even primary) in its influence or claims.

This sketch of the heritage of relativism highlights the context in which we serve and lead. The challenges are significant, but the distinctives of Pentecostal ministry are uniquely and divinely suited to penetrate the resistances of those who reject the possibility of absolutes: whether truth or Him who is the Truth.

### For Such a Time as This

One of the core challenges of ministry in a relativistic culture is in the area of biblical authority. The proliferation of online information serves to foster skepticism toward any voice that claims to be the final authority. The relentless attacks on any narrative that would claim ultimate authority can leave impressions — even in the minds of the faithful — that influence their responses to church leadership. At issue is the authority of God’s Word to describe reality, define truth, and direct behavior. We must exercise humility in the application of our hermeneutical paradigms, but our words must represent the Word — whether we are preaching, counseling, or correcting. The same living Spirit of God who inspired the human authors of Scripture speaks His words of affirmation to the heart of any person who hears His Word with an openness to receive.

I have seen God work in this way many times. For example, a young couple seated in my office looked at me with astonishment. They had received Christ at a recent stadium crusade and had started attending our church. When they asked me if I would perform their wedding ceremony, I gladly agreed and indicated the need for premarital counseling. During the first session the bride-to-be asked, “Pastor, are you seriously suggesting that one of us move out of our apartment until after our wedding day? We’ve lived together for 2 years.”

I reaffirmed my seriousness by bringing them to God’s Word. We worked through passages that revealed God’s amazing love for them and the power and blessing He would release into their lives if they yielded to Him in this important area. I knew that

# The Implications of Relativism

**In the middle of a war — whether in the broader culture or around the water cooler — no one goes on with life as normal. Society’s battles over truth have far-reaching effects. Given the pervasiveness of relativism in our society, we ought to briefly consider some of its implications.**

One implication — at least on the religious front — is that persuasion is *prohibited*. On many university campuses, evangelism — the taboo word is *proselytizing* — is viewed as “cramming your religion down someone’s throat.” Obviously, trying to persuade or evangelize another implies you have truth to proclaim — and that you think your listeners may well be wrong.

This brings us to a second implication: *To be exclusivistic is to be arrogant*. Given the number of different religious beliefs in the world, to claim to know something that others are ignorant of therefore *must* be wrongheaded and erroneous. Moreover, exclusive claims — especially about the uniqueness of Christ for salvation — are often confused with Western colonialism and imperialism — nothing more than bigotry and narrow-mindedness, a Western imposition of ideas upon unknowing or unwilling hearers. (To be sure, non-Christians have in some cases good reason to be critical of us. Christians invite hostility when they shout that Christianity is true and exclusive — and equally loudly proclaim that other views contain no truth at all. Christians can indeed appreciate much of what is true within other faiths. Since all truth is God’s truth, moral truths, for instance, can be found outside the Bible — just as truths from mathematics, history, and science can be. Exactly what or even whether the Christian should seek to learn from or imitate ethical non-Christian religions, however, is another, more complicated, matter.<sup>1</sup>)

A third implication is that tolerance is the cardinal virtue. To imply that someone is wrong is terribly intolerant, especially when tolerance is popularly but erroneously defined as being open to and accepting of all ideas. What homosexual activists call *tolerance*, for example, is unconditional acceptance of their lifestyle as legitimate and right. This attitude of open-mindedness actually turns out to be empty-headedness. It lacks discrimination and any criterion for acceptability. In the words of Allan Bloom, “Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason’s power.”<sup>2</sup>

A final implication of relativism perhaps best explains how our arguments over truth can begin to feel like a war: *In the absence of the possibility of truth, power rules the day*. That is, once truth is whatever we say it is, asserting power over others is a natural next step. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) wrote that the obliteration of God — and therefore all objective standards for truth and morality — would usher in an age of nihilism, the rejection of all objective meaning and value.<sup>3</sup> All that is left is the will to power, by which only the fittest survive.

Stanley Fish at Duke University, well-known for his repudiation of objective literary or moral standards, has said, “Someone is always going to be restricted next, and it is your job to make sure that the someone is not you.”<sup>4</sup> Many special interest groups today, though certainly not all, operate on this principle: Because they have no objective standards by which they operate — no evidence that what they advocate is good or right — they can only exert power to legitimize their views, to let their voices be heard and provoke change. Government or other social structures become weapons of power, wielded by the cultural elites and interest groups that

have grabbed more influence and power than the other side.

Again, this has been observed from long ago. In another of Plato’s dialogues called the *Gorgias*, a man by the name of Callicles asserts that justice is really only the rule of the powerful over the citizens of a state.<sup>5</sup> Whatever is best of the rulers is naturally just for Callicles. Morality is arbitrarily reduced to power.

This is the environment into which we speak — relativistic, power conscious, hostile to truth claims, especially those that flow from faith. Though relativists claim to own the label of “tolerant,” as we critique objective and moral relativism we will see how this incoherent, self-contradictory philosophy is far more dogmatic and narrow-minded than Christianity is.<sup>6</sup> It is strangely ironic that, despite allegations that Christians are bigoted and narrow, the Christian’s absolutist position is not only true but consistent and compassionate. 🌐



**PAUL COPAN**, West Palm Beach, Florida. Reprinted from *True for You, But Not for Me* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 21, 22. Used with permission.

## ENDNOTES

1. Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices* (Virginia Beach, Va.: Regent College Publishing, 1999), 144. See also Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1969), 11, 12; and Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 140, 141.
2. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 38.
3. “The Gay Science,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Viking, 1954), 95.
4. Cited in Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), 163.
5. For example, *Gorgias*, 491b. Also, in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*, Plato takes aim at relativism, which he despises. The last thing he wants to do is equate perception with knowledge, which would mean that falsehood is impossible.
6. Alister McGrath, “The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Church,” *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (September 1992): 363.

## Resource List

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- St. Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. Translated with an Introduction by R.S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin Books.
- Bork, Robert H. 1996. *Slouching Toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*. New York: HarperCollins.
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- Sire, James W. 2004. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press.
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to live out their Pentecostal identity unapologetically and with humble resolve to fulfill the Great Commission because the Lord has poured out His Spirit on us for such a time as this. 🙏



**MICHAEL J. BEALS, PH.D.**, senior pastor, Mission Hills Community Church, Rancho Santo Margarita, California. He serves as assistant professor of Philosophical Theology and Christian Ethics at Vanguard University and adjunct professor of Philosophy and Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

reason alone would not sway them. I did not use my position to try to compel them. By this point in their relationship many influential voices that affirmed their lifestyle had filled their lives. I used my voice to make the case from Scripture and prayed that the Spirit would illuminate the truth. He did. At our next meeting they told me they no longer were living together. The wedding ceremony was a celebration of grace.

Another challenge pastors face in this relativistic culture is the seamless manner in which people adapt to conflicting systems of reason and rules as they function in multiple communities. When I was a young believer, I heard a sermon that exhorted me not to live a double life. The exhortation from the pulpit now is not to live multiple lives.

Outside the church, people have freedom to live multiple lives. One result of this freedom is the fact *integrity* has come to mean abiding by the rules of your group.

The Spirit of God empowers us to prioritize our loyalties and implement our values in any context. He partners with us to cultivate and demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit at all times and in all places. Prior to any other professional or personal affiliation, we are members of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10), and the Holy Spirit provides assurance of our membership in His family (Romans 8:16).

We are further challenged as we seek to ground personal identity in an objective standard of human personhood. With the rejection of truth as a guide, people spend years foraging among the ruins of modernity sampling disparate worldviews and attempting to form an identity with incompatible and often incoherent ideals. This is in

stark contrast to the identity of those who have accepted Christ. As long as men and women remain the measure of truth or goodness, the search for personal meaning and wholeness will leave them empty and alone. But, when nonbelievers encounter the reality of Pentecost at work in the lives of God's people, they get a glimpse of the generosity of God's grace, and they long to belong. This was so in my life. At age 18, I had no experience with true Christianity, and I was already tired of foraging. I accepted an invitation to attend an evening service at an Assemblies of God church. There I saw people joyfully and unashamedly responding to the move of the Holy Spirit. I was so moved by its genuineness and power that I knew I had found what my heart desired. I told the youth pastor so, and that night I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. More than 30 years later, I continually thank the Lord for making me His disciple, His son, and His heir.

### Conclusion

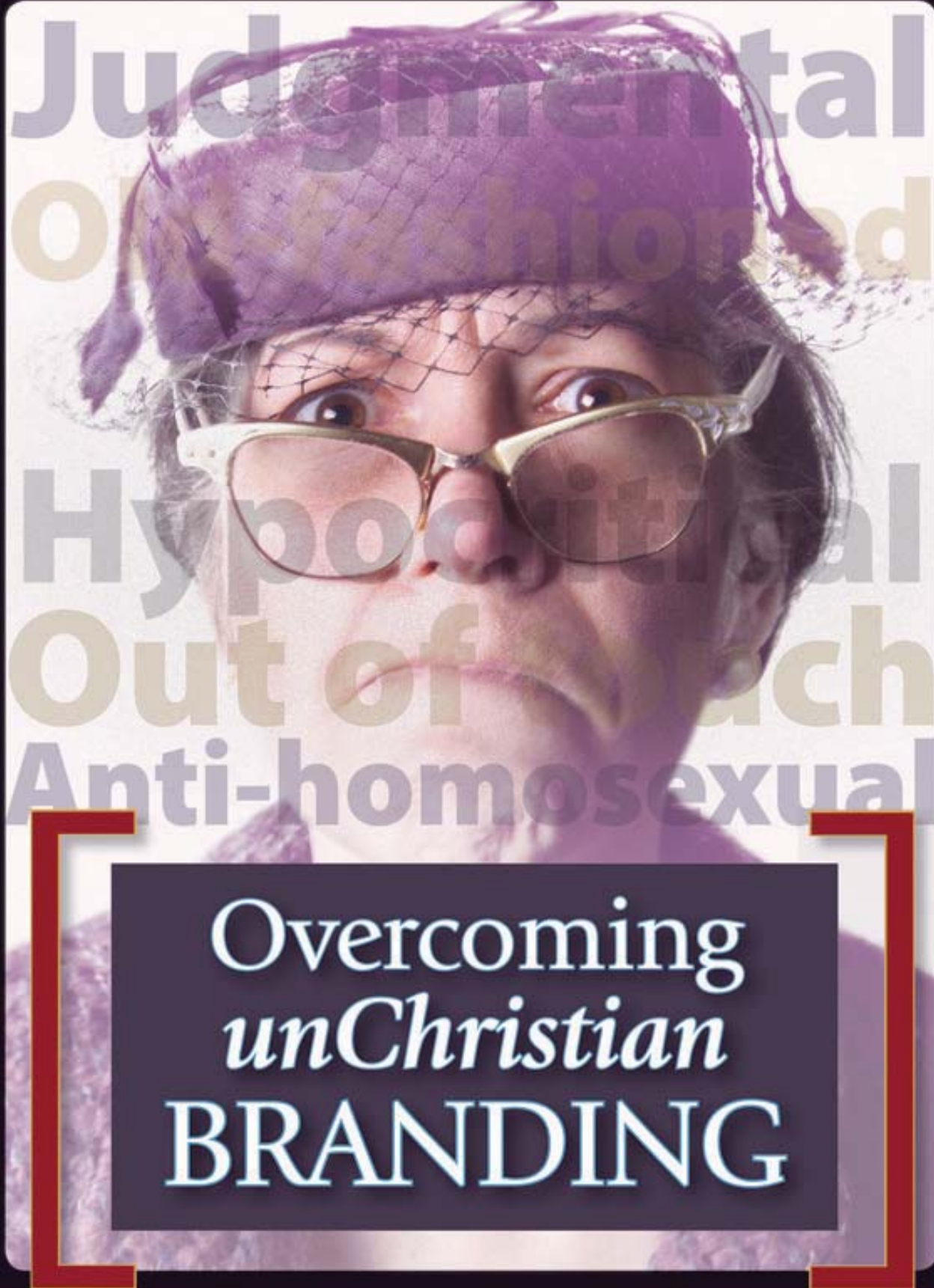
The challenges of relativism for faithful ministry are not new. The temptation for people to establish themselves as the measure of truth and goodness began with Adam and Eve and remakes itself in every generation. Relativism leaves people restless. This restlessness is a critical ally in the cosmic struggle for the souls of men and women. St. Augustine gave voice to this longing of all humanity for their Creator when he wrote "our heart is restless until it rests in You" (*Confessions*).

Active churches that are alive in the Spirit provide a vibrant, stable refuge for those longing for a firm and enduring foundation. The power of Pentecost is a lifeline for people who live with the gnawing insecurity of a situational identity. Pastors must encourage their congregations





Judgmental  
Out of touch  
Hypocritical  
Anti-homosexual



Overcoming  
*unChristian*  
BRANDING

Istockphoto

By David Kinnaman

**W**e had just received the final data and report for the church. We were wrapping up the conference call with the church's leaders.

During this hour-long phone call, we discussed the research we had conducted on the church's behalf. Research is not a panacea, but it can help discover what opportunities and challenges await a congregation.

I had spent several months doing a highly customized study of people who lived in the area surrounding the church. This was a prominent megachurch. It held a strong influence in the community because of its size, history, and leaders.

But people in the community had told our interviewers that the church came across as arrogant. They believed the church was out of step with the needs of the community.

The leaders of the church did not see their church as arrogant. They said the reason for their negative branding was their "strong emphasis on teaching the truth." One of the church's leaders quickly added that the local newspaper had recently featured several articles that were critical of the church.

For a minute, I almost bought it. *Churches are often misunderstood*, I thought. Given the spiritual dimension of our work, it is easy for people to portray the church incorrectly. The world, one might say, has a vested interest in getting our message wrong. Jesus even promised that a broken world would criticize our efforts as Christians.

Yet, the story does not end there.

### **A Twist**

By the end of the conference call, the same group of advisors and staff proved that the arrogant label might fit after all. After the conference call, I found myself agreeing with that assessment. Why is that?

The research showed that the people in the community expressed a clear set of physical and spiritual needs. During the call, however, the church deflected that ministry opportunity among the economically downscaled. One church leader closed the door on that discussion by saying: "We already have programs for that group. You know, we just feel like we're ... well, we're concerned about those people being too dependent on our church."

*Excuse me, poor people too dependent?*

During the conference call we also discussed working with other churches in the area. The research indicated an opportunity for the church to partner with other congregations to help serve the area and unite local

believers. Their response: "We tried that. But our members just were not happy about it. Other churches were just too different from ours. I don't think that will fly here."

*What? Partnership with other believers will not fly?*

Toward the end of the call, one of the men clarified the objective of the research with

In proclaiming truth to a secular society, we need to admit that *our flaws* often obscure the Truth we seek to represent.

this comment: "We are mostly concerned about how we can launch another campus on the other side of town ... using satellite technology or whatever. You know, the multisite campus movement. For us, that's the main thing we were looking for from this research."

Frankly, I was stunned by the progression of the conference call. I sensed the same lack of humility that people in the community had identified. Had the community or had the journalists who wrote about the church misunderstood the church? Perhaps on some level; but in a real way, the outside observers had hit a raw nerve. They were more accurate than the church leaders were willing to admit.

Research is like a mirror. But the church's spiritual guides were not willing to look at the reality of their reflection.



## An Image Problem?

I use this story for a reason. I do not intend to disparage this church (which I have intentionally not identified). I describe this episode to point out how often Christians are self-absorbed and unaware of their own image. Christians often lose sight of the reality of how they come across to people.

In fact, we are like this more than we realize. Paul uses an apt metaphor when writing to the early Christian community (2 Corinthians 3:2): “You yourselves are our letter ... known and read by everybody.”

When someone *reads* your life — or your church — what does it say? When you encounter negative press — either specifically concerning your church or about Christianity in general — what does this tell you? How do you respond — defensively, or with graciousness and willingness to learn?

Part of dealing with negative press is to understand where it comes from, how people derive their image of you. In ministering to a skeptical culture, we need to fully grasp *why* people are skeptical. In proclaiming truth to a secular society, we need to admit that *our flaws* often obscure the Truth we seek to represent.

As Christians, we need to understand that the negative press we receive is often a result of our own *unChristian* attitude and behaviors.

After all, if our world is not what it ought to be, maybe we need to be the first to acknowledge that we are partly responsible.

This admission goes to the heart of my most recent research. Christianity has an image problem. People on the outside are quick to point out the gaps between what we say we believe and how we live. A new generation of Americans is putting more distance between themselves and the Christian faith. People are expressing more hostility, doubt, frustration, and skepticism toward Christianity. This is especially true among young people. They perceive Christians as judgmental, hypocritical, and grabbing for political power.

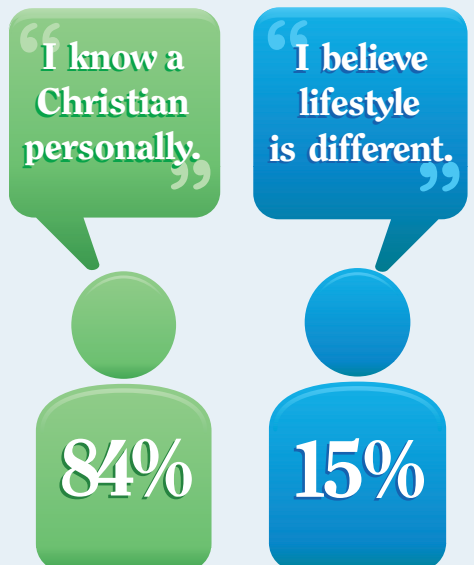
Millions of non-Christians (and many Christians as well) believe Christians have made homosexuality worse than other sins. In fact, we

recently discovered that most senior pastors believe that Christians have not exhibited enough love in addressing homosexuality. Although Scripture is clear that same-sex relationships are immoral, it is a complicated issue, one in which Christians have often received negative publicity.

Furthermore, young non-Christians also conclude that Christianity is old-fashioned, boring, and unintelligent. They contend that Christians are insincere and too focused on making converts. They believe the followers of the Prince of Peace are unable to live peaceably with others.

## A COMPELLING WITNESS?

Percentages of non-Christians who say  
(Ages 16–29)



## PERCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY (Ages 16–29)



Perception	By Outsiders	By Churchgoers
anti-homosexual	91%	80%
judgmental	87%	52%
hypocritical	85%	47%
old-fashioned	78%	36%
too involved in politics	75%	50%
out of touch with reality	72%	32%
insensitive toward others	70%	28%

These may sound like harsh statements, but they spring from extensive research we have conducted with Americans, and especially with young adults and teens who are not Christians. Whether we like it or not, these negative views are fixed in the minds of young people in our culture. In just a decade, the perception of evangelicals has become *eight times less favorable* among young non-Christians when compared to the image held by Boomer non-Christians.

We may not like these realities, but we need to consider what people think.

### A Bad Brand?

Negative publicity. A bad brand. How do church leaders need to deal with these problems? First, they need to keep in mind how prevalent this problem is. This is not a new problem. People have misunderstood and ridiculed Christians for centuries. Nevertheless, it is worse than ever in America, especially in the wake of movies, books, magazines, television and Internet news, and other pop culture sources. These are quick to berate, ridicule, and criticize Christianity.

Second, as Christians, we need to understand that the negative press we receive is often a result of our own *unChristian* attitudes and behaviors. You might call it *unChristian* press — image problems of our own making.

These perception problems result from our not living up to what Jesus asks of us. It is worse than simply being flawed; we are deluded enough to ignore our flaws. Our spiritual intentions cloak the fact we are pursuing them through *unChristian* methods. Our hearts are cracked — even as leaders. We begin to believe that our own accomplishments pave the way for future success, with or without God's blessing. Paul puts it in

strong language (Galatians 3:3): "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

It is easy to blame the *big names* — the unscrupulous televangelists. But high-profile leaders do not single-handedly create the Christian community's reputation. Every one of us — leaders, communicators, and bearers of the image of God — are partly responsible. Do your thoughts and actions always reflect Christ's love toward others? When was the last time

homosexuality, only to be reminded later that one of our houseguests had struggled with that lifestyle. I am ashamed of these memories — and others like them — when my behavior stole away a sliver of God's great fame.

All have contributed to this image problem. All have facilitated an image of Christianity defined by what it is against rather than what it is for.

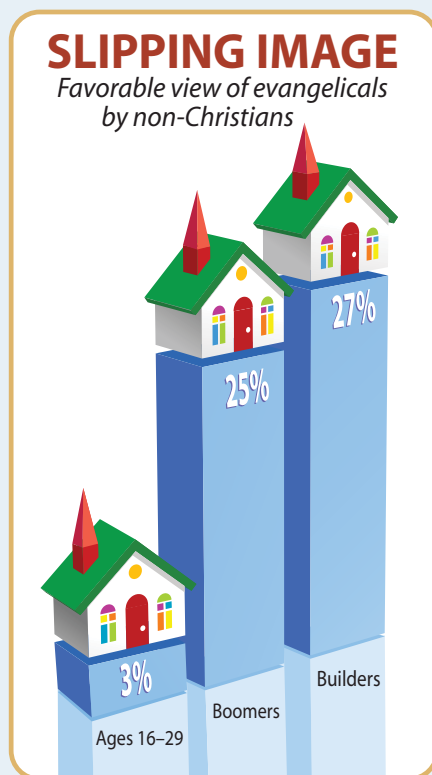
### Steps To Take

Where do Christians need to go from here? What steps can they take to help deal with negative imagery in the marketplace? Here are some practical applications.

First, Christians need to properly distinguish between persecution and criticism. American Christians are much too willing to claim persecution for mild to moderate criticism. The consequence? Christians are often misguided in what they are trying to achieve. They try to minimize discomfort. They attempt to polish their image. Ironically, they claim not to care what people think, but end up being slaves to their reputations. They miss the fact suffering helps them identify with Christ. It also gives them opportunity to provide a winsome answer for the hope they have in Jesus.

We do not always need to agree with our critics to see they are right about many things. Pastors need to help Christians understand that when people criticize them, it presents them with an opportunity — in fact, a blessing (Matthew 5:10–12) — not a red badge of courage. Persecution should drive us to give more of ourselves away, not to batten down the hatches.

Second, Christians need to pay attention to their cultural setting. This is not the first-century church,



you made an offhanded, demeaning joke about homosexuality or some other area in which people struggle? Have you been kind and bighearted — without being condescending or compromising — toward people who believe differently from you?

I vividly recall verbally hammering two young Mormon missionaries who came to my door. Another time, I remember making a joke about



# Isn't Christianity Judgmental?

**“Why do Christians always seem to be saying that other people are somehow wrong in their choices? This seems so inhibiting and judgmental.”** The irony of this postmodern idea is the claim that someone (the Christian) is wrong for thinking someone else was wrong. But the protagonist is doing what he is accusing the Christian of doing — judging someone by thinking he is wrong. We call this inescapable reality the *law of noncontradiction*. The protagonist cannot disapprove of a Christian's judgmentalism without making a moral judgment himself.

So the question is not: Do Christians make moral judgments about the world? Of course they do, but so does everyone else. The question needs to be: On what basis do we make moral judgments? Is this basis adequate or not?

Imagine that the classic issue at stake is: What is wrong with sex before marriage? Can Christians not ask: “What is wrong with anything at all?” Where do you get the moral code by which you live your life?

There may be many different responses: “I do what I feel is right.” (*My morals are entirely personal and arbitrary.*) Or, “Society decides what is right and wrong.” (*Laws are made and as long as I live within them everything is okay.*) Or, the response could be anything in between.

For Christians, right and wrong are not purely up to the individual because what you feel is good for you may hurt me. Right and wrong are not even entirely up to society. Many societies have made legal decisions that you or I might take issue with. Issues of right and wrong for the Christian come from a higher standard than any one

person or group. This standard comes from God.

The Creator is also the Moral Lawgiver. When a Christian says that he believes God designed sex for expression within marriage, he is not setting *himself* up as judge and jury and deciding to make life difficult for unmarried people. He is following the Maker's instructions.

This question about sex is a vitally important question for many in their search for God. In fact, sometimes sexual and moral issues provide the main foundation for a person who does not believe in God. Atheist and author, Aldous Huxley, wrote openly about his motivation for believing that life had no meaning and that there is no God:

“I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently, I assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. ... For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation ... liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. ... There was one admirably simple method in our political and erotic revolt: We could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.”<sup>1</sup>

This is not to say that ethical objections to becoming a Christian are not sincere or heartfelt. For some, though, the questions of sex and sexuality are utterly crucial. Many people might be genuinely sceptical about Christ because of the out-of-date ideas about sex that Christians have. How can sex possibly ever be wrong?

nor is it the predigital, modernistic 1900s. Things are quickly changing around us — socially, culturally, technologically, and attitudinally. We can feel threatened by many of these shifts. Nevertheless, we need to understand how the Christian tradition has influenced this country — both for good and for ill.

In a country where 83 percent of the population identify themselves as Christians, the American church is dealing with significant spiritual apathy, arrogance, and

self-absorption. Young people are rightly rejecting some embarrassing elements of our self-righteous subculture. Are you helping them disavow the cultural Christianity, spiritual consumerism, and easy-bake materialism that prevent most rich Americans from penetrating the hole on a needle?

Third, Christian leaders need to help people in their churches understand their role as missionaries. They are agents of healing and restoration to a broken world, wherever they serve.

This project changed me as a researcher. One of the most personally challenging insights came when I realized how little I understood what it means to be a missionary to a cracked culture. It is much easier to be offended than to be provoked into making a difference. I find it much more natural to talk about sin than to assist people affected by sin.

I would ask you, based on what we learned in this research, to help reorient believers' thinking about people outside the church. They are



It may surprise some that the biblical view of sex is extremely positive. God thought of sex. He gave us this wonderful expression of love for another. An entire book of the Old Testament is devoted to extolling the beauty of sex and showing God's delight in what He has made pleasurable and good.

From the beginning, the Bible lays a foundation for a Judaeo-Christian approach to sex. Genesis provides the original context for sexual intercourse and shows that God has designed sex for expression within a lifelong marital relationship between one man and one woman. Jesus used these same words in His teaching on sexuality.

God expressed the divine image in both male and female. God made man and woman equally in His image despite their physical, anatomical, and procreative differences. As they join together as husband and wife, they express their unity and diversity. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Here we have a blueprint for sexual love. Through the sexual act a man and woman have a new, incredible kind of intimacy. The Bible calls this being "one flesh," and God designed this one-flesh relationship to be exclusive and faithful. Both Jesus and Paul emphasized the beauty of monogamous marriage.

We can approach the question of how sex outside of marriage could be wrong by looking at the beauty, intimacy, and preciousness of sex. God designed that sex happen in a safe and committed context of love and devotion. According to the Maker, this is where sex is at its best.

Judgmentalism is not the issue. We all make judgments. The question is what are our judgments based on. For the Christian, our moral framework comes from God — through His Word. A skeptic will challenge the Bible, but this presents an entirely different question.



**AMY ORR-EWING** lives in London and is training director at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Trust, where she oversees the Trust's apologetics training program. She is author of *Is the Bible Intolerant?*

#### NOTE

1. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), 270–273.

not opponents. Whether broken, flawed, arrogant, obnoxious, or offensive, it does not matter. These people are not enemies of Christianity. It is not an us-versus-them battle; it is an us-versus-us crisis.

As Christ followers, we affirm that the world is not what it ought to be — and we need to confess our part of the problem. Are you cultivating fear and loathing among churchgoers? Or are you nurturing people who are godly, thoughtful, responsible, and responsive to the out-of-sync world around them?

### Creating the Future

Reaching non-Christians does not have a simple solution. There are some important guidelines for re-engaging people outside the church and reframing the Christian way of life. First, we need to remember that our goal is not popularity.

Being well liked does not make a Christian more effective. Working harder, saying the right words, and trying the right combination of things do not help us reach more people. Instead, nurture creativity in your

ministry efforts because without it your ability to penetrate people's hearts and minds will wane.

One of the undercurrents of non-Christians' perceptions of Christianity is indifference. The faith has no relevance. They are losing their interest and becoming more resistant to a church's overtones. In fact, traditional church-marketing efforts — from advertising to personal invitations — are less effective than ever. But for most people outside the faith, it is not for a lack of hearing the gospel. Most of them have heard it before. The message, however, never sank in; it had neither gravity nor buoyancy, neither humanity nor divinity. It did not stick.

This is why creativity becomes so crucial in telling the story of relationship to a living God — not through slick designs or hip sermon titles — but through honest people telling the story of Christ's death and resurrection in relevant ways. If God has given you a passion for trying something new, keep pursuing that vision.

We cannot ignore the poor reputation of our faith. You may already have a sense of this problem. If not, I hope this article spurs your realization of the challenges we face. I hope it catalyzes your search for solutions in your life and ministry.

It is easy to live a spiritually lazy life, but harder still to catalyze people to spiritual maturation and transformation. It is a cheap excuse to complain that the culture mistreats Christians; it is much more difficult to make sacrifices for and serve that culture. Slowly succumbing to pride is a path of minimal resistance compared to humbly measuring our heartbeat every day by God's standards.

God is pleased when we accomplish things that increase His fame in our time. Jesus highlighted similar goals (Matthew 5:16): "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

languages; they will struggle to find common ground.

Evangelicals and other conservative Christians will need to make tough decisions about whether they are loyal to the evangelical label

As an oncologist must correctly diagnose and treat cancer, churches must have a team of people who pray, counsel, and guide people through their frustrations. If pastors ignore this baggage at the time people are open to dealing with it, they will have failed these people spiritually.

Those who do come to churches will increasingly come from a Christian background, while fewer people on the distant side of the religious spectrum — non-Christians, atheists, and others — will be open to the Christian *thing*. Outsiders' will grow even more skeptical of a pastor's motives and interest in them. Even insiders will question their allegiance to the congregation, finding new arenas to express their faith, as their resentment builds toward the *unChristian* faith.

On its current collision course, the cold war between Christians and outsiders is likely to deepen. Christians will face more hostility when dealing with those outside Christianity, especially in business, education, and politics, as well as in the arts, media, and entertainment. It will grow more fashionable — even justifiable — to disparage and dismiss Christians.

Research is like a mirror. Will the church — will pastors — look at the brutal reality of the reflection? 🌀

## In a country where 83 percent of the population identify themselves as Christians, the American church is dealing with significant spiritual apathy, arrogance, and self-absorption.

### Perceptions Matter

Maybe you do not know what to make of what is happening in today's society. One thing is certain: *unChristian* branding will affect your life and ministry. If the current trajectory is not changed, the size and influence of non-Christians in American society will likely grow. Without major changes in direction, the culture will struggle to see Jesus in the efforts and language of Christians.

The negative perceptions about Christianity will only deepen. These views will continue to barricade people from Jesus. Parents in outsider homes will raise their children to despise or disregard Christians — largely because they have never known any real Christ followers.

On the other hand, true Christ followers will find it increasingly difficult to have open and respectful conversations because people inside and outside the church will dredge up Christian stereotypes rather than engage in heartfelt conversations about real issues. Christians and outsiders will speak different

— a term that is not in the Bible — or to the beliefs and convictions that undergird it. This term has become an emotional and spiritual barrier to millions of outsiders.

Another probable, if unfortunate, outcome is that some conservative Christians will become even more entrenched, defensive, and strident. They will become more aggressive in buttressing Christianity against what they (sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly) perceive as attacks on the faith. They will become increasingly marginalized, undermining their efforts to reach new people with the gospel. The gap between non-Christians and theologically conservative Christians will grow, making it harder to connect with certain groups in America's fragmented mission field.

Pastoral ministry in the next 10 to 20 years will be a great deal different from what it was in the past. People will come to pastors with an intense load of previous experiences and deep hurts. They do not want a pastor to scold them; they want help and empathy.



**DAVID KINNAMAN** is president and strategic leader of The Barna Group, Ltd., in Ventura, California (<http://www.barna.org>). His bestselling book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*, explores this subject further.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.





A vintage television set is the central focus, positioned on a dark wood parquet floor. The TV screen displays the title 'Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The television is surrounded by glowing, golden-yellow light trails and small, warm-toned lights, creating a magical or nostalgic atmosphere. The background features a wall with a green and gold damask wallpaper. The overall scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting a classic or historical setting.

# Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners

By Graham Johnston





I love the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. Unfortunately, I grew up in the days before VCRs, DVDs, and cable television. If I wanted to watch this movie as a boy, I had one opportunity each year on the family television at a network's prescribed time. My children would not suffer this injustice; we own the movie. They can enjoy this story whenever they please.

One day, as I was watching *The Wizard of Oz* with them, I noticed that the opening credits took a long time. When the story finally began, I thought, *This movie is slow. How long before Dorothy gets to Oz? It has been black and white a long time; bring on the color.* I also wondered, *Why have I not had these observations before?*

As I became aware that my children were rapidly losing interest, I realized that I was viewing the movie, not through my own eyes, but through their eyes. Then it dawned on me: This story was written for a different generation. *What had worked for me was not working for them.*



# Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners

Perhaps you have felt this way when relating God's Word in the 21st century. *This is a great message, but it was written for an entirely different audience than mine.* How can we present God's message for this generation?

Some have compared the shift from modernity to postmodernity with gravity; it is all around us. Whatever people might say, the reality is that postmodernism is here. The quicker we accept it, the better off we will be.

Postmodernism creates obstacles that biblical communicators will need to overcome. For many postmoderns, authority is up for grabs. Who has the right to speak? The postmodern world longs for connection, not truth. How can we present God's Word without reducing it to the place where our message resembles a night at the improv?

In a world devoid of absolutes, relativism reigns. What is true and right for you may have no bearing on

me. Postmoderns view any form of religious belief and conviction with doubt at best, to out-and-out cynicism. When it comes to preaching, we can continue to speak to the *insiders*, but even with *the committed ones*, business as usual will not cut it anymore.

## Preaching Is Telling a Story

When it comes to preaching, one of the scariest observations some of us

days." No, what they will not stomach is preaching that is boring. So what do movies possess that the average Sunday message does not? *Story*. Not stories as in illustrations, but *story*.

Robert McKee is a leading expert on film screenwriting. He is famous for his seminars on scriptwriting. I appreciate his definition of *story*: "The creative demonstration of truth." McKee states, "Master storytellers never

When it comes to preaching we can continue to speak to the *insiders*, but even with *the committed ones*, business as usual will not cut it anymore.

will make is that we are emulating the preaching style we grew up listening to. This style has long become obsolete to most contemporary listeners. Here is a test. Have someone listen to a recording of the first 3 minutes of one of your sermons. Then pause it. Does the listener want to hear more or has he heard enough? Do you

know what is the kiss of death to preaching? When listeners say in their hearts early in your sermon, *I know where he is heading, and I have heard it all before.*

I am amused when people say that preaching in the 21st century is dead: "We live among a generation raised on television and movies; they will not tolerate preaching these

explain. They do the hard, painfully creative thing — they dramatize. Audiences are rarely interested and certainly never convinced when forced to listen to the discussion of ideas."<sup>1</sup>

For me, the creative demonstration of truth — God's truth — is usually how I summarize outstanding preaching. I believe we are living in the age of story. People are responsive to messages in story form. So what does that look like and how might we incorporate our sermons into story?

## Develop tension

When I was a teenager, the movie, *Jaws*, kept moviegoers in cinemas and away from beaches in droves. *Jaws* held people on the edge of their seats and offered them an occasional chance to jump completely out of them. Imagine if, before the music commenced, a narrator said, "You are about to witness a huge shark running amok and terrorizing a coastal town called Amity. You will witness people being eaten alive — a woman, an old fisherman, Quint the shark hunter. But do not worry. Before the movie is over, Sheriff

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**"In recognition of your three decades of faithful service to First Assembly of God, the board has decided to give you your first afternoon off. And we promise not to call you at home."**





Brody will blow up the bad shark. Now sit back and enjoy the movie." Why did they not include this narration? Simple. One of the keys to holding a person's interest is *tension*. This is why we want to see the story unfold as it happens. We do not want to know how the movie ends at the beginning.

A lack of tension equals boredom. Robert Cialdini, a social psychologist at Arizona State University, states, "Mysteries are powerful because they create a need for closure."<sup>2</sup> Certain kinds of preaching place a premium on dispensing information and facts. In the first couple of sentences, the preacher sums up the entire message. This approach does bring clarity. The speaker, however, has tipped his hand. His listeners know what is coming; the tension is gone. As a result, people tune out. Let's face it, people require more than just facts.

In this moviegoing (and storytelling) generation, when you spill the beans in the first minute, the average listener is wondering why the curtain has not fallen and why people are not streaming to the exits. It is over. The story is finished. We can go home now.

Fast-forward to the end of *Jaws* and time how much longer the movie extends *after* the shark is defeated. Answer: About 30 seconds. Why? Because what follows is *anticlimactic* — the story is over. The tension has been resolved. *Story* creates tension that draws listeners in by creating a need for closure.

### Answer the big question

After the shark is dead, all is right with the world once again. We know that the storyline is finished when the movie answers the big question driving the story. I will call this the over-arching question of the story.

"Excuse me," you might say. "I do

not recall a question being posed at the beginning of *Jaws*." But this question *was* in the opening scene. As the opening credits are rolling, two partially intoxicated young people scamper off from the others to take a swim. What appears to be a tranquil midnight dip turns into a terrifying attack by an unseen creature of the deep. This scene raises an over-arching question in the minds of viewers: *How do we stop this creature so we can be safe again?* Once the question has been answered, the story is over.

Here is another key component to a story: Story is usually launched by a question, a crisis, or a dilemma, not an answer. One over-arching question drives the story to its conclusion. What does this have to do with preaching? Every biblical passage, be it an epistle or narrative, possesses a story.

Recently, I was assisting a young pastor with her handling of Psalm 51, which relates David's journey and ultimate restoration after his adultery with Bathsheba. What is the over-arching question that this text addresses? The answer: What do we do when we blow it big time? The text

journalist's book. A journalist receives news of an event and writes down the facts. But when he reports it, the journalist examines the facts to find the *story*.

A young woman, age 22, who dies in a plane crash represents the facts. That she was pursuing a degree in community health to work among AIDS orphans in Western Kenya becomes the story. Every biblical passage contains ideas and content. In these ideas and content is a story that is as relevant to people today as it was back then.

### Create disequilibrium

The reason this is critical to effective communication is because of how people listen. The mind can listen in a passive state. For example, my wife says, "Do not forget to put out the garbage."

I nod while watching the ballgame on television, "Yeah, yeah, I'm on it."

One minute later I cannot even recall her speaking to me. I can repeat her words immediately afterward, but they do not stick in my brain. When we listen in a more active mode,

How can we present God's Word without reducing it to the place where our message resembles a night at the improv?

addresses the steps of acknowledging our wrong and confessing it, leading to spiritual restoration. Therefore, the question *arises out of the text and context* in the same way that, "How are we going to stop the shark?" arises out of the story of *Jaws*.

### Telling the Story

Preachers can take a page out of the

however, information moves to an entirely different place in our brains.

For example, if my wife says, "If this garbage is still here when I return, you are sleeping on the couch," this engages me, and I interact with what I am hearing. How does that happen? The answer: by *creating disequilibrium*. When people experience disequilibrium — something that stirs

# Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners

and shakes them — they suddenly become engaged in the process because the tension they feel gets their mental cogs turning.

One mistake preachers commonly make is creating an intellectual dilemma that is divorced from reality. For example, the classic medieval question is: How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? To which, the classic response is, “Who cares?” Sometimes, we frame a message around an issue such as, How did David defeat the Philistines? or What is the proper understanding of the immutability of God? These issues will be met by a collective yawn from all in earshot.

The over-arching issue needs to connect with the lives of the listeners and their world. Anything short of that spells disinterest. Learning for learning’s sake will only draw in a small percentage of people. Most people begin to actively listen when

the relationship between what you are preaching and its application to their everyday lives becomes apparent.

With disequilibrium in preaching comes some concerns. Don Carson, in his book, *How Long, O Lord?* deals with the problem of human suffering. Carson introduces his writing with a series of tragic events, all of which conclude with the question, “Where is God?” One of these vignettes details the events surrounding a pastor who is mowing his lawn one day only to have his tranquillity vanish when a large truck accidentally rolls over a 2-year-old boy and crushes him. The issue is clear: How could God allow this to happen?

Some pastors immediately object. “I cannot begin a sermon with that illustration. There are people in my congregation who have lost children. It hits too close to home, and it would prove too painful.” This is the point. When you introduce a message from God’s Word, ask yourself, *Is this raising*

*a question that people are asking: Where is God in all of this?* If it does, you have disequilibrium. Now you have people engaged not only because they have an intellectual curiosity, but also because it is an issue that grips them where they live. They feel it in their gut. And, yes, discomfort and unease come with it as well. But will people hang on the edge of their seats to hear what this passage might say about this matter? Yes. Again, McKee declares regarding movies, “The writer shapes story around a perception of what’s worth living for, what’s worth dying for, what’s foolish to pursue, the meaning of justice, truth — the essential values.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, people will appreciate your attempt to bring clarity to a difficult issue of life. It is more comforting for them when you address difficult issues than when you ignore these issues. After awhile, your listeners will develop confidence that God’s Word

## How Could a Holy/Loving God

**In our 21st-century sophistication, the idea of hell has become increasingly remote, even humorous. Woody Allen quipped, “Eternal nothingness is okay, if you’re dressed for it.”**

The headlines that followed Pope Benedict’s sermon about hell show the incredulity with which people hold the Christian doctrine of hell.

The pope said: “Hell really exists and is eternal, even if nobody talks about it much anymore.” The shock that a Christian leader actually believed in hell prompted breathtaking headlines in the *New York Times*: “Pope Proclaims Hell Exists.”<sup>1</sup>

After negotiating our way through the haze of humor and bemusement

concerning the idea of hell, several serious questions remain that we must address. Is it part of the profile of a loving God to punish people? How could that be fair?

How we feel about justice depends on which side of the law we find ourselves. Most people want to live in a society where administrators operate the legal system justly and fairly. When we are victims of a crime, we long for justice. Our loved ones want justice on our behalf if they care for us.

Love and justice are inseparable. To ignore evil or injustice would not be loving, so a loving God must also be a just God.

A friend of mine was recently beaten while her young children looked on. Her partner hit her so hard she could not open

one of her eyes for a day. The doctors were concerned that her eye may have suffered long-term damage. Covered with cuts and bruises, she went to the hospital. Despite her condition, she was unwilling to report the man to the police.

As her friend, my heart cried out for justice for her and her children. This is because I love her. Love and justice are close companions. We see this in the Bible.

My colleague, Michael Ramsden, says, “The problem of evil is the problem of love.” If love is to exist, we must freely give and receive it, or else it is not love. If this freedom is possible, withholding love is also possible. Selfishness, violence, and injustice are the result of the abuse of love’s freedom. A loving God cannot



is able to address the real crises of this world and of their lives.

### Create a Gap

In their book, *Made To Stick*, the Heath brothers write about George Loewenstein's *gap theory*. Loewenstein maintains that curiosity happens when we feel a gap in our knowledge. The Heath brothers state, "One important implication of the gap theory is that we need to *open* gaps before we *close* them. Our tendency is to tell people the facts. First, though, they must realize that they need these facts."<sup>4</sup>

In creating a gap, the speaker functions much like a computer program. He creates a folder in the listener's mind that provides the message a place to reside. Presenting a situation or conflict creates this space so the listener will want to hear what the speaker is about to say. To present the facts first may be bringing the cart before the horse.

In the past, explaining why facts are important to the listener and what he could do with the information came toward the end of the message. People assumed that the Bible and preaching had take-home value. Today, the speaker needs to create a gap, or risk that the average listener will disengage with his message at the start.

Some might also argue that we do not want to infuse too much of the real world into our messages. People, however, have grown weary of platitudes and clichés emanating from the pulpit. Listeners are weary of dribble and endless words that avoid the true issues. I ask: Does the Bible provide real answers in a real world? If people are asking this question and the Bible is clearly addressing it, why should we be intimidated to journey there? Here is another question: Is our corporate worship a place where we escape from the harsh realities of our world, or is it a place where we

confront those realities in the strength of God's Word? I think you know my answer.

### Allow the message to unfold

After you have determined the overarching question, built tension into your message, and established disequilibrium in your listeners, allow the message to unfold. In effect, you are moving away from a *deductive* model of preaching (telling the listeners the main idea at the start) to an *inductive* model (allowing the message to come to light gradually).

In my perception, 20th-century pulpits were largely deductive. A pastor gave his listeners the main idea of his sermon up front and then the body of the message fleshed out the details of the biblical concept he presented. Let's examine why this model is no longer the most effective way to communicate God's Word in the 21st century.

Suppose we asked: "Fifty years ago

## Send People to Hell?

ignore these violations of His world or else He would not be a loving God.

Why must God's judgment involve retribution and punishment in hell? Is this not outmoded and vindictive?

Retribution is an important factor because, in a real sense, it connects the punishment with the sin. It means that punishment is not arbitrary or random, but rational and consequential.

If one of my boys hits his brother over the head and then bites his leg, he knows I will remove him from the room for time out. He endures this separation for a minute or so because he has acted aggressively. Even as a toddler he understands that his actions lead to punishment.

Wrongdoing must be recognized as such both by the perpetrator and the world around us. This is the function of punishment.

Hell is the ultimate punishment. It is the destination of those who refuse to recognize their own sin for what it is. Their assertion of the self over others and God defies divine justice. Hell is the ultimate consequence of egotism.

The idea of eternal suffering as a result of temporal sinning seems disproportionate if people do not fully appreciate the seriousness of sin. But a biblical view of sin positions it as serious. The worth of people, created as we are in the divine image and given the capacity and opportunity to make

moral choices, shows how serious it is to abuse this human dignity by sinning. This applies to one's own life, to others, and ultimately, to defying the Maker himself. We underscore further the seriousness of sin in the Christian worldview when we reflect on the cost Jesus paid to deal with it.



**AMY ORR-EWING** lives in London and is training director at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Trust, where she oversees the

Trust's apologetics training program. She is author of *Is the Bible Intolerant?*

#### NOTE

1. *New York Post*, March 26th, 2007.



# Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners

## Preaching to a Postmodern World

Graham Johnston (Baker Books, 189 pp., paperback)

*Cross-cultural communication* is a phrase that brings to mind missionaries, faraway lands, and new languages. Graham Johnston, in *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, challenges preachers to consider their communication of the gospel as cross-cultural communication. The world has changed as the generation shaped by postmodern thinking has come of age.

The challenge of gospel communicators today is finding a meaningful way to balance an adaptation of the homiletical process to the postmodern culture without compromising their commitment to biblical hermeneutics. Johnston believes good communication is a learned and necessary skill: "Divine empowering and good communication are not mutually exclusive."

While his review of postmodernism is accurate and concise, Johnston's intent is not to provide an exhaustive treatise on culture. Instead, his aim is to give a basic understanding of postmodernism, and then provide

why would a person listen to what the pastor had to say in a sermon?" We could come up with several responses. First, if the pastor was speaking from the Bible, that was enough. Second, the pastoral role came with built-in authority. People trusted their pastor and were inclined to believe what he said. Third, the church itself carried weight; it was viewed and accepted as a credible moral compass. Preaching

tools for communicating the gospel effectively while understanding the new context found in the pew.

Detractors posit that Johnston's approach has so contextualized the presentation of the message that God is no longer part of the equation. Johnston's aim, however, is to refocus our attention from the standard way of doing things to embrace the opportunities and challenges of presenting the gospel, so a divine and life-changing encounter takes place between the biblical and postmodern cultures.

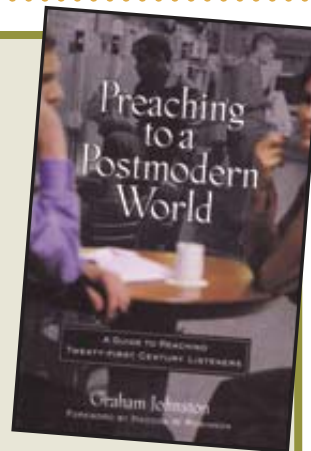
Johnston has made a valuable contribution to homiletics. His book is a must-read for ministers.

*Reviewed by Mike McCrary, Young Life and Family Ministries pastor, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.*

came with inherent authority. We cannot claim this today.

Postmodernism is largely a crisis of authority. The average person believes (whether he can articulate it or not) that he does not know who or what to trust anymore. As a result, a person defaults to: "I will trust myself."

The singer, Jewel, summed up this idea in the chorus of her song, "Trust your heart, your intuition and it will



lead you in the right direction." So, people today believe that because the preacher says so does not make it right; because the Bible says so does not necessarily make it right either.

The strength of the deductive model is the clarity it brings when one states something upfront such as, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." But the problem remains: What if the average person does not believe this? When a person makes a statement, the listener must say, "Okay, I agree with that," or "No, that has not been my experience."

If a pastor launches into his message with a statement about God, there is a high probability that many of his listeners *immediately* disengage because they are saying *no* in their hearts. You might be thinking, *Doesn't this create tension? Tension is good, right?*

The tension I mentioned earlier comes because people want to resolve an issue. This tension lies in suspending judgment to see how things may turn out. Once the speaker declares his hand at the start, the tension is gone except for the annoyance the listener may feel toward the speaker for wasting his time and for being perceived as arrogant.

On the other hand, if one does not begin with a statement, one may begin with a question. McKee says, "*Curiosity* is the intellectual need to answer questions and close open patterns. *Story* plays to this universal desire by doing the opposite, posing questions and opening situations."<sup>5</sup>

Speaking inductively takes an indirect form that allows the listener to process what the speaker says and, thus, suspend any judgment. An inductive approach works best when *listener receptivity is low*. If one wants to communicate to seekers or even believers who have doubts and



misgivings, the inductive approach works best. In the opening question, the preacher suggests to the listener, *I respect you enough to allow you to figure this out without my having to tell you point blank.* An inductive approach does not tell the listener what to think or believe. Instead, it invites the listener to explore the subject with the speaker. It declares, "Let's figure this out together."

This approach neither compromises the integrity of God's Word nor the sensibilities of the contemporary listener. The preacher needs to invite the listener to journey with him as the over-arching question unfolds the message, allowing the listener to make up his own mind. In short, stories inform people, not by stating facts, but by taking people on a journey of discovery. Preaching can do the same.

### End Well

I have detailed how one needs to begin his sermon by raising an over-arching question that will drive the message to its conclusion. Another characteristic is that every story possesses a beginning, a middle, and an end. Some might say, "Don't all sermons have these?" Not necessarily. There are ends and there are ends. In the same way, every airplane flight will end at some point, but there is a difference between a clean landing and a crash landing.

What makes a good ending to a story? First, the message needs to adequately address the over-arching question. This is where the message needs to come to rest. For me, it is helpful to think of a closing argument in a court

case. The court will not allow the lawyer to introduce new evidence into the case while he is making his closing argument. If he is to present evidence, he needs to put it forward in the *body* of his argument. The *conclusion* is the opportunity to gather all the threads and begin to make a statement. Listeners have had opportunity to grasp how the speaker came to arrive at this point. If the conclusion fails to correspond to the over-arching

articulate the main idea of his message in the conclusion using *one clear sentence*, then the force of *story* is lost.

### Develop the Plot Content

Last, we need to examine what comprises the middle section or the body of the message. In *story*, we call this the *plot*. Every good storyteller must maintain the balance between two elements that are in dynamic tension — *content* and *progression*. Content is

Once the speaker declares his hand at the start, the tension is gone except for the annoyance the listener may feel toward the speaker for wasting his time.

question, listeners will be confused and annoyed. Let's go back to *Jaws*.

The opening scene established the presence of a threat. The story cannot end until the people in Amity deal with the threat. The opening makes it inevitable that people will challenge and defeat the shark, or they will die trying. The opening scene and the concluding scene are connected in such a way that one cannot begin the story until he is clear where to end the story.

Thus, the basic element of *story* remains *one clear idea that becomes the story's destination*. If one cannot

the use of information and vivid detail. If the storyteller fails to convey enough information, people will either not believe the story or lose interest.

Suppose I begin a story by saying, "A guy goes into a store to buy something." Vague and uninteresting; it lacks detail and content.

In preaching, good communication requires substance. People want to see the connection between the story (where one is leading the listeners) and the details of the text (what the Bible says) so they are convinced that the speaker is not just making it up.

### Pontius' Puddle

©2008 Joel Kauffman






# Telling the Story for 21st-century Listeners

Discriminating audiences demand content. The mind craves order. Once the speaker establishes tension, listeners will be following the content or storyline, so it needs to make sense. The body of the message develops the plot by revealing details in the biblical

disinterest. We like to put our feet in streams; we are afraid to put our feet in ponds. Good preaching produces streams; dull messages become ponds.

Regarding tension, how does one know if content and progression are well-balanced in one's message? I often

only limited resources, to secure their safe return. To see this drama played out before me was so engaging that when the capsule safely re-entered the atmosphere, I was celebrating as tears came to my eyes. The scriptwriters told the story in such a way that these astronauts became real people; their lives mattered. The story made the events come alive. The movie transformed a nostalgic bit of news into a story that inspired me to act with courage and hope.

Each week, I take an ancient passage some thousands of years old, full of wisdom and grace, and form it into a story with meaning and relevance for people today. My challenge is to bring God's story to people so ancient history becomes undeniably good news. 

The payoff comes when the preacher reaches the conclusion and listeners are pleased that they journeyed with him to discover truth from God that will help them find their place in this world.

passage. These details give evidence that the story is indeed a biblical message.

## Progression

The second required element to the plot is progression — flow and mobility. The listener loses interest if the speaker bogs the story down in too much detail.

On one hand, people long for content, but pace is also critical. How many times does a story fall flat because what seems so intriguing to the speaker means nothing to the listener? Preachers can suffer from this disease while sitting alone at their desks pouring over commentaries and Bible dictionaries. Preachers need to monitor the pace of their sermons based on what the listener needs to know to draw a reasonable conclusion to the tension that he has raised.

People tend to watch moving objects. Take a ping-pong ball. It is almost humorous to observe a group of spectators at a table tennis game. Lay that same ball on the table and they lose interest.

Mobility in communication is the key to holding people's interest. The difference between a pond and a stream is mobility. Streams move; ponds stagnate. Streams intrigue; ponds

ask, "When Jerry Seinfeld is creating his monologues at home without anyone else around, how does he know his material is funny? How does he know what will make people laugh?"

The answer is intuition. He knows intuitively what is funny and what is not. He has honed his feel for comedy over years of performing before live audiences. This is where storytelling (and preaching) becomes an art. The preacher begins to develop a feel for the amount of detail that is required, yet enables the story to progress at a pace that will not cause listeners to lose interest. This is why editing makes the movie; the same is true in preaching. Trace the plot and keep on course.

The payoff comes when the preacher reaches the conclusion and listeners are pleased that they journeyed with him to discover truth from God that will help them find their place in this world.

## Conclusion

Do you recall the movie *Apollo 13*? I knew how it ended because I knew that the three *Apollo* astronauts did not die in space. What made the film gripping was not a surprise ending but the unfolding storyline. I had no idea of the effort required by NASA control and by the astronauts in the *Apollo* spacecraft, using



**GRAHAM JOHNSTON, D.MIN.,** is senior pastor of Subiaco Church of Christ, Subiaco, Western Australia, and adjunct lecturer in homiletics at Perth Bible College, Karrinyup, Western

Australia. He is also the author of *Preaching to a Postmodern World*.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

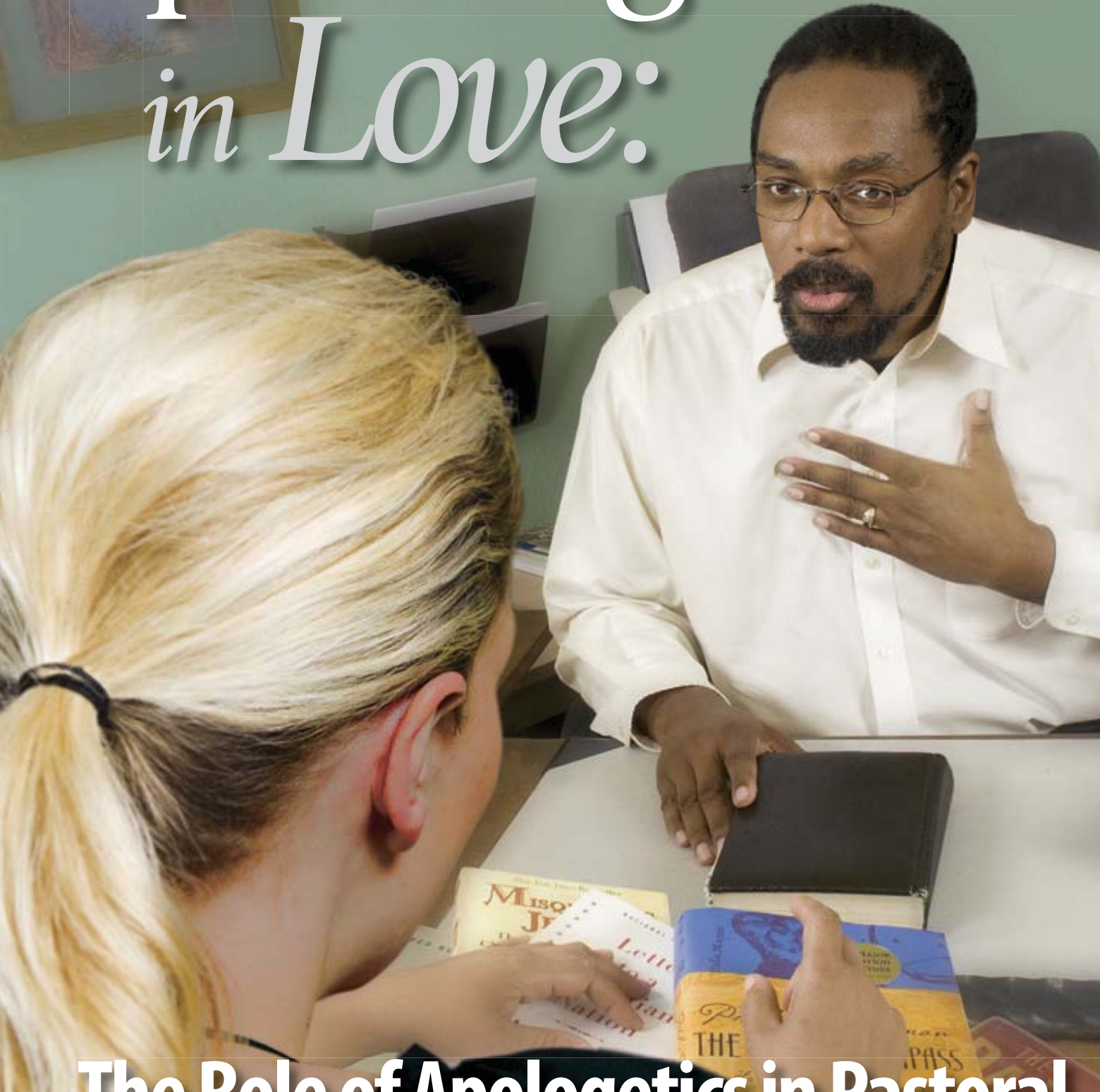
## NOTES

1. McKee, Robert, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperEntertainment, 1997), 113, 114. "Storytelling is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story's event structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea . . . without explanation. Master storytellers never explain. They do the hard, painfully creative thing — they dramatize. Audiences are rarely interested, and certainly never convinced, when forced to listen to the discussion of ideas. A great story authenticates its ideas solely within the dynamics of its events; failure to express a view of life through the pure, honest consequences of human choice and action is a creative defeat no amount of clever language can salvage."
2. Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made To Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007), 81.
3. McKee, *Story*, 17.
4. Heath, *Made To Stick*, 85.
5. McKee, *Story*.





# Speaking the Truth *in Love:*



## The Role of Apologetics in Pastoral

BY GEORGE P. WOOD

A few years ago, Sherry, a woman who attended my church, handed me *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown and asked me to read it. Even though the book is fictional, it was raising troubling questions about the history, beliefs, and social practices of traditional Christianity. Sherry wanted me to help her sort out fact from fiction.

I procrastinated reading *The Da Vinci Code* for several months. I did not want to waste my time reading a mystery novel. But the book was a runaway best seller. Columbia Pictures announced plans to make a movie starring Tom Hanks based on the book. Scholars published

*The Da Vinci Code* taught me that apologetics is important.

books debating its factual assertions. Television news magazines produced hour-long specials regarding it. And more parishioners came to me with their troubling questions about it. So I finally read the book.

*The Da Vinci Code's* fast-moving plot kept me interested from start to finish. The book, however, also incorporated self-proclaimed *facts* into the storyline that were obviously false and easily refuted. I could see why people with little knowledge of Christian doctrine and church history might be impressed, but I was a seminary-educated pastor, and I was not. To help set the record straight, I preached

to my parishioners about *The Da Vinci Code*, and I wrote a blog series about it for my church's Web site.

*The Da Vinci Code* taught me that apologetics is important. Radical skepticism about traditional Christianity pervades our culture. If the church does not offer a convincing response to skeptical arguments, no one else will.

### Truth and Spiritual Maturity

Why does the church need to respond to skeptics?

In Ephesians 4:14,15, the apostle Paul draws a connection between truth and spiritual maturity: "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things

grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

According to Paul, *spiritual maturity* — defined as *Christlikeness* — is the *end* we pursue. The *means* by which we pursue it is *truth telling*. Falsehood is an obstacle to our pursuit of spiritual maturity. So if we want to be Christlike, we must be able to discern the truth and defend it against falsehood.

Unfortunately, our culture is rife with every wind of teaching. Radical skepticism about traditional Christianity is *overt*, *covert*, and *multimedia*. Consider a few examples.

Jim Lersch/Stockphoto



# Speaking the Truth *in Love*

Richard Dawkins is a well-known evolutionary biologist and militant atheist. He recently published *The God Delusion*. Although atheists represent a tiny fraction of the American populace, Dawkins' book is a best seller. It offers a variety of arguments why belief in God is irrational.

Another best-selling author who challenges traditional Christianity is Bart Ehrman. At one time, Ehrman was an evangelical Christian; now he considers himself an agnostic. In *Misquoting Jesus*, he argues that the text of the New Testament is unreliable because scribes have altered the New Testament documents

over the years. According to Ehrman, we cannot know what those documents originally said.

Dawkins and Ehrman's books are nonfiction best sellers. But fiction best sellers also attack traditional

*Amber Spyglass*. In these books, God (the Authority) and His church (the Magisterium) are evil, oppressive forces. Humanity is liberated when, at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, God finally dies.

## Because of its cultural pervasiveness, radical skepticism also seeps into the church.

Christianity. Their arguments, however, are covert, rather than overt.

Philip Pullman, for example, has written a best-selling, award-winning trilogy marketed to children. His *Dark Materials* consists of *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The*

*The Da Vinci Code* incorporates attacks on traditional Christianity into its storyline. The book's plot turns on the revelation that Jesus Christ married Mary Magdalene and fathered a royal dynasty. This dynasty promotes the gospel of *the Sacred Feminine*, which,

## How Can We Justify the Killing

**How could a good God — a God of peace — condone warfare as He does in the Old Testament? This question might be in reference to passages such as 1 Chronicles 5:21,22: "They also took one hundred thousand people captive, and many others fell slain, because the battle was God's." But more than simply condoning warfare, God seems to command it. He even gave instructions concerning how to conduct war, and commanded the mass killing of the inhabitants of particular cities.**

When a skeptic examines the Old Testament, it is important for him to remember that God did not approve of everything recorded in the Bible. For example, the Bible records the assassination of a man called Eglon (Judges 3:17–25). This action is neither condemned nor praised; it is simply relayed to us. A large proportion of the acts of violence recorded in the Bible

fall into this category. We need to be careful, then, how we read the different accounts of war in the Old Testament.

It is true, however, that some wars are commanded by God, particularly regarding Israel's taking possession of the land God gave them after they were rescued from slavery in Egypt. For many generations, Christians have deliberated over how to understand these passages.

The Old and New Testaments present a portrait of God as one who judges evil. In the Old Testament, one means of God's judgment is war. In the Old Testament, war and struggle are in the context of a wider cosmic struggle between good and evil (a struggle that continues in the New Testament).

A Christian reading of the Old Testament interprets the battles depicted there in this context of a larger struggle. The battle of Jericho, the wars against the southern coalition

of Canaanite kings, and the wars against the northern coalition in Canaan would be included in this context.

God fought on behalf of many of the judges in the Old Testament — as well as faithful kings such as David and Jehoshaphat — in judgment of evil practices. God even used foreign nations to fight against Israel's enemies in ways that helped His people. For example, the prophet Nahum announced the appearance of the divine warrior who would fight (in this instance, the Babylonians) against Israel's longtime oppressor, Assyria.

It is vital to note that Israel was not always the one who brought about God's will on the battlefield. In fact, the Israelites were often on the receiving end of God's judgment. At times, they were massacred and enslaved, but at other times they were militarily victorious. We would be misunderstanding the Old Testament if we said that God was always on Israel's



according to Brown, a male-chauvinist, traditional Christianity works hard to suppress.

Books are not the only media in which traditional Christianity is attacked. Hosts from television and radio shows interviewed Dawkins and Ehrman about their ideas. Major movie studios released films based on both *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Golden Compass*. *Time* and *Newsweek* devoted cover stories to the book's controversies.

Because of its cultural pervasiveness, radical skepticism also seeps into the church. Christians cannot avoid wrestling with the questions culture is asking.

If belief in God is irrational, as Dawkins argues, why should we believe in Him? If the New Testament is unreliable, as Ehrman argues, why should we trust what it says? Radical skepticism becomes an obstacle to faith for unbelievers, and a temptation for believers to abandon the faith.

In the language of Paul, radical skepticism is a "stronghold" (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). What do Christians do with strongholds? "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Apologetics

refutes skeptical arguments so unbelievers can become believers and believers can mature spiritually. Therefore, in our cultural context, both evangelism and discipleship require apologetics.

### The Pastor as Lead Apologist

Whose responsibility is apologetics?

In 1 Peter 3:15, the apostle Peter wrote: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." The Greek word for *answer* is *apologian*, from which we get *apologetics*. Thus, every Christian is an apologist.

## in the Old Testament?

side. Israel's election as God's chosen people was not a *carte blanche* to wage war against anyone at any time. At certain times God used Israel as an instrument of His judgment against evil and oppressive nations; at other times He judged them, and they were on the receiving end of war.


Deuteronomy 20 records the rules of war for God's people. These rules dictate justice, fairness, and kindness in the use of the sword. God allowed special hardship conditions as grounds for excusing soldiers from military duty. The nation of Israel waived a soldier's military obligation until he no longer qualified for exemption under those conditions (Deuteronomy 20:5–7). Israel even sent home those who had no such excuse, but were afraid or reluctant to fight (verse 8).

Unlike the armies of other nations who might attack a city without giving it an opportunity to surrender (compare 1 Samuel 11:1–3), God required the armies of Israel to grant a city opportunity to

surrender without bloodshed before mounting a full-scale siege and destroying the city. In this context, God required that Israel spare the women and children from death, and their captors were to care for them (Deuteronomy 20:10–14). Only in the case of the depraved inhabitants of Canaan did God require total destruction.

The reason for the God-sanctioned war and destruction of the inhabitants of Canaan was the likely corruption of the moral and spiritual standards of Israelite society: "Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 20:16–18). This is important because God had chosen Israel to bear God's self-revelation to the world — the task of making God known.

There is some discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments concerning warfare. While in the Old Testament God often used war as an instrument of His

judgment, Jesus has shown that it is now a betrayal of the gospel to take up arms to defend or promote the interests of Christ. This discontinuity, however, is not absolute.<sup>1</sup> There is also continuity, especially as we look at the New Testament's picture of the Final Judgment and its form of warfare in which spiritual weapons demolish spiritual strongholds. God's judgment of evil runs throughout the Bible, and war in the Old Testament is one outworking of this reality. 



**AMY ORR-EWING** lives in London and is training director at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Trust, where she oversees the Trust's apologetics training program. She is author of *Is the Bible Intolerant?*

#### NOTE

1. For further study, see Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).





# Speaking the Truth *in Love*



But pastors pull double duty concerning apologetics. We are the church's lead apologists, and we train church members to become apologists. How do we become apologists? Three words: *prayer*, *books*, and *dialogue*.

## Prayer

Prayer prepares us *spiritually* for apologetics. When I am reading Dawkins, Ehrman, or some other skeptical author, I feel my own faith in God is being challenged. The challenge is not merely intellectual; it goes deeper. It is like hearing that your wife has cheated on you. Your mind processes the information, but your heart feels the pain. I know my wife is faithful, and God is more faithful still. But when someone questions your fundamental relationships, their questions mark your heart, even if you have a good answer.

Consequently, to meet the challenges of radical skepticism head-on, our hearts must be in the right place. Notice the order of Peter's remarks in 1 Peter 3:15. First, he told

us, "in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord." The Greek word for "set apart" is *hagiasate*, which the King James Version translates as *sanctify*. Peter told us that only after we sanctify our hearts are we to "give an answer to everyone who asks you." A pastor's heart sanctity must precede his head apologetics, and prayer is the key to heart sanctity. So, "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22).

## Books

Reading widely prepares us *intellectually* for apologetics. The Bible is the ultimate source of and final authority for what Christians believe and how they live. It is God's Word in human words (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20,21). Because of this, the Bible is the book radical skeptics most often attack. Consequently, pastors need to understand what the Bible says and how to properly interpret it.

If a pastor wants to become a good apologist, reading the Bible alone will not be sufficient. Consider Jesus. He was well-versed in Scripture. In His debate with the devil, He quoted Scripture to refute the devil's arguments (Matthew 4:1–11; compare Deuteronomy 6:13,16; 8:3). But Jesus was also well-versed in the arguments of His opponents. When Jesus quoted Scripture in Matthew 4:1–11, He introduced each verse with

the formula, "It is written." But in Matthew 5:21–48, He used a different introductory formula, "You have heard that it was said." In these verses, He was citing the Pharisees' traditional commentary on the Law, not the Law itself. He could critique the Pharisees' misinterpretations because He was familiar with them. It is not enough for pastors to read *their side* of a controversy. We must also read *the other side*, so we will know how to give an intelligent response to radical skeptics.

Pastors need to read widely in the literature of Christian apologetics. Many well-qualified theologians, biblical scholars, and church historians have written excellent defenses of traditional Christianity. Pastors need to read those books, and then share them with others.

## Dialogue

Finally, dialogue prepares us *rhetorically* for apologetics. Pastors are accustomed to standing in the pulpit each Sunday and preaching *to* (in some cases, *at*) their congregations. Such proclamation is a one-way form of communication, *from* us *to* them. Proclamation has a legitimate role in pastoral ministry. But do not forget dialogue — a two-way form of communication *between* us and them. Dialogue is an ideal form of communication for answering questions and rebutting skeptical challenges.

Jesus utilized both forms of communication. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 through 7) is a good example of proclamation. But Matthew 21:21–32 shows Jesus answering His critics' questions and asking them questions in turn. I used both forms of communication to refute the false claims made by characters in *The Da Vinci Code*. I



# Speaking the Truth *in Love*

*proclaimed* an entire sermon about it one Sunday, but I also engaged in extensive *dialogue* about it afterward.

## A Skeptic-Friendly Community

How do pastors train members of their congregations to become apologists? Two issues must be considered: *environment* and *curriculum*. Let's look at the environment issue first.

Several years ago, I ate lunch with a man named Jack, an unbeliever who was respectful of the church. He had serious questions about the faith. To get answers, he joined a small group that was reading a book on apologetics. Unfortunately, when members of the group found out that Jack was an unbeliever, they hectored him about his need for conversion but never bothered to answer the questions that were an obstacle to his converting. He never returned to the group.

As Jack told me his story, I learned a valuable lesson: *We must accept skeptics before we argue with them.* Remember, according to Ephesians 4:14,15, "speaking the truth *in love*" (emphasis

added) is how we overcome falsehood and pursue spiritual maturity. Many churches want to speak the truth to skeptics, but they do not want to love them. Most unbelievers I know reverse those priorities. They want the church to accept them before the church answers their questions.

Interestingly, accepting people is a means to answering their questions. I once led a small group of married couples. Most of them were believers, except for one couple. The wife was a Christian and the husband was not. His name is Mark. The group accepted Mark for who he was, and they encouraged him to ask probing questions about the faith. As the leader of the group, I never told him that his questions were out of line. Instead, knowing that these questions were potential strongholds in his life, I did my best to answer each one. If I did not know the answer, I researched it that week and shared my discoveries at the next meeting. For months, Mark asked what "you Christians" believed about a variety of topics. But I remember the meeting when he began

to talk about what "we Christians" believed. By accepting Mark and answering his questions, the group had helped him come to faith.

The questions Jack asked were similar to the ones Mark asked. The answers I gave them were identical. But Mark is a believer, and Jack is not. The difference? Mark's small group accepted



## Resource List



**Copan, Paul. 2007. *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press.**

Copan has written a user-friendly, Scripture-engaging Christian philosophy of religion book — a kind of launching pad for Christian leaders, students, and teachers in philosophy of religion as they think critically, instruct others, engage with non-Christians, and live their lives in God's presence. *Loving Wisdom* reflects the themes Copan has found important and fruitful in his own spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage and in his interaction with those outside the faith in open forums and coffee shops.

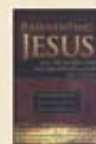


**Groothuis, Douglas. 1996. *Jesus in an Age of Controversy*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.**

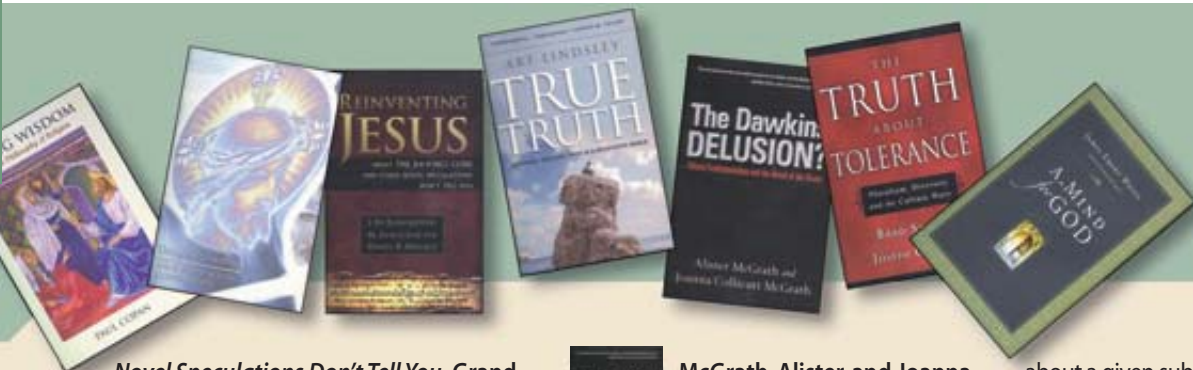
Best-selling books challenge us to rethink our ideas about Jesus. The Jesus Seminar makes headlines with its systematic attempts to undermine the accuracy of the Gospel accounts. New Age teachings about Jesus have found their way into many pulpits.

In response to this confusion, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* provides a straightforward, easy-to-understand study of the questionable foundations and faulty conclusions of these new views.

This important book provides the historical and logical evidence that confirms biblical teachings about Jesus. It will enable you to defend your faith against attack, help those struggling with questions and doubts, and encourage you with the overwhelming weight of evidence that confirms that Jesus is the only Savior and Lord.



**Komoszewski, J. Ed., M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace. 2006. *Reinventing Jesus: What the Da Vinci Code and Other***



**Novel Speculations Don't Tell You.** Grand Rapids: Kregel.

From the worldwide sensation *The Da Vinci Code* to the national best-seller *Misquoting Jesus*, popular culture is being bombarded with radical skepticism about the uniqueness of Jesus and the reliability of the New Testament. *Reinventing Jesus* cuts through the rhetoric of extreme doubt to reveal the profound credibility of historic Christianity. Meticulously researched yet eminently readable, this book invites a wide audience to take a firsthand look at the primary evidence for Christianity's origins. *Reinventing Jesus* shows believers that it's okay to think hard about Christianity, and shows hard thinkers that it's okay to believe.



**Lindsley, Art. 2004. *True Truth: Defending Absolute Truth in a Relativistic World*.** Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Conventional wisdom holds that any belief in absolutes, especially of a religious nature, leads inevitably to the oppressive absolutism of such movements as the Inquisition, the Crusades, and even Nazism. As a result, Christian apologists have been hard-pressed to make a case for the rational absolutes that are a necessary part of belief in Jesus.

While maintaining the indispensability of absolutes, Lindsley ably demonstrates that faith in Christ is necessarily opposed to and incompatible with the abuses of oppression, arrogance, intolerance, self-righteousness, closed-mindedness, and defensiveness. Surprisingly, Lindsley shows that it is relativism that often harbors dangerous, inflexible absolutisms. Here is a book that actively challenges the dismissal of truth, preparing the way for more effectively proclaiming the gospel and living Christianly in a postmodern world.



**McGrath, Alister, and Joanna Collicutt McGrath. 2007. *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the***

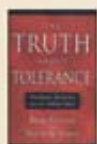
***Denial of the Divine*.** Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Alister McGrath, along with his wife Joanna, are ideal to evaluate Dawkins' ideas. Once an atheist himself, Alister gained a doctorate in molecular biophysics before going on to become a leading Christian theologian. He wonders how two people, who have reflected at length on substantially the same world, could possibly have come to such different conclusions about God.

McGrath subjects Dawkins' critique of faith to rigorous scrutiny. His exhilarating meticulously argued response deals with questions such as:

- Is faith intellectual nonsense?
- Are science and religion locked in a battle to the death?
- Can the roots of Christianity be explained away scientifically?
- Is Christianity simply a force for evil?

This book will be warmly received by those looking for a reliable assessment of *The God Delusion* and the many questions it raised — including all the relevance of faith and the quest for meaning.



**Stetson, Brad, and Joseph G. Conti. 2005. *The Truth About Tolerance: Pluralism, Diversity, and the Culture Wars*.** Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

There is a widespread feeling today that something is very wrong with the way we think about tolerance. We have an intuition that in our diverse society tolerance is very important to practice, but at the same time we are unable to agree on what it means to be tolerant. Does tolerance require the acceptance of all views on a given subject as equally true? Does it mean that I must not believe too strongly that my views are right

about a given subject? Can I be tolerant and still believe in objective truth about religion, ethics, and politics?

The importance of this topic cannot be overestimated. The deep diversity of American life, and many other societies across the globe, demands a vigorous and proper understanding and practice of tolerance as a value. Without tolerance, pluralism and diversity dissolve into nothing more than tyranny and chaos.

The fundamental aim of this book is to stimulate reflection and writing on tolerance (both social and personal), particularly from a Christian point of view, and to affirm that personal and political commitments to truth are not averse to genuine tolerance. Indeed, truth and tolerance are inseparable. In their symbiosis, tolerance gives to truth the cognitive freedom it needs to be authentically recognized, and truth gives to tolerance the parameters and purpose it needs to function as it is intended — to serve people and communities in their quest for meaning and ultimately the knowledge of the One in whom alone lies their fulfillment.



**White, James Emery. 2006. *A Mind for God*.** Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

The apostle Paul calls us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). But James Emery White fears that Western Christians are failing in this task. Because we have not developed good intellectual habits, our minds instead have been captured by our culture.

*A Mind for God* is written to help us break free from this cultural captivity through the spiritual and intellectual disciplines of reading, study, and reflection. This inspirational and practical "rule for the mind" encourages and enables us to develop our minds for God.



# Speaking the Truth *in Love*



him, and Jack's did not. Pastors and their congregations must create an environment that *welcomes skeptics and provides answers*.

## An Answer-Ready Church

What about curriculum? What kinds of questions do churches need to be ready to answer? Unbelievers usually ask two kinds of questions: *what* and *why*.

What do Christians believe about \_\_\_\_\_? You can fill in the blank with almost any topic: God, Jesus,

Proper apologetics does not deal with the *what* question. Instead, apologetics deals with the *why* question.

miracles, suffering, gay marriage, and evolution. Answering these questions requires knowing what the Bible teaches about each subject. Pastors need to answer these questions every week in their sermons. Your Sunday School classes and small groups need to be studying these questions every week too.

Proper apologetics does not deal with the *what* question. It assumes that both you and the unbeliever know the answer already. Instead, apologetics deals with the *why* question. *Why is Christian belief about \_\_\_\_\_ reasonable?* Unbelievers — whether radically skeptical or not — do not merely want to know what Christians believe, they want to know why they need to believe the same things. Apologetics, to use Peter's words, is offering an answer for the hope you have (1 Peter 3:15).

In our cultural context, I repeatedly see two specific *why* questions.

*Why do I need to believe in God?* Dawkins and Pullman raise this question in their books. They are symptomatic of a resurgence of atheism, which argues that belief

in God lacks evidence, contradicts science, and encourages violence.

*Why do I need to believe in the New Testament portrait of Jesus?* Brown and Ehrman raise this question in their books. They doubt the reliability of the history, canon, and text of the New Testament.

Unfortunately, pastors cannot answer these questions merely by quoting the Bible. If someone challenges the authority or truthfulness of the Bible, quoting the Bible by way of response commits the

fallacy of begging the question — that is, assuming what you want to prove. Instead, we must develop reasons why the Bible's teaching is true, reliable, and authoritative.

Thankfully, many excellent resources answer specific skeptical questions. I recommend four books by Lee Strobel for a crash course on apologetics:

- *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for a Creator* rebut atheist arguments for the irrationality of belief in God. In the second book, in particular, Strobel uses scientific evidence that points to an Intelligent Designer of the universe.
- *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for the Real Jesus* rebut skeptical arguments concerning the historicity of Jesus' life, ministry, and resurrection. In addition, Strobel argues that the New Testament canon includes the oldest and most historically reliable books about Jesus. Finally, he argues that we can have great certainty about what the New Testament authors originally wrote. Many other excellent apologetics

books are available. But Strobel's books are especially good because he was once a skeptic himself. The evidence convinced him to become a believer. Moreover, Strobel's writing style is dialogical. He structures each chapter around an interview with an expert on the issue under consideration.

## People Matter Most

I began this essay with Sherry; so let me end with her.

As I mentioned, I procrastinated reading *The Da Vinci Code*. On several occasions, Sherry asked me about it, but I told her I had not yet read it. After a while, I noticed that Sherry was attending church increasingly less. I learned that she had cancer.

Although Sherry was a believer, it later became clear to me that *The Da Vinci Code* was important to her. Because I did not want to be bothered with a mystery novel, I never helped her sort fact from fiction in the book. As far as I know, she died without hearing good answers to her troubling questions. Thankfully, she is with Jesus now and has received His answers to all her questions.

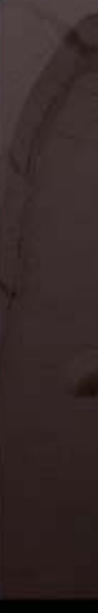
My negligence troubles me to this day. Radical skepticism is a stronghold against faith for both unbelievers and believers. If people such as Sherry, Jack, and Mike are important to us, then we must speak the truth to them in love now. Do not lose an opportunity — do not procrastinate — to provide an answer for the hope you have in Christ. Apologetics matters because the people God loves matter most. 🌱



**GEORGE P. WOOD**, pastor, Living Faith Center, Santa Barbara, California.

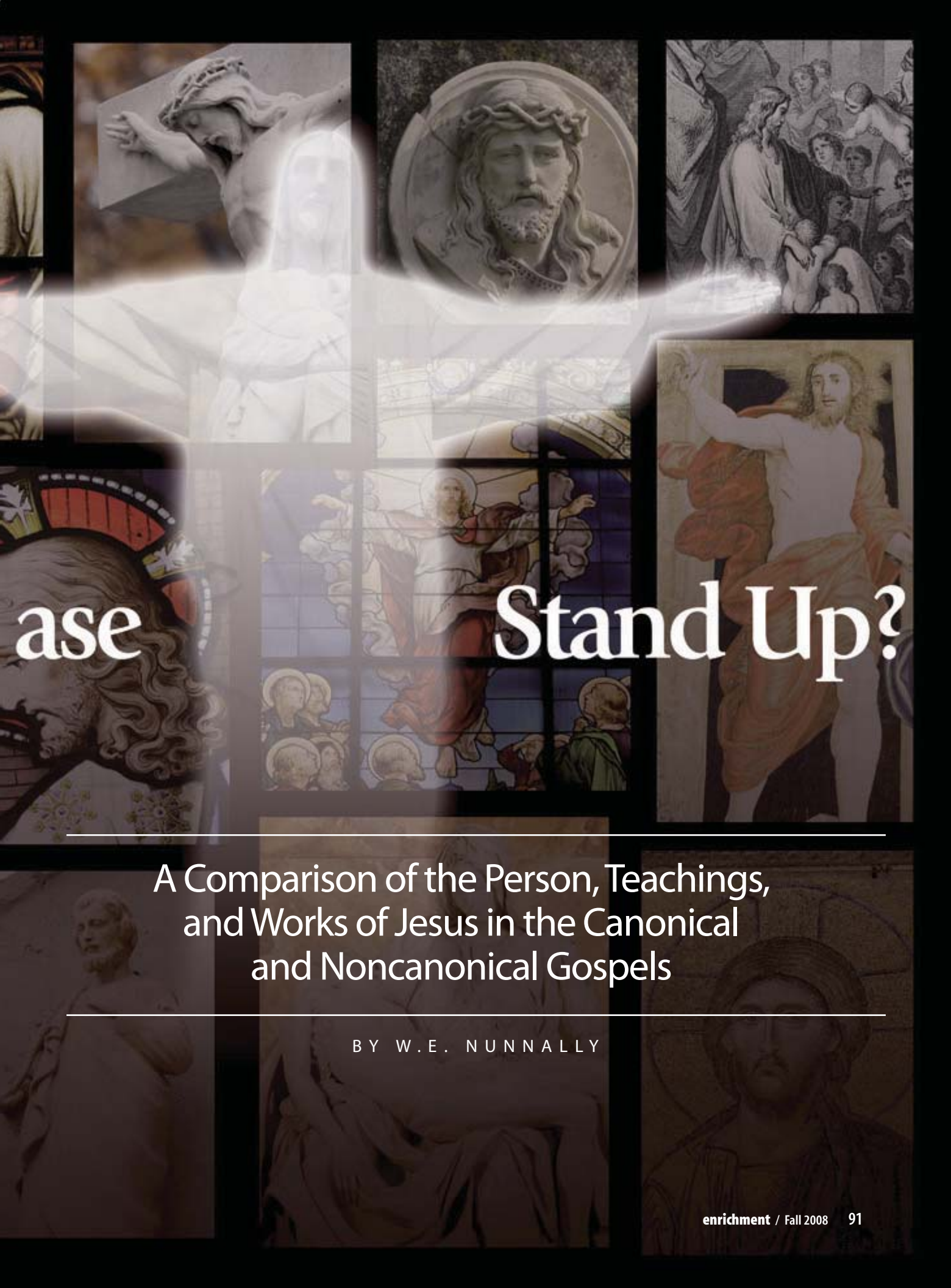
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# Will the Real Jesus Please





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# Stand Up?

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A Comparison of the Person, Teachings,  
and Works of Jesus in the Canonical  
and Noncanonical Gospels

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BY W. E. NUNNALLY

**Introduction**

Many pastors wonder about their ability to respond to members of their church who have read either *The Da Vinci Code* or have seen the movie. These claim that 80 gospels were left out of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> And how about the college freshman who has been exposed to the Jesus Seminar and now believes the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter are more

equipped because this issue is *not* going away.<sup>4</sup>

Today, those in spiritual leadership no longer have the luxury of remaining uninformed and giving smug, dismissive answers. Every day our people are being bombarded with challenges to their faith that appear to be supported by facts and expert opinions. Hiding behind phrases, such as “You have to accept it by

inspiring teacher,<sup>7</sup> or did He perform miraculous works? Is it true that the authors of the biblical Gospels and the Early Church intentionally marginalized women and that the noncanonical writings promoted the equality of women?<sup>8</sup>

Popular authors, such as Dan Brown who wrote *The Da Vinci Code*, base their claims on the premise that we now have noncanonical gospels that are more ancient and more historically reliable than the canonical Gospels.<sup>9</sup> The Gnostic gospels, however, have been available for more than 65 years. Most were found among the dubious writings of a heretical offshoot of the Orthodox Church called Gnosticism. In addition, most scholars date these texts between the late second and fifth century. Unfortunately, none of this has restrained members of the radical Jesus Seminar from using these texts to reconstruct a very different Jesus from the one who emerges from the canonical Gospels. Nor has it prevented Brown from marketing his conclusions to a culture that yearns for a more palatable, less challenging version of the Master.

This article provides the data to answer these important questions so we can provide an evidence-based response rather than rhetoric, and offer conclusions based on fact rather than on uninformed personal opinions. As we develop our response to these modern challenges, we will consider passages from three categories of noncanonical literature: *orthodox* (biblical), *hybrid* (primarily biblical, but with some elements not compatible with biblical teaching), and *heterodox* (usually dominated by heretical Gnostic ideas). Consider these questions: Do these extra-biblical documents describe an

**Every day our people are being bombarded with challenges to their faith that appear to be supported by facts and expert opinions.**

ancient and more reliable than the four canonical Gospels?<sup>2</sup> Or, a pastor is not sure what to say when a board member brings a popular magazine with an article entitled, “Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple: A Trinity of New, Scholarly Books Tries To Strip Away the Traditional Gospel Accounts of the Man From Nazareth”<sup>3</sup> to a board meeting? As pastors, we must become

faith,” or “God said it, I believe it, and that settles it,” will not retain today’s literate, educated, and tech-savvy generation, nor will it attract the next generation to Jesus.

It is necessary, then, to engage the issues of the marketplace at the point of attack: Does the evidence support the popular claims of *The Da Vinci Code* and the scholarly conclusions of the Jesus Seminar, or not? Is Jesus divine or is He “a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. ... A mere mortal.”<sup>5</sup> Were “those Gospels that spoke of Christ’s *human* traits” intentionally omitted from the New Testament in favor of those “embellished ... gospels that made Him godlike”?<sup>6</sup> Was Jesus merely a good man and an



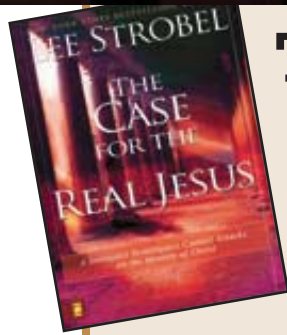


exclusively human Jesus without divine attributes? Do they speak of Jesus as a mere mortal and not a miracle-worker? Finally, do they claim to reverse the trend of discrimination against women that the biblical Gospels began for producing a male-dominated church?<sup>10</sup> This is not an exhaustive study; however, this representative section will help facilitate detailed comparison while avoiding the vagaries of over-generalization.

### An Exclusively Human Jesus?

One common charge against the canonical Gospels is that they exaggerate the deity of Christ and downplay His human characteristics. Meanwhile, the gospels excluded from the New Testament canon tell the true story — Jesus was only human. Does the evidence support these assertions?

Some orthodox, extra-biblical texts claim that Jesus did not die a natural death as a man, “[Jesus said:] ‘Mariam, Mariam, know me: do not touch me ... thy God did not die, rather he mastered death.’”<sup>11</sup> The Acts of John, a text containing both orthodox and heterodox elements, preserves this statement by the apostle: “Sometimes when I meant to touch him I encountered a material, solid body; but at other times, again, when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal, and as if it did not exist at all. ... And I often wished, as I walked with him, to see his footprint in the earth, whether it appeared — for I saw him raising himself from the earth — and I never saw it.”<sup>12</sup> It also records Jesus as saying, “Nor am I the (man) who is on the Cross”<sup>13</sup> and “I have suffered none of those things which they will say of me. ... You hear that I suffered, yet I suffered not ...



# The Case for the Real Jesus:

## A Journalist Investigates Current Attacks on the Identity of Christ

Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 309 pp., hardcover)

In one of their songs, Canadian rock band, *Downhere*, asks, “Can anybody show me the real Jesus?” For two millennia, Christians have turned to the New Testament to answer this question. But in the postmodern era, doubts have been raised about the New Testament’s canon, text, originality, and truthfulness.

Strobel, in *The Case for the Real Jesus*, sets out to overcome these doubts using the format he popularized in *The Case for Christ*. For each doubt raised about the New Testament’s portrait of Jesus, Strobel answers by interviewing an expert.

Strobel and his panel of experts consider six issues: (1) the extent of the New Testament canon; (2) the reliability of the New Testament text; (3) the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection; (4) the independence of the Gospels’ portrait of Jesus from pagan rites and ideas;

(5) the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Jesus’ life and ministry; and (6) the exclusive truth of the Christian faith. For each issue, Strobel and his experts offer reasonable arguments for their positions, as well as discuss and rebut opposing arguments. Their conclusion is that the New Testament portrait of Jesus is the real one.

This book is written for a popular audience, but each chapter concludes with suggested readings for people who wish to further investigate the issues. I recommend it as an introductory text for people with doubts about Christianity, as well as for Christian small groups, book clubs, and Sunday School classes.

Reviewed by George P. Wood, pastor, Living Faith Center, Santa Barbara, California.

and that I was pierced, yet I was not wounded; that I was hanged, yet I was not hanged; that blood flowed from me, yet it did not flow.”<sup>14</sup>

Other Gnostic documents equally insist that Jesus did not live or die as a man. For example, The First Apocalypse of James states, “The Lord said: ‘James, do not be concerned for me or for this people! I am he who was in me. At no time did I suffer in any way, nor was I distressed. And this people did not do any harm to me. Rather it was imposed upon a figure of

the archons.’”<sup>15</sup> The Gospel of Philip claims, “Jesus deceived everyone. For he did not show himself as he was; but he showed himself as [they would] be able to see him. ... He [showed himself] [to the] angels as an angel and to men as a man.”<sup>16</sup> The Gospel of Bartholomew reads, “Bartholomew said to him: ‘Lord when you went to be hanged on the cross, I followed you at a distance and saw how you were hanged on the cross and how the angels descended from heaven and worshiped you. And when darkness



came, I looked and saw that you had vanished from the cross.' "17 One Gnostic text states, "[Jesus said:] 'They thought that I was a mortal man.' "18

From these texts, we can make the following observation. Claims by popular authors and modern scholars that the apocryphal materials emphasize the humanity of Jesus have far exceeded the evidence. The opposite is true: *Orthodox texts, hybrid texts, and Gnostic texts generally de-emphasize, to the point of exclusion, the earthly aspects of Jesus' life and death.*

The maligned *canonical* Gospels describe Jesus' life and death in real, human terms. From the New Testament texts, we read that Jesus became tired, hungry, thirsty, frustrated, and angry, and that He ultimately suffered and died.

### A Divine Jesus?

Today, liberal scholars proclaim that the canonical Gospels promote a divine Jesus that is theologically and politically convenient, but historically inaccurate. Proponents sometimes claim that the noncanonical literature

**Today, liberal scholars proclaim that the canonical Gospels promote a divine Jesus that is theologically and politically convenient, but historically inaccurate.**

is more historically reliable because it rejects the divinity of Jesus for an exclusively human Jesus. Do the noncanonical documents describe a Jesus who is not divine?

In *orthodox documents* from the post-New Testament period, the clarity of claims for the deity of Jesus increases exponentially. We find one example

in the *Epistula Apostolorum*: "We know this: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [is] God."19 Another orthodox text reads, "There is no other God save [Jesus] Christ."20 In yet another text, Peter states, "And I approached God Jesus Christ and said to him. ... And my Lord and God Jesus Christ said unto me."21

*Theologically hybrid texts* also emphasize the divine aspect of Jesus' nature. One reads, "But John stretched out his hands ... and said to the Lord, 'Glory be to thee, my Jesus, the only God of truth.' "22 In another hybrid text, Peter asked, "Would it therefore be pleasing to you, our brother, to come in accordance with the commands of our God Jesus?"23 In the Acts of Peter, Paul proclaimed, "Jesus the living God will forgive you."24 Similarly, Peter prayed, "Most excellent, the only holy one, it is thou that hast appeared to us, thou God Jesus Christ."25

Even fully *heterodox* (Gnostic) *texts* openly declare Jesus' deity. The Gospel of Truth declares, "But the name of the Father is the Son."26 In another Gnostic text, the apostle Thomas

prayed, "Jesus ... God of God ... who didst ... walk upon the waves like a God ... God from God Most High27 ... I praise thee, Lord Jesus ... For thou alone art the God of truth, and no other.28 ... O God Jesus Christ, Son of the living God29 ... and ... O Christ ... glory to thy Godhead."30 The writer of The Acts of Thomas further described

the object of his proclamation as "the Lord and God of all, Jesus Christ whom I preach"31 and is himself described three times as "the apostle of the new God."32

The Gospel of Bartholomew notes that after Jesus "had suffered and risen again ... his appearance was not as it was before, but revealed the fullness of his godhead."33 Describing Jesus' descent into hell, the text reads, "Hades answered [Beliar]: 'It cannot be that God has come down. Woe is me! Where shall I flee before the face of the mighty great God?' "34 Elsewhere, the document states that "Bartholomew came to her [the virgin Mary] ... and said: 'You who are highly favored, tabernacle of the Most High.' "35

This evidence shows that the New Testament Gospels are not alone in proclaiming the deity of Christ. In fact, all categories of extra-biblical texts (orthodox, hybrid, and heterodox) go considerably *further* than the canonical Gospels in the language they use to describe the divinity of Jesus. In comparison, the language of the New Testament Gospels appears muted. Therefore, Brown and the Jesus Seminar are not only incorrect in claiming that the biblical Gospels offer false claims of a divine Jesus, whereas the extra-biblical documents tell the true story of a "mere[ly] mortal" Jesus. But they are also guilty of misrepresenting the message of the noncanonical texts. Instead of revealing a Jesus who is only human, they emphasize His deity even more than do the canonical Gospels.

### A Jesus Who Did Not Work Miracles?

The tendency of higher critical scholarship has been to disregard ancient texts that testify to the



miraculous works of Jesus. However, with the rise of the Jesus Seminar and the popularization of its conclusions by *The Da Vinci Code*, scholars are now employing a new element in the argument against the reliability of the canonical Gospels. Scholars now claim that extra-biblical materials provide a more accurate description of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom who never worked miracles or performed

## Scholars now claim that extra-biblical materials provide a more accurate description of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom who never worked miracles or performed exorcisms.

exorcisms. Again, the question is whether the ancient evidence supports these assertions.

Orthodox, extra-biblical texts exhibit a certain continuity with the canonical Gospels in regard to doctrine. When reporting the miraculous, however, the tendency is toward more sensational or exaggerated claims. Many have heard these stories. Consider this one from the childhood of Jesus: "When this boy Jesus was 5 years old ... He made soft clay and fashioned from it 12 sparrows. But Jesus clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows: 'Off with you!' And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping."<sup>36</sup> The same text relates a similar story: "His father was a carpenter. ... And he received an order from a rich man to make a bed for him. But when one beam was shorter than its corresponding one ... the child Jesus said to his father Joseph: 'Put down the two pieces of wood.' ... And Jesus stood at the other end and took hold of the shorter piece of wood,

and stretching it made it equal with the other."<sup>37</sup>

During the flight to Egypt, "they went to that sycamore tree, which today is called Matarea, and the Lord Jesus made to gush forth in Matarea a spring, in which the lady Mary washed his shirt. And from the sweat of the Lord Jesus, which she wrang out there, balsam appeared in that place."<sup>38</sup> On the same trip, "lions and leopards

worshiped him and accompanied them in the desert ... showing (them) the way and lowering their heads (in worship); they showed their servitude by wagging their tails."<sup>39</sup> Yet another text states that when He was brought before Pilate, "the images of the emperor on the standards bowed and did reverence to Jesus."<sup>40</sup>

Hybrid texts exhibit the same tendency to exaggerate the miraculous. In reporting Jesus' resurrection, the Gospel of Peter states, "There rang out a loud voice in heaven, and they [the guards] saw the heavens opened and two men come down from there in a great brightness and ... That stone which had been laid against the entrance to the sepulchre started of itself to roll [away]."<sup>41</sup> The same work continues, "And whilst they [the soldiers guarding the tomb] were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching

to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens."<sup>42</sup>

Gnostic works appear to surpass all others in their exaggerated claims of the miraculous. One of the best examples of this is Jesus' claim in *Pistis Sophia* that *He himself* was responsible for Elizabeth's miraculous conception and Mary's virginal conception, "[Jesus said:] 'And when I set out for the world, I ... had the form of Gabriel. ... I looked down at the world. ... I found Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist ... and I sowed into her a power which I had taken from the little Jao, the Good ... that he [John] might be able to proclaim before me.' " Jesus again continued in His speech and said: "I looked down ... and found Mary, who is called 'my mother' ... and when she had turned upwards toward me, I thrust into her the first power, which I had taken from Barbelo, that is, the body which I have borne on high. And in the place of the soul I thrust into her the power which I have taken from the great Sabaoth, the Good."<sup>43</sup>

The Gospel of Bartholomew records Jesus as saying that during the Crucifixion, "when I commanded him [Michael] to go up, a flame issued from his hand, and after he had rent the veil of the temple, he divided it into two parts as testimony to the children of Israel for my passion."<sup>44</sup> At the Ascension, "the disciples were sitting together on the Mount of Olives ... [and] that power of light descended upon Jesus and surrounded him entirely and he shone exceedingly, and the light was beyond measure ... and ... Jesus rose up or flew into the heights."<sup>45</sup>

From these examples, we see that all categories of extra-biblical material

(orthodox, hybrid, and heterodox) display no tendency to *eliminate* the miraculous element in Jesus' ministry. In fact, just as they deal with the human and divine elements of Jesus' ministry, these documents tend toward *exaggeration*. We cannot say that the noncanonical texts support the assertions of the Jesus Seminar and *The Da Vinci Code* that the ministry of Jesus did not contain demonstrations of the miraculous. The textual evidence they use to buttress their argument argues against their position.

**Misogyny in the Biblical Gospels?**

A final claim Brown makes in *The Da Vinci Code* is that the biblical Gospels attempted to suppress the part women played in the Early Church. Brown says when we reference the materials intentionally left out of the New Testament canon and suppressed by the Christianized Roman Empire, we can rectify this inequity.<sup>46</sup> Again, we must ask: Do these radical assertions

meet the burden of proof?

Because of the close doctrinal affinities the orthodox texts have with their biblical counterparts, few

Peter said to them: 'Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life.' Jesus said: 'Behold, I shall lead her, that I may

**The Gospels consistently demonstrate Jesus' willingness to approach and mainstream marginalized women.**

texts offer an example that supports this category. One such text is the orthodox Acts of Andrew,<sup>47</sup> in which the apostle Andrew declared, "Adam died in Eve because of the harmony of their relationship."<sup>48</sup> This appears to reference the first couple's sexual union. The insinuation is that Adam did not fall because of disobedience but because of his sexual relationship with a woman. For the same reason, hybrid texts exhibit few misogynous tendencies. An exception appears in a prayer of the apostle John, "When I regained my sight [you] didst disclose to me the repugnance even of looking closely at a woman."<sup>49</sup>

make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit like you males. For every woman who makes herself male shall enter the kingdom of heaven.'<sup>51</sup> In the minds of those in heretical movements, such as Christian Gnosticism, being born female was evidently an impediment to entrance into the kingdom of God.

The Gospel of Mary is similar, "Then arose Mary ... and spoke to her brethren: 'Let us rather praise his greatness, for he hath made us ready, and made us to be men.'<sup>52</sup> Evidently the Gospel of the Egyptians contained a similar teaching: "Cassianus [founder of Docetism] now says, 'When Salome asked when what she had inquired about would be known, the Lord said, "When you have trampled on the garment of shame and when the two become one and the male with the female (is) neither male nor female."<sup>53</sup> Another passage from the same work reads, "The Savior himself said, 'I am come to undo the works of the female,' by the female meaning lust, and by the works of birth and decay."<sup>54</sup>

Ironically, the thoroughly heterodox texts display the highest degree of misogyny. This is ironic because the Jesus Seminar most often invokes the Gnostic texts and the Gnostic texts are the *only* category cited in *The Da Vinci Code*.<sup>50</sup>

One favorite extra-biblical text cited by the Jesus seminar is the Gospel of Thomas. It says, "Simon





[from] him, death came into being. Again, if [she] en[ter]s (into him) and he takes [her] to himself, death will no longer exist."<sup>55</sup> In other words, the Gospel of Philip teaches that women have no chance of salvation unless their femaleness is eradicated and they are submerged back into the male — a teaching much like that found in the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of the Egyptians.

The inferiority of women to men is also a theme these sources often express: "Along with the true prophet [Adam] there has been created as a companion a female being who is as far inferior to him as *metousia* is to *ousia*, as the moon is to the sun, as fire is to light."<sup>56</sup> And "While in this world[,] the union consists [of] man and wife — representing power and weakness."<sup>57</sup>

In the following texts, women are man's primary source of temptation, defilement, and deception: "Then the Savior ... said: 'Anyone who seeks the truth from her [a female] who is truly wise will make himself wings so as to fly when he has to flee the desire which burns the spirits of men ... stinking pleasure ... insatiable lust ... the bitter bond of desire. ... They are constantly being killed, as they are drawn to all beasts of uncleanness.'"<sup>58</sup> "Woe to you who love the company of women and the adulterated intercourse with them ... masters of your body ... evil demons."<sup>59</sup> "Female prophecy desires to be considered male. On account of this, she steals the seed of the male, [and] envelops them with her own seed of the flesh. ... She promises to give earthly riches. ... [She] believes that she herself will be deified. ... She destroys what she has. ... She stains herself with blood at the time

of her menses and thus pollutes those who touch her. ... [She] brings about wars in which much blood is shed. ... She prophesies errors ... and thus deceives."<sup>60</sup> The purity of prayer can even be adulterated by the mere presence of women: "Judas said, 'When we pray, how shall we pray?' The Lord said, 'Pray in the place where there is no woman.'"<sup>61</sup>

In comparison to biblical texts, the orthodox and hybrid documents have a somewhat lower view of women, sex, the physical world, and the human body. However, the tendency of heterodox documents toward misogyny is far greater than that of the biblical Gospels and orthodox and hybrid extra-biblical materials. The textual evidence, therefore, does not support the popular claim that the New Testament Gospels are a part of a movement to marginalize the role

## After surveying the relevant extra-biblical texts, one may legitimately conclude that they do not support the argument that the biblical Gospels obscure the humanity of Jesus.

of women and that extra-biblical texts elevate the role of women.

In fact, the opposite is true. The Gospels consistently demonstrate Jesus' willingness to approach and mainstream marginalized women (Matthew 9:20–22; 26:7–13; Mark 5:25–34; 14:3–9; Luke 7:37–50; 8:43–48; John 4:7–27; 12:3–8, etc.). Women are mentioned as role models of sacrifice and persistence (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 7:37–50; 15:8–10, et al.). The Gospels juxtapose their faithfulness to the fearfulness of Jesus' male followers (Matthew 27:55,56;

Mark 15:40,41; compare Matthew 26:56, et al.). They received revelation and functioned prophetically (Matthew 21:9; Luke 1:26–38,46–55; 2:36–38), and were equally engaged in prayer (Acts 1:14), witness, and public ministry (Acts 1:15; 2:4,17,18). They were not only the first to give testimony to the Resurrection and bring the good news to the men (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–11; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–18), but they were also later seen giving instruction to men (Acts 18:26).<sup>62</sup>

### Conclusion

This article has addressed the four most prominent assertions of the Jesus Seminar/*Da Vinci Code* about the New Testament Gospels and their noncanonical counterparts. After surveying the relevant extra-biblical texts, one may legitimately conclude

that they do not support the argument that the biblical Gospels obscure the humanity of Jesus. Nor do the extra-biblical texts clearly reveal it. One cannot claim that the biblical Gospels provide exaggerated claims of deity while the noncanonical documents deny the deity of Jesus. Furthermore, one cannot claim, based on textual evidence, that the New Testament Gospels inject exaggerated claims of Jesus' miracles. Nor do the extra-biblical texts reveal a Jesus who is merely a teacher of wisdom. Finally, we must also reject their assertion

that the biblical Gospels marginalize women while the noncanonical texts elevate the status of women based on the very evidence they use to support their claims. In fact, not only does the ancient evidence fail to support these four arguments, but it also diametrically opposes them.

Those who are seeking truth have nothing to fear from the evidence. It is not only important to engage current issues at the evidential level, but it is also possible. Also, one does not need to be an expert in apologetics to be able to read the relevant texts and provide evidentially based responses to detractors and to the faithful who have legitimate questions.

A final practical consideration is that many works that focus on exaggerated reports of the miraculous, apocalyptic visions, and revelations do not focus on the person and work of Jesus. In this respect, much of modern Christian writing, preaching, and teaching exhibits greater similarity to extra-biblical documents than to the biblical documents it is supposed to emulate. Also, many reports of the miraculous heard in Christian circles today more closely resemble the exaggerated reports of the miraculous that appear in extra-biblical (including heretical) documents rather than their less spectacular biblical counterparts. Consequently, these extra-biblical materials provide a helpful point of comparison that is valuable not only for comparison to our ancient biblical documents, but also for the evaluation of the content of modern messages as well. 📌



**W.E. NUNNALLY, PH.D.**, is professor of Early Judaism and Christian Origins at Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri.

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#### NOTES

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 231.
2. Robert W. Funk, *New Gospel Parallels*, vol. 1,2 (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990), 3,4,25.
3. Richard Ostling, "Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple: A Trinity of New, Scholarly Books Tries To Strip Away the Traditional Gospel Accounts of the Man From Nazareth," *Time*, 10 January 1994, 38.
4. For example, Jesus Seminar assertions and *Da Vinci Code* popularity were likely what inspired the sensationalistic documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, by Simcha Jacobovici and James Cameron that was aired in prime time by the Discovery Channel in 2007. In this documentary, producers claimed to present incontrovertible evidence that Jesus was married and had at least one child by Mary Magdalene, the same claim made in *The Da Vinci Code*. People may access J.H. Charlesworth's devastating argument against the conclusions of the documentary at <http://www.ptsem.edu/NEWS/talpiot-tombsymposium.php>. Charlesworth gives a brief report on the results of the international Symposium on "Afterlife and Burial Practices in Second Temple Judaism" held in Jerusalem on January 13–16, 2008. This report based on scientific grounds rejects each piece of evidence and each conclusion presented in the documentary.
5. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 233,234,245. John Dominic Crosson, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 20,21,50. Also, Funk, *The Five Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 32,33.
6. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 234,244.
7. Funk, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1991), 30–34. John Dominic Crosson, "The Search for Jesus," in *The Search for Jesus: Modern Scholarship Looks at the Gospels*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archeology Review, 1994), 110,121–123,132. Also, Crosson, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 17,82,85,95,190.
8. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 238,239. Crosson, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 174.
9. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 234. Funk, *New Gospel Parallels*, 1,3,25. Funk, *The Gospel of Mark*, 11ff. Funk, *The Five Gospels*, 15,16,18,26.
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11. Coptic Psalm-book II, 192; H-S 1:353,354.
12. Acts of John 93; H-S 2:227.
13. *Ibid.*, 99; H-S 2:233.
14. *Ibid.*, 101; H-S 2:234.
15. H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:322.
16. Gospel of Philip 26a; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:191.
17. Gospel of Bartholomew 1:6,7; H-S 1:488.
18. Conversation of the Risen Jesus with the Apostles; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:349.
19. *Epistula Apostolorum* 3; H-S 1:192.
20. Acts of Paul 2; H-S 2:353.
21. Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter 16; H-S 2:681,682.
22. Acts of John 43; H-S 2:237.
23. Letter of Peter to Philip; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:348.
24. Acts of Peter 47; H-S 2:281.
25. *Ibid.*, 51; H-S 2:285.
26. Gospel of Truth 38:1–24; H-S 1:529,530.
27. Acts of Thomas 48; H-S 2:469.
28. *Ibid.*, 25; H-S 2:455.
29. *Ibid.*, 60; H-S 2:476.
30. *Ibid.*, 80; H-S 2:485,486.
31. *Ibid.*, 26; H-S 2:456.
32. *Ibid.*, 42; H-S 2:466; 69 and 70; H-S 2:480.
33. Gospel of Bartholomew 1:3; H-S 1:488.
34. *Ibid.*, 1:19; H-S 1:489.
35. *Ibid.*, 2:4; H-S 1:492. The term *tabernacle* is used twice more for Mary in 2:8 [H-S 1:492] and 4:4 [H-S 1:495].
36. Infancy Story of Thomas 2:1–4; H-S 1:392,393.
37. *Ibid.*, 13:1,2; H-S 1:396.
38. Arabic Infancy Gospel 24; H-S 1:409.
39. Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 19:1; H-S 1:410.
40. Acts of Pilate 5; H-S 1:452.
41. Gospel of Peter 9:35–37; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:224.
42. *Ibid.*, 10:39,40; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:225.
43. *Pistis Sophia* 7 through 8; H-S 1:402,403.
44. Gospel of Bartholomew 1:27; H-S 1:491.
45. *Pistis Sophia*; H-S 1:253,254; compare H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:364.
46. Compare Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 233,234,238,239,244.
47. H-S 2:992–395.
48. Acts of Andrew 7; H-S 2:411.
49. Acts of John 113; H-S 2:257.
50. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 245–247.
51. Gospel of Thomas 114; H-S 1:522.
52. H-S 1:342; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:393.
53. Gospel of Egyptians in Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 3.91ff; H-S 1:168; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:211.
54. *Ibid.*, 3:63; H-S 1:166,167.
55. Gospel of Philip 71; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:197, compare also Gospel of Philip 78; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:198.
56. Epistle of Peter to James 3:22; H-S 2:117.
57. Gospel of Philip 103; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:201.
58. Book of Thomas; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:242,243.
59. *Ibid.*, H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:246.
60. Epistle of Peter to James 3:23; H-S 2:117,118.
61. Dialogue of the Savior 90 through 91; H-S 1<sup>2</sup>:310.
62. For a more complete treatment of the issue of women in ministry, compare W.E. Nunnally, "Women in Ministry," <http://www.centralfaithbuilders.com>. Craig Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), 101–121.







# The Bible —

Moving Past the Translation  
Controversy and Defending the Bible  
in an Ever-increasing Secular Society

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BY RICHARD L. DRESSELHAUS



# Can We Trust It?

**H**old your fire. Don't shoot. Give me opportunity to explain. Here's the deal. I have good friends who are loyal defenders of the King James Version. I also have good friends who argue the case for modern translations.

And I'm with my friends. Intentionally. Deliberately. Thoughtfully. Reverently.

Several years ago I read two papers about modern translations. One was a summary of a doctoral dissertation; the other was an article by a professor. They represented the same seminary. Both had carefully researched the subject, and both had written with scholarly passion. Nevertheless, they represented opposing sides of this controversy. I will give each paper a solid A.

This controversy has a long history and will not soon disappear, if ever.



## Sharpening the Focus

Beyond this controversy is a pressing need to reaffirm the complete reliability and unquestioning authority of the Bible — regardless of which translation we choose. This is especially true today because in many quarters the Bible is under sharp attack.

These questions are familiar: “Since all you have are copies of copies, how can you have any confidence that the text now in use is anything close to the original writings?” “You claim inerrancy and infallibility for the original writings; but, since these writings are likely lost forever, is it logical to claim reliability and inspiration for the text now in use?” “Since there are so many translations of Scripture, and no two are in complete agreement, doesn’t that fact discredit the Bible and undermine its claim to reliability and authenticity?”

I present this article as a response to such questions and with complete assurance that the Bible now in use is fully trustworthy — both in its entirety as well as in its parts.

Miraculously and yet observably, the Holy Spirit has preserved His Word through each generation so, in our day, we can handle the Bible

with complete confidence. The Bible remains essentially the same Word that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Following is historical, documentary, and manuscript support for this bold

Concerning the New Testament, they have arranged texts of common origin and content into *families* — thus facilitating the analysis of alternative readings. They have also provided a *textual apparatus* that allows even a casual reader to make a preliminary

Through *textual criticism* ... scholars have examined available manuscript readings and with confidence have established a text so near to the original as to refute this objection.

claim. This evidence demonstrates in observable ways the mystery and marvel of the incredible means and methods the Holy Spirit employed to preserve and give us His Word.

## Exploring the Boundaries

Scripture is the final and only authority for all we preach and believe. Not only do we hold that God inspired all Scripture, but we also claim inerrancy for the autographs. We must continually declare the total reliability and unquestionable authority of Scripture; it is God’s unchanging Word.

We owe incalculable gratitude to all who have gone before us. Their dedicated efforts have preserved for us a text that is unprecedented among ancient writings concerning its accuracy and purity of transmission. You cannot miss God’s hand in this.

Preserving the biblical text must be a priority of the church. The church’s finest minds must relentlessly pursue the identity of a biblical text that is ever closer to the original writings.

For example, scholars have been diligent in the discovery and preservation of biblical manuscripts.

determination on particular readings of choice. We need to be ever grateful for the efforts of those who have handled the sacred text long before our day.

Allow me to give a practical review of this subject. In a Sunday morning message I enumerated the sins of the flesh found in Galatians 5:19–21 (NIV). That afternoon I received a call from a listener: “Pastor, why did you leave out ‘murderers’ (KJV)?” He deserved an answer. His question raised the very issues before us. Let me provide another illustration. Have you ever wondered what happened to the end of the Lord’s Prayer in the NIV? “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13, KJV).

Furthermore, what about the inferences that we might draw from statements given concerning Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53 through 8:11 (NIV): “The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have. ...” What do we say when our people observe that key words from Scripture — *blood*, *fasting*, and others (KJV) — have been omitted? The people to whom we



preach need to know what this means. Before jumping to conclusions, let me remind you that *adding to* is as much a transgression as *leaving out*. These questions are more complex and demanding than they might seem at first glance. But the real questions are not as much about translations as they are about the underlying Greek text and its accuracy.

Finally, my focus is primarily on the New Testament text because this is the center of most of the controversy. Much that is of significance in dealing with the New Testament text has a corresponding significance in the Old.

Let me illustrate. I will not forget looking into the showcase at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem that contained the Book of Isaiah, a part of the Dead Sea Scrolls collection.

This copy, dated 100 B.C. — within 500 years of the original manuscript — was nearly 1,000 years older than any previously discovered manuscript and brought us much closer to the day of Isaiah's original writing. Before my eyes lay a manuscript so near to the Isaiah text the church had been using for centuries that any discrepancies were deemed insignificant. (*See sidebar Isaiah and the Dead Sea Scrolls.*) You cannot miss God's sovereign hand in this.

This documented evidence points to the total reliability of the text of Scripture that we read today. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has silenced many critics because they show the accurate transmission of the scriptural text down through the centuries.

## Surveying the Centuries

Most scholars believe the 27 books of the New Testament were written between A.D. 48 and A.D. 100. But how did the Early Church reach a consensus that these 27 books bore the mark of divine inspiration and authority? As early as A.D. 130, the church had likely accepted all four Gospels and 13 of Paul's epistles as canonical (passing the test of authenticity). Marcion, a doctrinal heretic, published his truncated (abbreviated) canonical list in A.D. 140. This motivated the church to pursue with greater diligence its own formulation of the New Testament canon.

In A.D. 180, Irenaeus mentioned the four Gospels in their current order. In 325, Eusebius of Caesarea published a nearly complete list



## Isaiah and the Dead Sea Scrolls

**The Isaiah scrolls found at Qumran closed that gap to within 500 years of the original manuscript.** Interestingly, when scholars compared the MT of Isaiah to the Isaiah scroll of Qumran, the correspondence was astounding. The texts from Qumran proved to be word-for-word identical to our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations (Archer, 1974, p. 25). Further, there were no major doctrinal differences between the accepted and Qumran texts (see

right). This forcibly demonstrated the accuracy with which scribes copied sacred texts, and bolstered our confidence in the Bible's textual integrity (see Yamauchi, 1972, p. 130). The Dead Sea Scrolls have increased our confidence that faithful scribal transcription substantially has preserved the original content of Isaiah.

### REFERENCES

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## Qumran vs. The Masoretic Text

**Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only 17 letters in Dead Sea Scroll 1QIs<sup>b</sup> differ from the Masoretic Text.**

10 letters = spelling differences

4 letters = stylistic changes

3 letters = added word for "light"

(verse 11)

17 letters = no affect on biblical teaching

of New Testament books. In 367, Athanasius of Alexandria issued a list that matches ours.

For nearly 1,500 years, faithful scribes copied these precious writings from century to century not only in Greek, but also in the other languages of their day. By A.D. 200, people could read the New Testament in Syriac, Coptic, and Latin; and, in a short time, in Gothic, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Slavonic, and Arabic as well.

Admittedly, the autographs — the handwork of the New Testament writers — have been lost to us, likely forever. Some have argued that with this admission the claim for a reliable and fully authoritative text is pointless. However, the opposite is true. Through *textual criticism* (the science of working with copies of available manuscripts to determine as nearly as possible what would have been the original reading), scholars have examined available manuscript readings and with confidence have established a text so near to the original as to refute this objection.

Some believe that as many as 1,000 people sought to produce editions (recensions) of the New Testament prior to the advent of the printing press in the 15th century. Since all copy work was done by hand, any reliable duplication of an editor's work would be virtually impossible.

Following is a brief description — along with the number of copies and the date — of the approximately 24,000 manuscripts an editor (redactor) might have available to him (using Bruce Metzger's numbers).<sup>1</sup>

**Papyri — 99:** From A.D. 200 to the fifth century. Papyri are identified with a "P" with superscript numbers to indicate individual manuscripts. Papyri are writing materials made from a reed-like plant that grows along the banks of the Nile. The Chester Beatty papyri contain much of the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline epistles and the Revelation.

**Uncials (capitals) — 306:** From the 2nd to the 10th centuries. Identified by alphabetization and Arabic numerations, that is, "B" or "03."

Uncial manuscripts were written on vellum, a writing material made from animal skins. The Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus contain nearly all of the New Testament.

**Minuscules (cursives) — 2,856:** From the 10th to the 15th centuries. Identified by Arabic numeration without the "0." Here also, vellum was the writing material.

**Lectionaries** (special readings used in the worship life of the church) — 2,403: Identified by an "l" with superscript numbers to indicate individual manuscripts.

**Versions (translations) —** approximately 2,400 in all of the languages noted above, identified by abbreviation and superscript numbering to indicate individual manuscripts: Latin = Lat.; Syriac = Syr.; Ethiopic = Eth., etc.

**Church Fathers:** Their quotations from the New Testament comprise the balance of the material used by the editor. They, too, are identified by abbreviation: Ambrose = Am.; Augustine = Aug.; Eusebius = Eub., etc.

Combined with symbols and signs, these identifying designations form the *textual apparatus*, providing the reader with possible alternative readings.

One might ask why the Holy Spirit did not miraculously preserve the original autographs. What if He had? Imagine the veneration? The inordinate preoccupation? The idolatry? The message of the words themselves might well have been lost.

Instead, the Holy Spirit has given us a voluminous amount of collaborative writings. Sincere people can examine these extant (available) texts and determine those closest to the original. Even so, an exact duplication is impossible.

## Manuscript Evidence for Ancient Writings

Author	Written	Earliest Fragment/copy	Time Span in Years	Number of Manuscripts
Caesar	100 to 44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000	10
Plato	427 to 347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200	7
Thucydides	460 to 400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300	8
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1,000	20
Suetonius	A.D. 75 to 160	A.D. 950	800	8
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500	643
New Testament	A.D. 40 to 100	A.D. 125	25 to 50	24,000

Information in this chart can be found in various sources. This chart was adapted from: *Christian Apologetics*, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p. 307; and *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell, 1979, pp. 42,43.





Let me catch the heartbeat of this miraculous preservation of these manuscripts by citing the following: Tacitus wrote the *Annals of Imperial Rome* in A.D. 160. There is only one copy from the 11th century, a gap of 9 centuries. There are only nine

## It is folly to place English translations side by side and argue based on omissions or additions.

copies from the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries of Josephus' *The Jewish Wars*, written in the first century. That, too, is a gap of 9 centuries. Homer wrote the *Iliad* (the *bible* of the ancient Greeks) in 800 B.C. There are 600 copies from the 2nd century available today, a 10-century gap. The New Testament was written between A.D. 48 and A.D. 100. In contrast, we have a small fragment of papyri from John 18 (the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate on the subject of truth) that scholars agree could be as early as A.D. 120, a 20-year gap. The conclusion is clear: Of all ancient writings, none is so well-attested as the New Testament. This is clear evidence of God's providential care for His Word. (See sidebar *Manuscript Evidence for Ancient Writings*, page 104.)

### Finding Consolidation

In 1516, nearly 75 years after Johannes Gutenberg printed his 42-line Bible (in Latin) in Mainz, Germany, Erasmus of Rotterdam printed the first Greek New Testament (with Latin translation). Pope Leo X, an enemy of Martin Luther, commissioned this work. This marked a new day in the quest to determine and preserve the integrity of the New Testament.

While other editors were quick to

follow, Erasmus' text-type was the basis for the Greek New Testament used by the Reformers: Luther's Bible, Tyndale's Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishop Bible, and the Cloverdale Bible.

Interestingly, Elzevir, one of these early editors, included in the preface to

his second edition these words: "The text which is received by all, in which nothing is changed or corrupted"; hence, the phrase *Textus Receptus* or *the Received text*. This is the text-type for the King James Version.

Another factor plays into this unfolding drama. In about A.D. 400, the Roman Empire split into two parts: The West, with its primary academic center in Alexandria, and the East, with its primary academic center in Antioch of Syria. In the West, monks copied New Testament manuscripts in Latin. In the East, monks copied New Testament manuscripts in Greek. For some, the work was tedious and done carelessly. Others performed their work as a sacred charge.

I mention this only to show the complexity of the matter. No two manuscripts are identical. The scribes' eyes and hands were sometimes not that sure and predictable. This is why editorial work on the text of Scripture is complex and challenging. In some cases, scribes would puzzle over different manuscript readings. Rather than choose one of several, they would include each of the different readings and combine them into one reading.

Let me illustrate: One manuscript

may use the name *Jesus*, another the name *Lord*, and yet another the name *Christ*. A scribe might decide to use the full designation, *Lord Jesus Christ*. The original author, however, may have used only one name for Jesus. Textual critics call this practice *conflation*. In some cases, this practice leads to an expanded and elongated text. This illustrates how complex the editor's task was.

Ample evidence shows that in the few passages where there appears to be a serious challenge in a given text of Scripture (Mark 16:9–20, for example), no Bible doctrine is threatened or incomplete. The rarity of these *significant challenges* to the text of Scripture is further evidence of God's watchful eye over His Word.

### Identifying the Streams

While other editors figure in the more modern period (since mid-19th century), none had a more profound impact on New Testament textual study than B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, dons (teachers) at the School of Divinity at Cambridge. Their work produced both a Greek edition of the New Testament as well as a delineation of methodology that they used in their editorial work. To this day, many people hold their work in high esteem.

Fundamental to their work was the identification of a text-type strikingly different from that initiated by Erasmus and those who followed in his steps. Westcott and Hort gave credence to two fourth-century uncials: the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus. They believed the text in these two manuscripts was closer to the original autographs. Though briefer, and in some cases more crude, they remained convinced that

## Resource List

For those wishing to pursue this subject, I recommend the following materials. Some of them will assume the superiority of the Westcott and Hort theory, while others will represent a challenge to that theory.

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- Martin, Alfred. 1972. "A Critical Examination of the Westcott-Hort Textual Theory." In *Which Bible?* 3d ed., ed. David Otis Fuller, 144–173. Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications.
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- Wallace, Daniel B. 1994. "The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique." *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 37: 185–215.
- Much work is to be done in the field of textual criticism (the quest after a Greek Testament that resembles as closely as possible the autographs [original writings]). For those who pursue this quest with scholarly excellence, humility, and reliance on the Holy Spirit, their work will be greeted with gratitude by the generations to come who love and honor the Word of God.

**RICHARD L. DRESSELHAUS, D. MIN.**, San Diego, California

this text-type was more reliable and authentic than the Erasmus text-type. They also argued that the early papyri fragments and the testimony of Early Church fathers served as collaborative evidence to the superior quality of the text-type in these two ancient documents.

Thus, a second stream of text emerged. This new stream is usually referred to as the *neutral* or *Alexandrian* text, while the earlier text-type is

## Scholars have been diligent in the discovery and preservation of biblical manuscripts.

identified by one of the following descriptions: *Byzantine text*, *Received text*, *Traditional text*, *Majority text*, *Antiochian text*, and *Syrian text* (Hort).

Finally, we get to the essence of the controversy over Bible translations. (Again, our focus is primarily on the New Testament text.) The key question is not: What translation do I prefer? but, On which *text-type* is my choice of translation based? Again, variations in translations (assuming an acceptable level of expertise) are primarily stylistic and a matter of preference.

### Following the Arguments

Since the controversy is irresolvable, at least in my opinion, wisdom dictates that we need to sharpen our rationale for the choices we make concerning our perspective on Bible translations. There are good — although not often articulated — reasons to pick one text-type over another.

It is folly to place English translations side by side and argue based on omissions or additions. The real question concerns the integrity of the underlying Greek text. I will come back to that later.

### The King James Version

If you are an advocate of the King James Version (or one of its variations), you will probably base your case on the following considerations.

First, can anyone be confident of the reliability and trustworthiness of these two ancient manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) so honored by Westcott and Hort, the *fathers* of the modern translation movement? It

seems the NIV translators had these two manuscripts in mind when they referred to "the two most reliable early manuscripts" (Mark 16:9–20), and "the earliest and most reliable manuscripts" (John 7:53 through 8:11). John Burgon, a contemporary and sharp critic of Westcott and Hort, challenged the confidence these Cambridge professors placed in these uncials. Burgon cites, in his opinion, numerous contradictions between these two manuscripts. He saw convincing evidence of what he felt indicated scribal tamperings throughout. While modern scholars usually dismiss him as reactionary, we do not need to quickly dismiss his work.

Second, since 95 percent of all extant (known) manuscripts are of the Byzantine text-type (on which the KJV is based), does that not speak volumes as to the witness of the church through the centuries? Is it reasonable to assume that the church was without the most reliable text-type until Constantine Von Tischendorf almost accidentally discovered the Sinaiticus at

# Is the Bible Intolerant?

Amy Orr-Ewing (*InterVarsity Press, 143 pp., paperback*)

**H**as someone ever questioned you about your belief in the Bible and its reliability? Amy Orr-Ewing had that experience, only it wasn't from her acquaintances; it was from her theology professors at Oxford. They weren't simply checking her biblical knowledge; they were challenging her faith. But she stood firm in her faith and her belief in the inspiration of Scripture. Orr-Ewing is currently the training director for RZIM Zacharias Trust.

Over the years many people have asked Orr-Ewing questions about the Bible. She believes, "A conviction that the Bible must be wrong, held by those at the highest level of academic excellence, seems, in turn, to have been embraced at a popular level by many people who have barely glanced at the Bible but who feel sure that

it is not to be trusted."

Much of Orr-Ewing's book deals with the reliability of the biblical manuscripts. The author clearly explains why we can have full confidence because of the way today's Bible has come to us. The sheer number of manuscript copies available today compared with the number of manuscripts from other ancient writings is amazing. That fact alone has provided scholars with a plethora of opportunities for manuscript comparisons.

Concerning these biblical manuscripts, she answers the question: Has the Bible been changed in transmission? Many people have pointed to the variants in the available manuscripts as a sign of textual corruption. But Orr-Ewing effectively refutes that argument.

The author also deals with other topics



concerning the Bible: What about all the wars in the Bible? What about the holy books from other religions? Isn't the Bible out of date on sex?

In the concluding chapter, Orr-Ewing rightly states, "This is where we come to the

heart of the matter: God is a real, personal being, revealed to us in the person of Christ. Whatever questions or arguments we may have, in the end it all comes down to whether this is the case. Is Jesus real? Can I know Him? Can He really deliver me from my own sin?"

This book is a valuable resource for teaching believers about the inerrancy and reliability of Scripture. It needs to be in every Christian's library.

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*Reviewed by Richard L. Schoonover, associate editor, Enrichment Journal, Springfield, Missouri.*

St. Catherine's Monastery in the mid-19th century, and that the Vaticanus gathered dust on a library shelf in the Vatican until modern scholars resurrected it to significance? Has the church been without the best witness until the last 200 years?

Third, the claim of most modern scholars that the early Papyri and the post-Nicene Fathers all reflect the Byzantine text-type is also yours to challenge. If so, the Byzantine text-type may, indeed, have a history that antedates the later date scholars usually assign to it (circa A.D. 400).

Fourth, the Byzantine text-type is more complete; it does not exclude verses, words, and phrases that translators sometimes omit in modern translations. Generally, this text-type is smoother and more easily read.

Finally, is it reasonable to set aside a text-type that has served the church of every century until the 19th? For many, to do so is asking too much.

## Modern translations

Conversely, if you are an advocate of a modern translation (ASV, RSV, NEB, NIV, UNIV, NASV, NKJ) with footnotes,

etc.), or the neutral, Alexandrian text-type, then consider the following:

First, Erasmus, and those who immediately followed in his steps, used only a limited number of late manuscripts (none prior to the 11th century) for their editorial work. Scholars hold that Erasmus, lacking Greek manuscripts for a part of the Book of Revelation, translated into Greek from a Latin manuscript. Scholars view this as a radical departure from acceptable editorial work. Also, much of the manuscript evidence referenced earlier was not





available to these 16th-century editors.

Second, some think that the Byzantine text-type is reflective of what scholars call *conflation*. That is, over the centuries scribes in the East (who copied Greek manuscripts) were prone to harmonization — making the text more readable and understandable. If, for example, one manuscript spoke of *fasting* and another spoke of *prayer*, the scribe would use both *fasting and prayer*. For this reason, modern translations that follow a neutral or Alexandrian text-type do not have the words and phrases that many scholars believe to be scribal additions that were not in the original text. This accounts for many of the deletions found in modern translations.

Third, some argue no early papyri or a post-Nicene Father (prior to A.D. 400) reflects anything other than a



subject with greater accuracy and scholarship, but none will care more deeply than I about the integrity, authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture. While my study has perhaps been elementary, it has given me a deeper appreciation for the

## The modern church must not make the controversy over translations its greatest concern but must focus on the biblical illiteracy that is permeating the church.

neutral, Alexandrian text-type. Thus, the weight of history falls on the side of the text-type on which modern translations are based.

Fourth, scholarship in the field of textual criticism over the past 150 years has generally supported both the theory and text-type first popularized by Westcott and Hort. Greek students in seminaries across America usually use this Greek text and are taught this theory.

### Touching the Heart

I share these thoughts out of deep concern. Others might treat this

supernatural ways in which God has preserved for us His eternal Word.

Pastors need to explain to their people how the providential hand of God is clearly demonstrated by the miraculous means with which the Holy Spirit directed men in the preservation of a fully reliable and authoritative Scripture. The story is engaging and reassuring. With more information comes deeper assurance.

A second concern is this: The modern church must not make the controversy over translations its greatest concern but must focus on the biblical illiteracy that is permeating the church.

The prophet Amos warned both his hearers and the church today about a famine, not of water and food, but “a famine of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). Unfortunately, the proliferation of translations has brought a corresponding loss of the familiar ring of Scripture. This is regrettable. Every spiritual leader needs to standardize the use of a given translation to gain back some of what has been tragically lost. We dare not lose the familiar ring of Scripture in our ears and in our hearts.

### Conclusion

The controversy, if it leads to anything other than serious study and reflection, will be counterproductive and harmful to the unity of the church. It will also adversely affect our witness to the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture to those outside the church. It is time to accept what is inevitable (the advent of a variety of translations), recognize that some questions will remain unanswered, and then understand that hostility and judgmentalism are detrimental to the clear witness of God’s people.

It is time to bury the hatchet. If you shoot, I trust the shot will fall harmlessly beyond the scope of those who could be harmed.

His Word will endure both now and forever. Blessed be His Name. 🙏



**RICHARD L. DRESSELHAUS, D.MIN.,** is an executive presbyter and former senior pastor, First Assembly of God, San Diego, California.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

### NOTE

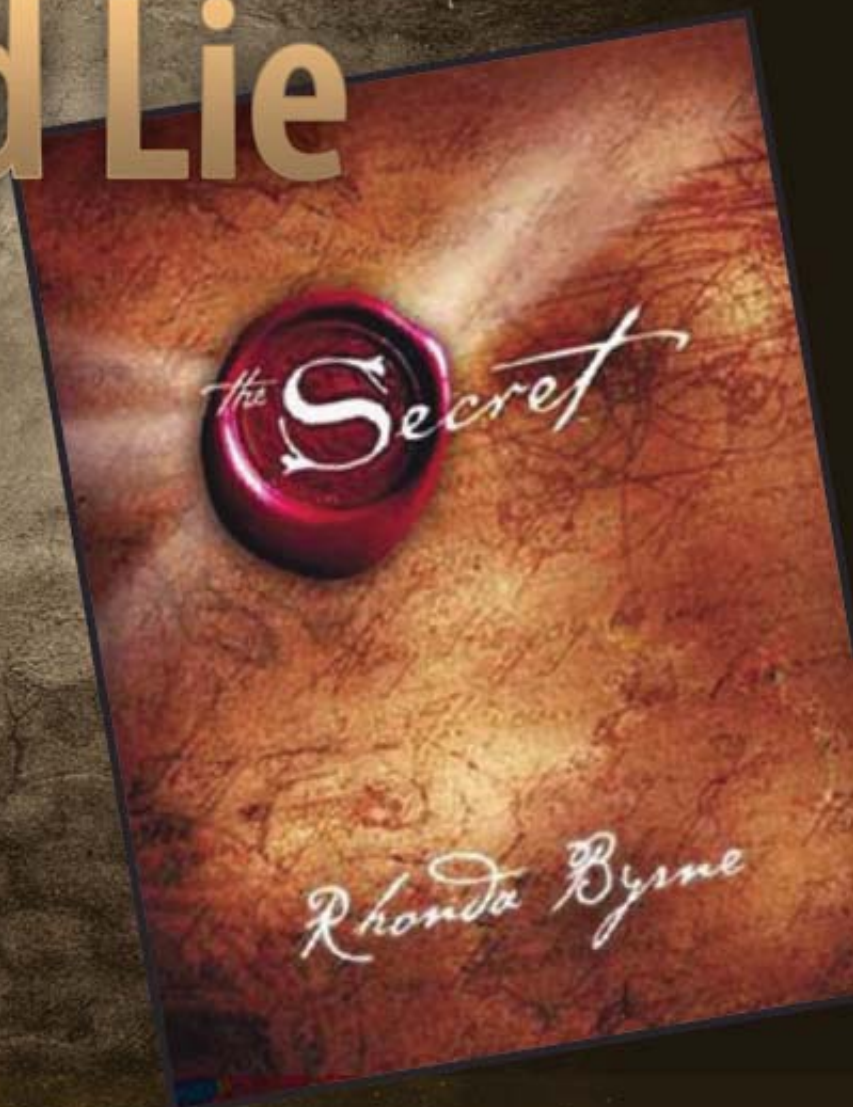
1. See Lee Strobel’s interview with Bruce Metzger in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).





# The Secret: Uncovering the Truth About An Old Lie

By Rob Starner



*The earth turns on its orbit for You.*

*The oceans ebb and flow for You.*

*The birds sing for You.*

*The sun rises and it sets for You.*

*The stars come out for You.*

Would it surprise you if I told you we sang this in church last Sunday? It would be natural to understand the referent of these attributions of praise to be the One to whom we owe our life, our love, and our devotion.

Can I let you in on a secret? I did not copy the opening praise from a worship chorus. I copied it from the final paragraph of Rhonda Byrne's recent best-selling book: *The Secret*.<sup>1</sup> In her book, the recipient of these adulations is not God — at least not God as we know Him. The recipient of the worship is *You*.

Before we write this off as New Age nonsense that will fizzle of its own accord, we would do well to consider that: (1) *The Secret* presents itself innocuously as a self-help tutorial; (2) *The Secret* enjoys the endorsement of several influential people, including Oprah Winfrey and Larry King; (3) *The Secret* proclaims an alluring message; (4) many businesses are using *The Secret* in their employee motivational training; and (5) many Christians in our churches lack a grounding in God's Word that would enable them to easily discern truth from error.

In view of the magnitude of exposure *The Secret* has had, those in our churches who may have attended motivational seminars sponsored by their employers or who have read the book, need to know the dangers of *The Secret's* teaching. They also need to know how to respond to their employers and fellow employees who might have questions about this motivational teaching. This calls for an informed, biblical response.



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### ***The Secret's Success***

What is the secret of *The Secret's* success? The rapid and widespread impact of Byrne's *The Secret* derives from *viral* marketing techniques that utilize pre-existing social networks (businesses, Web sites, churches, and celebrities) to publicize the book. But these astute advertising venues are only partial answers. The real answer lies in a brilliant marketing strategy: choosing a compelling title, and appealing to a universally perceived need.

The title, *The Secret*, functions as a powerful, double-edged sword. It empowers both the author and the reader. Knowing information that others do not know generates feelings of superiority and power. Besides, people have an innate need to be part of a group, especially an in-the-know group. The rhetorical power of this information exchange derives from the fact each of these cravings capitalizes on the other. Thus, we have a method of information exchange in which both author and reader are *paid* for their part of the transaction. The reader (who knows the secret) has opportunity to become an empowered transmitter of knowledge in a

disciples. Readers want to know: What's in it for me? Why is this secret worth knowing? The promotional teasers offer insight: "Without exception, every human being has the ability to transform any weakness or suffering into strength, power, perfect peace, health, and abundance. ... *The Secret* explains with simplicity the law that is governing all lives, and offers the knowledge of how to create — intentionally and effortlessly — a joyful life. ... This is the secret to life."<sup>2</sup>

The news *The Secret* promises to deliver is ostensibly *good news*: "life-transforming"; "untapped power"; "how you can have, be, or do anything you want"; "[bringing] joy to every aspect of your life"; "eradicating disease"; "acquiring massive wealth"; and "achieving ... [the] impossible."<sup>3</sup> These claims address the universal problem of humanity's deep sense of weakness and concomitant desire for autonomy. The solution Byrne offers, however, is akin to putting a band-aid on a severed limb.

Where does God fit in all of this? Since people have a deep sense of weakness and a belief in a Higher Power, the quest to find and understand this Higher Power is sensible, if only for pragmatic reasons. *The Secret* reflects

## ***The Secret bears recognizable affinities with various overlapping theological perspectives that extend as far back as the Garden of Eden:***

Word-Faith theology, New Age thought, Christian Science, New Thought, theological liberalism, Eastern Religions, Gnosticism, Hermetic traditions, and what we might best label as *serpent theology*.

limitless number of future transactions. All this makes an incredibly compelling market strategy that has yielded astounding sales.

While provocative titles sell books, only convincing arguments make committed

one such quest. Although Byrne has marketed this book as the latest and greatest (she refers to its theme as "The Secret to life") of the self-help genre,<sup>4</sup> this work belongs in the religious category because it clearly promotes



a religious ideology. Thus, a careful comparison of the book's contents with its title and packaging reveals that what its readers see is *not* what they get. And what readers get is not a newly discovered truth, but a repackaged, long-standing lie.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Secret's Sources**

Byrne admits indebtedness to numerous sources. Unfortunately, she is often not forthright in her identification and use of *specific* sources.<sup>6</sup> Particularly problematic are her unsupported assertions that numerous world-renowned people from many walks of life have delivered the secret in their poetry, music, paintings, and philosophies.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of Byrne's disingenuous handling of source material, *The Secret* bears recognizable affinities with various overlapping theological perspectives that extend as far back as the Garden of Eden: Word-Faith theology, New Age thought, Christian Science, New Thought, theological liberalism, Eastern Religions, Gnosticism, Hermetic traditions, and what we might best label as *serpent theology*. A brief comparison of the major tenets of liberalism with the worldview presented in *The Secret* reveals several lines of defense Christians can use in combating the influence of this false teaching.<sup>8</sup>

### **Byrne and Liberalism: To Infinity and Beyond**

The secret religion Byrne offers shares several theological postulates with classical liberalism. The parallels between these heterogospels<sup>9</sup> are striking: both are human-centered; put confidence in



**A careful comparison of the book's contents with its title and packaging reveals that what its readers see is not what they get. And what readers get is not a newly discovered truth, but a repackaged, long-standing lie.**

humanity's ability to discover the Divine; appeal to science; emphasize feeling; and are concerned with human perfectibility. In spite of these parallels, however, Byrne's approach often stretches these shared notions to the limits of credulity.

First, even though the approaches of liberalism and Byrne are both man-centered, they do not have identical *men* in the center: For liberalism, mankind stands at the center; for Byrne, each person stands (alone) at the center of his universe. An unspoken corollary of this paradigm is that people (other than yourself) have significance only in that they happen to be objects in your universe over which you are master. A second unspoken corollary is that in your neighbor's universe, you are merely an object over which he is master. Both of these corollaries presuppose as many universes as people, and that

every person is an object in an infinite number of universes.

Second, although Byrne and liberalism put confidence in humanity's ability to discover God/Universe, both the map they trust to show the way and the vehicle they trust to take them there, differ significantly. Liberalism uses the Bible as its map and scientific and historical inquiry as its vehicle. Byrne's approach takes a much more skeptical view of the Bible than does liberalism. For her, the Bible is merely one among many more or less valuable maps. As for the vehicle, since you are at once Alpha and Omega, the starting point and the destination coincide, so you do not need a vehicle.

Third, liberalism and Byrne appeal to science, but to different ends. Liberalism appeals to science and reason to separate fact from what its faulty presuppositions had relegated to myth in the Bible. Byrne appeals

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to science to prove the *law of attraction*. Unfortunately, the authorities she cites have spurious credentials, and she bases her case on a radically decontextualized misinterpretation of the principle from quantum theory that “the observer determines the outcome.” In quantum physics, this expression means that the physical (not psychical) act of observation interferes with the outcome. With no legitimate justification, Byrne takes the expression to mean *your thoughts determine the outcome* and argues that quantum physics teaches the law of attraction.

Fourth, liberalism and Byrne emphasize *feeling*, but, again, we must make an important distinction. For liberalism, *feeling* is not concerned with *sensation*, whether we are happy, sad, or angry. Instead, it involves a deep awareness of the nearness of God — I in God, God in me, God in everything.<sup>10</sup> Byrne generously offers both nuances on the religious smorgasbord she presents in *The Secret*.

Fifth, religious liberals believe that every day, and in every way, society is becoming better. This expectant, self-confident, self-sufficient worldview reaches into every portal of society. Even in the field of psychology, humanity is touted as having the ability to heal its own disorders. In 1910, French pharmacist and psychologist Émile Coué founded a method of psychotherapy based on autosuggestion. He taught his patients to repeat in mantra-like fashion: “Every day, and in every way, I am becoming better and better.”<sup>11</sup> Those who read *The Secret* should note the striking parallels this self-reliant, psychological pep talk has to the therapies Byrne suggests.

### Evaluation

In this discussion, I have not said one word about sin. That is because Byrne never mentions the concept. To understand *The Secret*, Byrne consistently urges us to look to ourselves. Why is looking inside ourselves an effective strategy for Byrne? She tells us: “You are God in a physical body. ... You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are

perfection. You are magnificence. You are the master of the universe.”<sup>12</sup>

Sin is not a part of this *pseudo-world*. But we must mention sin because it is an indispensable constituent of the *real* world. Sin made knowledge of God an inaccessible secret. But God refused to hide in secrecy. Instead, He poured himself out in revelation. In the Bible, God is letting humanity in on the biggest *secret* of all time.

Instead of looking to Adam, we must look to Jesus Christ. The first Adam failed in his charge to point us to God — as did all of his descendents, both individually and collectively. Only the second Adam — Jesus Christ, the God-man — can lead us to God.

The direction of approach is telling. In our quest for God, we discover that He has been pursuing us all along. How does He get our attention? He recognizes our weakness and offers us His strength — with one catch: We must use it *His way*, never for exalting ourselves, but for serving others. Thus, knowledge of God comes through *relationship* with His Son, Jesus. Believers both objectively witness (Scripture) and subjectively experience this relationship (Christ indwelling the believer). Instead of worshiping ourselves or retreating into a pseudo-cosmos in which we are master of the universe, we need to lose ourselves. For only in self-denial do we find true empowerment and satisfaction (Matthew 16:24 and parallels).

Byrne, on the other hand, urges us to *find* ourselves. *The Secret* projects health, wealth, and happiness as a human entitlement. Readers are encouraged to create feelings of happiness by thinking happy thoughts. Beyond Byrne’s expressed desire that *everyone* know the secret, her overwhelming emphasis is on what the secret can do for the *person* who knows it.

The book enlists numerous testimonials claiming this esoteric knowledge is the source of the person’s dramatically improved health, wealth, or happiness. This message resonates with prosperity theology. The parallels are

striking and instructive.<sup>13</sup>

Byrne's understanding of God is seen nowhere more clearly than in the definition she offers in the summary of chapter one: "The Great Secret of Life is the law of attraction." By *law of attraction*, Byrne means that your thoughts have a frequency that they send out to the universe; the thoughts magnetically attract like thoughts and bring them back to you. The *good* news is that by knowing this Secret, you can begin to attract positive circumstances into your life by sending positive thoughts out into the universe. You name it. You claim it. Your thoughts — and only your thoughts — are the limit. *Whatever*

you think about, you can bring about. You are the master of your own destiny.

The *bad* news is that you — and you alone — are completely responsible for the bad things that happen in your life. One purveyor of *The Secret* addresses this. Here is his conclusion:

"You are going to immediately say, 'I didn't attract the car accident. ...' I am here to be a little bit in your face and to say, 'Yes, you did attract it.' This is one of the hardest concepts to get, but once you have accepted it, it is life transforming."<sup>14</sup>

Now watch how he addresses naysayers:

"You have a choice right now. ... Do you want to believe ... that you have no control over circumstances? Or, do you want to believe and *know* that your life experience is in your hands and that only all *good* can come into your life because that is the way you think? You have a

choice, and whatever you choose to think *will* become your life experience. Nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts."<sup>15</sup>

Many things need to be said about these citations. Let me mention two or three. First, the capitalization of "The Great Secret of Life" hints at personhood, but the law of attraction is life-less; it has power, but zero volition. It is simply at the disposal of the user. It can make not a single demand regarding its use — whether for moral or immoral purposes. It

## Pastors must present a biblical worldview because it offers something of far deeper import than pleasure. A biblical worldview offers meaning and purpose.

bears no judge's gavel. I can use it for whatever purpose I deem appropriate. That is good because in this pseudo-cosmos, I am god.

Someone might counter, "But you cannot use it to hurt

people because that would be immoral." In whose judgment? The point is that in an impurely fabricated, person-centered universe, where other people are merely objects in the universe (also at the disposal of the master) and the person is god, not a single action of this god (namely you) can be called into question. This

grants you instant autonomy.

The geographical problem is that this is a pseudo-cosmos. It is a logical impossibility. It demands as many universes as people. It requires a single person to be a myriad of different individuals in everyone else's universe. The moral problem is that it obliterates the distinction between right and wrong. People judge everything from this god's perspective. Were everyone to become *Secret* disciples, the moral situation *in the real world* would be this: Everyone does what is "right in his own eyes."

The true God has already addressed this issue (Judges 17:6; 21:25; Proverbs 21:2, KJV). People may choose to live in a pseudo-world, but that will not alter the fact the only true God will





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## The themes in *The Secret* are not merely decorative hood ornaments to a Christian theology; they are the engine that drives the pagan bus.

judge their actions and motivations in the *real* world. Like Belshazzar of old, they will be “weighed in the balances, and ... found wanting” (Daniel 5:27, KJV).

Second, these citations address one’s notion of powerlessness with the implicit promise of giving the convert control over life — the desire to be God with no restraints, no conditions, and with absolute autonomy. Sadly, even Christians carry this carnal impulse until they receive their full sanctification at death or when Christ returns for His church. The apostle Paul urged us to: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality,

impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:5,6).

Paul gives these injunctions in the context of *community*. In the real world, we are all part of one universe. Our actions have moral implications in terms of how they affect our neighbors. The true God has defined what is moral and immoral, and the consequences of each path.

Finally, this law-of-attraction principle functions in much the same way as the *faith* principle of Word-Faith theology. Word-Faith theology claims this *faith principle* works for unbelievers as well as believers. *The Secret* outdoes this in two ways: (1) it extends the power to the thoughts, not merely verbal confession; and (2) it excludes the Christian God from the equation.

### Resource List

Forbes, Cheryl. 1983. *The Religion of Power*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Garlow, James L. and Rick Marschall. 2007. *The Secret Revealed: Exposing the Truth About the Law of Attraction*. New York: Faith Words.

Grenz, Stanley J. 1996. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson. 1992. *20th-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Gungor, Ed. 2007. *There Is More to the Secret*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

McKim, Donald. 1985. *What Christians Believe About the Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Walker, James K. and Bob Waldrep. 2007. *The Truth Behind the Secret: A Reasoned Response to the Runaway Bestseller*. Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.

### Conclusion

Byrne’s belief that you are the master of the universe takes liberalism’s affirmation of the imminence of God and stretches it to the most extreme view imaginable: God is not *are* God Almighty. You determine not merely *your* future, but *the* future. You not only *call the shots*, you *make the call*. Nothing is right or wrong until *you* declare it so.

On careful reading, the only secret we discover is that *The Secret* is not what it appears to be at first. It is not a self-help collection of tips for success in life;<sup>16</sup> it is, in fact, an altar call. It is an invitation to accept yourself as Lord and Savior.

This *new secret* sounds remarkably like the *old lie* presented to Adam and Eve — and an alarming number of their descendents. Thus, we must conclude that the overall theological system endorsed by *The Secret* is fundamentally incompatible with historic Christianity. The themes in *The Secret* are not

merely decorative hood ornaments to a Christian theology; they are the engine that drives the pagan bus.

The most insidiously pernicious lie tendered by *The Secret* may well be its naive, amusement-park approach to life. It operates in a pseudo-world, where people leisurely amble through the attractions, eat popcorn, and enjoy the rides. But in the real world what happens when the *ride* a person believes will give him ultimate pleasure and satisfaction is permanently closed to him, leaving him without hope of ever experiencing the satisfaction that it alone can bring? If you answered, "He leaves the park," you are correct. Every 16 minutes someone in this country tragically makes the conscious decision to leave the park forever.<sup>17</sup> Last year a pastor's son close to me tragically made the conscious decision to do so. I believe the distorted worldview presented in *The Secret* is partly responsible. As pastors, we must seek to dismantle this faulty construct in evangelizing, preaching, teaching, and counseling.

Pastors must present a biblical worldview because it offers something of far deeper import than pleasure. A biblical worldview offers meaning and purpose. It shows us that we can only find true satisfaction and joy in a relationship with God and wholesome relationships with people.

People need a theology that is not shaken by the tragedies of life. This theology can only be found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the worldview reflected in the Bible. Nothing in *The Secret* offers this kind of hope.

God created the cosmos as an arena in which I could learn about Him. Experiencing God's comforting presence

and His delivering power in the buffeting storms of life brings awareness that God did not design this world as my final destination. It brings the confident expectation that He has a much better place prepared for me — and for all who put their trust in Him. ☺



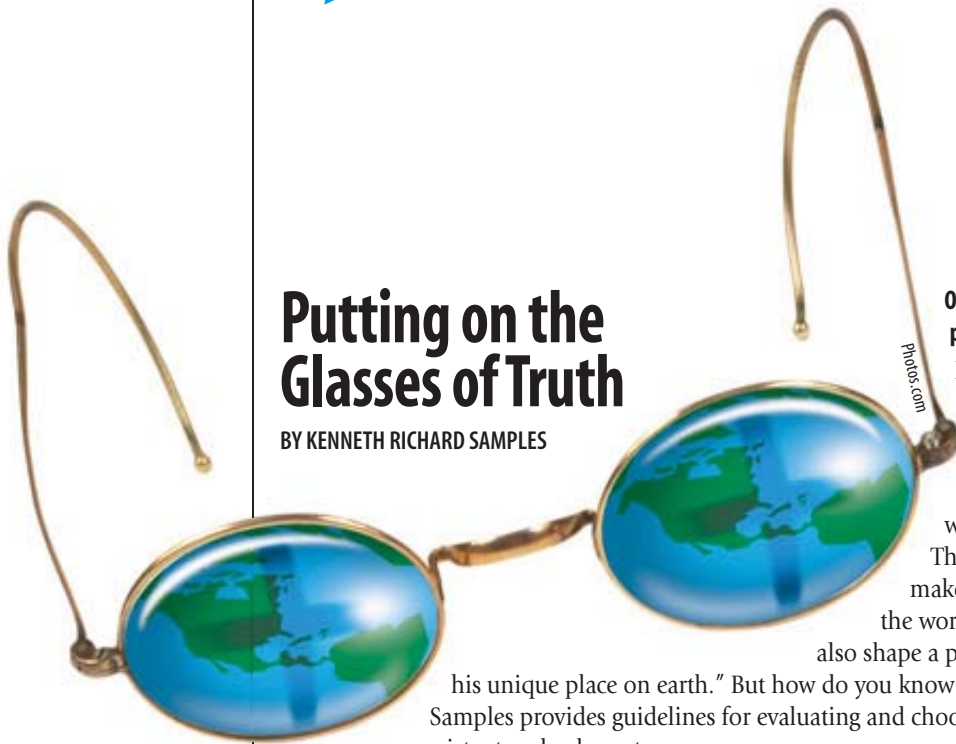
**ROB STARNIER, PH.D.**, professor of Greek and New Testament, Southwestern Assemblies of God University, Waxahachie, Texas.

To comment on this article go to *Enrichment* journal forum at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal>.

#### NOTES

1. Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York: Atria Books, 2006).
2. From *The Secret* homepage at <http://www.theseecret.tv> (accessed February 27, 2008).
3. Byrne, *The Secret*. These promises are found on the front flap and back of the dust jacket.
4. Byrne, *The Secret*, p. ix. Capitalization in the original is as cited. This expression suggests not merely one among many secrets to life, but the secret to life.
5. For thorough critiques from a sound, biblical perspective, see James L. Garlow and Rick Marschall, *The Secret Revealed: Exposing the Truth About the Law of Attraction* (New York: FaithWords, 2007) and James K. Walker and Bob Waldrep, *The Truth Behind the Secret: A Reasoned Response to the Runaway Bestseller* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2007). These works document numerous instances of statements taken out of context or fabricated to bolster support for particular assertions. Walker and Waldrep do a laudable job of critiquing Byrne's mishandling of quantum physics. Garlow and Marschall primarily object to the "dishonest nature of the book" (p.239). For an approach that focuses on the underlying need that *The Secret* addresses (albeit wrongly), see Ed Gungor, *There Is More to the Secret* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007).
6. Readers should find it disingenuous that although Byrne acknowledges Jerry and Esther Hicks in a list of those she thanks for their inspirational teachings, she fails to mention that the Hickses have been teaching "the secret" for more than 20 years and that their material was a significant part of the original DVD version of *The Secret* (for which the Hickses received half a million dollars in royalties). Readers need to note that Byrne edited the Hickses out of the extended version DVD, and apart from a single reference in the aforementioned list, the Hickses are entirely absent from the book. Even though the Hickses credit Abraham as the source of their teaching, knowing a collection of nonphysical entities through whom they have channeled this information may help readers determine the truth. For more on this, see Walker and Waldrep, *The Truth Behind the Secret*, 27–39.

7. Byrne, *The Secret*, 4.
8. For excellent discussions on the influences of some of the more specific sources mentioned in this list, see Garlow and Marschall, *The Secret Revealed*, 215–41. For the similarities with Word-Faith, see my article, "Prosperity Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley Burgess (New York: Routledge, 2006).
9. Paul uses the adjective-noun configuration (*heteron evangelion* — another gospel of a different kind) to describe the religion of the Judaizers (Galatians 1:6). No sooner are the words out of his mouth than he realizes he has just used the term *evangelion* (meaning *good news*) to describe this man-centered approach to God. To repair this, Paul immediately inserts a corrective statement, "which is *not allo*" (another [one] of the *same* kind, verse 7). In this clause, Paul uses the adjective *allo* (another [one, thing, matter] of the *same* kind) as a noun substitute to avoid using even one more time the term *evangelion* to describe the *false one* (referencing the religion of the Judaizers without reapplying the term *good news*. The grammar and syntax of this sentence suggest that Paul is saying: "When we compare the truly good news with the religion offered by the Judaizers, we are not comparing apples with apples. The former is an instrument of edification and life; the latter an instrument of destruction and death." Paul felt that the *religion* taught by the Judaizers was so utterly incompatible with the *gospel* revealed to him by the resurrected and glorified Christ that he could not with forethought bring himself to describe that system as *good news*. To offer a synopsis of the Judaizers is beyond the scope of this article, but we need to note that it was as man-centered as the religious views offered in *The Secret*.
10. The equation of religion with feeling traces to Friedrich Schleiermacher. For a discussion on this, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 39–62.
11. Encyclopedia Britannica Online at <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9026549/Emile-Coue> (accessed February 27, 2008). I find no particular fault with the words themselves. But it seems clear that the idea behind them was *I am making myself better and better by repeating this mantra, not I am becoming better and better because I am surrendering myself to the Holy Spirit's work in my life*.
12. Byrne, *The Secret*, 164, 183.
13. For a fuller treatment of this aspect, see my article, "Prosperity Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Stanley Burgess (New York: Routledge, 2006).
14. Byrne, *The Secret*, 27, 28. Italics original.
15. *Ibid.*, 28.
16. I am not minimizing the value of self-help books. I am merely suggesting that promoters of *The Secret*, knowingly or unknowingly, are using the book's affinities with the self-help genre for substantial marketing gains.
17. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, "Facts and Figures National Statistics," [http://www.afsp.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewpage&page\\_id=050FEA9F-B064-4092-B1135C3A70DE1FDA](http://www.afsp.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewpage&page_id=050FEA9F-B064-4092-B1135C3A70DE1FDA) (accessed March 4, 2008).



## Putting on the Glasses of Truth

BY KENNETH RICHARD SAMPLES

**One of the greatest challenges pastors face today** is helping their people develop a Christian worldview. According to Samples, "A worldview functions in much the same way as a pair of glasses through which a person sees the world. This interpretive lens helps people make sense of life and comprehend the world around them. Worldviews also shape a person's understanding of

his unique place on earth." But how do you know if your worldview is correct? Samples provides guidelines for evaluating and choosing a worldview that is consistent and coherent.

## Overcoming the **INTOLERANT** LABEL Through Practical Ministry

BY SAMUEL M. HUDDLESTON

**"Christian" and "intolerant" appear as synonyms** in today's media. Huddleston, assistant superintendent of the Northern California/Nevada District, warns the comparison sometimes fits. His ministry among inmates grew out of his own painful past. "The church came to my aid as a young, wayward man — helped my family and me through some of our most difficult days," Huddleston says. "While I was imperfect, they accepted and loved me." He calls for uncompromising adherence to God's standards through undiluted expressions of God's love.



## Preaching the Truth to Secular and Religiously Diverse Audiences



BY SETH ZIELICKE

**What do you say when you are asked to speak** at a conference attended by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, New Agers, Atheists, Catholics, and Protestants? Do you water down the message of the Cross? Do you preach a strong salvation message and give an altar call? Zielicke shares what he learned when he was asked to speak at such a conference. These three principles will help any person who is faced with witnessing to those of various religious backgrounds.





## Lostness From God's Viewpoint

BY GEORGE O. WOOD

**AG General Superintendent Wood shows "lostness" to be a foreign concept** to many people in that spiritual condition. Reflecting on Jesus' parables in Luke 15, Wood identifies life forces that can influence a person's separation from God. "Who is concerned about finding the lost? God himself!" Wood insists. "The lost are His: the sheep, the coin, the son. Each shows a different aspect of the work of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in salvation."

## Life in the Spirit and the Way of the Cross: Following Jesus via Luke-Acts

BY MARTIN MITTELSTADT

**Mittelstadt, associate professor of New Testament at Evangel University, reacts against a one-dimensional measurement** of genuine service to God — equating success or failure in discerning God's will with blessing or struggle respectively. Mittelstadt surveys six passages in Luke-Acts that evaluate "discipleship that perseveres in the midst of suffering and persecution." He warns against any "Pentecostal tradition ... that does not relate to the kind of conflict, resistance, and opposition that was so much a part of its formative years."



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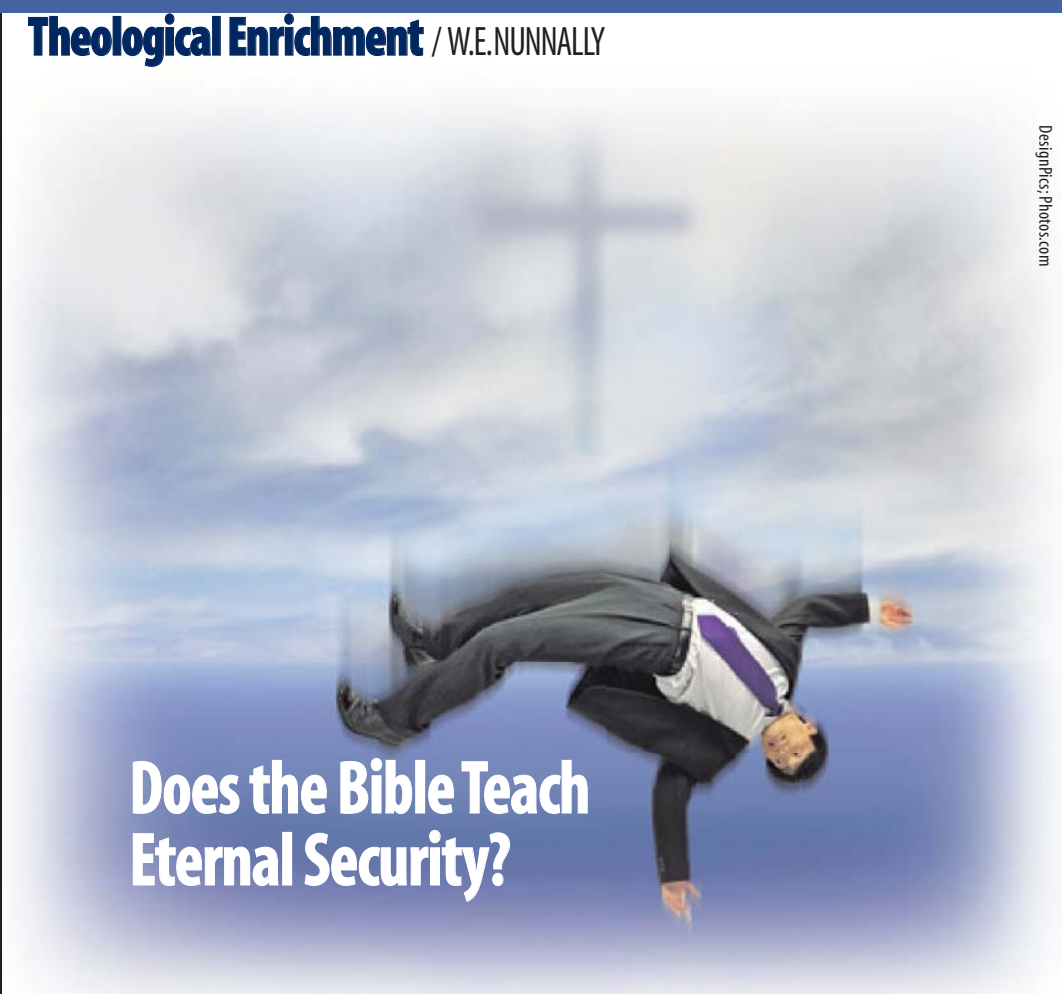
## Six Secrets for Introducing Successful Change in Your Church

BY CHARLES ARN

**Arn, president of Church Growth, Inc., admits people are naturally resistant to change.** Any pastor wanting to transform congregational life should chart a course of careful metamorphosis. Arn believes new ideas should be expressed with six characteristics in focus: as a means to reach an agreed-upon goal, as an addition instead of a replacement, as a short-term commitment initially, as a product of shared ownership, as a

remedy against status-quo passivity, and as a message disseminated through recognized avenues of leadership.





## Does the Bible Teach Eternal Security?

*Can believers voluntarily forfeit their salvation by turning away from the lordship of Christ?*

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### Introduction

In a previous article, I briefly discussed the doctrinal position of *perseverance of the saints*, *eternal security*, or *once saved, always saved*.<sup>1</sup> Here, however, I will address it more completely.

The doctrine of eternal security teaches that once a person experiences salvation nothing can cause him to lose that status. Millard J. Erickson states: "The Calvinist position is both clear and forthright on this matter: 'They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved' " (Westminster Confession of Faith 17.1).<sup>2</sup>

Henry C. Thiessen further states: "Concerning such it affirms that they shall 'never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace.' This is not equivalent to saying that they shall never backslide, never fall into sin, and never fail to show forth the praises of Him Who has called

them out of darkness into His marvelous light. It merely means that they will never totally fall away from the state of grace into which they have been brought, nor fail to return from their backsliding in the end."<sup>3</sup>

Like limited atonement, Augustine popularized the doctrine of perseverance of the saints in the fifth century A.D. The Roman Catholic Church eventually adopted his teaching on this subject as official doctrine. It was the commonly accepted position at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Leaders of the Reformation, such as John Calvin, also accepted and promoted it along with a number of other pre-Reformational Roman Catholic doctrines and practices. In this way, eternal security has come down into the doctrinal systems of many modern Protestant denominations today.

The Arminian/Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, and the Assemblies of God that grew out of it, have both historically rejected the belief in eternal security. The official AG Web site states,



**W.E. NUNNALLY, Ph.D.**, professor of Early Judaism and Christian Origins, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri

"The Assemblies of God has taken a stand against the teaching that God's sovereign will completely overrides man's free will to accept and serve Him. In view of this we believe it is possible for a person once saved to turn from God and be lost again."<sup>4</sup>

Even though the Assemblies of God has taken a strong and unequivocal official position, the people we minister to may not understand this doctrine or our position on the issue. People in our congregations often work with people who believe in eternal security. They need to know how to respond to the beliefs of their coworkers. Therefore, it is important for pastors to teach the arguments used by proponents of perseverance of the saints/eternal security, the appropriate responses to their assertions, and the biblical basis for our position: Believers can voluntarily forfeit their salvation by turning away from the lordship of Christ.

There are, to be sure, varying beliefs concerning eternal security within Calvinism. For example, one extreme view argues that God will take a believer home because he will not straighten out his life and he has become an embarrassment to God. Others who believe in eternal security, however, do not believe that eternal security gives license to sin: "On the other hand, however, our understanding of the doctrine of perseverance allows no room for indolence or laxity. It is questionable whether anyone who reasons, 'Now that I am a Christian, I can live as I please,' has really been converted and regenerated. Genuine faith issues, instead, in the fruit of the Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

### Scriptures Used in Support of PS/ES and Their Proper Interpretation

Those who espouse the PS/ES view of salvation often refer to John 5:24 to support their position, "He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."<sup>6</sup> Proponents believe this verse means once you have passed from death to life, you eternally have life. The grammatical context of this verse, however, makes clear that the word *eternal* is not an adverb modifying the verb, as if to say one *eternally has life*. Instead, it is part of a compound noun. Therefore, the *life* is eternal, not one's possession of it. Also, the words *hearing* and *believing* are in the present tense, meaning continuous action.

Proponents also argue that once a person and God unite, that bond can never be broken. They

appeal to John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." We cannot say, however, that this text rules out the possibility that one can choose to leave (compare John 17:12).

John 10:27,28 is also used to support PS/ES: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand." To these verses we could add Romans 8:35,39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." But the biblical authors are saying that external forces are incapable of separating us from God. Neither rule out the possibility that a person can exercise free will and choose to depart.

It should also be noted that the present tense in Greek denotes continuous action. This verse is literally translated, "My sheep continue in hearing my voice, and I continue to know them, and they keep on following me and I keep on giving them eternal life." This means that our not perishing is contingent on our continuing to hear and follow Jesus, a theme that echoes throughout Scripture. Instead of supporting PS/ES, this text supports the possibility that a believer can walk away from God by refusing to *continue* in obedience to Christ.

Using John 15:1-11, these proponents state: "If believers have been made one with Christ and his life flows through them (John 15:1-11), nothing can conceivably nullify that connection."<sup>7</sup> But the entire 15th chapter shows the possibility that this connection can be broken.

The word translated *abide* throughout chapter 15 is *meno*, meaning "to remain, continue, stay." Therefore, Jesus says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. ... If anyone does not abide [continue, stay] in me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2,6). The next section begins with Jesus declaring, "I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling" (John 16:1). If turning away from God were not a distinct possibility, Jesus would not have addressed it at such length.

Some adherents of PS/ES point to Paul's words in Philippians 1:6 for support, "I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of



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*If turning away from God were not a distinct possibility, Jesus would not have addressed it at such length.*



Paul warned the Corinthians that belief in a defective version of the good news could endanger their salvation.

Christ Jesus." In reading verses 1–11, however, it becomes clear that what Paul was confident of was the Philippians' desire to press on to maturity — the believer's only real security. This is supported by Paul's later admonition to the Philippians to "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12). Furthermore, after noting that even his own eternal destiny was not yet written in stone (3:12,13), and to ensure his own eternal life, Paul was pressing on to greater maturity and obedience (3:14). He exhorted the Christians at Philippi to follow his example and avoid following the examples of those whose end is destruction (3:17–19).

People sometimes appeal to Hebrews 7:25, "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." Advocates understand the word "forever" to refer to *those drawing near to God for salvation*. The immediate context, however, and the overarching message of the Book of Hebrews requires the phrase to refer to Jesus and the length of time He, as High Priest, is able to provide atonement that makes salvation possible (compare also verses 3,17,21,24,25; 5:6; 6:20), not to the perceived eternal security of the believer.

A favorite text of those who embrace PS/ES is 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." Advocates use this passage to claim that those who cease to follow Christ never had experienced salvation. There are several things we need to examine in this verse.

First, the text does not explicitly state what proponents of PS/ES assert it says (that separation means their salvation was not real). John was writing after their defection and noting that their desertion was proof that they no longer belonged to the community of the redeemed. He was comparing them to those who had resisted false teaching, continued to embrace the truth, and persisted in abiding in Christ (verse 24).

Second, the contrasting responses of *going out* and *abiding/remaining* recall Jesus' own teaching in John 15, where He described members of the body of Christ who fail to "abide," do not continue to bear fruit, dry up, and are eventually cut off.

Third, both Testaments are replete with examples of people and groups who were, at one point, clearly in right standing with God but later repudiated His lordship (Genesis 4:3–16

[compare Jude 11]; Exodus 32:32,33; Numbers 3:2–4; 4:15–20; 16:1–33; 22:8,12,19,20,32–35; 24:1,2,13; 31:7,8; 1 Samuel 10:1–7,9–11; 13:8–15; 16:14; 31; John 6:66 [compare verse 67]; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17,18; 4:10; Titus 1:12–16; Hebrews 12:15–17; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 2:6,15 [compare Acts 6:5; Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.29], 20).

### Arguments That Warn Believers of the Possibility of Apostasy

Sometimes those in the Arminian camp have not clearly articulated their doctrinal position. We have used the phrase *lose your salvation*, as though such an act could be accidental, unintentional, and the result of a momentary slipup. Detractors have rightly attacked this phrase as an inaccurate reflection of Scripture. Therefore, we must refamiliarize ourselves with passages that support our doctrine, and then articulate it in a way that properly reflects the teaching of God's Word.

Arminian/Wesleyan/Holiness/Pentecostal teaching maintains that believers retain their free will even after salvation. Scripture teaches that those who trust in and obey Jesus are even more free after salvation than before (John 8:36; Galatians 5:1,13), not less. Our doctrine can be described by the biblical phrases "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4), "falling away" (Hebrews 3:12), and "fallen away" (Hebrews 6:6).

J. Rodman Williams states: "But, because of the fact that the salvation of God operates through faith — a faith that is living — the forsaking of that faith can lead to apostasy. By failing to abide in Christ, to continue in Him and His word, to persevere in the midst of worldly trial or temptation, to make faith firm and strengthen it — thereby allowing unbelief to enter — believers may fall away from God. Thereby they may tragically forfeit their salvation."<sup>8</sup> (*See sidebar, Steps Leading to Apostasy, page 125.*)

The English word *apostasy* is a transliteration of the New Testament Greek word *apostasias*. Reference works note that it and its verbal form include these nuances: to take a stand apart from, to commit political defection or treason, to separate from, to be drawn off or away, to induce revolt, to withdraw, to depart, to fall away, to cease from having any interaction with, to desert, and to put away (as in divorce). None of these phrases suggest a loss of covenant as the result of an accidental or temporary breach of established standards of holiness. Instead, they all imply forethought, intent, and

a persistent state of rebellion against the mastery of Jesus over one's life. (See sidebar, *Apostasy*, page 126.)

### Free Will


God created man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). In part, this means that even as God thinks, plans, reasons, and decides, so also does man. Although the Fall partially effaced the image of God stamped on mankind at creation, these other attributes certainly were not. In addition, God will not invade or violate the free will that He has purposely created within man, whether he accepts Christ or not.

In the Old Testament, God dealt with the Israelites almost exclusively through conditional covenants. God continually warned them to fulfill their covenantal obligations or their relationship with Him would be nullified (compare Exodus 32:33; Leviticus 22:3; Numbers 15:27–31; Deuteronomy 29:18–21; 1 Kings 9:6,7; 2 Kings 17:22,23; 24:20; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 7:19–22; 15:2; 24:20; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 1:2–4; 59:2; Jeremiah 2:19; 5:3,6,7; 8:5,12; 15:1,6,7; 16:5; Ezekiel 3:20; 18:12,13; 33:12). Grace was available in the Old Testament (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 6:25; Jeremiah 3:12), but as in the New Testament, grace was never an excuse to continue in sin and never lessened the demands of the covenant (compare John 1:16,17; Romans 6:1,2; 8:7–11; Luke 12:48; compare also Romans 1:31, “faithless” or “covenant-breakers,” KJV).

### The Gospels

John the Baptist boldly proclaimed, “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9). In fact, Jesus began His ministry by reiterating this same message (Matthew 7:19).

Jesus also taught that if we are unwilling to forgive, we remove the possibility of our receiving God's forgiveness (Matthew 6:15). In Jesus' original historical context and in Matthew's canonical context, the new covenant community — comprised of *believers* — Jesus said that only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13), and that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before His Father (Matthew 10:33). When He said, “Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven” (Matthew 12:31), He made no distinction between the saved and the unsaved.



## Steps Leading to Apostasy

1. Believers, through unbelief, fail to take the truths, exhortations, warnings, promises, and teachings of God's Word with utmost seriousness (Mark 1:15; Luke 8:13; John 5:44,47; 8:46).
2. As the realities of the world become greater than the realities of God's heavenly kingdom, believers gradually cease to draw near to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16; 7:19,25; 11:6).
3. Through the deceitfulness of sin, they become increasingly tolerant of sin in their own lives (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Ephesians 5:5; Hebrews 3:13). They no longer love righteousness and hate wickedness.
4. Through hardness of heart (Hebrews 3:8,13) and rejecting God's way (3:10), they ignore the repeated voice and rebuke of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22).
5. The Holy Spirit is grieved (Ephesians 4:30; cf. Hebrews 3:7,8) and His fire put out (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and His temple violated (1 Corinthians 3:16). He eventually departs from the former believers (Judges 16:20; Psalm 51:11; Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Hebrews 3:14).

**DONALD STAMPS, Gen. Ed.** *Life in the Spirit Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 1918. Used with permission.

In the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, the seed took root and began to bear fruit, but various circumstances eventually destroyed it (Matthew 13:3–23). In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus commanded that members of the new covenant community who persisted in unrepentance be put out of the church and treated as outsiders to the covenant. Jesus also warned that in the last times, false messiahs “will mislead many” (Matthew 24:5), and during persecution, “many will fall away” (Matthew 24:10). Verse 24 records Jesus' teaching that false messiahs and false prophets will “mislead, if possible, even the elect.”

Advocates of PS/ES think the phrase “if possible” points to a hypothetical situation and shows it is *not possible* for anyone to stray from the faith. This argument, however, does not consider the larger context (Matthew 24:5,10) or other texts (1 Thessalonians 4:1,2) that clearly state that some believers in the last days will depart from the faith for various reasons.

Luke reported that Jesus taught, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and [continually]

*Jesus said that only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22; 24:13), and that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before His Father (Matthew 10:33).*

*Jesus commanded that members of the new covenant community who persisted in unrepentance be put out of the church and treated as outsiders to the covenant.*

looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The context makes the meaning of the metaphor clear. The same can be said for Luke 14:34,35, "Salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (for more on the teaching of Jesus, see Matthew 7:16,17,21,24, 26; 10:38; 12:30; 18:23-35; Luke 9:23 and following; 14:25-33).

### Pauline teaching

On the mission field, after they had "made many disciples," Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches they had planted earlier, strengthening the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:21,22). This would have been an unnecessary expenditure of time and energy if apostasy was not an

option. Later, Paul warned the leaders of the church in Ephesus that "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30.)

In Paul's letters, his teaching was no different than in his preaching in Acts. He warned the churches in Rome, "For if God did not spare the natural branches, [Israel], He will not spare you either [Christians in Rome]. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness [note the language of conditional covenant] if you continue in His kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off" (11:21,22). He also challenged them, "If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (14:15; compare also 1 Corinthians 8:11, where the same terms appear).

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (compare also 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14), Paul challenged the Corinthians to excommunicate people who live in sin (compare Matthew 18:15-17). He chided libertines in the church at Corinth for allowing their freedom to cause the destruction of the weaker "brother for whose sake Christ died" (1 Corinthians 8:11). "Brother" indicates that all involved are members of the same covenant community. He believed there was a possibility that even he could become a castaway from the faith (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul further warned the Christians at Corinth that this could be their lot as well, and that they could end up like the Israelites who died in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1-13). "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (verse 12).

Paul also warned the Corinthians that belief in a defective version of the good news could endanger their salvation, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:1,2). Later, he challenged them again, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you — unless indeed you fail the test!" (2 Corinthians 13:5). This challenge is similar to the one he delivered to the Colossian church: Jesus would present them blameless before God, but only provided

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## Apostasy

**T**o apostasize means to sever one's saving relationship with Christ or to withdraw from vital union with and true faith in Him. Thus, individual apostasy is possible only for those who have first experienced salvation, regeneration, and renewal through the Holy Spirit (Luke 8:13; Hebrews 6:4,5); it is not a mere denial of New Testament doctrine by the unsaved within the visible church. Apostasy may involve two separate, though related, aspects: (a) theological apostasy, i.e., a rejection of all or some of the original teachings of Christ and the apostles (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3), and (b) moral apostasy, i.e., the former believer ceases to remain in Christ and instead becomes enslaved again to sin and immorality (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 23:25-28; Romans 6:15-23; 8:6-13).



that [they] “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast” (Colossians 1:21–23).

To the churches in Galatia, Paul exclaimed, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). In Galatians 4:1–11, he described a progression in which the Galatian Christians had gone from slaves, to sons, and then back to slaves again. In the conclusion of this section, Paul said, “I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”

To those who had been saved by the blood of Jesus, but then accepted the *Jesus-plus* gospel of the Judaizers that added circumcision to the *Ordo Salutis* (way of salvation), Paul proclaimed, “You have been severed [*kataergo*: “cut off, emptied of, annulled from, canceled from, brought to an end, destroyed, annihilated”] from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen [*ekpipto*: “to fall from or out of, to forfeit, to lose, to cause to come to an end”] from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

To the Philippian church, Paul stated that he had suffered the loss of all things “that I may know him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10,11). If Paul’s salvation was final and nothing could change his status with God, he was not aware of it. He had taken to heart the spiritual devastation in the lives of some of his closest companions because, in the same context, he told the church at Philippi about people who once were well-known believers, but he lamented “they are enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18).

When Paul instructed pastors, the message was the same, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1; compare 2 Timothy 4:3,4).

### The general epistles and the Apocalypse

The remainder of the New Testament is also clear about the fact a believer can voluntarily forfeit his salvation. The Book of Hebrews contains some of the clearest warnings against apostasy and also urgent exhortations to remain firm to the end — all directed toward Christians.

Because of the greater revelation that came with the incarnation of Christ, the author of Hebrews told Christians, “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it” (2:1). In this text, the writer included himself in a warning against leaving the way of salvation. In the

same context, he raised the rhetorical question, “How will we escape [judgment, compare verse 2] if we neglect so great a salvation?” (verse 3). Again, the author included himself along with his Christian audience.

We should note that the verb is *neglect*, not *reject*. His readers were neglectful Christians, not rejecting unbelievers. In 3:6, he echoed the same challenge heard from Jesus and Paul: And we are His “house ... if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.” He reiterated later, “We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (verse 14). He warned fellow believers, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away [*apostaenai*, “apostasize”] from the living God” (3:12, emphasis added). Believers need to “fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, anyone of you may seem to have come short of it” (4:1), because even believers can “fall, through following the same example of disobedience [that covenant Israel exhibited]” (4:11).

In 6:4–6, the author declared: “Those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have *fallen away*, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (emphasis added).

Reminiscent of Numbers 15:30,31, Hebrews states: “For if we go on sinning *willfully* after receiving the knowledge of the truth, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*, but a terrifying expectation of judgment” (10:26,27, emphasis added). He continues, “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which *he was sanctified*, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (10:28,29, emphasis added). The italicized portion of these verses provides incontrovertible evidence that the audience is Christian. These believers are warned not to “throw away” (as opposed to “accidentally lose”) their salvation (10:35).

The writer of Hebrews left his Christian audience with this exhortation, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness [compare Deuteronomy 29:18–21]



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*The Book of Hebrews contains urgent exhortations directed toward Christians to remain firm to the end.*

*A believer's only security is in consistent obedience to the will of the Master.*

springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears" (Hebrews 12:15-17).

James tells us: "if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death" (James 5:19,20).

Peter writes, "There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." (2 Peter 2:1). In the same context he continued, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire' " (2 Peter 2:20-22, emphases added to demonstrate the fact the author is describing people who had previously been numbered among the redeemed).

John described a sin that is "leading to death"

that cannot be forgiven (1 John 5:16). The context in the first half of the verse as well as the use of the same terminology elsewhere in this letter (1 John 3:13,14) make it clear that this is spiritual death, not physical death. This message is no different from his message in the Apocalypse. There, he promised eternal life only to those who overcome and remain faithful until the end (Revelation 2:10,25,26). On the other hand, he guaranteed rejection and loss of life to those who do not (Revelation 2:5; 3:11,16). To the end of the book (and thus, the New Testament), he continued to warn about the possibility of forfeiture of one's salvation (Revelation 22:19).

### Conclusion

It is evident that the Bible warns against the possibility of forfeiture of one's status with God. Scripture is clear that a believer's only *security* is in consistent obedience to the will of the Master. This reality fits perfectly with the biblical definition of salvation. Salvation is not a one-time crisis event that seals a believer for all eternity, but a process that has past (Romans 10:9,10; 2 Corinthians 5:17), present (Luke 9:23; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15; 3:18; Philippians 2:12; 3:8-16), and future stages (Romans 8:19-24; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 1 Peter 1:3-7; Revelation 12:10; 20:1-10; 21:1 through 22:14). Believers retain the option to choose a life of obedience and submission to the will of God or to walk away from a relationship with God and suffer(ed) eternal separation from God as a result. By teaching your people this truth, you can encourage them to live godly lives and respond to those who believe in eternal security. ☺



### NOTES

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5. Erickson, 1007.
6. Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (<http://www.Lockman.org>).
7. Erickson, 999.
8. J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 2. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990), 131.







## Helping People Who Struggle With Addictions

*Strongholds are works of the flesh, and pastors must deal with them accordingly.*

### Do We Manage a Sin or Overcome a Stronghold?

**Jim, 27, was single, and in the prime of his life,** but his addiction to cocaine had a vice-like grip on him. Counselors had convinced Jim that he had a disease, not a stronghold. The best he could ever hope for was the willpower to manage his illness, not eradicate it. Jim felt helpless and shackled by his addiction, with little hope of getting well. His condition worsened. By the time he stumbled into my office — a gesture, he confided, to satisfy his mother — he was selling cocaine to support his habit. Not long after our conversation I received a call from his mother: Jim was in prison. Desperate for more drugs and short on cash, he robbed a convenience store and shot a police officer — a decision that

ultimately yielded a life sentence without parole.

On a Wednesday, 21 years ago, I had seen more than my usual number of clients. I was on my way to the evening service when a young woman approached me. Because I was tired, I asked her to come back the next day. She began sobbing, “My name is Grace. If you don’t see me now, I won’t make it through the night.”

She drew back the sleeves of her blouse and exposed raw and swollen track marks up and down her arms. With slurred speech and barely able to stand, she told me she had just come off a 3-day heroin binge. She had spent \$1,500, was broke, scared, and without hope.

I told her I would give her a few minutes. She cried, babbled words, writhed, squirmed, and fell off her chair several times. During her sobs and my prayers, I had a vision. I saw the hand of a technician and the sleeve of a lab coat. The hand was reaching down, grabbing cobras, and milking their venom. As I watched, the hand turned the venom into a serum — antivenin.

At first, I did not understand. Then I watched as the narrow picture panned into full view. I saw that the hand in the vision belonged to Grace. She was wearing the lab coat and making the antivenin.

I spoke to her about what I had seen. I told her God wanted to use her as a deliverer as she shared the love and power of God (antivenin) that would save people addicted to heroin and cocaine.

In the hour that followed, God delivered her from her heroin addiction (stronghold). Today, she is in the ministry helping people affected by drugs. She has remained drug free for 21 years.

### Statistics

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2006 drug misuse or abuse (cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine) accounted for nearly 1.4 million emergency room visits nationwide. Excessive use of alcohol attributed to more than 100,000 deaths. The National Center on Addiction and Substance

  
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**LARRY E. HAZELBAKER, Ph.D.,** is an ordained Assemblies of God minister, professor of psychology, and chairperson of the behavioral and social sciences department at Southeastern University, Lakeland, Florida. He is also founder and president of Harbor Institute, Inc., a nonprofit organization that ministers to ministers and their families.

Abuse reported that youth who drink are 50 times more likely to use cocaine. Furthermore, 14 million Americans met the diagnostic criteria for alcohol use disorders. Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use among youth has risen dramatically since 1985. It is estimated that one-third of all 12th graders consume alcohol weekly. Substance abuse is on the rise, especially among youth.

### The Cycle of Addiction

For an explanation of the cycle of an addiction, visit <http://www.DrugRehab.net>.

**First**, most addicts are intelligent people and have plans for their futures.

**Second**, addicts find it difficult to deal with the problems that come with life and begin using the substance as a coping mechanism.

**Third**, using drugs helps addicts compensate for some deficiency in their lives. Depression, pain, relationships, job troubles, or not being able to overcome an unrelated issue (such as obesity) are common excuses for substance abuse.

**Fourth**, the substance becomes a painkiller. It lessens the emotional and physical pain and gives addicts a way to escape their problems. New problems emerge once the addiction takes hold. Addicts begin to do whatever is necessary to get high.

**Fifth**, behavior associated with drug dependency — difficulty communicating, poor job performance, and poor physical health — becomes the norm. The addiction *drives* the addict's life and controls and dominates his thoughts. At this point, the substance is a stronghold that slowly strangles him.

**Sixth**, the substance controls addicts, and they are obsessed with obtaining and using it. It degrades them and gives them a sense of hopelessness and despair.

**Seventh**, addicts attempt to quit. Failure at program after program, therapist after therapist, and relapse after relapse leaves addicts with a sense of loneliness, despair, and defeat. They are slaves to the substance.

### How It Happens

Addictive behavior is common. A person's nature is to abuse. Anything can become a stronghold (addiction). Once a behavior becomes an addiction, it controls a person's life, thoughts,

and actions. It happens when, for whatever reason, a person begins to take a substance that makes him feel good. The behavior begins to form a neural pathway across a cluster of neurons in the brain. The more the behavior is reinforced by the stimulus, the deeper the pathway, thereby forming a behavior or a habit — an addiction.

An addiction is a reoccurring compulsion that controls a person's thoughts and actions, a stronghold that is nearly impossible to overcome. Because of this fact, most treatment programs focus on managing the addiction rather than on overcoming a stronghold.

### Medical Model on Addictions

If ministers believe the medical model for explaining addictions, then No. 7 in the above cycle is true. There is little help for addicts. The best a pastor can do is to provide tools to help an addict manage his addiction while the addict spends the rest of his life engaging in the intense struggle to control his addiction.

Many clinical professionals believe that colleges do not train ministers how to treat people who have addictions. If the general belief were that an addiction is a disease, I would agree. Doctors — not pastors — treat diseases. If pastors choose to accept the medical model, they will need to create a referral list of the clinics and agencies in their area that treat addictions as diseases and refer parishioners to them. Alcoholics Anonymous and other treatment centers can intervene and, at the least, provide addicts with the education needed to manage their addiction.

### Biblical Perspective on Addictions

If ministers take the Bible literally, addictions are strongholds that stem from works of the flesh. They are *spiritual* problems that manifest themselves in the flesh. In alcoholism, current medical definitions claim the etiology (origin) of alcohol addiction is a genetic predisposition. Thus, alcoholics are victims of their own DNA. If pastors choose to agree, they accept that alcoholism is a terminal disease — the person is and always will be an alcoholic.

The Word takes a different position. Drunkenness is a sin and a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:21).

*Confession is the first step toward healing in the redemptive cycle.*





Pastors need to embrace the biblical definition of an addiction and create ministries in the church to assist in the transformation of addicts.

To receive cleansing, one must ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9). If pastors accept the medical model, then they must embrace the management of sin. An addiction is not like diabetes. It does not make sense to accept the

medical model of an addiction and disregard the biblical definition of sin. We must believe we can be more than overcomers.

### Think About It

A victim-based mentality tends to drive Americans. We try to discover *reasons* to excuse maladaptive or unacceptable conduct. If we can convince ourselves that our addictions come from our genetic make-up, we have found a reason to excuse sin. If a person is from a family in which high blood pressure or diabetes is prevalent, it is not as surprising when a doctor gives him the same diagnosis. His genes provide an explanation for the diagnosis.

Strongholds, however, are not diseases; they are works of the flesh, and pastors must deal with them accordingly.

People are genetically predisposed to fornicate. But when a fornicator stands before God, he will not be able to call on human nature to excuse his sin. Likewise, an addict will not be able to stand before God and blame his addiction on a litany of excuses society has offered him. God will say, "Depart from me, ye worker of iniquity."

### What Can a Pastor Do?

Pastors must embrace the biblical model of dealing with strongholds and add a Christ-centered program to the ministry of the church. One program, Turning Point, not only helps those with strongholds but also trains laypersons to be group facilitators.

If a pastor cannot afford the Turning Point program and desires to implement his own ministry, the following model might be a good place to begin to help addicts. Several years ago, I crafted the following seven-step biblical model out of several 12-step programs. The church can effectively use this model. It will require the pastor or his designee to take a leading role.

**Step One: Confession.** The addict must admit that he is powerless over the stronghold. By doing this, the addict is taking ownership of his addiction. Second Corinthians 12:10 says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." Confession is the first step toward healing in the redemptive cycle. God cannot intervene unless we invoke 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

**Step Two: Recognize helplessness.** Pastors must help the addict understand and believe that



## RESOURCES for Ministering to Those Battling Addictions

■ Anderson, Neil T. 1996. *Freedom From Addiction: Breaking the Bondage of Addiction and Finding Freedom in Christ*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books.

■ May, Gerald G. 1988. *Addiction and Grace, Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. New York: HarperCollins.

■ Miller, Geri. 2003. *Incorporating Spirituality in Counseling and Psychotherapy: Theory and Technique*. Hoboken, N.J.: J. Wiley & Sons.

■ Miller, Geri. 2005. *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling*. 2d ed. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.

■ Pita, Dianne Doyle. 2004. *Addictions Counseling: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide for Counseling People With Addictions*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co.

■ SoberRecovery® & SoberRecovery Community Forums. "Alcoholism Addictions Mental Health Help." The Mulligan Group. <http://www.soberrecovery.com/> (accessed February 15, 2008).

■ Weaver, Andrew J., Charlene Hosenfeld, Harold George Koeing. 2007. *Counseling Persons With Addictions and Compulsions: A Handbook for Clergy and Other Helping Professions*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press.

LARRY E. HAZELBAKER, Ph.D., Lakeland, Florida



God alone is able to reroute neural pathways. God, however, requires our confession of helplessness. He is able to restore the addict to wholeness, but the addict must declare himself incapable. God delivered Grace in my office, but not before she recognized that deliverance required His intervention. Faith in Him and His ability is imperative. Deliverance may be instantaneous or a process.

**Step Three: Surrender and forgiveness.** We must help the addict understand that he must surrender to God. Breaking the bondage requires the release of one's own will. God alone can help an addict overcome completely. Ask Him to forgive and help you. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28; see also 1 John 1:9).

**Step Four: Be truthful.** An addict will never get what he needs until he does what he should. If we confess sin, God will forgive it. Ask the Holy Spirit to take an inventory of your wrong behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, and then begin to conform to what God has to say about these things. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Wayne W. Dyer has written a series entitled, *Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life*. This is a biblical principle, but addicts must know what to change.

**Step Five: Ask God for His help.** "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives" (James 4:2,3). God's will is for people to live in good health — physically, mentally, and spiritually. We do not ask amiss when we ask God for His help in overcoming sin. Remember, Christians believe that substance abuse and addiction is sin, not a disease. An addict needs to ask Him daily, by the minute, for help in overcoming these strongholds.

**Step Six: Read God's Word and pray without ceasing.** If we believe what God's Word says, why do we not embrace it like it was our life support? "For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). We must believe that the Word reveals the power of God, reveals what we need to know and pray for, and reveals how to live our lives accordingly so we can cast down strongholds.

**Step Seven: Testify.** Be grateful and carry the gospel to others. "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). Testifying brings accountability. A testimony service gives overcomers opportunity to tell of the life-changing power of God and His Word. Solomon stated, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Proverbs 18:21). Speak life.

## Conclusion

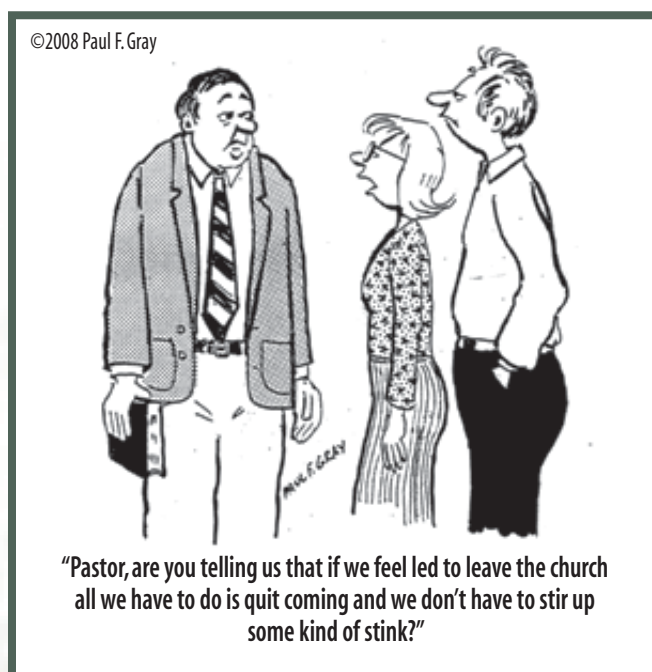
God wants us to be overcomers and victors — not managers — over sin and strongholds. Most pastors have encountered people who have life-controlling issues. Our role is to give them spiritual guidance and counsel on how God can use their experience to help others overcome. Let us not lay aside the Word of God to consult Freud or Dr. Phil. Rather, we must read His Word and allow God to minister and perform His work through us as we use our knowledge of what previously separated us from Him. He will use our history, often a tragic one, riddled with sin and strongholds, to bring others into the protection of His power and love. All for His glory and purpose. 🙏

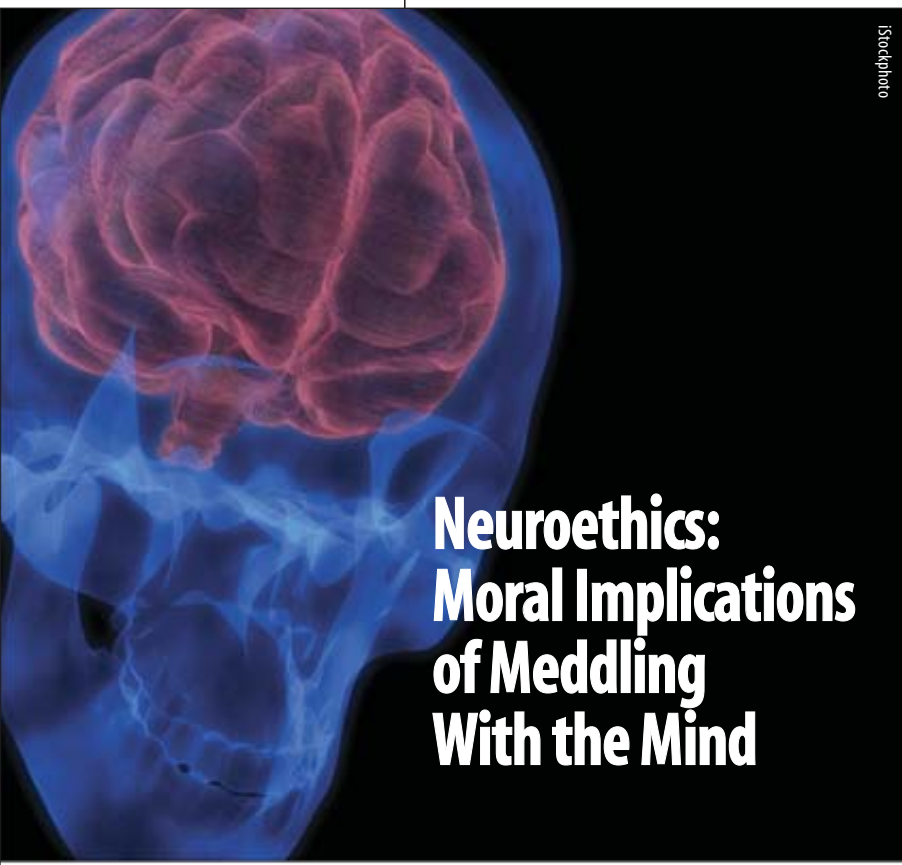
## NOTES

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Drug Abuse Warning Network (2007).
2. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2001).



*Christians believe that substance abuse and addiction is a sin, not a disease.*





## Neuroethics: Moral Implications of Meddling With the Mind

*Pastors today counsel increasing numbers of people who are taking medications to improve their thought processes or stabilize their mood.*

  
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**A**dvances in neuroscience will expand our knowledge of the brain in the 21st century in much the same way that our knowledge of genetics was expanded at the end of the 20th century. While these scientific discoveries are complex, the results of these discoveries will profoundly impact our medical care, our criminal justice system, and our society's receptiveness to spiritual truth.

Results of neuroscience research also influence ministry today as pastors counsel increasing numbers of people who are taking medications to improve their thought processes or stabilize their mood. Pastors and chaplains who are ministering to families facing difficult end-of-life decisions quickly learn how determining different levels of consciousness impacts patient care. Pastors and evangelists must also combat the materialistic view of life prevalent in our culture



**CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL, PH.D.**, an ordained minister and medical research scientist, preaches in churches and conferences nationwide. She is a research fellow at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital as well as the founder of Life Impact Ministries.

from the pulpit. To prepare you to address these issues in your ministry, I will examine four issues in neuroethics to discern the moral implications that arise from meddling with the mind.

### Medicating the Mind

Scientists have developed medications to increase attention span and improve memory for people suffering from attention deficit disorder or Alzheimer's disease. Similarly, scientists have designed medications to treat debilitating emotional problems by stabilizing a person's mood. One question that arises from the development of these medications is whether these pills can also improve thinking and elevate mood in healthy people.

On college campuses, healthy students are looking to answer this question when they attempt to increase their concentration and alertness when studying for final exams by using drugs developed for people who have attention deficit disorder. Students often obtain these *smart drugs* from friends who have a legitimate prescription. Is such a practice ethical and appropriate?

The first problem with using these drugs in healthy people is the danger of potential side effects. Researchers do not know how safe these drugs are for healthy people or the potential for damage to their nervous system.

The brain is a complex system. Prolonged use of these drugs could result in unanticipated problems. A medication that repairs the effects of a biochemical imbalance in a person with a certain psychological condition may cause an imbalance when used by a healthy person. For example, a drug that improves attention in people who have ADD can occasionally cause manic symptoms in people with no prior history of bipolar disorder.

The second problem is social. The use of performance enhancers creates an unfair advantage for those with access to the drugs. In addition, when some people use performance enhancers, others feel pressured to use them as well to stay competitive. The use of performance-enhancing drugs in sports has

demonstrated this. People in the workplace could feel pressured to enhance their mood or decrease their need for sleep to remain competitive with coworkers.

Finally, technology, such as the use of drugs to improve study habits, ultimately short-circuits the development of skills and character that is a vital part of the educational process. Mood enhancement raises concerns about maintaining personal authenticity. Do we become someone other than our true self when we artificially regulate our moods?

Another question that arises from the development of medicines for the mind is whether these pills supplement or supplant personal growth. A related question — especially relevant for ministers to consider — is whether, in certain cases, doctors are prescribing medications in an attempt to fill a spiritual void in a person's life. While medications for the mind may be lifesaving in some situations, one wonders if, in other cases, taking psychoactive drugs to help people overcome the emotional hurdles in their lives is simply an expedient choice — for both patient and caregiver — but not necessarily the best choice for long-term resolution of challenging life issues. In any case, the use of psychoactive drugs to treat the biological aspects of a person's behavior does not negate their need for pastoral care. Pastors have an obligation to meet the spiritual needs of a person who is experiencing the stress of coping with mental illness.

One practical consideration, given the increasing numbers of people who are taking medications for their minds, is to consider the effects of these medications in ministry settings. For example, a person whose behavior suddenly changes may have stopped taking prescribed medications. When a person with bipolar disorder experiences a period of elevated mood, he may exhibit erratic behavior, sleep problems, rapid speech, and a sense of being *chosen* for a *special mission*. A pastor counseling a person with a recent unexplained change in behavior needs to consider gently asking the person whether he is taking any medications now or has in the past.

When discussing medication in counseling sessions, a pastor must avoid assuming the place of a doctor or undermining a doctor's advice. For some behavioral conditions,

alternatives to taking medications exist. While a pastor can help a person work through his feelings about medications, any decision to stop taking medication is one a counselee must make in conjunction with his doctor. A person should not suddenly stop taking most psychoactive medications; instead, he must gradually decrease doses to avoid unwanted side effects.

Pastors can work to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. This will help make it possible for people struggling with mental health issues to receive the ministry they need. Mental illnesses, such as clinical depression,

*A pastor must avoid assuming the place of a doctor or undermining a doctor's advice.*



have a genuine biological component. A pastor should not view this condition as a sign of spiritual failure. Pastors can incorporate illustrations reflecting emotional struggles in sermons, promote compassion toward those suffering from these struggles, and send the message that seeking help for mental and emotional problems is not only appropriate, but also commendable.

### **Viewing the Mind Materialistically**

Research in neuroscience will result in more than just new treatments for psychiatric problems. Neuroscience discoveries will shape how society views the spiritual aspect of humanity. As neuroscience research begins to offer biological explanations for personality traits, human behavior, emotions, perception



*Mental illnesses, such as clinical depression, have a genuine biological component. A pastor should not view this condition as a sign of spiritual failure.*

of reality, decision-making ability, and even sense of spirituality, people will question the existence of an immortal soul. As a result, pastors will need to help people look beyond a materialistic view of the mind to recognize the reality of their spiritual needs.

Does the existence of a biological basis for many aspects of human behavior mean scientists have disproven the concept of a human soul? To answer this question, consider whether the existence of a soul is an appropriate topic for science to address.

Science operates by reducing complex problems into hypotheses that scientists can either verify or falsify through experimentation. Scientists then conduct experiments to analyze parts of a system with the hope that they will better understand the whole system. However, complete understanding of the whole from understanding individual parts is rarely possible, because the whole is usually more than just the sum of its parts.

Consider the classic calculation of lines of communication within a small-group ministry setting. In a small group with five members, if every member is able to communicate with every other member, there will be 10 possible lines of communication between group members. If you double the number of group

members to 10, however, the number of lines of communication increases to 45. Doubling the group size more than quadruples the lines of communication.

In scientific studies, the same principle is at work. Possible combinations of individual parts explode exponentially as systems increase in complexity.

Living systems are highly complex. The brain, with its estimated 100 billion neurons, is an example of such biological complexity. Consider that the brain of a 3-year-old child is estimated to have about 1 quadrillion synaptic connections (lines of communication between neurons). Neuroscience may be poised to help us better understand brain function, but the question of the existence of an eternal soul is outside the scope of scientific inquiry.

Humans are much more than just the sum of their biological parts. Even a thorough understanding of how individual parts function does not rule out the existence of a soul. This involves a level of complexity beyond the workings of the physical brain.

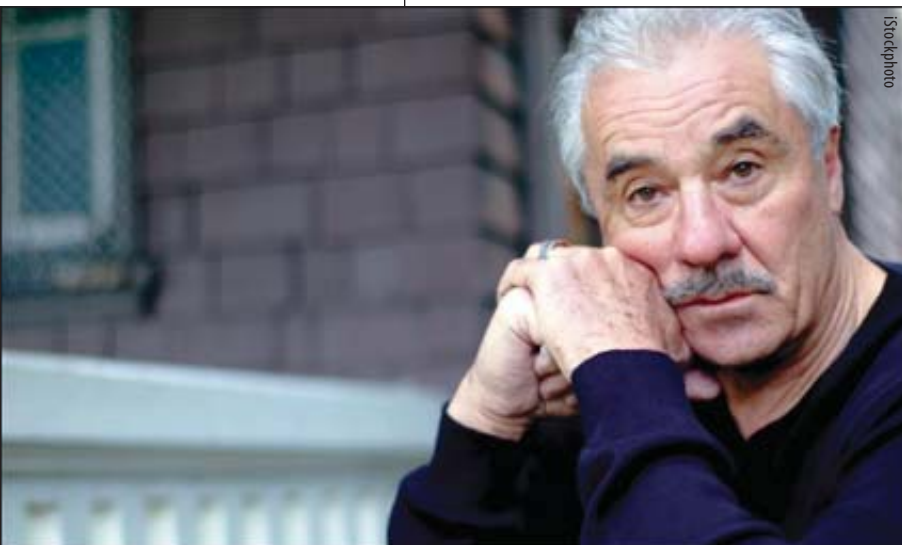
### Placing Blame on the Brain

Along with the existence of a soul, neuroscience findings suggesting that physical causes determine behavior challenge the ideas of free will and moral agency. We base our legal systems on the premise that a person is responsible for his choices and actions, not merely a victim of a chain of neurological events outside his control. Nevertheless, evidence that an offender has sustained damage to brain structures involved in impulse control may influence a judge's decision, especially when determining the penalty for the crime committed. The extent of an offender's punishment often depends on the extent of his responsibility for his own actions.

Cognitive neuroscience has identified brain systems that are involved in several psychological abilities required for positive social behavior. One example is the importance of the prefrontal cortex in the ability to weigh uncertain risks and make wise choices. Impairment in decisionmaking and willingness to risk negative consequences might predispose a person to criminal behavior.

Not all brain damage is a result of obvious brain injury. For example, researchers have linked the use of many illegal drugs to gradual impairment of prefrontal function. Childhood abuse and neglect can also affect the development of brain areas and integration between cerebral hemispheres. Thus, determining the extent to which brain impairment has affected a person's behavior, thereby reducing his culpability, is difficult.

While understanding the physiological nature of a person's behavior can increase our compassion for people who have made poor choices, we must exercise caution in placing blame entirely on the brain. A predisposition



for a behavior does not mean that a person has lost all ability to choose between good and evil. We must be careful that people do not feel powerless to make positive behavioral choices. A key component of the gospel is that each person has the power to make a decision, choosing eternal life through Christ and turning from sin.

### Evaluating Levels of Consciousness

Another area of neuroscience research that has ethical implications is the development of new technologies to help doctors determine whether a patient who cannot communicate is aware of his surroundings. Brain-damaged patients who are aware of their surroundings require different levels of care from patients who are in a vegetative state. Thus, determining the level of consciousness of a brain-damaged patient is an ethically important medical question. Understanding whether a patient can hear and understand the bedside conversations of his family and pastor during hospital visitation has ministry implications as well.

As severely brain-damaged patients emerge from a coma, they may enter varying levels of consciousness. One such level is a persistent vegetative state, characterized by the absence of awareness of the environment. Another level is the minimally conscious state in which doctors can observe certain behavioral evidence of consciousness, such as the ability to follow simple commands or to indicate a yes/no response through sounds or gestures. The locked-in syndrome is a third possible level. Patients who have locked-in syndrome are alert and aware of their environment but unable to move or communicate beyond blinking or moving their eyes vertically because of complete paralysis of nearly all voluntary muscles in the body.

Interpreting a patient's behavior alone provides an imperfect measure of a patient's mental state, since other neurological damage may complicate the interpretation. Doctors are now using functional brain imaging as an additional means of evaluating levels of consciousness. Some studies using *functional magnetic resonance imaging* have uncovered a surprising level of thinking ability in patients whose behavior is consistent with persistent vegetative state or minimally conscious state. For example, researchers asked a woman in a vegetative state to imagine playing tennis. Using fMRI, they detected activity in the area of her brain that activates when a person thinks about normal subjects,

such as playing tennis. Her ability to activate these regions of her brain and to cooperate with researchers by imagining particular tasks when asked to do so demonstrated a conscious awareness of herself and her environment.

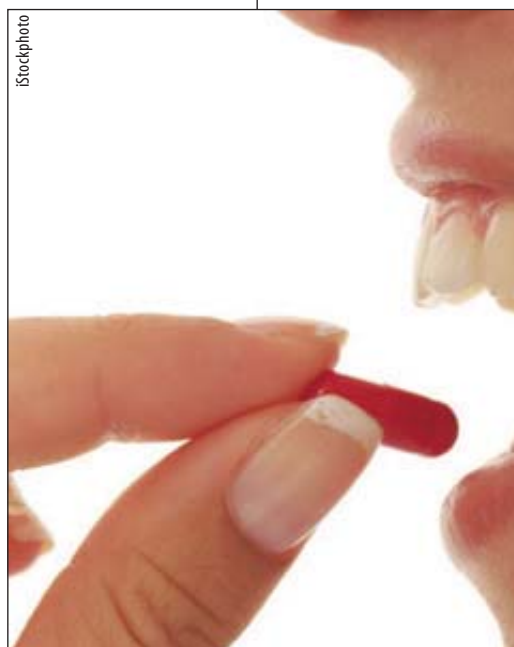
The implication of this research for pastoral care is the realization that we still have much to learn regarding levels of consciousness in brain-damaged patients. Pastors would do well to treat all patients as if they were aware of their surroundings. When at the patient's bed-

side, speak to him and pray with him as if he can understand you. Do not make comments to the family in the presence of the patient that would be upsetting to the patient if he could hear your words. No harm comes from erring on the side of caution and assuming that the patient has a higher level of consciousness than he may possess. The patient, however, could experience great distress should he hear a conversation

that assumes he is unaware of his surroundings when, in fact, he can understand every word.

### Providing a Biblical Perspective

What do these developments in neuroscience mean for ministers? A pastor can provide a biblical perspective to people encountering this technology in their lives. Medications and technologies that treat psychological and emotional difficulties do not negate the need for pastoral counseling to address the patient's spiritual needs. In the face of a materialistic deterministic worldview, a pastor can uphold the concept of personal responsibility, value science while reminding parishioners of its limitations, and promote discernment and the importance of informed consent for those facing difficult medical decisions. Finally, ministers must endeavor to connect people with the One who can transform them by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2) in ways beyond the reach of even the most ambitious neuroscience research. ☉



*Medications and technologies that treat psychological and emotional difficulties do not negate the need for pastoral counseling.*



## I Disagree With My Husband

to minimize our potential losses by trying to correct our husbands.

For example, if I can stop my husband from relating improperly with key leaders, then it could minimize tension, giving us more security and longevity at the church. If I can critique his sermons, then he would preach better and perhaps more visitors would stay and join the church.

On one level, it makes sense for a pastor's wife to offer input. After all, they are in the ministry together, and she is only trying to be helpful. However, she must take great care because people must earn the right to speak into someone's life. When a person gives corrective input along with liberal praise and affirmation, it is often more easily received. When advice is infrequent, it carries more weight.

The problem comes when suggestions are unsolicited and frequent. Timing is important. Remember the last time someone gave you advice when you were not asking for it. Add to that your

frequent attempts to correct and advise. It can feel intrusive and demeaning.

If your husband becomes defensive, it means he is feeling demeaned or misunderstood. Since this is not your intention, you may need to reconsider your timing and approach. Ask permission to give input. "I have an idea about Sunday's sermon. Would you like to hear it?" If the answer is no, restrain yourself.

You believe the reason your church is failing to grow is your husband's approach — he is not performing up to the standard you believe is necessary. His resistance and defensiveness indicate that he knows this. He may feel that he is failing in your eyes. This is difficult for him. Most men want their wives to admire and respect them. If your husband is confident that you respect him as a person and as a pastor, he will be more likely to entertain your infrequent suggestions.

*While it makes sense for a pastor's wife to offer input, frequent attempts to correct and advise can feel intrusive and demeaning.*

**Q:** What should I do when I disagree with the way my husband handles things at church? We have always felt called to ministry together, but lately I am becoming increasingly more frustrated with my husband's approach to people and ministry. I think this is the reason our church is failing to grow. When I try to give my input, he becomes resistant and defensive and we usually have an argument. I understand that my husband is the pastor of our church, but his decisions affect my future.

**A:** Your question brings attention to a ministry wife's reality. While we may understand that God calls us to encourage our husbands and support them in ministry, we also realize that their success or failure affects us. Pastoral ministry as a vocation impacts our life — location, income, well-being, and social network. We are tempted

  
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**GABRIELE RIENAS**, a pastor's wife for 27 years and a professional counselor, lives in Beaverton, Oregon. She speaks at retreats, conferences, and events worldwide. Contact her at 503-705-9230.



Challenge your own perceptions about the right approach to ministry. Often, there are areas of church leadership of which only the pastor is aware. Second-guessing your husband without knowing all the information can be naive and premature. Give your husband the benefit of the doubt. Realize that your opinion is only one way of looking at the situation.

As difficult as it may be, you may need to change your ideas of what ministry success looks like. The reasons for a lack of church growth are vast and complex. Be careful about second-guessing your husband.

Approach your concerns using dialogue, not confrontation or correction. "I noticed that you seemed upset about the discussion in the leaders' meeting. Would you like to talk about it?" Seek to understand. If your husband still seems defensive, consider the possibility that he may no longer see you as his ally. Seek to change this perception by being patient and changing your approach.

On rare occasions, intervention may be needed. If there is a moral issue or out-of-control behavior, seek advice and assistance from wise leadership or counselors. Do not keep these kinds of issues to yourself, but receive help from others.

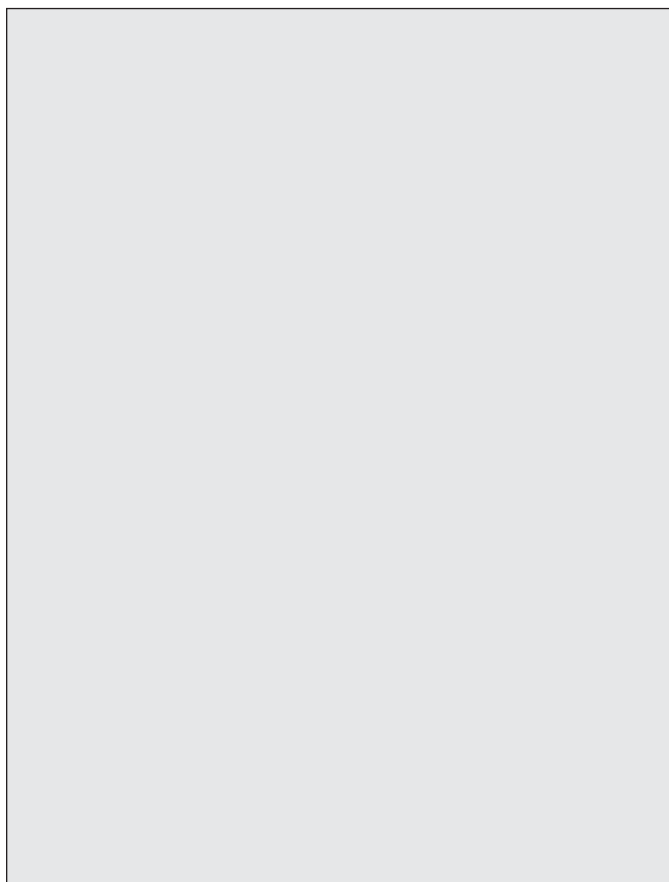
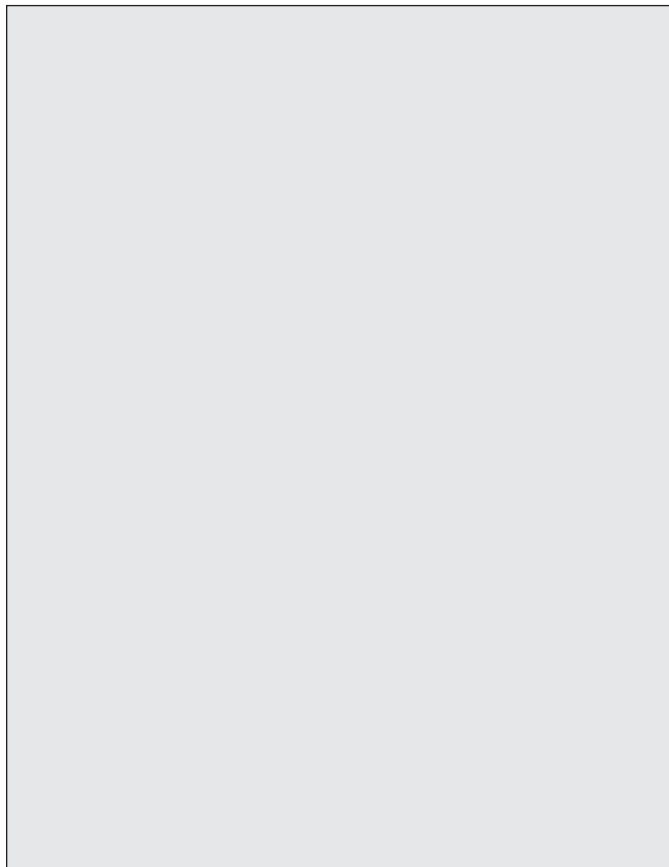
Pastors' wives have the unique opportunity to deal with control issues in their own lives. I try to keep the following questions fresh in my mind:

- Do I believe that God has called my husband to pastor this church for this season?
- Knowing God loves His church, do I believe that God equips His servants (my husband) for the task, addressing his shortcomings in His own time?
- Can I trust God, or do I need to intervene with my own agenda?

Let your concerns direct you toward your source of security and help — your relationship with Jesus. Find freedom in relinquishing control of your life and future into the hand of God. His intentions for you are for good and not harm. In that place of surrender, you can become more aware of the right manner and time to plant helpful seeds into your husband's life and ministry. ☺

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If you have questions you would like Gabriele to answer, e-mail them to: [enrichmentjournal@ag.org](mailto:enrichmentjournal@ag.org). You can also mail your questions to: Q&A for Pastors' Wives, *Enrichment* journal, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802-1894.



## Why Our Preaching Doesn't Matter to the Church

*Until we have fresh affection for the Word and prayer ourselves, we cannot make disciples.*

While many Pentecostal preachers are experts in leading people to the altar, much of our preaching on the life between conversion and heaven has left the Bride in the cold.

In spite of the zeal, mannerisms, quirkiness, and passion that often characterize Pentecostal preaching, I am a fan of Pentecostal preaching. To be sure, the expectation of fire in our preaching produces some flamboyant excesses, and at times emphasizes style, swagger, and bravado over substance. Even so, anointed Pentecostal preaching — because it is sensory in its appeal — continues to be relevant and effective, despite the potential dangers and pitfalls.

Distinctively Pentecostal preaching stirs the mind, heart, and emotions. It allows for interaction and feedback between the proclamation of the Word and the people of God. At its core, Pentecostal preaching is experiential in nature. It invites and initiates experience for all participants — from the preacher to the congregant.

The zeal and power of Pentecostal preaching brings animation to the ancient Scriptures, giving expression with life and vigor to God's holy words. For Pentecostals, this often starts with the reading of the biblical text, and generally concludes with an altar invitation — an opportunity for the hearers to participate in the divine life that exudes from the pulpit.

Because we value this experiential nature of preaching, many Pentecostal teachers and preachers are experts at leading people into moments of divine encounter around the altar, including salvation and Spirit baptism. Without such opportunities, preaching becomes a merely human exercise devoid of demonstration of the Spirit and power. Yet,

while Pentecostals are appropriately zealous in leading people into these experiences, we are failing to equip listeners with the tools necessary for a life between these moments of corporate divine encounter.

Pentecostal preaching must be evangelistic — it must call people to Christ. This is the function of the Spirit — to empower us for soul winning. But there is room for Pentecostals to reevaluate and revision the art of preaching in such a way that there is fresh affection for the growth, stimulation, and spiritual formation of the church.

Through a lifetime of experience in Pentecostal churches I have observed that the majority of preaching in our pulpits revolves around three experiences: salvation, rededication for backsliders, and Spirit empowerment. While I do not question the value or validity of these experiences, can a believer grow spiritually on a steady diet of this kind of preaching? If believers are not taught foundational truths about discipleship — how to follow basic spiritual disciplines for themselves such as prayer, meditation on Scripture, solitude, and fasting — the only alternative is for them to become codependent on these periodic altar experiences to *live right*.

How many sitting on our pews "ought to be teachers" and no longer struggling to grasp the "elementary truth of God's word" (Hebrews 5:12), but are still immature in their understanding of what it is to be a disciple? I am convinced this has less to do with their desire to follow after the disciplines of Christ than it does with our failure to communicate clearly the call to discipleship. The gospel that requires active participation in our growth in Christlikeness, the gospel that requires a commitment to crucify the flesh, abide in Christ, and allow His words to abide in us — is not the gospel they have signed on for. Pastors will beg, plead, and prod until they coerce people into an altar experience of conversion, but in the process



**JONATHAN MARTIN** is pastor of Renovatus, Charlotte, North Carolina.



neglect the Great Commission mandate which instructs us to make disciples, not converts.

## The Call To Disciple Making Through Preaching

We are not making disciples if our preaching does not cause people to become dependent on the Word itself more than our delivery of it. Preaching needs to inspire, convict, and motivate people to encounter God through spiritual discipline after the worship service is over. Our ministry as pastors is to make disciples — apprentices of Jesus — who know how to have intimacy with Him through prayer and meditation on Scripture. We feed the sheep so they may in turn feed themselves and are not codependent on us.

How can people sit under inspiring Pentecostal sermons without growing in discipleship and spiritual discipline? It is not because pastors do not use Scripture or prayer. Even with our frequent machine-gun style delivery of Scripture are we prompting the people entrusted to our care to become people of the Word themselves? Do our people see in us a genuine love for the Word of God and the presence of the Father, or do they see a talented preacher who knows how to manipulate Scripture to get a response that satisfies the ego? It is one thing for us to lay claim on Scripture and *use it*, it is quite another thing for the Scripture to lay claim on us in such a way that the Word is accentuated more so than the messenger. We know how to *make* things happen, but until we have fresh affection for the Word and prayer ourselves, we cannot make disciples.

While what we preach is important with regard to disciple making, the issue goes deeper than preaching. If our people follow us around in daily life as the disciples did with Jesus, will they become true disciples? Jesus' disciples were not just impacted by His powerful preaching and miraculous healing; they were impacted by His example. If people follow us around for a week, will they learn what it is to carve out times of prayer and Bible meditation, or will they just learn how to occupy time with spiritual busyness and activity? They will find in us pastors who know how to string some good thoughts and illustrations together and wrap them up in a blanket of charisma and energy for a Sunday or Wednesday service, to be sure. But will they learn what it is to be a disciple, to be a person captivated and obsessed by the Scriptures and the intimacies of prayer?

To make disciples, we must first revisit what it is to be a disciple ourselves. But eventually, this intentional shift to disciplinemaking must bleed into the nuts and bolts of our preaching.

We must examine the content of our preaching. Taking an obscure text and interpreting it creatively with a unique delivery to impress the flock will not make disciples. To make disciples we must cause our people to be more enamored with the Word than with our intelligence, creativity, and charisma.

We tell our people time and again to be praying and studying their Bibles more often when what we ought to be doing is showing them how to study and pray more. Most Christians do not know where to begin in developing a prayer and devotional life. They need practical help from the pulpit. They need a preacher who will use the Psalms to teach them to pray with rawness and honesty — to pray from the heart. They need to learn how to use the Lord's Prayer as a model for their own prayer life. They need to be encouraged to approach the throne of grace with boldness rather than fear and a sense of unworthiness. They need someone to teach them how to pray with simplicity and authority.

They need a preacher who can teach them how to read and study the Bible. Too many Christians start in Genesis only to give up in Leviticus. Before tackling more difficult books like Leviticus and Revelation, walk them through the Gospels and teach them the basics of what it is to be a Christ follower. Teach them how to read the Scriptures prayerfully and slowly, allowing the Spirit to breathe creative life on them through the text.

## Conclusion

If you are not addressing these basic issues from the pulpit, chances are you are not making disciples. If it is your charisma and personality they depend on, you are setting them up for disappointment. They must see in you a life of personal commitment to spiritual discipline and growth in Christlikeness. They must hear practical ways they can participate in the abundant life of discipleship. And if you remain sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in the process, you will find your preaching to be not only practical but also Pentecostal in the truest sense. Indeed if you are to teach, train, and equip people for discipleship, you cannot do it without the passion, anointing, and power of the Spirit. 🌀



*We must cause our people to be more enamored with the Word than with our intelligence, creativity, and charisma.*





# Changes NEXT EXIT →

## Organizational Development and the Church Part Four: Change Leadership in the Church

In 2006, Edward E. Lawler III and Christopher G. Worley debuted a remarkable business book entitled *Built To Change: How To Achieve Sustainable Organizational Effectiveness*. The authors emphasize that the most successful companies will stay responsive to external changes and challenges through a fluid process of strategizing, updating their competencies and capabilities, and constantly adjusting structures, systems people, and rewards toward achieving top performance.

Businesses, churches, and parachurch ministries all benefit from the same intentional fluidity as the rapid rate of technological economic and social change is significantly — if not severely — impacting all three spheres. The thriving churches of the first part of the 21st century are being pastored by leaders who see change not as an occasional event but as a way of life, always eager to shape the wineskin to fit what the Spirit is pouring out here and now.

Leadership author and speaker Bob Buford notes that what is needed in church leadership these days can best be explained by a set of four archetypes developed by Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist.

"The first (archetype) is a warrior; a warrior is a doer," notes Buford. "Second is king; a king isn't a doer, but brings order to an organization. The third is a sage or wisdom figure; and the

fourth is a lover, someone who loves something outside of themselves — not just in a sexual sense, but has an appreciation of music, art, a sunset, etc."

He continues, "There are a lot of people who can't graduate from being warriors to kings, and not many people graduate from being kings to sages. Sage to lover is not a transition; it's something you are in different forms your whole life. The lover changes with the other seasons."

"But a lot of pastors aren't drawn to the responsibility of changing from doer to leader. It's not in their nature."

### Leading From the Center

James O'Toole, author of the book, *Leading Change*, writes that all leadership is about leading change. O'Toole uses as his model the French expressionist painting of Christ's entry into Brussels. The painting depicts a massive crowd, with Jesus riding on a donkey.

"He's right in the middle, sitting on the donkey, a little higher than the crowd but in the midst of the crowd," reflects Al Winseman, The Gallup Organization's global practice leader for faith communities, on the painting. "He's leading from the center of the organization. I think that's a very powerful image."

The paradox of the church, Winseman

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*Thriving churches are being pastored by leaders who see change not as an occasional event but as a way of life.*



**JOHN MICHAEL DE MARCO** is an ordained United Methodist pastor, leadership consultant and writer, based in Nashville, Tennessee. To learn more, please visit [www.johnmdemarco.com](http://www.johnmdemarco.com).

continues, is its nature as an institution that people look to as the last bastion of stability in a sea of change. Yet, the mandate of the church from Jesus is to be the agent of change in the world. "You've got this tension, the expectation many people have that at least in the storms of the change of life the church is the last refuge because it will never change. Pastors and church leaders really need to look at that creative tension. God never changes, but yet is continually changing. That's a whole theological excursion in itself."

Pastors, Winseman adds, need to help people navigate change. "One of the demands of leadership is making sense of the world around them, their own experience, and the experience of the organization. It's kind of being an interpreter of reality for people. Leaders very much need to be in tune in what's going on with culture. In a lot of ways they need to be cultural anthropologists."

Adds speaker and consultant Nancy Ortberg, "As much as we all recognize the need for change, either the pace is so relentless that we can't keep up or we don't see the need for change. Most people just don't gravitate toward change. I think one of the biggest roadblocks is collaborating with people in the church community to get people to share the vision, not just have the vision thrust upon them."

Ortberg points to another best-selling business book, Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, as demonstrating that people will give buy-in to change if they have a voice in the process. "People are reasonable enough where they don't always have to get their way," she adds. "Change takes time. Most of us are very impatient."

Another hurdle to leading change is a lack of clarity from leaders concerning what the change specifically is, Ortberg cautions.

"Some leaders are so vague that it's difficult for people to get on board; where is it that you want to take us?" Another roadblock is the mistrust we have to own up to. Many leaders have used their leadership in inappropriate ways. There's not a good way to microwave trust. It takes time, it's fragile."

## Change Leaders in the Trenches

Dan Betzer, senior pastor of First Assembly of God in Fort Myers, Florida, reflects that change is a constant. "It is said that the average successful business has major changes every 3 years or fewer. The average church changes every 50 years. The Assemblies of God, in general, is in dire need of major transition governmentally, philosophically, and methodologically."

Betzer notes that his own congregation has changed the way it does services, continually modifying time schedules to accommodate the surrounding society in Fort Myers. "We try to upgrade the music all the time. That doesn't mean we've abdicated the old, but we've integrated the new and made the old sound like it was just written. We don't emulate anybody because that's pretty hard to do. Great churches are led by people who are geniuses. If you try to wear their armor, it's like David with Saul's armor."

"Most of these changes help us win more people to Christ and help them grow," Betzer adds. "Jesus was ultra conservative theologically, but in His application to the people He was extremely liberal. I've tried to live by that. I think Jesus is the role model for a pastor."

B.G. Nevitt of Glad Tidings Assembly of God in Decatur, Illinois, has "regular sit-downs" with people in his congregation "to find out what's the heartbeat, what's going on in our community, what people are experiencing, and what are their hurts. If we don't have the pulse of our community, we'll never reach it."

When Nevitt entered the ministry, people warned him that the elderly would be resistant to change. "Absolutely false. They are the greatest



*"One of the biggest roadblocks is collaborating with people in the church community to get people to share the vision, not just have the vision thrust upon them."*

— Nancy Ortberg

cheerleaders of change, if you bring them along the journey with you. If you don't, sure they're going to resist it because they don't understand what you're doing."

One example of avoiding assumptions about change concerns a chandelier that hung in his sanctuary, Nevitt notes. "It was made by people in the church, and looked like a gigantic, old wagon wheel. Half the church loved it, and the others hated it and were afraid to sit under it. Previous pastors tried to take it out, and it nearly split the church. The deacons said, 'You can do anything else you want, just leave the light alone.'

"There was one family left whose name was on the plaque," Nevitt continues. "I told them the church needed to diversify light, instead of having one fixture in the center. ... I said, 'I won't do anything without your blessing, but it's hard for the older people to see their Bibles. We need more light.'

"The guy looked at me and said, 'I've got the hoist; do you want me to bring it in tomorrow and help bring it down?'

"The wife looked at me and said, 'The last pastor tried to take it down, and we gave him fits. But you asked us, and he didn't.'"

"You've got to take people along."

"People now are accustomed to the instant," observes Rod Loy, senior pastor of North Little Rock First Assembly of God. "Instant response to their questions. I get mad if I e-mail a customer service rep and don't have a response within 3 hours. We want to leverage change in our once-a-week world, an every-Sunday approach to leveraging change. There's nothing else in their world that takes 7 days to get interaction and feedback. I publish my e-mail address in the bulletin. I tell people you'll always hear back from me within 24 hours, unless I'm off the grid, in which case it will take me 48."

Loy continues, "Because people are now living in this interactive world, they want to interact and relate to the changes as they are occurring. We are not wired that way in the church. I'm not sure people are always resisting change, as we think. It's their attempt to be part of an ongoing dialogue."

There is a strong tendency in today's information-overload culture, Loy observes, for leaders to grab hold of the latest idea or principle and "come back and stuff that down through the organization: 'We're going to do this.' It's like they're pushing this change down into a bottle, and that change is still being shoved down to

one or two levels when they go and get another idea and another change. They keep piling it on top, without waiting for things to come back up," he claims. "My rule is you get to stuff one thing at a time, and you don't get to stuff the next thing until that one thing comes back at you from the bottom levels of the congregation."

He notes, "We're on one core value a year. I'm teaching *Every Soul Matters to God*. I'm just stuffing that, stuffing that. I knew we understood that one when I watched some junior highers in a drama for fine arts, and their theme was *Every Soul Matters to God*. When the shirts for the singles ministry said ESMTG on the shoulder, we got it. It's through the organization; it's coming back to me, and now I can do the next one."

In a culture that is convinced that everything must happen now, Loy warns, the frequent result "is that nothing completely happens."


### Six Concerns To Consider

Leadership author and speaker Ken Blanchard, summarizing his *Concerns* model for leading change, says one of the biggest problems he's seen with pastors and other leaders is "they think about the change they want to make, and the big thing they're pitching is: What are the benefits of the change? People don't want to hear that. Their first concern is information: Tell me more about it. The second thing people are concerned about is personal: How is this going to affect me? If we raise money for this, will it take away from our ongoing budget?

"What you resist, persists," Blanchard warns. "If you don't give people an opportunity to express their concerns, they bring them out later. In the process of sharing concerns, the concerns often go away."

The third concern for a change initiative is ordering the key steps of implementation. The fourth is the impact or the benefits of the change. "One of the biggest things I've been able to help people do is realize that you have to address the first three areas before you talk about the benefits," Blanchard points out.

The fifth concern of change is collaboration, Blanchard says. Who else should be involved in the change? The final concern is refining the changes the church has implemented.

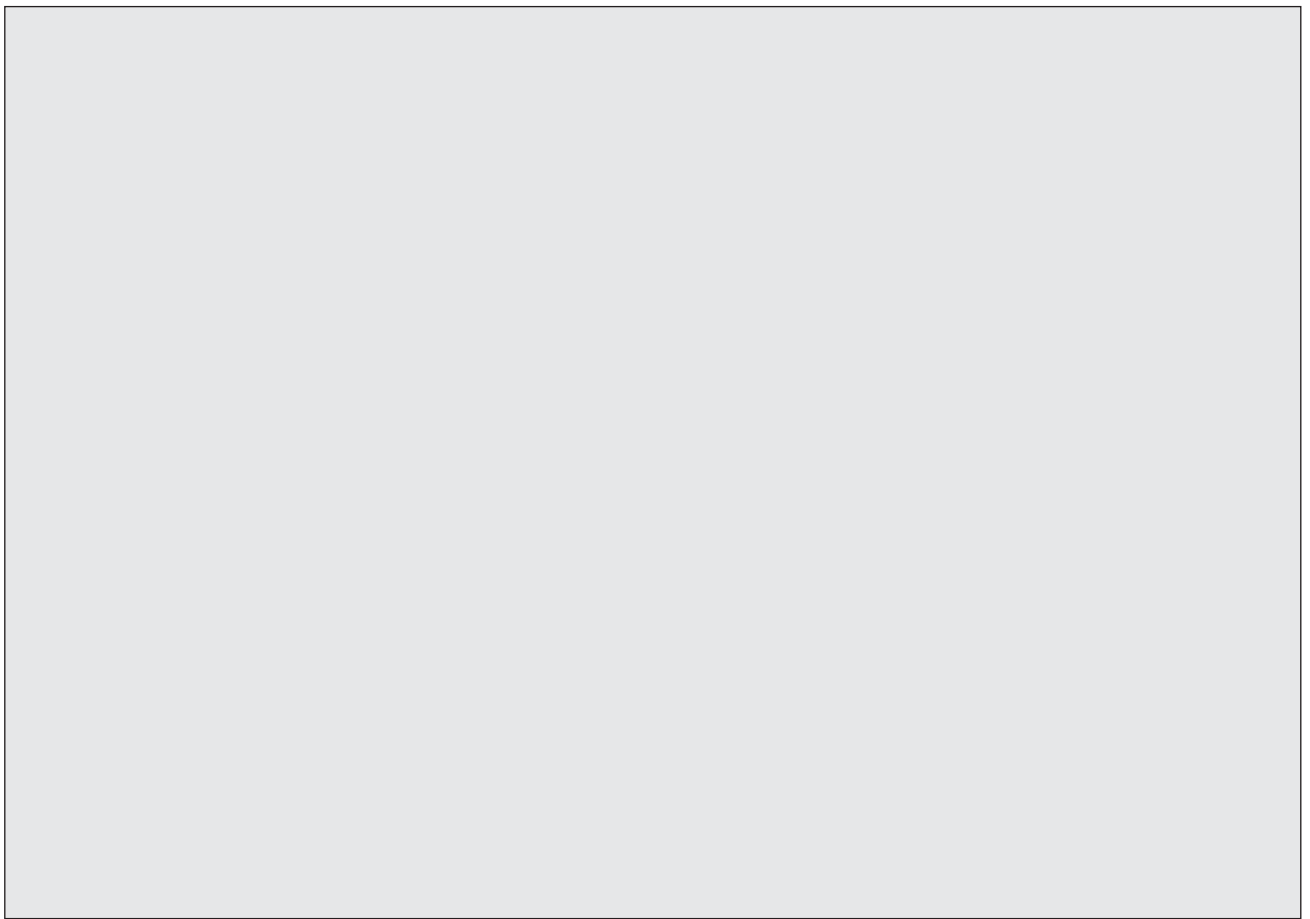
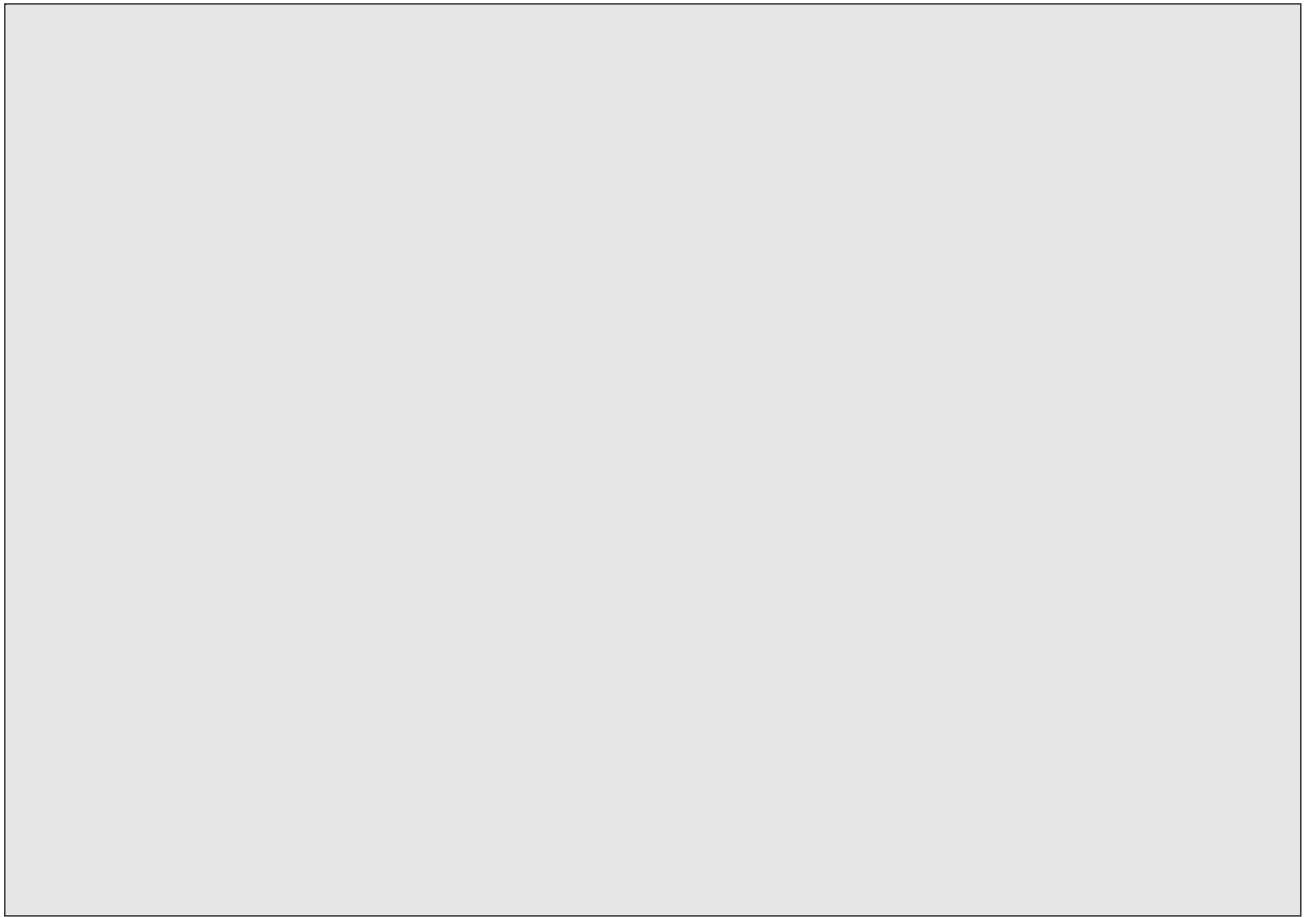
Concludes Blanchard, "The greatest leadership model for all time is Jesus of Nazareth. We ought to stop looking outside the church for their leadership training. Take 12 enthusiastic believers and make them self-reliant achievers." 



*"If we don't have the pulse of our community, we'll never reach it."*

— B.G. Nevitt







IPHCA Archives & Research Center

## George Floyd Taylor (1881–1934) “Understanding the Spirit’s Work and Witness”<sup>1</sup>

*Taylor became one of the most ardent champions of Pentecostalism.*

**G**eorge Floyd Taylor was born in Magnolia, North Carolina, in 1881. He had a rough start. At first, it seemed he had no chance of survival, but after his caretaker rubbed him with warm water for an hour, he began to show signs of life. In many ways, his miraculous first moments set the tone for his life. Even though Taylor struggled with a variety of congenital disabilities, he never let them get the

best of him. He was a fighter, and he succeeded against odds that would have discouraged others.

As he approached adulthood, Taylor decided his best career option was to become a respectable Methodist minister. To prepare himself, he attended the University of North Carolina in 1901. During his first year in college, however, Taylor became acquainted with Albert Blackmon Crumpler and his recently founded Holiness Church. Methodist decorum could not compete with Crumpler’s charisma, and Taylor, with obvious institutional talents, was soon drawn into the leadership core of the new denomination. Busy with church work, Taylor left school and did not return to UNC until 1928 to finish his degree.

When Taylor joined the Holiness Church, it was not yet Pentecostal. In fact, Pentecostalism was still an unknown entity in North Carolina. Once the Azusa Street revival was under way, however, news spread quickly through the holiness networks of the South. Taylor felt compelled to examine the new Movement. He was soon a confirmed believer, receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit in January 1907. Taylor never did anything halfway. Once he was convinced of the truth of Pentecostalism, he became one of its most ardent champions. Soon he was denouncing anyone in the Holiness Church who refused to accept the new Pentecostal message. Ultimately the denomination split, with Taylor



**DOUGLAS JACOBSEN** is distinguished professor of Church History and Theology at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Indiana University Press, 2003), which won the 2004 Pneuma Award from the Society for Pentecostal Studies, and of *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices From the First Generation* (Indiana University Press, 2006) from which this series of articles is adapted. He is also the coauthor of an introduction to theology entitled *Gracious Christianity: Living the Love We Profess* (Baker, 2006).

and a group of friends leaving to start their own new Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Taylor, a systematic theologian by nature, felt compelled to articulate his beliefs with clarity and to explain how those beliefs fit together in a complete system of Christian thought. Every systematic theologian has one core doctrinal point of reference. For Taylor, it was the work and witness of the Holy Spirit. Based on his personal study of the Bible and his own pastoral experience, Taylor developed the idea that the inner work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life was usually accompanied by an externally observable witness of the Spirit's work. Speaking in tongues was, for example, the visible sign or witness that one had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Taylor believed that the other activities of the Spirit were also linked to one or another external indicator.

While giving special attention to these external indicators of the Spirit's work, Taylor cautioned against placing too much emphasis on the physical. In particular, he understood that there was a difference between simple emotionalism and a genuine manifestation of the Spirit. From his perspective, there was nothing wrong with emotions, as long as people properly understood them. But if they got out of control, emotions could do both people and the Movement significant harm. Like many Pentecostal theologians who would come after him, Taylor wanted to encourage freedom in the Spirit, but he also wanted to be discerning and disciplined in spiritual matters.

*The following selection from Taylor's first book, The Spirit and the Bride, published in 1907, explains his sevenfold understanding of the Spirit's work and the external manifestations he believed would normally accompany each of these works.<sup>1</sup>*

In Revelation 1:4, 3:1, and 4:5, we read of the seven Spirits of God, while in Ephesians 4:4 we are told that there is but one Spirit. Harmony exists between these Scriptures in the fact there is but one Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit, as sent forth for the illumination, comfort, and edification of all the subjects of God's redeeming grace, is represented to our finite minds by sevens. This does not infer that the Spirit is divided, but He is the one Spirit in whatever way He may operate in us.

Doctor Seiss says, "There is a sacred significance in numbers: not cabalistic, not fanciful; but proceeding from the very nature of things, well settled in the Scriptures, and universally

acknowledged in all the highest and deepest systems of human thought and religion."

Three represents the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Four represents humanity.

Seven is the union of three and four; hence, it represents salvation, or the Christ-life in His saints. It is connected with whatever touches the covenant between God and man. It also signifies dispensational fullness. It is complete in that which is temporal. Thus, we are not surprised to find that the Holy Spirit, in His offices, administrations, operations, and in whatever way He may deal with man, is presented to our minds in the number seven.

We have already seen that the Spirit uses seven symbols to present to our finite minds the different ways He operates in our hearts, and now we are to see that there are seven operations of the Spirit. May the Holy Spirit help us to a proper understanding of these mighty things.

**1. The Spirit Strives (Genesis 6:3).** It is the office of the Spirit to convict of sin, both actual and inbred. The Holy Ghost often strives with careless Christians to move them out into active service for God.

**2. The Spirit Regenerates (John 3:5–8).** To be born again or from above is to receive a new heart. This change in the heart and life is wrought by and through the power of the Holy Ghost.

**3. The Spirit Sanctifies (1 Peter 1:2).** Sanctification is the destruction of the old man, the taking away of the old heart, and the eradication of the carnal mind. Jesus — that He might sanctify the people with His own blood — suffered without the gate. The Holy Ghost applies the blood of Jesus to the heart, and the heart is sanctified. The blood is the means by which we are sanctified, while the Holy Ghost is the Agent.

**4. The Spirit Witnesses (1 John 5:6).** He witnesses to our justification (Romans 8:16), to our sanctification (Hebrews 10:15), to divine healing, to answer to prayer, etc.

**5. The Spirit Teaches (John 14:26).** The Spirit must teach the sinner how to be saved. Every saved soul realizes his need of divine guidance, of divine illumination, of that wisdom that is from above, and to every such soul there comes the blessed assurance that he will be so guided and led. The Spirit enables him to understand the Scriptures, to perceive spiritual things, to know God's will, and to receive divine wisdom. "For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"

*Taylor, a systematic theologian by nature, felt compelled to explain how his beliefs fit together in a complete system of Christian thought.*



(Romans 8:26). Into all the details of the ministry of the gospel, the Holy Spirit enters. It was by the direction of the Spirit that Philip was sent into the desert to preach to and baptize the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29-39). The Spirit suffered not Paul and Silas to go into Bithynia when they desired of themselves to do so (Acts 16:7). And it was the Spirit that sent Peter to preach to Cornelius (Acts 10:19 and 11:12). And so all through the ministry of the apostles, the Holy Spirit directed them.



**6. The Spirit Anoints (Psalm 23:5; Acts 4:31).**

The purpose of these anointings is to prepare us for service, or to enable us to undergo some particular trial. Many miss all the sweetness of a trial by failing to tarry before God until He anoints them for that trial.

**7. The Spirit Baptizes (Matthew 3:11).** This is the culmination of the offices of the Spirit; it is the grand climax. This is the seal of the Spirit of promise, by which seal we are designated as the Bride of the Lamb.

Thus, I have given the seven offices of the Holy Spirit with reference to man's salvation. There may be others, but it seems to me that they can

be enumerated under these seven.

"There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Corinthians 12:6,7).

It appears to me from the above Scripture that a manifestation follows each operation of the Spirit in our hearts. I also gather from other Scriptures that each operation of the Spirit includes two kinds or phases of manifestation. First, there are the invisible and internal influences or manifestation; and second, the visible and external manifestation, and since there is profit in the manifestation, it is given to every man in whom the Spirit operates.

1. We know that when the Spirit strives with a man, there is uneasiness in his soul, and a troubled look on his face (Daniel 5:6; Acts 24:25; Psalm 42:5).

2. Justification brings the invisible manifestation of peace (Romans 5:1), and the visible manifestation of a new life (Ephesians 2:1-5; Galatians 5:22,23; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

3. Sanctification brings the invisible manifestation of joy (Luke 24:50-52), and the visible manifestation of fruit unto holiness (Romans 6:22).

4. The witness of the Spirit brings an internal manifestation of confidence toward God (1 John 3:20-22), and an external manifestation of testimony to the world (Romans 10:10).

5. A person who is taught by the Spirit has an internal manifestation of an insight into the words of Jesus (John 14:26), and an external manifestation of wisdom, especially in regard to the Christ-life, and the hidden things of God (Genesis 41:37-40; Daniel 1:19,20; Acts 4:13; 18:24-26).

6. A person who receives an anointing of the Spirit has an internal manifestation of an insight into God's dealings with His children (Psalm 23:5,6), and an external manifestation of boldness and liberty (Acts 4:29-31).

7. The baptism of the Spirit brings an invisible manifestation of living water (John 7:37-39), and a visible or external manifestation of tongues (Acts 2:3,4).

I have not mentioned other manifestations of the Spirit, but as far as I have gone, I have tried to build upon the Word. It is possible that I have made some error in giving the manifestation following each of the first six operations; for in regard to these the Word is not so clear. I will therefore give my readers the liberty to rearrange these manifestations if they choose; but you must remember, "the manifestation of the Spirit

*Like many Pentecostal theologians who would come after him, Taylor wanted to encourage freedom in the Spirit, but he also wanted to be discerning and disciplined in spiritual matters.*

is given to every man" in whom He operates, and also your manifestation must be scriptural. But when we come to the manifestation following the baptism of the Spirit, we have a "thus saith the Lord." We may think for many years that we have the manifestation of the Spirit following any or all of the first six operations, and then find out that we have been mistaken; but not so in regard to the visible manifestation of the seventh.

Here let me say that there is quite a difference between "the manifestation of the Spirit" and emotions. A person may have emotions without "the manifestation," or he may have "the manifestation" without emotions. An emotion is caused by the spiritual overcoming the physical. But such is not the case with regard to speaking with tongues. Of course, a person may be emotional while speaking with tongues, but neither is the other, nor does either cause the other. Leaping, shouting, dancing, etc., are emotions, while speaking with tongues is "the manifestation."

### **Taylor's *Original Wisdom* for Today**

Taylor was both a systematic theologian and a careful observer of human behavior. How do his ideas and observations prompt your own thinking?

1. Taylor lists seven operations of the Spirit. Do you find his list helpful? How might you expand or reorganize his list?

2. Is it necessary or helpful to catalog the effects of the Spirit as Taylor does or should theologians and pastors be more fluid in their understandings of the many different ways the Spirit can be present in the world, in the church, and in people's lives?

3. How do you distinguish between mere emotions and what Taylor calls *the manifestation* of the Spirit? Is this an issue for members of your own congregation? 🌀

#### **NOTE**

1. Portions of this article are adapted from Douglas Jacobsen, *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006).



## A Thanksgiving Psalm

CROFT M. PENTZ, Union, New Jersey

TEXT: PSALM 100:1–5

### INTRODUCTION

Look at the thank-related words in the Bible. *Thanks* is mentioned 75 times; *thanksgiving*, 28; *thank*, 27; *thankful*, 3; *thanked*, 3; *thanksgivings*, 2; and, *thankfulness*, 1. There are 139 references of these words. Other thank-related words include *bless* and *praise*.

Jesus healed 10 lepers. Only one returned to thank Him (Luke 17:12–17). How often do we thank God for His many blessings?

Some things we need to be thankful for include:

- Parents. For their patience, prayers, hard work, and example.
- People. Schoolteachers, Sunday School teachers, doctors, and nurses.
- Peace. Peace of heart, soul, and mind.
- Pastors. Pastors who preach, teach, visit, and counsel.
- Prayer. The opportunity to pray, presenting all our needs.
- Partners. For husband and wife who stand together in serving God.
- Problems. Through problems we learn to trust and grow in God.

Saying thank you not only makes others feel good, but it also makes you feel good. Being thankful keeps old friends and makes new ones.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. Sound (Psalm 100:1).

- a. Joyful noise. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."
  - (1) Psalm 9:1 says, "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart." Not a complaining noise, but a joyful noise.
  - (2) Joy at Christ's birth. "And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10,11).
- b. Joyful people. "All ye lands." All people in all nations. Thank Him for all His benefits (Psalm 103:3). All who have breath need to be joyful and praise the Lord (Psalm 150:3).

#### 2. Service (Psalm 100:2)

"Serve the Lord with gladness."

- a. Glad because of salvation. He has brought us out of the horrible pit, placed our feet on the solid rock and established our goings, and put a new song in our hearts (Psalm 40:1–3). We have salvation by accepting God's Son (John 1:12; see 1 John 3:2).
- b. Glad because of the Savior. Our Savior has a name above all other names (Philippians 2:9). Calling on this name gives us salvation (Romans 10:13; see John 3:16).

#### 3. Singing (Psalm 100:2).

"Come before His presence with singing."

- a. Songs of Praise (Acts 16:25). Despite having been beaten and placed in stocks, Paul and Silas sang praises to God at midnight (Acts 16:25). Paul said to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts toward God (Ephesians 5:18,19).
- b. Songs of pleasure. James said, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). The Psalmist encourages us, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation" (Psalm 95:1).

#### 4. Supernatural (Psalm 100:3).

- a. Controller. "Know ye that the Lord he is God." He created the world (Genesis 1:1). He created all things (John 1:3). He is not only the creator, but He is also the controller (Colossians 3:16).
- b. Creature. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." God created man and woman in His own image (Genesis 1:27). God breathed into Adam, and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7). God then made a help meet for Adam (Genesis 2:18).

#### 5. Sheep (Psalm 100:3).

- a. Personal. "We are His people." By the new birth, we become part of the family of God (John 3:1–16).
- b. Protection. "And the sheep of His pasture." Note: "The Lord is my Shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). This good Shepherd gives abundant life (John 10:10). He gives eternal life (John 11:25,26).

#### 6. Sharing (Psalm 100:4).

- a. Praise. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." The Psalmist warns not to forget all His benefits (Psalm 103:2). Paul said in all things we need to give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- b. Personal. "Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name." In His name, we have salvation (Romans 10:13). In His name, we have healing (Mark 16:18). Only through Him do we have salvation (John 14:6).

#### 7. Steadfastness (Psalm 100:5).

Note three things that will always remain steadfast with the Lord:

- a. Goodness. "For the Lord is good." The Psalmist says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). The prophet said, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nahum 1:7).
- b. Mercy. "His mercy is everlasting." The prophet said, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22,23).
- c. Truth. "And his truth endureth to all generations." Note these words, "And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true" (2 Samuel 7:28). Paul said that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).



## CONCLUSION

A thankful person is a happy person. He is a healthful person. When we are thankful, it extends our blessings. Failure to be thankful may end them. Some count their blessings on their fingers and their problems on an adding machine.

Our prayers need to begin and end with thanksgiving. Too many prayers are filled with requests and little, if any, thanksgiving.

We need to continually thank God for His blessings. We often have many prayer requests, but we seldom remember to offer praise and thanksgiving when He answers.

Begin practicing thanksgiving today.

## NOTE

1. Scripture is KJV.

# ■ Taking It to the Next Level

NELSON BRENNER, Pocomoke City, Maryland

TEXT: HEBREWS 6:1

## INTRODUCTION

The principle of progressing to the next level is seen in many areas of our lives; for example, education and sports. The same principle applies to our spiritual lives. The Hebrew Christians were failing.

## MESSAGE

### 1. Program of progress.

- a. The process (Philippians 3:12–14).
- b. Paul was intent on progressing to the next level. He would not rest on his laurels. He had not yet attained. He was still striving.
- c. Moving toward the next level is called *sanctification*. Sanctification is the progressive work of grace that begins at salvation and continues throughout our lifetime. The Spirit carries out our day-to-day progress in sanctification.
- d. Natural growth is spontaneous, but spiritual growth requires effort and diligence (2 Peter 1:2–11; Hebrews 6:11, 12).

### 2. Procedure of performance.

- a. The leaving (Hebrews 6:1).
  - (1) *Leaving* means to not abandon, but to move beyond — letting go to embrace another. For example, little girls outgrow baby dolls.
  - (2) Moving to the next level requires letting go, having a willingness to change, leaving our comfort zone, and being dissatisfied with the status quo — which leads to repression, not progression; to stagnation, not acceleration.
  - (3) Paul was not content to remain stationary: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” (Philippians 3:13). We cannot live in the past and still advance. We cannot loiter, linger, or lag behind if we want to progress to the next level.

b. The going (Hebrews 6:1).

- (1) The writer of Hebrews was confident that he would progress with God’s help. God is always urging us on to the next level, and the next.
- (2) The only way to reach the next level is by moving, not by standing still.  
Illustration: Ten Lepers. They received their healing when they started moving and obeying. So, get moving; the next level awaits.
- (3) Moving requires:
  - (a) Motivation. We become motivated when we see a need for, an advantage in, and the benefit of doing something. Our motivation must be internal and provided by: 1) The promise of Scripture (Joshua 1:3); 2) The prompting of the Spirit (John 16:12, 13); and 3) The providence of God (Philippians 2:13).
  - (b) Resolution: “I press on” (Philippians 3:12). We need resolve because our dedication and determination will be tested. There are two things that test us:
    - (i) Stumbling Blocks.
      - Those who would hold us back: peers, family, and friends.
      - Things that hinder (Mark 4:18, 19).
      - Our adversary, the devil, does not want us to advance, to get more of God.
      - Self — self-complacency and apathy — is our biggest hindrance to reaching the next level.
      - For example, Elisha was tested, but he resolved to go on (2 Kings 2:1–14).
    - (ii) Stepping Stones.
      - God’s people: pastors, saints (Ephesians 4:11–16).
      - Means of grace: church, prayer (Acts 2:42).
      - Trials are blessings in disguise (Psalm 119:71).

### 3. Prospect of perfection.

The Prize (Philippians 3:14). The goal is maturity (Ephesians 4:13–15).

- a. God calls us to higher heights.  
For example: Moses (Exodus 34:2, 3). Climbing Mount Sinai in the morning was inconvenient, physically difficult, and time consuming, but worth it and life changing. It will cost you something to go to the next level; it is not a free ride.
- b. There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity. Paul’s testimony (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). You can walk, run, and go at your own pace. The important thing is keep going on and up. There are no limits (Ephesians 3:20).
- c. A pole-vaulter does not begin by setting the bar at the top. The bar is set low and gradually raised. Don’t you think it is time to raise the bar spiritually? The writer of Hebrews was expressing this idea to these early believers.

## CONCLUSION

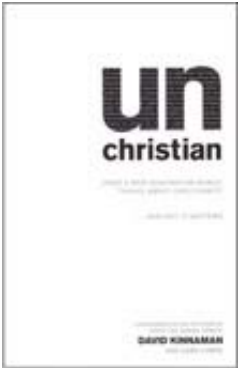
Are you progressing to where you should be? need to be? Or, like the Hebrews, are you living below your privileges — underachieving?

Chorus: “I am reaching for the highest goal, that I might receive the prize; pressing onward, pushing every hindrance aside out of my way, because I want to know You more.”

## Book Reviews

### Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity — And Why It Matters

DAVID KINNAMAN AND GABE LYONS (*Baker, 256 pp., hardcover*)



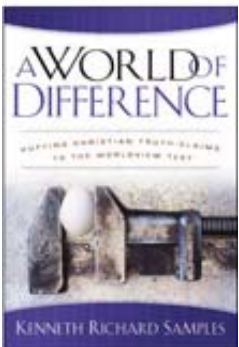
*Unchristian:  
What a New Generation  
Really Thinks About Christianity  
— And Why It Matters*

I found myself somewhat reluctant to read another book full of depressing statistics about the failings of the American church. Avoidance and denial can be tempting when you feel pastorally overwhelmed and out-voiced by the culture. *Unchristian* is a massive dose of painful reality as the Barna Group makes the case that the American church has an image problem of crisis proportions, especially among 16 to 29 years old.

Kinnaman and Lyons have structured *Unchristian* around six extraordinarily negative perceptions of the evangelical world. Christians are too: (1) hypocritical; (2) focused on getting converts; (3) antihomosexual; (4) sheltered; (5) political; and (6) judgmental. Without compromising, how do we either move past or rectify those perceptual barriers and build bridges to emerging generations? The answers, along with the reflections of more than two dozen church leaders, make *Unchristian* a worthwhile read — in spite of the pain.

Although the book is controversial, I found *Unchristian* to be more than a data-driven diagnosis seemingly unfair to our cause. Part of the church's image problem concerns the offense of the Cross, cultural relativism, and the fact people love darkness rather than light. The book tries to deal honestly with that reality. Nevertheless, Kinnaman and Lyons present pastoral prescriptions that get to the heart of the great need to disciple devoted followers of Jesus who authentically live out Christ's kingdom in a culturally impacting way that glorifies God.

—Reviewed by Jim Bradford, senior pastor, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri.



*A World Of Difference:  
Putting Christian Truth-claims  
to the Worldview Test*

### A World Of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-claims to the Worldview Test

KENNETH RICHARD SAMPLES (*Baker, 320 pp., paperback*)

Is there truth? What makes the Bible different from other *holy* books? Don't all religions lead to God? Unfortunately, such questions make many Christians hesitant to share their faith with those who want answers. Even worse, Christians often struggle to hold on to their own beliefs in the face of conflicting messages.

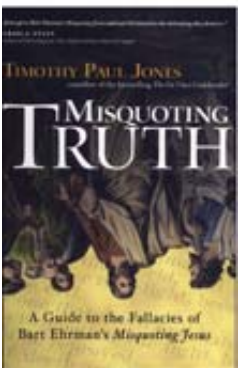
According to Barna's research, less than 1 in 10 evangelical Christians holds a biblical worldview. *A World of Difference* attempts to change this disturbing fact by educating readers about what makes the Christian perspective uniquely reasonable, verifiable, and livable.

Samples explains how "a person's worldview shapes his vision of what is real, true, right, and valuable. It is the prism through which one makes sense of life and death." His in-depth analysis of Christianity's historical and philosophical basis tackles tough issues using logic and reason to develop the concept of *testable truth*. Critical thinking skills help readers evaluate competing worldviews. After exploring the Christian worldview, Samples uses nine distinct tests to compare it with current religious and philosophical competitors including Islam, postmodernism, naturalism, and pantheistic monism.

Anecdotes describing Samples' personal life-and-death crisis bring his clear explanations to life and show how Christianity passes the same tests other religions fail.

Pastors will find this book an excellent resource for meat-and-potatoes topics that will not only feed their congregants' spirits but also satisfy their intellectual appetites. The discussion questions and additional resources at the end of each chapter make this book a valuable tool for small-group studies as well.

—Reviewed by Patti Townley-Covert, communications director at Reasons To Believe, an interdenominational science-faith think tank in Pasadena, California.



*Misquoting Truth:  
A Guide to the Fallacies  
of Bart Ehrman's  
Misquoting Jesus*

### Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*

TIMOTHY PAUL JONES (*InterVarsity Press, 144 pp., paperback*)

Are the books of the New Testament reliable? Are they based on eyewitness testimony? Were they accurately copied? Is what we read today the same as what was written centuries ago?

In his bestselling book, *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman answers no to all these questions. Ehrman is chair of the religious studies department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a well-regarded textual critic and historian of early Christianity. Concerning

personal spiritual commitment, he describes himself as “a happy agnostic.”

Jones rebuts Ehrman’s arguments in *Misquoting Jesus: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman’s Misquoting Jesus*. He demonstrates that textual variants in the extant copies of the New Testament books are trivial, and no Christian doctrine depends on a textual variant. Consequently, we can have a high degree of confidence in the textual reliability of the New Testament.

Jones also builds a strong case for the eyewitness foundation of the Gospels, which were written by apostles or their associates. Both the antiquity of the Gospels and their apostolic foundation explain why certain books made it into the New Testament canon, while others did not. Because the New Testament books are rooted in eyewitness testimony, we can be confident of their historical reliability as well.

Ehrman raises interesting questions in his book, *Misquoting Jesus*. Unfortunately, he provides the wrong answers. Jones offers a fairer, more accurate presentation of the facts about the New Testament’s reliability. I strongly recommend this book to pastors and lay people alike.

—Reviewed by George P. Wood, pastor,  
Living Faith Center, Santa Barbara, California.

## Truth Decay

DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS (InterVarsity Press, 300 pp., paperback)

No pastor wakes up Sunday and prays, “God, please help me to deliver an irrelevant message today.” On the contrary, relevance is a central concern for most pastors given the cultural shifts away from Christianity in America. *Truth Decay* provides helpful insights for pastors who desire to speak the truth of the gospel in culturally relevant ways while avoiding the pitfall of merely presenting cultural doctrines in Christian terms.

After explaining the rise of today’s postmodern rejection of objective truth, Groothuis gives a philosophical and biblical defense of truth as a necessary tool for everyday life as well as for one’s walk with God. His balanced approach accepts that our reasoning is fallen, and therefore, limited; yet, he refrains from submitting to postmodernism’s claim that reasoning is entirely flawed.

Groothuis voices concern regarding Christians today who, striving for cultural relevance, merely accept postmodernism’s dismissal of truth and, therefore, eschew the role of truth in Christianity. Groothuis then offers his own alternatives for engaging the postmodern world in ways that

are effective and retain a crucial commitment to truth in a vibrant relationship with God.

Far from being a purely theoretical work, *Truth Decay* explains how God’s truth ignites our passion for Him in a world gone numb with endless distractions, infuses our lives with objective meaning in a chaotic and pointless culture, and binds His people together in community. As such, Groothuis’ work will help pastors who are seeking to deliver God’s truth in culturally relevant ways.

— Reviewed by Stephen Scheperle, Springfield, Missouri.

## Church Safety and Security: A Practical Guide

ROBERT M. CIRTIN (CSS Publishing Company, 152 pp., paperback)

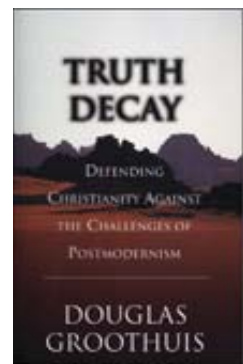
Why do pastors need to read another book on the legalities and dangers confronting churches today? And, if they do, why is this the book?

Pastors need to read this book because it is a practical guide to assessing the possible vulnerabilities of churches and ministries in the areas of violence, child abuse, day care and Christian school jeopardy, medical emergencies, and negligence. This book is different from most on the subject because it offers simple and effective safeguards and procedures to overcome these vulnerabilities.

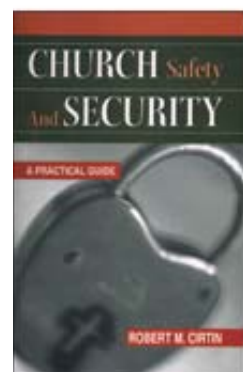
Pastors may have read of the horrible incidents of armed intruders invading a church, even a worship service. This book contains a 15-point list of what to do if that happens in your church. This list alone is worth the purchase price of the book. There may be times when the church needs to do an investigation. This book has an instructional guide on how to do one correctly. Medical emergencies are common and the church needs to know how to respond. This book explains what equipment your church needs on campus, how to formulate an emergency medical plan, and how to develop and train a medical response team.

Cirtin has served as a church staff member. He is a law officer and a certified investigator. He is also a professor of criminal justice at Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri, and owns an investigation firm. His unusual, even unique blend of experience, education, and expertise has helped him produce a valuable resource that can protect churches in our litigious society and prepare church leaders to anticipate and respond to many emergencies. Every church leader needs this book.

— Reviewed by Terry Raburn, superintendent,  
Peninsular Florida District of the Assemblies of God,  
Lakeland, Florida.



Truth Decay



Church Safety and Security:  
A Practical Guide



### AG Family Services Agency

Sponsorship Ministry Rekindles Futures of Hillcrest Children's Home and Highlands Maternity Home

**The Hillcrest and Highlands sponsorship ministry** provides your members opportunity to directly minister to the medical and personal needs of a child, or teen mother and infant. For as little as \$25 a month, you can make a difference in the life of a child.

Every cent of your Hillcrest Children's Home sponsorship goes to direct childcare. Hillcrest has many needs this autumn: school clothes and supplies, eyeglasses, medical checks, and orthodontic work.

Students finishing high school are preparing for college or technical school. Hillcrest Children's Home now has a college scholarship fund to help ensure a bright future for Hillcrest teens. Your support of this fund helps provide a college or university education for Hillcrest students.

In addition, 100 percent of your sponsorship for Highlands Maternity Home goes directly to medical and professional care for young women and their infants, rescuing them from harm's way. The Baby Bootie Club provides state-of-the-art medical and professional care for the expanding Highlands ministry. Order your free Bootie Bank today to partner for life.

To make a difference in the lives of infants, children, and youth, call Assemblies of God Family Services/Hillcrest and Highlands at 501-262-1660, or visit <http://www.agfamilyservices.org> (click on the contribution link). Request the new, free AGFSA DVD/media packet today, and see what God is doing to change lives.

#### Touchscreen Software and World Focus CD

**Consider Touchscreen software for the church foyer.** Explore the world electronically at the

touch of a finger. For more information, visit <http://www.worldtouchscreen.ag.org>, or e-mail [worldtouchscreen@ag.org](mailto:worldtouchscreen@ag.org).

World Focus CD contains summaries of each country where the AG is involved with missions work. CDs are available for \$3 from the AGWM catalog multimedia section. To order, call 1-800-988-6568, or visit <http://www.worldmissions.ag.org>.

**U.S. Missions Candidate Orientation** • **U.S. Missions is dedicated to reaching all ages, backgrounds, and communities in America** with the gospel.

We have a mandate from God to give every person in the United States an understandable presentation of the gospel.

U.S. Missions hosts two orientation sessions each year for new missionary candidates. Candidate orientation consists of interviewing, training, evaluating, and preparing candidates for the emotional and spiritual aspects of missions work. Each session ends with a commissioning service. A schedule for the next year is below. For more information, contact Mary Hartley at 417-862-2781, ext. 3274.

SEPTEMBER 12–19, 2008 – Fall 2008 Candidate Orientation

DECEMBER 1, 2008 – Missionary application deadline for Spring 2009 Candidate Orientation

MARCH 6–13, 2009 – Spring 2009 Candidate Orientation

JUNE 1, 2009 – Missionary application deadline for Fall 2009 Candidate Orientation

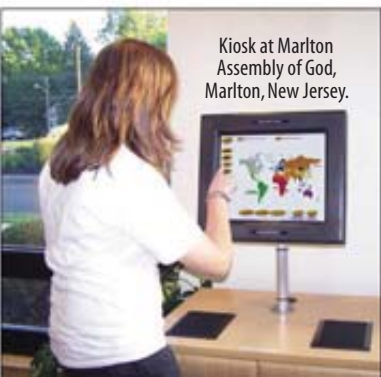
SEPTEMBER 11–18, 2009 – Fall 2009 Candidate Orientation

#### Evangel Publishing Kids' Edition for Seventh Straight Year

**"Giving pastors another low-cost, highly effective evangelism tool** to reach children with the gospel is the primary reason we publish the Kids' Edition," says *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*



Photos.com



Kiosk at Marlton Assembly of God, Marlton, New Jersey.

*Touchscreen software will take an individual on a multimedia missions trip around the world.*

#### Discipleship Website

##### Looking for discipleship resources?

Check out the discipleship Web site at <http://www.discipleship.ag.org>. It is packed with helpful information, downloadables, articles, and resources to assist the church in most aspects of discipleship, including Christian education, discipleship, small groups,

personal Bible studies, preconversion, and new convert care.

##### Discipleship Forum

##### Do you have questions about discipleship?

Are you looking for those who have discovered effective methods to share their findings? Join the discussion on the discipleship forum at [http://www.](http://www.forums.ag.org/discipleship/)

[forums.ag.org/discipleship/](http://www.forums.ag.org/discipleship/). The forum offers pastors and church leaders opportunity to engage in online discussions, to ask questions, and to extend their ministries by sharing experiences and advice with others in need of discipleship help. Whether you have advice or questions, investing time on the discipleship forum will enrich your ministry.

Managing Editor Kirk Noonan regarding the upcoming Oct. 12 issue. "Plus, we love knowing boys and girls get a kick out of the edition while learning about Jesus."

The issue marks the seventh consecutive October the *Evangel* is publishing an English-language edition for children. *TPE* will produce a corresponding Spanish version of the children's issue as the fall edition of *Evangelio Pentecostal Hoy* for the fifth straight year. The response to the *Kids' Edition* has been noteworthy, according to Noonan.



"Since we started doing the children's issue 6 years ago, more than 374,000 extra copies of the editions have been ordered," Noonan says. "That tells us we are meeting a need. "This year's version will be the best yet," adds

Noonan. "Pastors can count on a strong salvation message and exciting content, including stories, games, activities, and superb graphics. Plus, it's an inexpensive way to engage children with life-transforming biblical truths."

Many people give the Kids' Edition to trick-or-treaters. Congregations, such as First Assembly of God in Minot, N.D., use the issue for outreaches. The church ordered 1,000 copies of the 2007 Spanish Kids' Edition for ministry in Mexico.

Churches placing orders of 400 or more copies of either or both versions by Sept. 30 can receive free customized imprinting on the back cover of each issue.

For additional information on the upcoming Oct. 12 Kids' Edition (#69-7841) or the Spanish version (#69-7855), visit the *Evangel's* Web site at <http://www.tpe.ag.org>, or call GPH Customer Services at 1-800-641-4310. The cost is only 25 cents each for orders of 50 or more copies.



## A System To Follow Up Online Responders to the Gospel

**Network211 has launched 1-2-1 Connections** — a secure, interactive system for tracking and following up with online responders to evangelism

Web sites. Volunteers can use 1-2-1 Connections to disciple new Christians around the world. Our evangelistic Web sites make an *altar call response button* available 24/7. We call this a *yes button*. Our goal is to reach 10 million people in the next 10 years.

Imagine discipling someone from Antarctica,  
(continued on page 156)



## 2008 National Girls Ministries Week, September 14–20

**The 2008 National Girls Ministries annual theme is *Lives in the Making*.** The author of Psalm 139 expresses how great, mighty, and awesome is God. God knows each girl before she is born, and He knows everything about her. During 2008, National Girls Ministries wants girls and leaders to grasp the significance of their creation by Almighty God and to know that He is always aware of the minute details of their lives.

If your church has not received the annual Theme/Sleepover packet, contact the national Girls Ministries Department for your free materials. Packets contain promotional plans and resources for National Girls Ministries Week, a Sleepover planning guide, and a new catalog. To receive a packet, call the national office at 1-417-862-2781, ext. 4074, e-mail [ngm@ag.org](mailto:ngm@ag.org), or download your materials from the National Girls Ministries Web site at <http://www.ngmevents.ag.org>.

The National Girls Ministries Week offering, received by churches during National Girls Ministries Week services, helps the national office cover administration costs and provides resources to more than 200,000 girls and leaders involved in the Assemblies of God Girls Ministries programs.

## Nationwide Girls Ministries Sleepover/Coins for Kids Project



**The annual Nationwide Girls Ministries Sleepover is Sept. 26,27.**

This year's theme is *Race of a Lifetime*. This theme, based on 1 Corinthians 9:24,25, uses Paul's race analogy to describe how believers need to pursue their relationships with Christ.

This year, as the world participates in the Summer Olympic Games, girls will learn how discipline and training will keep them close to God. The Nationwide Sleepover is a great way to start your new Girls Club's year and introduce visitors to Jesus. Invite girls to join the race.

During the sleepover, we will also receive the annual Coins for Kids offering. All funds collected this year will go toward completing and equipping the Bolivia Hope Center (Cochabamba) project. Bolivia Hope Center will provide a home for as many as 35 children whose mothers are in prison. The children currently live with their mothers in the Cochabamba prison in impoverished conditions. While living at the Hope Center, children will receive academic and spiritual education, and unconditional love. All Coins for Kids funds sent to the national Girls Ministries Department will be included in your church's total BGMC giving.

Every church reporting Girls Ministries on their Annual Church Ministries Report will receive a combination annual Theme/Sleepover packet. If you have not yet received your packet, contact the national Girls Ministries Department, or visit <http://www.ngmevents.ag.org> for a downloadable version.



Singapore, or Japan. You can — using e-mail. Network211 is mobilizing volunteers committed to discipling inquirers online. We invite you to join Team 10Million and become an Internet missionary volunteer from your home.

Many of our partners are organizing a Team 10Million missions group in their churches. As pastors log new converts into the system, volunteers connect with them online, discipling and encouraging them. This is a new way to be involved in missions.

To learn more about 1-2-1 Connections and to become a Team 10Million volunteer visit <http://www.project10million.com/team-signup.html>.

Network211 offers online tutorials and e-Ministry Seminars to help volunteers learn to use 1-2-1 Connections. We also conduct e-Ministry Seminars in churches, sections, and districts in the United States and around the world to help pastors turn their Web sites into evangelistic ministries. For more information, visit <http://www.network211eministry.com>.

Network211 helps pastors use 21st-century technology to connect with their communities

and church members to communicate the first-century gospel. Learn more about our vision and mission at <http://www.network211.com>.

### Enrichment journal Launches Forum



The newest feature on the *Enrichment journal* Web site is the EJ Forum. This forum allows print and online readers to comment on

*Enrichment journal* articles. Starting with the fall 2008 issue, each article on the Web site will have a link to this forum. Once at the forum, users will be asked to register before commenting on *Enrichment journal* articles. The forum can also be accessed at <http://forums.ag.org/enrichmentjournal/>. The *Enrichment journal* staff believes this forum will provide valuable input for future issues of EJ as well as allow for a healthy exchange of ideas among ministry leaders. ☺





# With Christ

**Etta L. Baird**

Ebony, Virginia

**J.E. Baker**

Ironton, Missouri

**Joy O. Barnett**

Overland Park, Kansas

**Vincent Baroncelli**

Bay City, Texas

**John H. Beamer**

Lebanon, Pennsylvania

**Floyd W. Beckstrand**

Finley, North Dakota

**R. Stanley Berg**

Springfield, Missouri

**Michael D. Blatchley**

Coldwater, Kansas

**William Bloodworth**

Livingston, Texas

**Jose Bonilla**

Bridgeport, Connecticut

**Wayne A. Boyd, Sr.**

Poplar, Montana

**Bonnie P. Brown**

San Jose, California

**J.C. Burks**

Meridian, Mississippi

**Charles W. Butterfield**

Salem, Oregon

**Robert A. Canterbury**

Lake George, New York

**Helen L. Carmichael**

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Springfield, Missouri

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**Seth B. Cotton, Jr.**

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**W.R. Cullum, Jr.**

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Snyder, Texas

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Baytown, Texas

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One of the most challenging aspects of pastoring is helping your congregation adhere to and maintain a Christian worldview.



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## Proclaiming Truth Today

**In John 18:38, Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?"**

In our post-Christian culture — or as some have called it, an anti-Christian culture — people are asking the same question, or perhaps another question: "Is there such a thing as truth?" Relativism is taking such a hold on our society that many people believe there is no such thing as absolute truth.

As a pastor, how do you respond to the belief there is no absolute truth? How will the people in your congregation respond to this statement from a coworker or friend?

The quest for truth and the need to proclaim truth is not new. Someone wrote about Irenaeus, one of the Early Church fathers: "With his heart for peace, Irenaeus opposed the Gnostics not out of desire for power but out of concern for their salvation. He wanted, he said, to 'turn them back to the truth' and 'to bring them to a saving knowledge of the one true God.'

"Furthermore, he was a pastor with a responsibility to care for his flock. His opponents were enticing members of his community away from the apostolic faith with a message that sounded true but wasn't.

"As a pastor, then, Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* in order to describe the heresies that were threatening his congregation and to present the apostolic interpretation of the Scriptures. He revealed the cloaked deception for what it was and displayed the apostolic tradition as a saving reminder to the faithful."<sup>1</sup>

How do *we* respond to the attacks and beliefs that are prevalent in today's society? How do we proclaim the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world where Christians are labeled as *intolerant*? How do we help our congregation respond to the questions from unbelievers who ridicule the Christian faith?


Our proclamation of the truth must be based on the Bible, God's inspired Word. While the Bible is under attack today, teaching your congregation how the Bible has been transmitted through the centuries shows them its authenticity and reliability. We can trust it.

We can also proclaim this truth in a way that engages today's listeners and challenges them to consider the claims of Christianity.

One of the most challenging aspects of pastoring is helping your congregation adhere to and maintain a Christian worldview. A glance at some of George Barna's statistics<sup>2</sup> indicate that many of those who claim to be Christians have less than an ideal view concerning the Bible, Jesus, and moral behavior. Your people are constantly being bombarded by a secular worldview. Unless they are strongly committed to the truth of God's Word, this secular worldview begins to shape their lifestyles.

Christianity is being attacked today in unprecedented ways. The world views Christians as intolerant, bigoted, and unloving. Some even advocate eradicating Christianity from society. How do we respond to these accusations?

Many of the attacks on Christianity and its beliefs are not based on fact, but on opinions stated as facts. Understanding the weaknesses of these arguments is the first step in answering our critics. Second, being able to provide a logical defense of these false concepts of Christianity and its beliefs is important in helping people understand the fallacy of these beliefs. Third, practical ministry to those who claim we are intolerant toward them is a way to show that, while we do not condone sin, we do love the sinner. Like Irenaeus, we can have compassion on those who are captivated by sin.

The *Enrichment* staff prepared this issue to help you minister more effectively in today's pluralistic society. We have provided valuable resources that will help you prepare your congregation to minister to those they come in contact with at work or in their neighborhood. Together, through loving ministry we can proclaim truth in today's secular society. 

### NOTES

1. Bingham, D. Jeffrey, "One God, One Christ, One Salvation," in *Christian History*, fall 2007, issue 96, p 19.
2. Born Again Christians: <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8> accessed December 12, 2007; Faith Commitment: <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=19> accessed December 12, 2007.

RICHARD L. SCHOONOVER is associate editor, *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri.