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NEWS JOURNAL

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BOLAND FAMILY: Tommy and Beth Ann Boland (center) enjoy dinner with their daughter Susan Boland Butts (left) and son Edwin Boland (right) at a *Baptists Today* event in Waynesville, N.C., in September, at which time Tommy received the John F. Baugh Laity Award. Photo by John Pierce.

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Cover photo by John Pierce. Young pastors (left to right) Scott Hagaman, Julie Merritt Lee, Jeff Harris and Jeff Mathis share their commitments to congregational ministry in the midst of cultural change.

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News journal board installs directors, officers, emeriti at September gathering

WAYNESVILLE, N.C. — “*Baptists Today’s* greatest strength is the independence and influence of its Board of Directors,” said Executive Editor John Pierce during a dinner event as part of the news journal’s Sept. 19-20 board meeting.

DIRECTORS EMERITI

Earlier this year, the Executive Committee created the designations of “director emeritus” and “director emerita” to honor persons who have made significant contributions to the ministry of *Baptists Today* and continue to provide support and affirmation. The first class was inducted at the Sept. 19 dinner event.

Tommy Boland of Alpharetta, Ga., who at the same event was presented the John F. Baugh Laity Award, was designated as director emeritus.

Winnie Williams of Clemson, S.C., an author, professor and real estate developer who previously served as chair of the board, was named director emerita. Winnie and her husband Woodie have been faithful supporters, Pierce noted, and were among the first to indicate they had included *Baptists Today* in their estate planning so their support will continue on into the future.

Kirby Godsey, chancellor of Mercer University, was installed as a director emeritus. A quote from Godsey was placed on the cover of the recently published commemorative book, *Baptists Today @ 30*: “This journal exists, in my judgment, not chiefly so the truth can be heard, but so that anyone’s version of the truth can be questioned.”

“The editorial freedom that I enjoy is rooted in that understanding of seeking truth



Left to right, Tommy Boland, Winnie Williams, Kirby Godsey and Mary Etta Sanders were installed as the first Directors Emeriti. Photo by Ben McDade. Below, Don Brewer of Gainesville, Ga., and Cathy Turner of Clemson, S.C., are the new chair and vice chair of the *Baptists Today* board. Photo by John Pierce.

and allowing a critical look at what might be mistaken as truth,” said Pierce, expressing gratitude for Godsey’s wise counsel and support.

Mary Etta Sanders, a lay leader from Dalton, Ga., was also named director emerita. Pierce described her as a dear friend and faithful supporter of *Baptists Today*.

“Whenever I’m in Mary Etta’s presence, I feel affirmed and more energized about the mission at hand,” said Pierce. “She believes in what we are doing — and her understanding of and appreciation for our ministry rub off on others — including me.”

NEW DIRECTORS

Four new directors, including three lay leaders, began first terms on the *Baptists Today* board. Two other laypersons returned for new terms.

Andrew McGill is an active member of First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., who helped in the formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Tennessee. He is vice president for strategy and business development for Memorial Health Care System in Chattanooga.

Donna Wood is a leader in Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., where she chairs the finance committee. She is vice president of the Macon Accounting Center for Ricoh Americas Corporation.

Jim Strawn is a member of Dunwoody Baptist Church in Atlanta. After retiring from a career in radio, he was recruited by his former pastor, Daniel Vestal, to work in finance with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He retired from that role in 2004 and now buys, restores and sells old books.

David Hull is pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala. He has served in many leadership roles including chair of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s 2012 Task Force.

Clem White, an attorney in St. Petersburg, Fla., and Sarah Timmerman, a retired teacher and lay leader in Cairo, Ga., returned to the board after serving six years at an earlier time.

BOARD OFFICERS

Outgoing officers, Chairman Walter Shurden of Macon, Ga., and Vice Chairman Bob Cates, were recognized for their service along with directors completing their terms.

Incoming officers are Chairman Don Brewer, a lay leader in First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., and Vice Chair Cathy Turner, a member of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C. Charles Schaible of Macon, Ga., chairs the Budget/Finance Committee and Jack Glasgow of Zebulon, N.C., chairs the Development/Marketing Committee. **BT**



Tommy Boland is honored with second John F. Baugh Laity Award

WAYNESVILLE, N.C. — The second annual John F. Baugh Laity Award was presented Sept. 19 to Tommy Boland during a dinner event held in conjunction with the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting.

Boland has served in many leadership roles in the First Baptist Church of Chamblee, Ga., that merged into the early formation of Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga. Among those positions of service, he was the treasurer of that congregation for more than 50 years.

A trustee and special counsel to the president for Mercer University, Boland also helped organize and lead the former Mainstream Baptist organization in Georgia — at which time he and the late lay leader John Baugh of Houston, for whom the award is named, would discuss the importance of lay engagement in Baptist life.

He described Baugh as being “very likeable,” having “a winnable soul,” and caring deeply about the Baptist witness.

Boland’s own contributions to the larger Baptist movement included serving as interim coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship following the retirement of his close friend and former coordinator Cecil Sherman — until Daniel Vestal assumed that post.

“In some ways, giving the John F. Baugh Laity Award to Tommy Boland tonight doesn’t fit,” said John Pierce, executive editor of *Baptists Today*, at the casual event held under a large tent overlooking the mountains of Western North Carolina. “For one, this is a rather informal affair and Tommy leans toward the formal.”

“Second, this award brings public recognition ... and Tommy works hard at avoiding the spotlight,” he continued. “However, there are many more good reasons why presenting the second annual John F. Baugh Laity Award to Tommy Boland is most appropriate.”

Pierce said that because of Boland’s calm demeanor and steadfast service, many do not know of the significant influence he has had as a Baptist lay leader. One of those places of service, he noted, has been in “giving immeasurable leadership to *Baptists Today* over the past 15 years” that included “providing needed organizational guidance and serving effectively as a director and chairman of the Board.”

In 1954, Boland joined Wachovia Bank of Georgia (then the First National Bank of Atlanta) where he worked in the commercial credit department. His responsibilities grew quickly. In 1975, he was named senior credit officer for the bank and helped develop the bank credit cards we use today.

Eventually he would rise to the top, and served as Chairman of the Board of Wachovia Corporation of Georgia and Wachovia Bank of Georgia until his retirement in 1994.

Boland served as president of the Georgia State University Alumni Association, trustee and treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Foundation, and president of the Atlanta Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. He was a director of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Metropolitan Atlanta Community Foundation, the United Way of Metro Atlanta and the Robert W. Woodruff Arts Center. He is trustee emeritus of the Scottish Rite Children’s Medical Center in Atlanta as well.

“Mr. Boland has a long and deep commitment to the development of youth,” said Pierce, during the award presentation. “In the golden age of Baptist denominational life he led the youth department in his church’s Training Union program and was a Royal Ambassadors counselor as well as director of the summer camp program for more than 20 years.”

Boland and his wife Beth Ann, also a faithful volunteer who served on the board of Associated Baptist Press and in many other roles, are the parents to two (Edwin and Susan) and grandparents to three.

Baptists Today created the laity award last



year to honor the memory of John Baugh and to recognize the many contributions of laypersons in Baptist life. The inaugural award was presented to Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas, in the San Antonio home of Babs Baugh, at the same time *Baptists Today* presented its annual Judson-Rice Award to the Baugh Family.

“We continue this good, new tradition of honoring a superb Baptist lay leader, while raising the visibility of all lay leadership in Baptist life,” said Pierce at the gathering of Baptists from the mountain region of North Carolina to enjoy barbecue and Appalachian music and pay tribute to good leadership.

Pierce thanked Boland for bringing his “exceptional leadership and organizational skills and resources to important places in Baptist life — including *Baptists Today*.”

About 15 years ago, when the 30-year-old news journal was at a crossroads, Boland was a key person in setting *Baptists Today* on a new course.

“I thought there was a really good reason for it continuing or I wouldn’t have gotten involved with it,” Boland said of that time.

The news journal, today, he said proudly, is “comprehensive in a fashion the average layperson can use.”

Boland also played a strategic role in the expansion of *Baptists Today* into new publishing opportunities through the Nurturing Faith initiative, said Pierce.

“We are very grateful to him for all he has done — for so many, for so long, so faithfully.” **BT**

‘We continue this good, new tradition of **honoring a superb Baptist lay leader**, while raising the visibility of all lay leadership in Baptist life.’

“I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

—Pope Francis (RNS)

“True faith in God that demands selflessness is being replaced by trendy religion that serves the selfish.”

—Aging evangelist Billy Graham in his 32nd and most recent book, *The Reason for My Hope: Salvation* (RNS)

“Any time a culture or society loses a place of worship, regardless of your affiliation to the religion, it probably degrades the quality of life.”

—Randy Patterson, who lives near the vacant white frame sanctuary of Pleasant View Baptist Church in northeast Dallas that “died out” and has sold its property to a developer (AP)

“We have responsibility to be the presence of Christ, and we are coming together to state that and be encouraged by that and be challenged by that.”

—Pastor Tony Lankford of Park Avenue Baptist Church, one of several Cooperative Baptist Fellowship congregations that formed CBF Georgia-Atlanta to minister collaboratively in the city (ABP)

quotation remarks

“If any enterprise in America is positioned to do the good that a paralyzed political class won’t do, it is faith communities . . . We know this from our generous responses to disasters. When terrorists hit, or floods rise, or hurricanes and tornadoes destroy, the faithful are among the first to respond and the last to leave.”

—Religion News Service columnist and Episcopal priest Tom Ehrlich

“While millennials are walking out the front door of U.S. congregations, immigrant Christian communities are appearing right around the corner, and sometimes knocking at the back door. And they may hold the key to vitality for American Christianity.”

—Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, former general secretary of the Reformed Church in America (RNS)

“We believe in the kind of God depicted in the Scriptures and in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is quite exhilarating to speak about a God who has an incredible bias, a notorious bias in favor of the downtrodden.”

—Desmond Tutu, retired Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize recipient (RNS)

“The Christians now live in a terror.”

—Hussam, concealing his identity, one of Syria’s 2 million Christians who fear being drawn into the civil conflict between Sunni Muslim rebels and dictator Bashar Assad’s regime (RNS)

“We need to come back and revisit this race conversation. Too many are being shuffled aside in our society, and we cannot accept that. Jesus does not accept that. He wants us to find a better way.”

—John Upton, Baptist World Alliance president and executive director of Baptist General Association of Virginia, urging Virginia Baptists to address issues of race including the crises in many African-American communities (ABP)

“Adoption can be wonderful when it’s about finding the right family for a child who is truly in need, but it can also be tragic and unjust if it involves deception, removes children from their home countries when other options are available, or is used as a substitute for addressing the underlying problems of poverty and inequality.”

—Kathryn Joyce, author of *The Child Catchers: Rescue, Trafficking, and the New Gospel of Adoption*, warning that the high demand and profits tied to international adoptions lead some orphanages to pull children from impoverished families (New York Times)

“I wanted her to know there are thousands of students who know about Malawi and are interested in clean water there.”

—Colleen Burroughs, executive vice president of Passport Inc., who during a recent meeting in Montgomery, Ala., with Malawi President Joyce Banda shared that summer campers had provided more than \$800,000 to Watering Malawi, a project Burroughs founded (ABP)

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By John Pierce

Conducting constructive conversations about congregations and cultural change

It is easy to find criticism of church life today — especially from those outside of the daily experience of congregational ministry. Some of it is well deserved.

Churches can be insular, exclusive, inflexible, and otherwise unhelpful and unchristian. It is a human community seeking to be touched by the divine. So, selfish human behaviors aren't automatically checked at the door.

It is important, however, to listen to the right critics.

Criticism from outsiders should carry less weight than from those still in the pastoral trenches. It's easy when landing a teaching job or signing a big book deal to trash congregational life or to stand outside the daily demands of church ministry and lob accusations about how those working hard on the inside are getting it wrong.

The word "criticism" has taken on a negative, pejorative meaning. At its root, however, to criticize something means simply "to separate and analyze." All communities, organizations and individuals can benefit when that is done openly, lovingly and fairly.

Readers will find an article (pp. 8-11) in this issue of *Baptists Today* based on a conversation with all of those good qualities. Jack Causey, an experienced and innovative retired pastor who mentors young ministers, enlisted four younger pastors — three of whom serve small-town, main-street First Baptist churches in Western North Carolina — to talk about the challenges and opportunities in congregational life today.

Jack also facilitated the discussion with the younger ministers and then opened the conversation to the audience composed of *Baptists Today* directors and spouses. It was an unusually insightful and inspiring experience.

Jim Strawn, a layperson in Atlanta's Dunwoody Baptist Church, said in conclusion: "I'm full right now. My heart, my soul, is full. It's because I've been to church right here."

He added: "I've heard four wonderful pastors be honest and candid, share their heart, share the joys, share the troubles. You've given me something to pray for when I go back home.

I just want to tell you how meaningful that's been to me. Thank you."

It was the sentiment of everyone who listened in. And, afterward, the younger pastors expressed appreciation for both the dialogue with colleagues who share familiar daily ministry experiences and those who heard their conversations and offered strong affirmation.

Several aspects of this well-spent time struck me as being of importance to congregations everywhere, regardless of the setting or age and experience of the pastor.

First is the ongoing need to provide safe, open and affirming opportunities for pastoral leaders to talk honestly about the challenges of ministry today amid all the demands and cultural shifts.

In assessing the time and energy spent on maintaining old, weighty processes for "doing church" that were constructed in a vastly different era, these bright, gifted pastors showed innovation. Yet they were cautious enough in their responses for listeners to know they were "separating and analyzing" real situations, not whining.

Second, the deep commitment of these pastors to congregational ministry, despite outside competition to church attendance and involvement, and seeing old systems bump against contemporary culture, was clear. They spoke not of a job to be endured but of a calling to be fulfilled.

Conversations about the "how to" of

congregational ministry always moved rightly to the "why" questions of calling, faithfulness and mission.

Third, there was no blame game. Too often congregational leaders avoid talking openly about such situations because it opens the door to either some disgruntled member harping that the pastor doesn't "visit" like the pastor of old or some younger persons in the church dismissing the vast contributions of those who have gone before them.

These young ministers, however, expressed deep appreciation for the tradition of faithful worship, stewardship and service that shaped generations of persons and impacted their communities deeply — in some cases for a century and a half.

Pettiness didn't show up in the long, deep, confessional conversations. Neither did anyone's pet project — just honest reflections and hopeful projections.

We created a safe environment for this kind of experience — and left reminded of the importance to affirm and encourage our ministers who lead our congregations in unusually challenging times.

Surely there would be great value in church members and pastors having such conversations. In some places, that is already happening. Pastors and lay leaders are listening respectfully to one another. If not, I'd recommend it.

Mature, respected lay leaders are in the best position to encourage such healthy conversations and to ensure that the pastor's vulnerability in sharing about the challenges is honored. It could bring new light and hope — and renewed commitments. **BT**



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Pastor Scott Hagaman, second from left, shares about how his congregation is exploring ways to move deeper into community life in the small mountain town of Marion, N.C. Also participating in the panel discussion are (left to right) pastors Jeff Mathis of Sylva, N.C., Jeff Harris of Tryon, N.C., and Julie Merritt Lee of Hendersonville, N.C. Jack Causey, right, who works with young ministers and congregations in North Carolina, enlisted the participants and facilitated the discussion.

Younger pastors share challenges, commitments to congregational ministry

WAYNESVILLE, N.C. — Four younger pastors in Western North Carolina shared honest appraisals of serving Baptist congregations in the 21st century during a panel discussion Sept. 19 as part of a meeting of the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors.

Three serve small-town First Baptist churches with long, rich histories. Pastor Julie Merritt Lee serves 12-year-old Providence Baptist Church in Hendersonville, N.C.

Baptists Today director Jack Causey, who mentors young ministers and assists congregations in their ministerial searches for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, enlisted the participants and facilitated the discussion.

After introductions, Causey, a retired pastor who previously worked with the Young Leaders' Program through the Center for Congregational Health, noted that his CBFNC colleague Eddie Hammett wrote recently that pastoral leadership in today's church demands "deep listening, a discerning spirit, and skill sets for change and transition" — and that "blowing a church apart is not the way to build the kingdom of God or to move people."

Causey asked the younger pastors to share about the challenges and opportunities they are

facing in the midst of a fast and deeply changing culture.

TRANSITION

For 10 years, Scott Hagaman has been pastor of the 150-year-old First Baptist Church of Marion, N.C.

"Since textiles and furniture have mostly left the Carolinas, towns like Marion have come to be what I call a deconstructed mill town," he said. "Many of the great resources that those towns have had in the past have diminished or gone away."

At one time Marion had a larger workforce than Asheville, he said of the many people who would come into the small mountain town to work in the numerous mills. The community boasted of its minor league baseball team, Belk's department store and Coca-Cola Bottling Company.

"And all that is gone now," said Hagaman. "And what was pretty much a very stable and reasonably prosperous community is now one of the poorest communities in Western North Carolina."

First Baptist Church stands out with its century-old, neo-gothic sanctuary with a divided chancel that fits the congregation's traditional worship.

"We're what I call a very folksy formal mountain church," he said.

However, Hagaman said the church and town are both in transition.

"A big portion of the college-educated folks and professionals attend our church," he said. "Which means we have tremendous people resources."

Yet, the community served by the congregation is vastly different now, he noted, describing Marion as "the first place I've ever lived where you cannot be insulated from poverty."

Church members love their community, he said, and are finding new ways to serve effectively. "I think the church's identity for a long time has been a servant kind of church."

The challenge, Hagaman said, is rooted in institutional life. His congregation is used to traditional ways of doing church — "down to how you organize your Sunday schools" and move through a detailed, month-long budgeting process.

"We spend tremendous resources, particularly people resources, great energy, just to maintain who we are," said Hagaman. "And then there's so little of those resources left over to advance and grow the church and to reach outside the institution to the people we very much want to reach."

As an example of expending time and energy on institutional maintenance, Hagaman said he had spent many hours that morning dealing with a workers' compensation insurance claim related to the church's daycare.

"They did not teach us that at Princeton Seminary," he added.

Church leaders are exploring ways to move the congregation deeper into community life rather than simply trying to attract people through worship and programming, he said.

COMPETITION

Pastor Jeff Harris said the First Baptist Church of Tryon, N.C., where he serves, is dealing with competition unknown previously.

Harris, 40, grew up in Wilkes County, N.C., best known, he said, for NASCAR driver Junior Johnson and moonshine — and where church once had some exclusive claims on most people's time.

"It wasn't that long ago when I was a youth and we had Sunday night church," he said. "There wasn't really a whole lot else to do in the small community I grew up in, so we went to church."

Members of his congregation now, he said, have so much "competition for resources of time and commitment and finances."

He described Tryon as "somewhat of a cosmopolitan blurb" with about 2,000 residents in a rural county of nearly 19,000.

"There are a lot of folks who retire to Tryon, and they bring a lot of money with them," he said. "Unfortunately, they mainly go to the Presbyterian church and the Congregational church and the Episcopal church."

First Baptist also has a divided chancel and a highly educated congregation with "a lot of hometown folks who grew up in Tryon and Polk County," he said — making it "a very typical sort of main street First Baptist Church."

While some smaller towns are graying, Harris said Tryon has many young families with children. Getting them engaged in church life is challenging, however.

"They come like once a month, and that's real regular, because they're playing travel baseball, and they're playing travel soccer," he said. "And that's been a huge source of frustration — which, finally, I've kind of just let go and realized that's just going to be how it is. And we have to figure out a way to navigate that."

EXPECTATIONS

Jeff Mathis came to another historic, main street First Baptist Church less than two years ago. Sylva, N.C., is close to the 10,000-student Western Carolina University in Cullowhee.

"So that gives our mountain community a different kind of shape," he said. "We have people who are retiring to our community, as well as locals who live up in the holler, as well as young people and families that are relocating close to the Asheville cultural center of Western North Carolina."

Changing congregational practices to meet new realities of ministry can be challenging, he said. Often that has to do with expectations of ministers — especially the high emphasis on the pastor visiting in the homes of members and prospects.

However, Mathis said his congregation, with many older members, is very "hospitable" and eager to reach younger persons in the community. To that end, they recently opened a new mission and fellowship center — and are engaging young adults in church leadership.

"[Church members] are blessing the initiatives of these college and 20-somethings," he said. "So our staff has ballooned, and they're all under 30."

The church's long, rich history is both a benefit, he said, and at times a challenge.

"I am haunted by the many pictures of the pastors and interim pastors that line the hallway outside my office — reminding me that I am on the end of a very long train of very effective pastoral ministry."

He described the Sylva congregation as a traditional church in a mountain community that is and has been going through some transition, particularly in the last 10 or 15 years. A part of that transition is engaging the broader community and embracing younger leadership.

"It has really been exciting to see this established church celebrate a variety of people that don't look like them — engaging in ways that are life-giving, by connecting with them in the larger community."

INNOVATION

Julie Merritt Lee is a Texan who completed the two-year pastoral residency program at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. She is in her fifth year as pastor at Providence.

"I was looking for a job as a pastor, and I knew I wasn't going to find it as a woman in Texas; that was just sort of the landscape of the times," she said. "So I opened up *Baptists Today*, looked at the classifieds, and that is how I got the job at Providence Baptist Church."

Hendersonville, about 30 miles south of Asheville, is "a retirement community to a tee."

Merritt Lee said congregations with older members often turn to a younger pastor in hopes of magically drawing younger families into the fellowship. But it takes more than a youthful voice in the pulpit.

She describes Providence as "a unique higher church" with a "different liturgy maybe than some, but it's a wonderful place."

The challenge for congregational leaders, she said, is to not think of church as the institution itself.

"One of the gifts that the 12-year-old church brings is it's very nimble," she said. "It's not institutionally weighted in a sense of, you know, we've got to do this because we've always done it that way."

However, bridging the congregation to the culture, even when congregational life is nimble, is filled with challenges and hope, she said.

"Asheville is very artsy; very much like Austin, which was my context," she said. "There's music, and there are the food trucks, and there are all these people."

"I keep thinking, 'What are ways we can bring the church to this culture that's so vibrant and so artistic and beautiful in all the ways of expressions, that I see God in very real ways?'" said Merritt Lee. "So I think that's an opportunity and a challenge."

TENSION

Those in pastoral ministry, especially in traditional church settings, often face the tension between investing time in the ongoing structures of congregational life and giving energy and creativity to new efforts, the young ministers said.

"The tension for me is trying desperately to open up the church so that the mission and fellowship center, for example, can become a place for younger adults to come and be excited about serving people in the community with and through us," said Mathis. "That's something in my early pastorate I'm really struggling with — and wondering where to spend my time and energy."

It is important, he said, to provide pastoral care and leadership to the existing membership while being present at a new after-school ministry and helping shape the new initiatives to engage college students and other young adults.

"I know that tension well," said Hagaman. "That's part of what I talk about as maintenance — and that may be a very almost insensitive way of referring to it. But part of maintaining who we are is taking care of each other. And part of being the church is being nurturing and caring and loving — and visiting. And that's part of who the church is, no matter where you are, no matter what generation. But, on the other side of the coin is having the energy to advance the church, to reach out and have relationships with people other than the people in the church. Largely, the people in the church want your attention and your energy."

Merritt Lee said some older ways of doing church might need a new direction rather than dismissal.

“Sunday night worship was a thing of the past,” she said, “although I grew up Southern Baptist and loved Sunday night worship.”

So what did her newer, nimble church do?

“We decided to start Sunday night worship — but to have it down on Seventh Avenue,” she said. “And we call it our Sunday night worship meal.”

This hospitality-focused ministry is based on Jesus and his disciples going to share a meal with all kinds of people. It is both an opportunity and a challenge, she said.

“So that’s what we do on Sunday nights ...” she said. “And they come most of the time not for the food, which is really what we were hoping; that we could create a true community where all different kinds of people would want to be there.”

Some tension created by cultural change can lead to new ways of doing church even for well-established congregations, said Hagaman.

“Three-fourths of the city council is in our church and are deacons,” he said. “So our whole perspective is that we lead the best of the culture in our town. But the culture’s shifting away from that ... and at some point our church will not be leading the culture, but will in some ways be left behind by the culture if we continue on the trajectory we were on.”

By acknowledging these cultural shifts, the Marion congregation is experiencing greater cooperation with neighboring churches, even much more conservative ones, he said.

“We have a really neat summer feeding program for children that is very ecumenical; we’re one of the distribution points,” he said. “Collectively, we as a community started a free medical clinic that’s been an ecumenical effort. We partner with a Hispanic Baptist church. We’re separate congregations, but we share our buildings and do ministry together.”

GENERATIONS

Asking how we are church together now and how we’re going to be church tomorrow invites new life and new breath into the congregation, said Mathis. That conversation often moves toward what it means to be an active part of the church family.

“We’re redefining what it means to be a church member all the time,” he said. “We have people still on the books from 1962. So are they the ones that get to have a vote, and the people that have been visiting for five years regularly can’t? Some of those questions I think we need to have some conversation about.”

Baptists Today director Kelly Belcher, a chaplain and member of Asheville’s First Baptist Church, asked panelists what church practices might need to die.

“I, personally, would like to blow up the nominating committee,” said Hagaman. “I’m convinced there is a more Spirit-led way to organize for ministry than this 20th-century, highly-structured, sort of board committee-oriented type of approach.”

Others on the panel and in the audience nodded in agreement.

“I would agree,” said Mathis. “One thing that has been really tricky is the system, the inherited system, and how it operates.”

The conversation moved back to the challenge of detailed organizational structures built at a time when more people were engaged in church life and more time was devoted to church processes.

“With the loss of a generation that built this system, with their leaving, there’s a sense of desperation,” he added — built on the false idea that “We have to maintain this structure; that’s how you do church.”

He said pastoral leaders of established churches struggle to find ways to honor the structures of the past while asking timely questions — especially about how recruiting and engaging church leadership is “transformed” from an elaborate, time-consuming, highly-structured process to one that relies more on available gifts and spiritual discernment.

“I did kill the nominating committee at my church, thinking that would create this glorious new thing, this new model, new transformation,” said Merritt Lee. “So I had this chart system — and we were to equip the saints for ministry; it’s very scriptural.”

The idea, she said, was to get volunteers to sign up for tasks that suit their gifts.

“It has not worked,” she said. “I think it’s been a good process, and we still actually have it, and we’re still working with it.”

Harris said leaders of historic congregations often deal with the issues related to facilities. Large, aging structures consume significant time and money.

“We’ve been blessed with beautiful facilities, and we have to steward those things,” he said. “(But) it’s unbelievable the amount of financial resources that we spend there.”

TRANSFORMATION

Merritt Lee said that while organizational matters deserve attention, ministers must stay focused on the spiritual shaping of congregational experiences.

“This is my one sermon: It’s a heart issue,”

she said. “And that’s why I want to be a pastor that prays and preaches and listens. And, really, I feel like that’s the call of our congregation. It’s not a pastoral model, it’s the congregational model — that we learn how to live in community, to pray those spiritual practices, and do that well, and proclaim the gospel.”

Harris said taking a CEO approach to “running the church” can leave pastors and the congregation spiritually depleted — and unfulfilled in the call to ministry. He said he tries to simplify his job as “being a Christian” and helping others to be faithful as well.

Giving time for prayer and study, rather than “running on fumes,” is needed to “speak a word about the Word” each Sunday and encourage deeper discipleship.

Baptists Today Board Chairman Walter Shurden, a church historian from Macon, Ga., asked the panel how the people in their churches experience God. Worship, sharing meals and service were among the responses.

Merritt Lee said she has raised that question repeatedly at a Friday afternoon Bible study.

“Every week I ask, ‘Where did you experience God this week?’ And it is extremely difficult for people to articulate an answer to that question,” she said. “And it’s not because they’re not experiencing God.”

Those responses — or lack of responses — have led her to preach and teach more on ongoing experiences with God.

“I feel like people don’t know how to name their experiences with God,” she said. “I think they’re so fearful of sounding like ‘one of them,’ when we talk about God and our faith and our tradition. So I grieve a little bit, because I think it’s hard for people to name that.”

Being in community — through Bible study, worship, hospitality and service with others — helps individual Christians, she said, to “get better” at articulating their experiences with God in authentic ways.

Leo Thorne, a *Baptists Today* director and associate general secretary of American Baptist Churches, USA, asked what younger adults want from churches.

“We all kind of live in a culture of narcissism,” said Mathis. “But if you’re under 35, you have a real heaping helping of that.”

As a result, he said, many younger persons are seeking something that is bigger and older and beyond their own selves. And the church can fill that void.

“I fell in love with the church in seminary ... and learned about this beautiful tradition that I really didn’t know that much about,” he said. “And somehow that’s been a real transformative thing. I don’t think I’m the only person who was looking for something like that, a tradition.”



Jeff Mathis (left), in his first pastorate, said First Baptist Church of Sylva, N.C., is seeking to honor its rich history while enlisting younger persons into leadership and ministry roles within the larger congregation.

While they rarely use the language of “calling,” Hagaman said many of his conversations with young persons are about finding meaning and purpose.

“I think it’s about each of us discovering our own particular calling,” he explained, “and what God wants to do with us to change the world.”

Harris said many young people who’ve been fed by narcissism and entitlement want to hear something more than a “very nice message.”

“The college students and 20-somethings that we’re connecting with want to hear truth — God’s truth,” he said. “...They don’t want to be appeased; they want to dig into scripture. They really want to ask tough questions. That’s something they are hungry for and yearning for — and I am too. We’re all hungry to hear God’s convicting word and how we can respond to it.”

DEDICATION

What each of the younger pastors expressed in a variety of ways is a strong commitment to congregational ministry despite the many challenges from significant cultural changes.

“The one thing in seminary that I said I did not want to do was pastor a church,” said Harris. “And so that’s what I did — and figured out after about six months that was a pretty good thing, and maybe that’s where God was calling me to be.”

And there is one thing that keeps ministers going, said Hagaman: “Discern your call carefully and thoroughly, because some days all you have is your call.”

“You don’t do it for the money; you don’t do it for the fame,” he added. “But a sense of calling and a bigger picture that ... you’re in this

for a grander reason that’s bigger than you can even imagine.”

Mathis said his short tenure as a pastor, after several years as an associate minister, has led him to come to the defense of the church.

“After reading blogs and articles and other young people chiming in on things about church, I sense and hear a lot of desire that we need to blow up the church; that the church is the enemy,” he said. “And I have to tell you, I acknowledge the church, at times in our history, we have been an enemy. But we are not the enemy.”

Mathis said he has a deep love and appreciation for the congregation.

“Being a pastor has put me in a better position to listen,” he said. “And how humbled I have been at the congregation, and the strength of generations that have built a beautiful community that has impacted the local culture in extraordinary ways ... The last thing I want to do is throw out the congregational setting that models beautifully in our world and in our day how to be church together. I mean, at its purest, we have multiple generations gathering together. And at no other place, or very few other places in our world, do we do that well, except the congregation.”

Those multi-generational relationships, he said, have great value.

“So while there are times when I want to say, ‘Gosh, what would it look like if we just cleared the deck and started over?’ I think that would be a real shame to multiple generations that have stood on the shoulders of saints from centuries and decades past,” he said. “And how to capture that, and create space for some life and new breath to come in, that’s the key I wrestle with.” **BT**

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Who is a Jew?



Few American Jews say it's a matter of belief

WASHINGTON — In the most comprehensive study of American Jews in 12 years, a strong majority said being Jewish is mostly about ancestry or culture, not the religious practice of Judaism.

“A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” released Oct. 1 by the Pew Research Center, shows strong secularist trends most clearly seen in one finding: 62 percent of U.S. Jews said Jewishness is largely about culture or ancestry; just 15 percent said it's about religious belief.

“Non-Jews may be stunned by it,” said Alan Cooperman, co-author of the study. “Being Jewish to most Jews in America today is not a matter of religion.”

In a related finding, more than one in five self-identified Jews (22 percent) told Pew researchers that they had no religion, a proportion that mirrors the roughly one in five Americans who claim no religious affiliation.

Yet in spite of their weakening adherence to Jewish observances, the report noted that “American Jews overwhelmingly say they are proud to be Jewish and have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.”

As if to prove that point, a strong majority of Jews (69 percent) call themselves very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel — a proportion that has held fairly steady for at least a decade.

Pew's new statistics on intermarriage, raising of children, synagogue membership and attachment to Israel are likely to come under intense scrutiny by Jews and Jewish groups who are focused on the “continuity” question.

In short, that question concerns the fear — brought into stark relief by the Holocaust

— that the survival of the Jewish people is tenuous. In many Jewish eyes, continuity depends on maintaining strong defenses — against external enemies who would kill Jews and destroy Israel, but also against the internal threat of intermarriage and its tendency to diminish the number of children who are raised as Jews.

Given that history, it is perhaps not surprising that when the study's surveyors asked what is essential to being Jewish, more respondents (73 percent) named “remembering the Holocaust” than any other answer.

“It's a way of saying Jews must continue,” said Rabbi David Saperstein, a leader in the Reform Jewish movement, the largest and most liberal of the three major streams of Judaism. “And therefore we need to build a Judaism that is strong and robust.”

Saperstein quoted the theologian and Holocaust survivor Emil Fackenheim, who said: “The 11th commandment is ‘You shall not give Hitler a posthumous victory.’”

By contrast, just 19 percent of respondents in the survey called “observing Jewish law” an essential part of being Jewish. After “remembering the Holocaust,” the second most popular response to what it means to be Jewish was leading an ethical life, the option chosen by nearly seven in 10 people.

Cooperman said the growing number of “Jews of no religion” is a major new twist in the continuity question. Two-thirds (67 percent) of “Jews of no religion” who are raising children told pollsters that they are not bringing them up as Jews in any way — not even as cultural or secular Jews.

“They're a growing group, and the question is, will they pass along their identity?” Cooperman said. **BT**

Other findings

The recent study on Jewish Americans also discovered that:

- Jews continue to support the Democratic Party over the Republican Party by a wide margin (70 percent to 22 percent).
- More than eight in 10 Jews (82 percent) said homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared with 57 percent of Americans in general.
- A vast majority of Jews believe a person can still be Jewish and work on the Sabbath (94 percent), and can be strongly critical of Israel (89 percent) or not believe in God (68 percent).
- More than three in 10 Jews believe a person can believe that Jesus was the messiah — the belief that's central to Christianity — and still be Jewish.
- Of the three major branches of Judaism, the Reform movement — the least traditional — claims 35 percent of American Jews, followed by unaffiliated Jews (30 percent), Conservative Jews (18 percent) and the Orthodox (10 percent).
- More than four in 10 American Jews (43 percent) have been to Israel, and about the same proportion (44 percent) believes Israel's continued building of settlements on lands claimed by the Palestinians is harmful to Israel's security.
- More than four in 10 Jews (42 percent) said having a sense of humor is essential to their Jewish identity.

Pew interviewed 3,475 Jews in America to produce its 213-page report, which pins the number of adult American Jews who say Judaism is their religion at 4.2 million. That number rises to 5.3 million if cultural Jews are included. Add to these figures the approximately 900,000 children being raised exclusively as Jews, or the 1.8 million living in households with at least one Jewish adult.

AN ANALYSIS

Billy Graham's legacy fading 'into the mists of history'

WHEATON, Ill. — We gathered at Billy Graham's alma mater over three days to explore his ministry's place in American history and chronicle its meaning for the future.

It was a fascinating conversation, and poignant, too, as Graham struggles with poor health at home in Montreat, N.C., far from the limelight he once commanded.

But as scholars and admirers here in suburban Chicago added to the growing conversation on Graham's legacy, a question hovers: How many people younger than, say, 60 are listening?

As Duke Divinity School's Grant Wacker told the Wheaton College gathering dominated by graying heads, during a recent lecture at Trinity College just one student knew the name Billy Graham. And that student thought Billy Graham was a professional wrestler.

"His story," Wacker said, speaking of modern Christendom's most famous figure, "is rapidly receding into the mists of history."

Graham, who turns 95 on Nov. 7, is under round-the-clock care at home, with limited vision, hearing and mobility. The Charlotte, N.C.-based ministry that's now run by his son, Franklin, does its best to keep the aging evangelist in the forefront: His picture is on the home page of the website, and Thomas Nelson just released Graham's 32nd book, *The Reason for My Hope: Salvation*.

But it's been eight years since Graham's last formal crusade. Those close to him say he is in good spirits but fragile health, and requires help in whatever ministry work he tackles. He no longer makes public appearances.

It's left to gatherings like this one to gauge the impact and meaning of Graham's command of the Christian stage for a half-century, and to mine the lessons for whatever form evangelism takes going forward.

The Sept. 26-28 conference was sponsored by Wheaton's Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, and featured a dozen scholars from around the country. Among the topics: Graham's mastery of the media, his sermon style, and why he succeeded in



commanding the world's stage for five decades or more.

I spent a decade covering Graham for *The Charlotte Observer*, and so the scholars drafted me early in the process to offer a layman's response to their analyses, and to write the last chapter in a book, tentatively called *Worlds of Billy Graham*, which will examine the future of his ministry under his more politically outspoken (and conservative) son.

Michael Hamilton of Seattle Pacific University spoke of the power of Graham's crusade sermons arising from a blend of pageantry, as well as his credibility and a simple message that never changed: Accept Jesus and know a new life, now and forever.

"Graham," he said, "aimed for the heart and not the head." Estimates are that 4 percent of his crusade audiences over the years answered the famed altar call and committed (or re-committed) their lives to Christ.

Elesha Coffman of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary analyzed Graham's mastery of mass media. Graham, she said, toed that fine line between slick and savvy in winning positive press. He also learned how to take advantage of movies, radio, magazines,

even appearances on *The Tonight Show*. His TV interview with Woody Allen can still be found on YouTube, evidence of Graham's ability to evangelize on pretty much any platform.

Wacker has been working for years on his own book, *Billy Graham and the Shaping of Modern America*, and mused about the qualities he believes pushed Graham into the spotlight and kept him there. Among them: his basic decency and unstained ministry; a willingness to apologize and adapt (such as his oft-repeated confession that he got too close to politicians and presidents), and the bottom-line promise he offered the faithful — the chance to come forward and start over.

"No matter how badly you have messed up," Wacker said, echoing a lifetime of Graham messages, "there's a second chance."

Even at this ardent Christian school, many students have only a vague knowledge of Graham. Freshman Hunter Dinkins, 18, of Visalia, Calif., said that God brought him to Wheaton. But as he waited for a history class outside the conference hall, he confessed that all he knows about God's most famous modern ambassador is that he held big crusades. "Other than that ..."

The statistic that Wacker shared at the start of the conference looms large: A 2007 Gallup poll found that 30 percent of Americans under 30 didn't know who Billy Graham was, much less what he accomplished.

As scholars study Graham's crusade tapes, write their books and give their lectures, they are hoping that the next generation of Christian leaders is listening, that someone out there in Christendom is learning something about integrity, vision and longevity.

"Billy Graham's legacy? Courageously preaching the gospel," said Wheaton graduate student Lance Hays, at 25 one of the youngest to attend the conference. "Years from now? Hopefully people will remember that he preached a message that never changes." **BT**

—Ken Garfield is the former religion editor of *The Charlotte Observer*.

Pope to canonize John Paul II, John XXIII in April

By Eric J. Lyman
Religion News Service

ROME — Popes John Paul II and John XXIII will be formally declared saints on April 27, 2014, the Vatican said Sept. 30. Pope Francis made the announcement during a meeting with cardinals gathered in Rome.

John Paul, who was pope from 1978 to 2005, and John, who reigned from 1958 to 1963, are considered two of the most influential religious leaders in the world in the last century, and they represent two poles in Roman Catholicism — John XXIII is a hero to liberals, while John Paul II is widely hailed by conservatives.

Francis said in July that he planned to canonize them together, the first time two former

popes will be declared saints at the same time. Francis seemed eager to make that pairing work, perhaps as part of his effort to try to heal some of the internal divisions in the church.

While John Paul was on the fast track to sainthood, the canonization process for John — who convened the Second Vatican Council and helped usher the church into the modern world — was moving much more slowly.

But Francis bent the rules so that a second miracle would not be required for John to clear the last hurdle for canonization.

The calls for John Paul to be made a saint started even before he was buried eight years ago last April: His funeral was marked by chants and banners reading “Santo Subito!” (Sainthood Now!) from the throngs of the faithful on hand.

Benedict XVI, who succeeded John Paul II, quickly bypassed the normal five-year waiting period after a person’s death in order to start the meticulous process for declaring someone a saint. That cleared the way for what will be the fastest canonization ever in modern times. While John Paul’s will take nine years, the sainthood bid of Opus Dei founder Josemaria Escrivá took 27 years — currently the quickest known canonization.

Two miraculous cures have already been chalked up to prayers addressed to John Paul.

A Vatican spokesman said that Benedict, who has largely remained in seclusion since his retirement last February, would take part next spring in the canonization Mass, which is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to Rome. **BT**

Wales admits women bishops, Church of England lags behind

By Trevor Grundy
Religion News Service

CANTERBURY, England — The decision by the Church in Wales to consecrate women bishops means the Church of England — the mother church of the worldwide Anglican Communion — will be the last in Britain to admit women as bishops.

Cheers erupted in a hall at Lampeter, Ceredigion in Wales, when the 144-member governing body of the Welsh church announced the result of the vote on Sept. 12. A similar bill failed narrowly in 2008.

Ireland and Scotland both allow female

bishops though none have been elected yet.

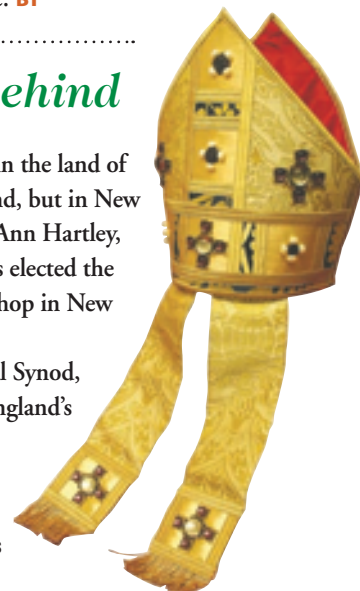
“The Welsh vote means that the Church of England will be last to accept the inevitable — women as bishops probably by the year 2015,” said Christina Rees, a member of the archbishop of Canterbury’s advisory council, and a prominent campaigner for women bishops over the last three decades.

“It’s beyond embarrassing to think the Church of England — mother church of millions of Anglicans — will be last in line on this issue that should have been dealt with years ago,” she said.

Rees noted that a woman ordained in the Church of England is about to be consecrated as

a bishop — not in the land of her birth, England, but in New Zealand. Helen-Ann Hartley, 40, last week was elected the third woman bishop in New Zealand.

The General Synod, the Church of England’s governing body, will meet in London in November and is expected to clear the way for the consecration of women bishops in 2015. **BT**



Pew Report: White evangelicals, more than U.S. Jews, say God gave Israel to Jewish people

By Michael Lipka
Pew Research Center

Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, and most Jews in the United States say that emotionally they are either very attached (30 percent) or somewhat attached (39 percent) to Israel. But on some measures, Jews’ feelings for Israel are equaled or even exceeded by those of white evangelical Protestants.

Twice as many white evangelical Protestants as Jews say that Israel was given to the Jewish people by God (82 percent vs. 40 percent). Some of the discrepancy is attributable to Jews’ lower levels of belief in God overall; virtually all evangelicals say they

believe in God, compared with 72 percent of Jews (23 percent say they do not believe in God and 5 percent say they don’t know or decline to answer the question). But even Jews who do believe in God are less likely than evangelicals to believe that God gave the land that is now Israel to the Jewish people (55 percent vs. 82 percent).

White evangelical Protestants also are more likely than Jews to favor stronger U.S. support of Israel. Among Jews, 54 percent say American support of the Jewish state is “about right,” while 31 percent say the U.S. is not supportive enough. By contrast, more white evangelical Protestants say the U.S. is not supportive enough of Israel (46 percent) than say

support is about right (31 percent).

White evangelical Protestants are less optimistic than Jews about the prospects for a peaceful two-state solution to conflict in the region. When asked if there is a way for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully, six-in-ten American Jews (61 percent) say yes, while one-third say no. Among white evangelical Protestants, 42 percent say Israel and an independent Palestinian state can coexist peacefully, while 50 percent say this is not possible. **BT**

Editor’s note: Evangelicals’ support of Israel is rooted in an interpretation of biblical prophecy that ties the Second Coming of Jesus to the survival of Israel.

Survey: Hispanics like Pope Francis, but more identify as evangelicals now

By Cathy Lynn Grossman
Religion News Service

AUSTIN, Texas — A Public Religion Research Institute survey released at the Religion Newswriters Association conference in late September finds that the religious profile of Hispanics is shifting:

Today, 53 percent identify as Catholic, but 69 percent said they had a Catholic upbringing. The biggest area of growth is evangelical Protestantism. Thirteen percent told pollsters they are evangelical today, compared with 7 percent who said they had an evangelical upbringing.

The second significant jump is out of religious identification altogether. While only 5 percent said they grew up with no religion, the share of Hispanics who check “none” for their current religious identification stands at 12 percent.

Twelve percent identify now as mainline Protestant, and 6 percent identify with a non-Christian religion.

The 2013 Hispanic Values Survey of 1,563 Hispanic adults was conducted online in both English and Spanish between Aug. 23 and Sept. 3. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The survey found that most Hispanics are

delighted with Argentine-born Pope Francis, but they hold slightly less favorable views of the Catholic Church. While nearly 69 percent look favorably on the pope, only 54 percent see the institution in a favorable light.

Hot buttons issues with conservative Christians — abortion and same-sex marriage — are not as critical to Hispanics. Topping their list of critical issues are jobs and unemployment (72 percent), followed by health care costs (65 percent) and the quality of public schools (55 percent).

While a majority (52 percent) of Hispanics say “abortion should be illegal in all or most cases,” it is cited as a critical concern by only 32 percent.

Only 22 percent cited same-sex marriage as a critical concern. Most Hispanics (55 percent) favor allowing gay and lesbian Americans to marry.

The survey found “bipartisan and cross-religious support for immigration reform among Hispanics.” Even so, the American dream seems out of reach to many: 72 percent say the “U.S. economic system unfairly favors the wealthy,” and 60 percent say “Hard work and determination do not guarantee success for most people today,” while 72 percent agree the government should do more to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. **BT**

Moody Bible Institute drops alcohol and tobacco ban for employees

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

The Chicago-based evangelical Moody Bible Institute has dropped its ban on alcohol and tobacco consumption by its 600-some faculty and staff, including for those who work in its radio and publishing arms.

The change in August reflected a desire to create a “high trust environment that emphasizes values, not rules,” said spokeswoman Christine Gorz. Employees must adhere to all “biblical absolutes,” Gorz said, but on issues where the Bible is not clear, Moody leaves it to employees’ conscience.

Employees may not drink on the job or with Moody students, who are not allowed to drink while in school.

Founded in 1886 by evangelist D.L. Moody, the Moody Bible Institute pays the cost of tuition

(about \$6,000 per semester before federal aid) for its 1,600 undergraduates who attend the main campus in downtown Chicago, many of whom go into ministry after graduation.

Students must abstain from tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs and “sexual promiscuity” for at least one year before they enroll and during their time at Moody.

Last year, the school lifted a ban on long hair for men and nose stud earrings for women. “Hair is to be well-groomed and should avoid extremes,” the guidelines say, and hair should be of natural color.

The change at Moody represents the latest shift in attitudes at different Christian institutions in recent years. Ten years ago in suburban Chicago, Wheaton College lifted the ban on student dancing and now allows faculty, staff and graduate students to drink, though not on campus. **BT**

Graham’s grandson: Evangelicals ‘worse’ than Catholics on sex abuse

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

AUSTIN, Texas — The Christian mission field is a “magnet” for sexual abusers, Boz Tchividjian, a Liberty University law professor who investigates abuse said Sept. 26 to journalists.

While comparing evangelicals to Catholics on abuse response, “I think we are worse,” he said at the Religion Newswriters Association conference, saying too many evangelicals had “sacrificed the souls” of young victims.

“Protestants can be very arrogant when pointing to Catholics,” said Tchividjian, a grandson of evangelist Billy Graham and executive director of Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), which has investigated sex abuse allegations.

Earlier this summer, GRACE spearheaded an online petition decrying the “silence” and “inattention” of evangelical leaders to sexual abuse in their churches.

Mission agencies, “where abuse is most prevalent,” often don’t report abuse because they fear being barred from working in foreign countries, he said. Abusers will get sent home and might join another agency. Of known data from abuse cases, 25 percent are repeat cases, he said.

Still, he says, he sees some positive movements among some Protestants. Bob Jones University has hired GRACE to investigate abuse allegations, a move that encourages Tchividjian, a former Florida prosecutor.

“That’s like the mothership of fundamentalism,” he said. His grandfather split with Bob Jones in a fundamentalist and evangelical division.

“The Protestant culture is defined by independence,” Tchividjian said.

Evangelicals often frown upon transparency and accountability, he said, as many Protestants rely on Scripture more than religious leaders, compared to Catholics.

Abusers discourage whistle-blowing by condemning gossip to try to keep people from reporting abuse, he said. Victims are also told to protect the reputation of Jesus.

Too many Protestant institutions have sacrificed souls in order to protect their institutions, he said. “We’ve got the Gospels backwards,” he said. **BT**

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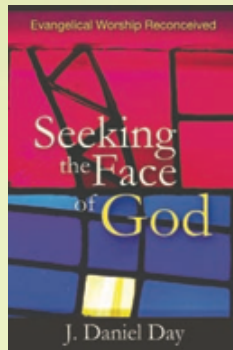
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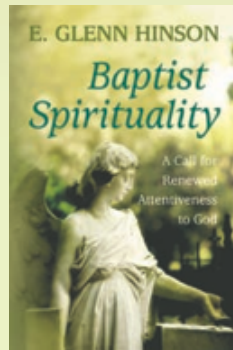
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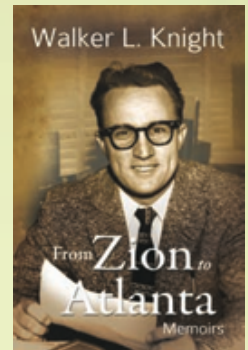
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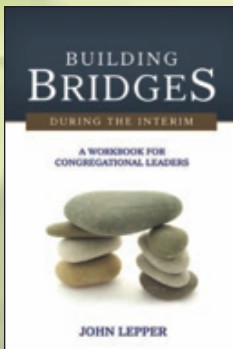
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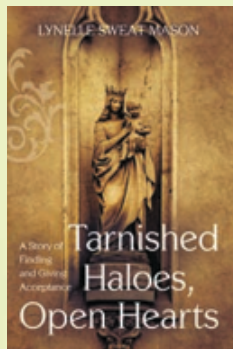
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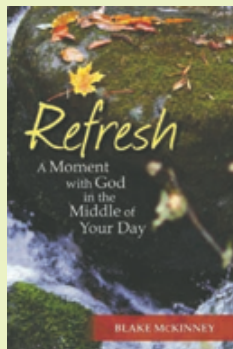
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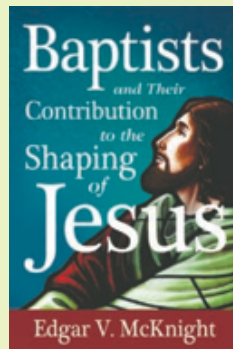
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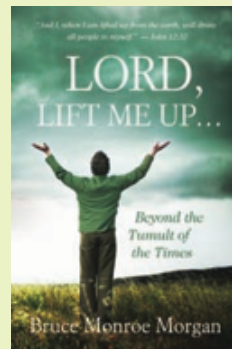
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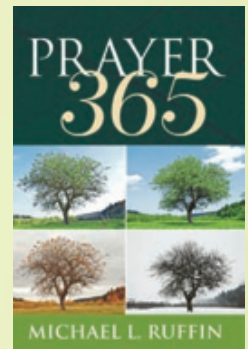
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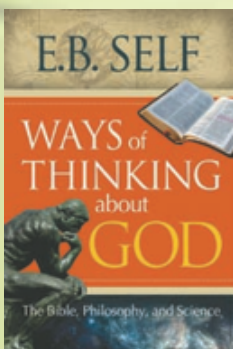
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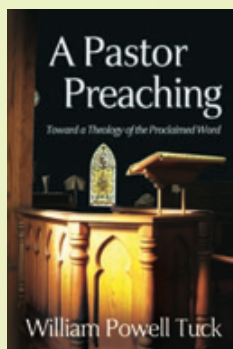
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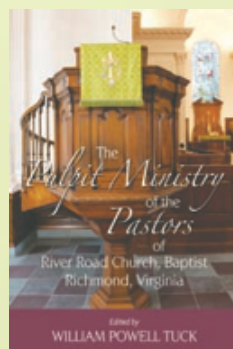
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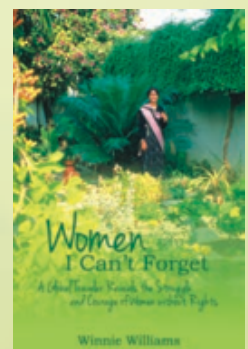
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December lessons in this issue

Advent Hopes, Old and New

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Youth Lessons are on pages 22–23.



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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 2:1-5

Dec. 1, 2013

You Don't Need That Spear

If you could name one thing you hope for, more than anything else, what would it be? You may think in terms of what you hope for yourself, for your family, for your community of faith, for the country, for the world. 🇺

Now, consider this intellectual exercise. Think about the shoes you're wearing, and imagine what it would be like to wear different shoes.

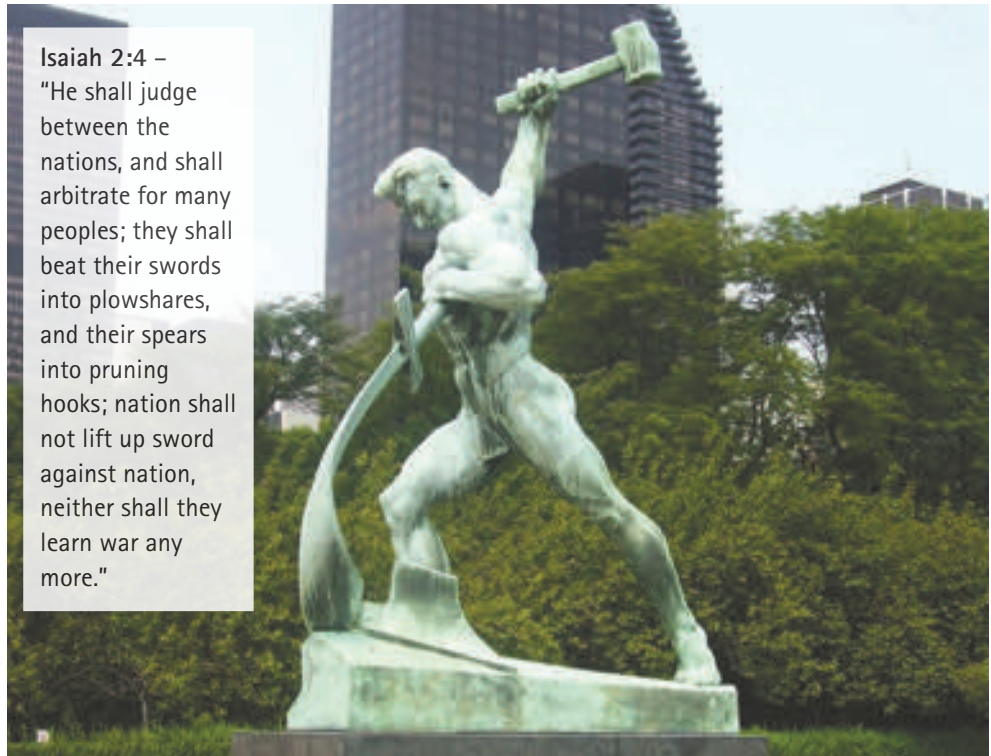
Picture yourself in a pair of work boots that are unusually clean. They used to be covered with dust and mud from your construction job, but now they serve only to transport you down to the unemployment office. What would you want most?

Suppose you were wearing the dusty thong sandals of a poor Dalit, one of the poorest of the poor in India, a member of the "untouchable" caste. You are as hungry for respect as for rice. What do you think would be your greatest hope?

If you were a mother with no shoes at all, chased from your home by the civil war in Syria, living in a crowded refugee camp and clutching a traumatized child to your breast, what would be your keenest wish?

Look down at a pair of sexy high heels. They don't belong to you, but you've been forced to wear them since a slick-tongued slave-trader convinced your parents back home in Nagaland that he could find their daughter a job so good that she could escape poverty and send money back home. Now you're stuck in a brothel, an unwilling sex worker forced to sell your body or lose your life. What would be your greatest hope?

Isaiah 2:4 –
"He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."



Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares, a sculpture by Evgeniy Vuchetich (1908-1974)

How do the hopes you first expressed compare to those you might have if you were wearing other shoes? Do you see how our particular situation in life impacts our greatest hopes and dreams?

But notice also that all these hopes are related. Our basic desire for survival requires sustenance and security and the ability to earn a living. These require a setting in which principles of peace and justice are known and practiced. When these things are in place, we have the luxury of hoping for meaningful relationships in which we can love and be loved. We can hope for opportunities to serve others and know that we have a purpose in life.

Wherever you find yourself along that spectrum, from hoping for survival to yearning for meaningful purpose, the prophet Isaiah has a word for you. Today's text, Isaiah 2:1-5, is an image so inspiring and iconic that the prophet Micah also called it up to encourage the people who were on the verge of giving up hope (see Mic. 4:1-4).

It is the image of a promised day when Jerusalem would be established as "the Mountain of Yahweh" and people from around the globe would travel there to learn what it means to live in justice and peace, what it means to build a place where combat weapons are reformed as farming tools and war becomes a thing of the past.

Can you imagine such a world? Would you work to make it happen?

A promised day (vv. 1-3)

Isaiah lived and worked during the last half of the 8th century BCE. 🇺 Judah had enjoyed a period of relative prosperity under the long rule of Uzziah, but days of peace and plenty had led to a false sense of security. Some believed that keeping up the temple rituals was all that was needed to fulfill their part of the covenant. They expected a "day of the Lord" to come as a time of glory for Israel, and seemed confident that God would never allow Jerusalem, the home of the temple, to be captured.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



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A present challenge (v. 5)

From about 735 BCE, however, a series of serious conflicts with surrounding nations deeply threatened national security. Political instability was rife, and economic disparity was on every hand. ↓

We cannot be sure if today's text was first spoken during the spiritually corrupt days of King Uzziah or during the troubled days of later years. Whatever the setting, Isaiah held hopes for a better future, and that hope found its voice in this prophecy of a coming day when not just Judah, but every nation would turn to God. ↓

"The mountain of the LORD's house" (v. 2) is an obvious reference to the temple mount in Jerusalem. Isaiah saw a day when it would become more than a spiritual height for Israel, a day when the mountain would be elevated to become the tallest in the world, a landmark to which all peoples would come. ↓ ↓

The important thing is not the height of the mountain but the presence of God, which Isaiah saw as being so tangible that all would know it as the Mountain of Yahweh, and people from every nation would "stream to it" for a global gathering in which "he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths."

Jerusalem, in Isaiah's vision, would become the center of learning for those who wanted to know God and know God's way: "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (v. 3).

Note, however, that the future Jerusalem would be more than a learning center for scholars seeking an understanding of the ways of God and humankind. "That he may teach us his ways" is followed by "that we may walk in his paths."

Knowing God's way is laudable, but means nothing if we do not also follow God's teaching. Jerusalem would be a place of both education and inspiration.

An age of peace (v. 4)

People would come to Jerusalem not only to learn of God's ways, but also to seek God's judgment for grievances

between nations, with the result being that all would live at peace and every weapon of war would become surplus, no longer needed. ↓

Can you imagine the appeal of such a hope? When we consider the intractable political issues that continue to plague Isaiah's former home in the Middle East, the prospect of peace seems beyond any hope short of divine intervention.

Civil war in Syria has killed more than 100,000 persons and sent even greater numbers fleeing to refugee camps, with no peaceful resolution in sight. Civil unrest in Egypt continues with the military seeking one type of society while a major party wants a government based on Islamic law. In the State of Israel, conflict between Israeli settlers with government backing who push deeper and deeper into Palestinian land continues to create tensions and hardship for millions.

Those countries are not alone. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq and Iran, Sudan and Somalia, political peace seems far away. Other countries may enjoy political stability but face other troubles, as in Latin America where drug cartels feeding American appetites for cocaine run rampant and neither the police nor military seem able to do much about them.

We are well aware of how the issues underlying political unrest or drug-related crime in other parts of the world may also haunt and threaten our own peaceful existence. Global terrorists seek to bring harm to all they consider to be enemies, and international versions of the Mafia can strike anywhere.

Can you imagine anything more desirable than a day when all nations will live at peace, when our technology can be turned from cruise missiles and nuclear warheads to more effective and environmentally responsible methods of agriculture and industry?

Isaiah saw just such a day, and the power of the image is unabated. ↓

Some argue that v. 5 should be seen as the beginning of the next oracle, but one can make a good case that it serves as an appropriate conclusion of 2:1-4: the vision of future peace concludes with a call for present action. The covenant people of Israel already knew what God expected of them; what they lacked was the will to act on it.

In v. 3, Isaiah had spoken of a day when all would seek to learn God's ways and "walk in his paths," but Isaiah saw no need for his compatriots to wait. Thus, he pleads: "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!"

Isaiah's great hopes did not call for the people of Israel to sit back on their haunches and wait for God to make their lives better. The vision of a day when all live according to God's teaching calls for God's people to work toward that day even now. At the heart of those teachings, Patricia Tull points out, are just arbitration in which people can work out differences without violence and education that teaches a better way (*Isaiah 1-39*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2010], 95).

It is when we learn to walk in God's ways, then put on our shoes and get on with it, that God's word to the world takes shape. When we trust God to teach us about justice and commit to walking in the ways of peace, then we can divert our budget resources from guns to gardens; we can shift our focus from conflict to peace, from war efforts to food production. When we walk in God's ways, we put feet to our hopes and discover that they're more likely to come true.

Think back for a moment. What was on your mind when this lesson first invited you to think about what you hope for most?

How do you think those hopes fit into what it means to hear God's teaching and follow God's paths?

And, what are you doing to make those hopes a reality? Swords don't turn themselves into plowshares. **BT**

Bible Study

Isaiah 11:1-10

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 8, 2013

Odd Bedfellows

Can you remember when you first saw a picture that sought to depict the idyllic scenes of Isaiah 11:6-9? ... Cozy images of a wolf and a lamb snuggling together beside a leopard and a goat, while a bear and an ox contentedly graze the same patch of grass and babies play in their midst?

Whether it was in the innocent pages of a children's book or one of Edward Hicks' folksy 19th century *Peaceable Kingdom* paintings, the image has an enduring appeal. We love the thought of a world where lions and tigers and bears can be playmates with lambs and bunnies and children. ↓

The second Sunday of Advent traditionally centers on the theme of peace, and one could hardly find a better text than Isaiah 11:1-10 to celebrate the hope of a peaceable kingdom.

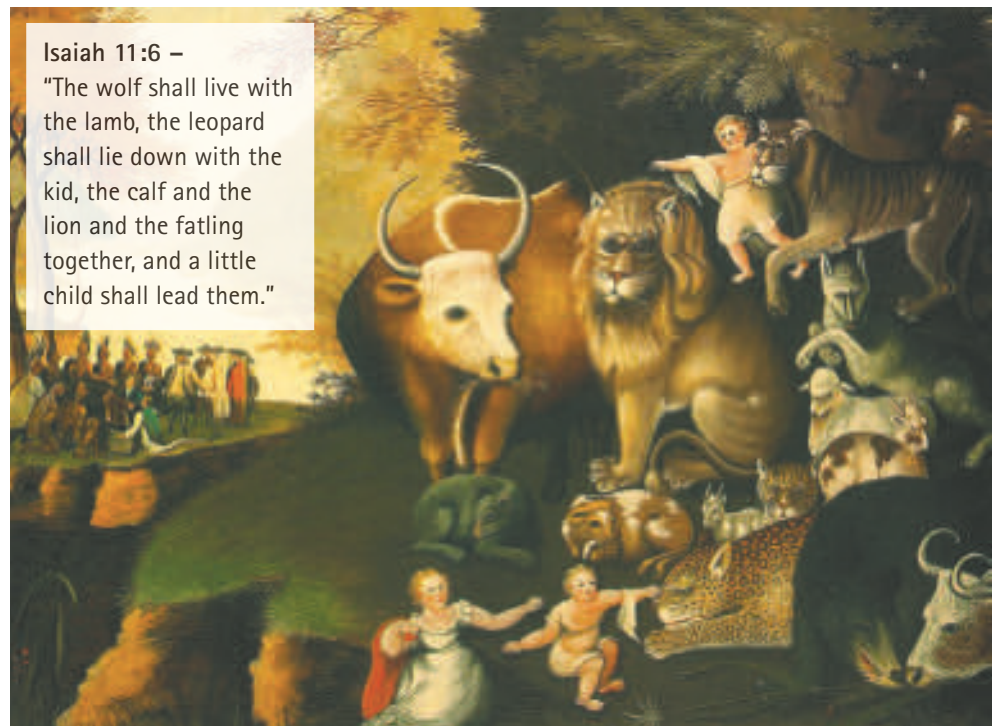
A wise counselor (vv. 1-3a)

Last week's lesson (Isa. 2:1-5) envisioned the hope of a world in which war would be a thing of the past and combat weapons would be turned into farming tools.

Today's text brings yet another image of peace, this one led by a righteous ruler who establishes an Eden-like world in which predators and prey – whether human or animal – live in perfect harmony.

Both texts imply that God's people should not only wish for such things, but also work for them.

Isaiah 11 can be seen as part of a larger unit that begins with 9:1-7, which



Peaceable Kingdom, by Edward Hicks (1780-1849)

speaks of the birth of a righteous king, predicts judgment on Israel and Judah for their prideful lack of justice (9:8-10:4), and declares that the arrogant Assyrians who oppress them will also be brought low (10:5-19, 28-34) as God preserves a remnant of the scattered Hebrews (10:20-27). ↓

In 11:1-9, the text returns to the theme of a righteous ruler who will establish an idyllic age that will bring all nations to God (11:10-16). In it, Isaiah unleashes one potent metaphor after another, each evoking emotional power.

The king is described as a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse, who was the father of David and ancestor of the Davidic line of kings. Earlier prophecies had imagined both Israel and Judah falling before the Assyrians, and 10:33-34 – immediately preceding our text – spoke of God felling the forests of Lebanon, emblematic of the Assyrians, who came from the north.

The tree of David's line might have been diminished with a run of poor kings and finally cut down, but it would not die. The Hebrews believed that God

had promised to David an eternal kingdom (see 2 Samuel 7), and Isaiah saw a day when a new and righteous king would rise like a green sprout from an old stump, a fresh branch from the roots of David's line. ↓

Isaiah describes the new ruler with three pairs of laudable attributes, all related to wisdom. Indeed, the vocabulary of vv. 2-3 sounds more like that of wisdom traditions than of prophecy. ↓ All six virtues are portrayed as being gifts of God's Spirit, as "the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him," bequeathing "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."

"Wisdom and understanding" suggest that the ruler would not only possess a great depth of knowledge, but also know how to use it wisely. "Counsel and might" (reminiscent of Isa. 9:6) portray the ruler as one who is both strong and knows how to use his power in strategic ways. ↓

"Knowledge and the fear of the LORD" are paired as a reminder that

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information is most valuable when used in service to God and God's people. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" was the mantra of Israel's wisdom teachers (Ps. 111:10, Prov. 9:10): knowledge should be grounded in a healthy respect for God's way.

A righteous judge (vv. 3b-5)

Ancient Near Eastern rulers, even those from Assyria and Babylon, prided themselves on ruling with justice, even if their notions of what is just did not always match up with biblical ideals. ↓

Isaiah declared that the coming ruler, wise in the ways of both God and the world, would govern with divine justice. Like God, he would not base his judgments on people's outward appearance or on their testimony, but on a deeper level.

The passage recalls 1 Samuel 16:7, where Samuel was about to anoint Jesse's impressive (and oldest) son Eliab as Israel's next king before Yahweh stopped him, saying "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." All of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, but only David, the eighth and youngest son, was chosen as a man "after God's own heart."

Isaiah, like his contemporary Micah, had a special concern for the poor, who were easily exploited by their wealthy neighbors. A cozy legal system requiring just two witnesses to appear before village elders made it relatively easy for a large estate owner to accuse a poor neighbor on false charges, hire a couple of false witnesses, and take the poor man's land. The elders who passed judgment were likely also men of means.

Earlier, Isaiah had pronounced woe upon those "who join house to house, who add field to field" to build large estates (Isa. 5:8). In contrast, the coming king would judge the poor rightly "and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (v. 4a).

The second half of v. 4 sounds surprisingly violent to modern ears, but "he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth" probably refers to the king's spoken decrees demanding justice for the poor. The reference to his "breath" killing the wicked is in parallel with the preceding line, and its main intention is to indicate that wickedness will be overcome and disappear from the land under the coming king, who would wear righteousness and faithfulness as a doubled belt (v. 5). ↓

A promise of peace (vv. 6-10)

As the coming ruler's power and sense of justice would bring an end to greedy humans preying on one another, Isaiah declared, such justice would extend even to the animal kingdom, bringing all creatures great and small into a time of peace and harmony not known since creation, when all animal life was given green plants to eat (Gen. 1:30).

Isaiah's image plays upon the imagination like tuned wind chimes in a gentle breeze. A wolf lives side by side with a lamb. A leopard stretches out beside a resting baby goat. A cow and a lion munch on grass while a child watches over the odd but amazing flock and a baby plays safely with snakes. ↓

Would you ever, in your wildest imagination, have come up with an image like that? It seems completely antithetical to the world as we know it, a world of predators and prey, eaters and the eaten.

What remains is for us to ask whether Isaiah believed the world will ever truly become a happy paradise where humans and animals roam freely and none are afraid, or whether he was using the animals as metaphors for something else.

Some have suggested that the various predators symbolized aggressive countries that would lay down their arms and live in peace with their weaker

neighbors. Others suggest that Isaiah's main intent was to forecast an image of what a wonderful world it could be if a leader emerged to inspire such a peaceable kingdom.

Finding a clear answer to this question is not nearly so important as catching the sublime emotional feel of Isaiah's imagery, and considering what steps we might take toward creating a world where violence and destruction have given way to a land pervaded by "the knowledge of the LORD" (v. 9).

Some believers take this text very seriously, and choose not only to live at peace with other people, but also to tread so lightly upon the earth that they subsist happily on fruits, grains and vegetables, and do not contribute to the death of animals.

Most readers are unlikely to go that far, but perhaps Isaiah's vision can inspire us to yearn for the day when the promised shoot from the stump of Jesse reigns over the earth, and to work toward that peaceable kingdom (v. 10).

Isaiah did not live to see such a king arise, nor did any of his spiritual descendants who added to his book over the next 200 years. No ruler has yet to touch the ideals displayed by the "signal to the peoples" that Isaiah envisioned, but believers who read this text through the lens of the New Testament believe that the shoot from Jesse's stump has emerged – and been cut down – and has risen again.

Jesus came as precisely the kind of leader that Isaiah imagined, speaking of a kingdom of God that no one around him could understand and that remains largely a dream. While we long with the writer of Revelation for a new heaven and a new earth, however, we remain responsible for the time in which we live.

Like the Righteous Branch, we are called to trust in God's Spirit for the wisdom, discernment, compassion, and courage needed to seek justice for the oppressed and equity for the poor of all nations.

As we do so, every now and then we may just catch a glimpse of the peaceable kingdom, and it will be glorious indeed. **BT**

Youth

December 1 — December 29, 2013

Youth Lessons by
David Cassidy
and online youth
teaching resources
(at nurturingfaith.
net) by **Jeremy
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of the Bible lessons by Tony Cartledge.

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

DECEMBER 1

Lists

Isaiah 2:1-5

Remember how much fun it was as a youngster to make a wish list for Christmas? Perhaps you would take a marker and circle anything that caught your eye from the ads in the Sunday paper. When you were finished, it might have been easier to make a list of what you didn't want rather than what you did want.

Remember the hope and anticipation that you had as you awaited Christmas morning? Now, multiply that hopeful feeling by a million and you have the hope that the people of Israel felt in the scenario from today's passage.

The people of Israel lived in relative prosperity during Isaiah's time, but it was a false sense of comfort. As the people went through the motions of temple rituals,

they awaited for "the day of the Lord" to come — bringing even more glory to Israel. Instead, the political landscape was becoming unstable and the day of the Lord felt like more of a dream than a reality. So when Isaiah foretold that not just the nation of Israel but all peoples would turn to God, their hopes were restored.

But the day of the Lord would not come about through the regular practices of the temple rituals, but only as the people learned and practiced God's ways. Nations would work out their differences, and peace would be the rule of the day. Weapons no longer would be needed — they would be transformed into farming tools.

All of this would happen because they would be living in the presence of the Lord.

Think About It:

Consider all the resources that it takes to bring security in the world. How would our world be transformed if those resources were used to create clean water, educate children and teach sustainable agriculture? What would you be willing to give up to make this happen?

Make a Choice:

How many decisions do we make each day that are meant to tear down instead of build up? How might your small decisions lead to a more peaceful world?

Pray:

O God, may we seek to learn your ways so that we might create a more peaceful world.

DECEMBER 8

How Sweet!

Isaiah 11:1-10

A box full of kittens ... a baby's smile ... a puppy running through lush, green grass. Images such as these bring a feeling of peacefulness and joy. Isaiah offers images of "the wolf living with the lamb," "the calf and the lion together" and "a child playing over the hole of a snake" to illustrate peace. But for Isaiah, these are not just images of what he hopes for, but images of what it will be like when the Spirit of the Lord rests upon a righteous leader who will guide the people."

The righteous leader that Isaiah speaks of will bring all nations to God, and a utopian age will begin. Jesse will be the root from which this leader will come — the family of David. The people might

have lost hope in this royal line because of some of the less-than-ideal kings who had led them, but Isaiah reminds them of the promise of an eternal kingdom God promised to David.

Isaiah lists six gifts this ruler will have: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge of the Lord and fear of the Lord. All six of these are the gifts of God's Spirit and show that the ruler knows and lives the way of God.

Isaiah and the people were watching, waiting and hoping for such a ruler. But it wouldn't be until a baby was placed in a manger that the world would find this kind of king. If we follow this king, can we too learn to show wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge of the Lord and fear of the Lord?

Think About It:

We say we want peace, but often we really just want what is in our best interest. How can putting God first lead to a more peaceful way of life?

Make a Choice:

We hear that peace is our hope, but rarely do we see people working to create peace. How can our actions lead to peace in a world filled with strife?

Pray:

O God, remind us that our hope for peace comes through your son and through following his ways of living.

The Road Home

Isaiah 35:1-10

We all have a sense of "home." It's that place where we belong, where we are valued and loved. Home is comfortable and familiar, a place to feel safe and fed and encouraged. For some, home is with family; for others, home may be with friends. When life is hard or we have found our way into difficulty, stress and fear, we long to make our way home. We are eager to return to that place where we belong and can rest and be loved.

Isaiah wrote words of hope to the people who longed to return home after

being held in exile. He offered hope that they would find their way home and that it would be wonderful: "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer" (vv. 5-6a).

Isaiah 35 describes a "holy way" that would allow the people to travel safely to and from Jerusalem. The promised road would remind the weary that God had prepared a means for them to find their way home again. This hope would help them make the journey in spite of their weariness and sadness. God also offers us a way home when we wander or find ourselves lost and weary.

Think About It:

In the journey of life, where do you find home? How does God help you through this journey?

Make a Choice:

When our journey is hard, we can choose to focus on the difficulties or remember God's presence and hope. Which will you choose?

Pray:

O God, thank you for home and for your help and presence as we journey through life.

Comfort

Isaiah 7:10-17

Did you have a favorite stuffed animal or blanket that you took everywhere and perhaps even needed at night to sleep? Maybe your parents wanted to get rid of it because it was torn, patched together and dirty, but there was no way you would ever think about giving it up. It really wasn't the object you wanted; it was the comfort and peace that came with your favorite animal or blanket.

Isaiah 7 describes the promise of comfort, but it comes not through a favorite object but as a person.

The promise was originally intended for Ahaz but became a sign for all of humanity. This sign would be called "Immanuel," or "God with us." The promise is that God is with us not just in the birth of the child but all of the time. The promise is not that the hard times will go away, but that God will be with us through these times.

Think About It:

Recall a time you experienced the comfort of God's presence in your life. What was it like?

Make a Choice:

We sometimes seek comfort in gadgets, music or other things. Will you seek comfort in God's presence?

Pray:

O God, thank you for your loving presence in our lives and for the comfort you bring.

The Other Side

Matthew 2:13-23

When you travel, do you follow the advice of brochures and travel guides, or do you prefer to explore other areas? There is usually a reason the guides tell us where to go: It is to keep us away from places city officials don't want us to see. Perhaps there are parts of your town that you do not show guests. The Christmas story is the same way. There is another part of the story that

we rarely tell because it is hard to see.

The birth of Jesus is miraculous but also scary. King Herod felt so threatened that he ordered all children under two years of age to be killed. The family of Jesus fled to Egypt so they would not be found and killed. Even the wise men decided to go home another way because they feared King Herod.

Jesus came into a world full of darkness, suffering and fear. He knew how much we needed a better way!

Think About It:

Why do you think the Gospel writers included this dark part of the story of Jesus' birth and early childhood?

Make a Choice:

How does Jesus' birth bring hope of a better world? How can you help?

Pray:

O God, may we find peace knowing that you are among us in this world of fear, pain and unfairness.

Bible Study

Isaiah 35:1-10

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 15, 2013

From Highway to Holy Way

How long has it been since you felt like singing and dancing? Too long?

While we may think dancing is off the table because we're tired or feeling a little blue, try to imagine life for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from the civil war in Syria, trying to make their way in surrounding countries and depending on the goodwill of hosts who become increasingly begrudging as the conflict drags on.

Will peace ever come? Will song and dance ever feel natural again?

The third Sunday of Advent is traditionally associated with the theme of joy, and today's text is an appropriate one, as it speaks to a bedraggled people clinging to their last shreds of hope and promises a day when the desert will bloom and the lame will dance.

Isaiah 35 must be read in conjunction with chapter 34, as the two constitute a unit, with chapter 34 being the yin to chapter 35's yang: the first chapter is a dark picture of desolation for Edom, while its twin is a bright image of redemption for Israel.

Israel's tradition held that the Israelites and Edomites were descended from the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, and the prophets often referenced that tradition in discussing the fates of Israel and Edom (see also Ezekiel 35-36 and Malachi 1). 🇺🇸 🇺🇸

A desert that blooms (vv. 1-2)

When things are going so badly that life could hardly get worse, it may seem

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Isaiah 35:1a –
"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom ..."

that the only hope is in a wholesale change. Sometimes that leads to social or political revolution, as in the famed "Arab Spring" that began in 2010 and continues in places such as Syria today or in past socialist-inspired revolutions in Russia, China and Latin America.

When the oppressor is a foreign power with a clearly superior military advantage, however, revolution is not a good option. King Hezekiah of Judah learned that lesson when he revolted against Assyria's King Sennacherib (c. 705-701 BCE), who ravaged the land and besieged Jerusalem. King Jehoiakim learned that lesson when he rebelled against the Babylonians in 601 BCE and died shortly thereafter. Babylonian domination grew over the next few years, with waves of Hebrew captives being taken into exile until King Nebuchadnezzar's forces leveled the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 586, carrying even more into exile.

That dark period of ethnic homelessness may be reflected in the

background of today's text, with the Edomites serving as an emblem for all of Israel's enemies.

Isaiah 34 depicts a slaughter of "all the nations" (all but Israel), with special attention given to Edom. The chapter is filled with imagery of desiccation, an unfolding picture of Edom's fields and flora becoming parched as water sources dry up and the once-fertile land enters a period of empty desolation.

Chapter 35 portrays a totally opposite fate for Israel, promising life instead of death. 🇺🇸 Isaiah sees a day when the Promised Land – especially the desert areas bordering on Edom – would be suffused with gushing springs that would transform the wilderness into a verdant vision of fertility. 🇺🇸

"The desert shall rejoice and blossom," Isaiah said, "like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing" (vv. 1b-2a). Crocuses are prolific bloomers that can thrive in habitats from meadowlands to tundra, and can even be found in deserts.

In 33:9, the prophet claimed that the

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typically fertile areas of Lebanon, Sharon, Bashan and Carmel had withered away. Now he names Lebanon, Carmel and Sharon as prime examples of the land's revitalization, but it is clear that the land's restoration reflects the presence of God. Isaiah says that in the "glory" of Lebanon and the "majesty" of Carmel, "they shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God" (v. 2).

The power of water in a dry land is obvious to anyone who has ever flown over the southwestern U.S., where giant circles of farmland or lush fairways of golf courses sit amid a barren landscape.

Ancient travelers in Israel's environs would have seen the wonder of places such as Jericho, where a single spring can turn desert land into an oasis.

Sufferers who rejoice (vv. 3-7)

In vv. 3-6a, Isaiah's imagery shifts from a transformed landscape to people who need renewing. With striking imperative verbs, he offers encouragement to his hearers and challenges them to pass on their hopeful confidence to others. The redeemed should actively "strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees," inspiring others to be strong and not fear (vv. 3-4a).

The prophet goes on to call forth an image of God deleting what is evil and opening the door to a new world in which the blind and weak will leap for joy at God's salvation, introducing an era in which physical or spiritual disabilities are no hindrance to experiencing God (vv. 4b-6a).

With v. 6b-7, Isaiah returns to his overriding image of a land that is not only renewed to its former state, but also more verdant than ever before. "Waters shall break forth in the wilderness," he said, "and streams in the desert" (v. 6b).

The "burning sand" of v. 7 may describe a desert mirage in which heat waves create the image of water. In God's new day, visions of desert lakes will become real, and the former wilderness haunts of wild jackals will give

way to land so saturated that it gives rise to tall grass, reeds and rushes.

The NRSV's use of the word "swamp" is an unfortunate translation, obscuring the positive image with one that most readers would find unappealing, as we think of a swamp as an unpleasant place crawling with alligators, snakes and dangerous insects. There is no word for "swamp" in the text, which says that the former lairs or "resting places" of jackals will sprout lush plants that normally grow only in water-fed wetlands, usually near riverbanks.

A highway to Zion (vv. 8-10)

Isaiah's paean to God's restoration of Israel concludes by describing a highway for redeemed pilgrims to use as they return through the transformed desert on their way to Jerusalem. While we may call our roads expressways or parkways, this road would be called "the Holy Way," a limited-access road where the toll would be paid by divine grace and only the righteous could travel.

Those who would follow the holy highway, furthermore, would be perfectly safe. Only the righteous would be there, and none of them would need to fear lions or other predators that could make travel by foot a dangerous enterprise. The wild beasts that had previously terrorized the way might be symbolic of the Edomites, who had previously controlled the southern highway leading from the Negev to Jerusalem.

Isaiah envisions a day when "the ransomed of the LORD" return to Zion amid songs of everlasting joy. Just as desolation would depart from the land and the wicked would be barred from the Holy Way, he says, "sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (v. 10, compare 65:19). The scene echoes Isa. 25:8, a promise that God will wipe away all tears, an image that reappears much

later in Rev. 7:17 and 21:4.

This image of a secure freeway by which pilgrims could joyfully sing their way toward Jerusalem was so appealing that v. 10 appears again in Isa. 51:11, where it appears less suited to the context than here.

The question we must ask about this text is whether the prophet spoke in metaphoric hyperbole – wildly exaggerating the change in fortunes of the exiles as they returned to Jerusalem – or whether he was thinking eschatologically, as in 2:1-5 and 11:1-10, the texts for our previous two lessons.

If we assume an exilic setting, it's likely that the prophet had in mind the exiles' return to Jerusalem along a highway not unlike that spoken of in Isa. 62:10, and that he used the metaphor of a transformed landscape as a hopeful image of a better future. If this is the case, we wonder why the text references the desolation of Israel's ancient enemy Edom rather than the Babylonian captors. Perhaps "Edom" served to symbolize any evil power that oppressed Israel.

If we assume the earlier setting, perhaps connected to Hezekiah's revolt against the Assyrians, the people would have already been in Jerusalem, so the picture of a journey back to Zion seems less likely. In that context, it would be more likely that the prophet was envisioning a future day when God would destroy the wicked and establish Jerusalem and its environs as a new Eden, lush with vegetation that shouts of life and hope on every side.

It is possible to see elements of either reading. While the immediate purpose of the text may have been to encourage the exiles by promising that God would make a way for them to return home, some elements of the text could only be fulfilled in a new age, a transformation far greater than a return from exile.

Whichever option we choose, the take-home message is clear: no matter what trials we face, those who are wise will choose God's way, and they can trust God to bring them safely home. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 7:10-17

Dec. 22, 2013

With Us – God!

How do you handle it when something you've long believed to be true turns out to be something else entirely? That could involve something as serious as a trusted friend turning out to be untrustworthy, or something as trifling as discovering that the pop song lyrics you've been singing for years are wrong.

For some readers, a study of today's text may bring a surprise. Many readers may have heard it only in the context of Christmas, and thus assume that Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy of Jesus' birth because Matthew quotes it in that connection. A closer look at the verse in its context will challenge that assumption. ⬇

Let's find out what was really going on in Isaiah 7:10-16. ⬇

A doubtful king (vv. 10-13)

To begin, we need to consider how the text fits into its literary ⬇ and historical setting. For once, the historical situation is unambiguous: Isaiah is confronting King Ahaz, who came to the throne at age 20 and inherited a foreign policy crisis that was not of his own making.

Around 735 BCE, the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser III (745-727) was at the height of his power and expanding his empire by means of a westward march, picking off one small kingdom after another. Sensing that they would stand a better chance of defending themselves if several neighboring kingdoms could present a united front, King Rezin of Aram (Syria) and King Pekah of the northern kingdom of Israel (sometimes



Isaiah 7:14 –

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

called Ephraim) formed an alliance.

The two kings pressured Judah to join the coalition, but young King Ahaz, possibly following the example of Jotham before him, refused to do so. In response, Syria and Israel invaded Judah, attempting to depose Ahaz and replace him with someone called "the son of Tabeel," a derisive term that may indicate "a nobody." ⬇

At some point in the conflict, Isaiah approached King Ahaz as he was examining the city's water supply, telling him not to fear the two northern kings, whom he dismissed as the smoking remains of burned-out torches (Isa. 7:1-7). Isaiah predicted that their coalition would not last (7:8) and insisted that Ahaz – known for his worship of foreign gods – must learn to trust in Yahweh: "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (7:9). ⬇

Some time later, Isaiah came before Ahaz again, possibly in the palace. Ahaz must have still shown little evidence of trusting in Yahweh, who challenged him (through Isaiah) to ask for a sign of

God's presence, even a miraculous one (it could be "as deep as Sheol or high as heaven," v. 11).

Ahaz, whether feigning piety or simply unwilling, declared that he would not put God to the test, prompting Isaiah to charge him with wearying God through being obstinate and unwilling to trust in Yahweh (vv. 12-13). ⬇

Significantly, in v. 13 Isaiah shifts his address from Ahaz alone to the "house of David," and switches to plural verbs. This alerts the reader to be aware that others were present, probably including members of the royal family. It also reminds the reader that the story is not about Ahaz alone, but involves the future of David's royal line.

A promised sign (v. 14)

We now come to the familiar part of the passage: "Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

A number of things bear comment.

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



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First of all, Isaiah declares that God will give to Ahaz a sign, whether he wants it or not.

The sign will involve a young woman who will bear a child. Here we run into several issues related to translation. The word translated by the NRSV as “young woman” means exactly that: the word *‘almah* comes from a root that means “ripe” and refers generically to a young woman who has achieved puberty: the masculine form of the word (*‘elem*) was used for a young man.

Young women were often married shortly after reaching puberty during that period, so an *‘almah* might or might not also be a virgin. The word *bethulah* could have been used in the technical sense of “virgin,” but Isaiah chose the less specific *‘almah*, indicating a stage of physical maturity rather than sexual experience.

It is likely that the woman Isaiah has in mind was not only married but also present. The direct article is attached to the word *‘almah*, so it should be translated as “the young woman” (NRSV) or even “this young woman” (NET).

The familiar KJV’s reference to “a virgin,” then, mistranslates the Hebrew text on two points, ignoring the direct article and using the more specific word “virgin” when the text did not demand it. (For more on how this happened, see the online “Hardest Question.”)

The state of the young woman’s pregnancy depends on another iffy translation: the word translated “will conceive” in the Greek Septuagint (or LXX, followed by the Latin Vulgate and the KJV) is actually an adjective that means “pregnant,” not a verb meaning “will conceive.” Thus, the NRSV renders it as “the young woman is with child.”

The young woman is not identified. Scholars have speculated that she may have been one of the king’s wives, Isaiah’s wife, or an unknown member of the royal court. 📖

Translation difficulties continue

with the woman’s naming of her child. The NRSV translates the text as a third person verb (“and shall name him ...”), but the form of the verb used could also be translated in the second person, as if Isaiah looked at the woman and said “you shall call his name Immanuel.”

“Immanuel” is composed of two words that are written separately in the Hebrew: *‘immanu el*, meaning “with us, God,” or “God is with us.”

Now we get to the real significance of the sign: It is to be a reminder to Ahaz that God was present with the people of Judah, including him. The words appear again in 8:8 and 8:10 in the context of an oracle describing Assyria’s coming devastation, and serve as a reminder that even in the most difficult of times God is with us.

One purpose of the sign may be to remind Ahaz that despite the hard days and continuing threats, a young woman would have the courage and faith to name her child “God is with us.” Perhaps Isaiah hoped that the powerful but fearful Ahaz would take a lesson from a vulnerable young woman who showed firm faith under trying circumstances.

Deliverance ... and judgment (vv. 15-17)

Isaiah continues to explain the sign in v. 15, which is also difficult to interpret, but seems to be a promise that before the soon-arriving child reached the age of knowing wrong from right, the lands of Syria and Israel would be desolate and the threat they posed to Judah would be over.

The difficult part is Isaiah’s reference to the child eating curds and honey and the relationship of the food to the child’s knowledge of good and evil. Although “curds and honey” has a positive sound, Isaiah used it to reflect a time of deprivation when Israel’s inhabitants would be forced from their cities and farms, returning to a nomadic lifestyle that depended heavily on milk

products supplemented by honey or other foods that could be gathered from the scrubby land. 📖

The bottom line of the sign is that within a few years – by the time the boy about to be born could tell right from wrong – the threat would be gone: “the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted” (v. 16).

The oracle of salvation quickly switches to judgment, however. Ahaz had not trusted Yahweh for protection against Syria and Israel, but had sent lavish gifts (including gold vessels from the temple) to the Assyrian king, asking him to come to Judah’s aid by attacking his northern enemies (2 Kgs. 16:7-9).

Tiglath Pileser III took the bait and attacked Syria, but Ahaz soon discovered that he had escaped two cats only to encounter a lion. Judah became a vassal to the Assyrians, forced to pay a heavy annual tribute. Although Ahaz engineered the unprofitable alliance, Isaiah saw Assyrian domination as divine discipline, predicting that Yahweh would “bring on you and your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria” (v. 17).

What can a modern reader do with this ancient text? It is not enough for us to hear it only as a happy promise ultimately fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus, for that was not its purpose.

This text reminds us of several things. Sin has consequences. Bad things happen. Hard times, whether we’ve brought them on ourselves or not, can be expected. That’s not the end of the story, however. In the midst of our trials, we can trust in God and believe that God is with us.

In this sense, Matthew’s use of the text at a time when Israel longed for deliverance is appropriate – not so much to bolster the account of Jesus’ virgin birth, but to remind believers that in Jesus Christ we find the ultimate sign of Immanuel, the promise that God is with us, not just at Christmas, but through all the times and circumstances of our lives. **BT**

Bible Study

Matthew 2:13-23

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 29, 2013

A Strange Beginning to a Happy Ending

Christmas, as many people have experienced, has a dark side. With its blatant commercialization, emotionally charged memories and gift-enhanced anticipation, it's easy to expect so much of Christmas that the season cannot help but be disappointing.

Families who have experienced a recent death or divorce see an empty spot under the Christmas tree where the loved one's presents used to go. Those who are alone at Christmas may feel more lonesome than at any other time of the year.

The original Christmas story also had a dark side – a very dark side. We don't like that part of the story, so we tend to gloss over it, but there it is, hiding behind the manger scenes and fireplace stockings, haunting the alleys of Bethlehem.

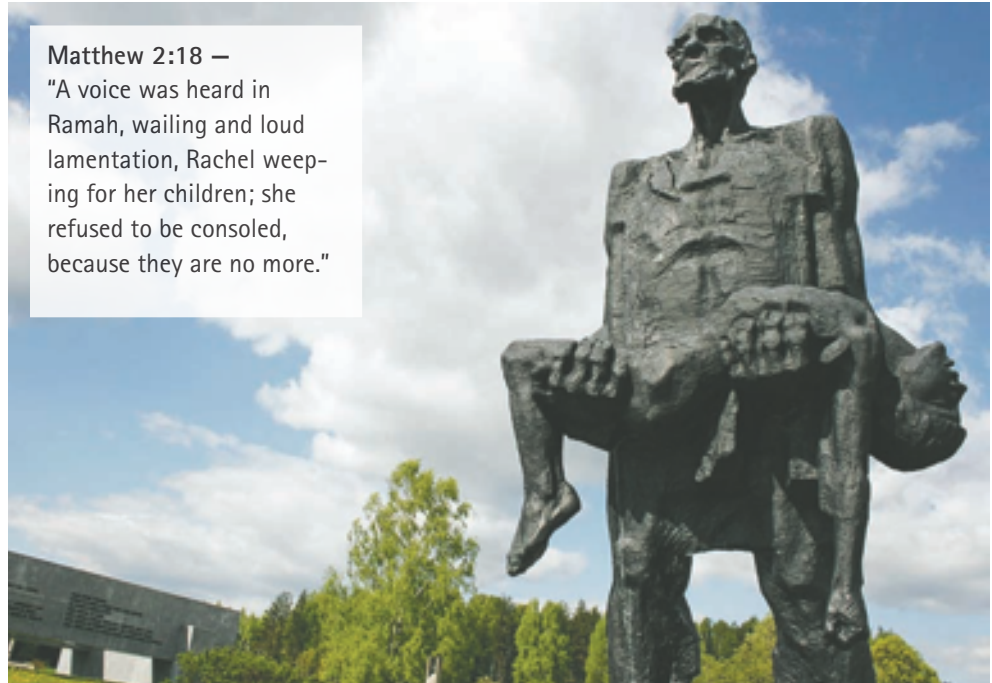
The dark side of Christmas is about insanity and brutality and death. It is about pulling up stakes, running through the night, and living on the edge. It is the story of baby Jesus, boy fugitive.

A stealthy escape (vv. 13-15)

Only Matthew tells us this story, which differs in many respects from the version told by Luke, in which Joseph and Mary were natives of Nazareth who returned there soon after Jesus' birth. Matthew, in contrast, portrays them as living in a house in Bethlehem. ⚓

Matthew alone recounts a series of terrifying events surrounding Jesus' birth and early life, each foretold by an angel who appeared in Joseph's dreams,

Matthew 2:18 –
"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."



The Unconquered Man, depicting Yuzif Kaminsky, the lone adult survivor of the Khatyn, Belarus, massacre, carrying his dead son.

with each event fulfilling some Old Testament prophecy. ⚓

Only in Matthew do we hear of the wise men who traveled far in search of a baby king they had seen in the stars. Assuming that King Herod would know of such an auspicious event, they stopped in Jerusalem to inquire, unintentionally alerting the paranoid ruler to a potential rival. ⚓

Herod was a harsh and unstable potentate who also happened to be of Edomite descent, so it's no surprise that he was unpopular among the Jews and feared a possible overthrow. ⚓

When the wise men alerted Herod to the predicted birth of a future king, which his religious advisors said could have taken place in Bethlehem, he paid close attention – and later was infuriated when they departed his kingdom without returning to report the child's whereabouts, as he had demanded while feigning a desire to pay the child homage (2:1-8).

After the wise men found the house where Jesus and his parents lived, they paid their respects and presented the family valuable gifts (2:9-11). Warned

in a dream to bypass Herod and return by "another way" (2:12), they foiled Herod's efforts to learn the child's specific location.

Joseph also had a portentous dream, instructing him to flee with his family to Egypt because Herod was seeking to kill (literally "destroy") the child (v. 13). Joseph packed up his family and left "by night," presumably the same night in which the dream had come (v. 14). ⚓

This was done, Matthew says, to fulfill the prophet's words: "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (v. 15, from Hosea 11:1). When Hosea spoke those poignant words, he was thinking about how God had called Israel out of Egypt, not about a future Messiah, but that did not bother early Christians, who were diligent in searching for connections between the Hebrew Scriptures and the life of Christ, and didn't hesitate to employ a popular Jewish practice of searching for hidden meanings, drawing typological connections between ancient and present days. ⚓

Thus, while the prophet clearly had an entirely different intent, early interpreters believed they could perceive a

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higher meaning that the prophet himself may not have understood.

An angry attack (vv. 16-18)

Herod's reaction was merciless and swift, but not swift enough. Having learned the time of the star's appearance, he ordered a mass execution of young boys in and around Bethlehem. ⤵

Herod's command to include all boys under two years old – “according to the time that he had learned from the wise men” (v. 16b) – suggests that they did not appear on the scene until at least a year after Jesus' birth. This is understandable, as considerable preparation would have been required for a very lengthy journey by foot, camel or donkey. ⤵

Bethlehem, about five miles south of Jerusalem, was a small town at the time, and the number of male infants in the lightly populated area could have been as few as 20, which may explain why the atrocity did not attract the attention of historians. There are no extra-biblical accounts of such an act, though it is fully consonant with Herod's reputation for brutality.

But even the massacre of 20 infants is a crime beyond imagining, as Americans learned in December 2012 when a deranged man gunned down first graders at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, killing 20 children and six adult teachers and staff members.

The slaughter of the innocents is truly a dark side of Christmas — an episode as black with death as Jesus' birth is bright with hope and life. How could early Christians hope to justify such a thing, or explain why God would allow such an atrocity to accompany the birth of Jesus?

Matthew again took refuge in scripture, seeing the awful calamity as a fulfillment of prophecy (vv. 17-18). Even so, Matthew carefully refrains from attributing the horrific massacre to God. Normally he introduces scripture quotations with statements such as “This was done to make come true what the Lord said . . . ,” or “this was to fulfill

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...” The present text, however, begins with a simple passive: “then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah.”

The quotation is from Jer. 31:15, where it plainly refers to the Hebrews who were killed or carried away in the Babylonian exile, which would have been an occasion for sustained and abundant weeping: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more” (v. 18). ⤵

In context, this quote from Jeremiah's prophecy derives from a joyful section of consolation, a promise that the exiles whose loss had occasioned such weeping would yet return. Perhaps Matthew saw the grief surrounding Herod's massacre as a similar prelude to the Messiah's work in calling home all who were exiled by sin.

A safe return (vv. 19-23)

The final chapter of Jesus' early journeying follows the death of Herod, which would not have been long in coming: Jesus' birth is often dated to between 4 and 6 BCE, and Herod died in 4 BCE.

Again, Matthew tells us, an angel appeared to Joseph, this time with the good news that Herod was dead, the coast was clear, and it was safe to return home (vv. 19-21).

When the weary travelers neared home, however, Joseph learned that Herod's son Archelaus had taken control of Judah. Herod the Great had ruled all of greater Palestine as a client king for the Romans, but none of his sons were deemed worthy of succeeding him. Thus, the territory was divided between three sons: Herod Antipas, Herod Phillip and Herod Archelaus.

Archelaus was widely regarded as the least capable of the three, known for

having inherited all of his father's vices but none of his virtues. The Romans endured his heavy-handed rule until 6 CE, then gave in to citizen complaints and deposed him because of his general incompetence and unneeded brutality.

Joseph was warned in yet another dream to avoid Archelaus' reach, so the holy family skirted Judah and journeyed into Galilee, settling in the obscure village of Nazareth, where the more lenient Herod Antipas ruled (vv. 22-23a). ⤵

Again, Matthew connects this move with the Old Testament – or attempts to. In v. 23b, he speaks as if he is quoting scripture: “... so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’” The problem is, neither this prophecy nor the word “Nazorean” appears anywhere in the Old Testament.

Matthew seems to know that he has no precise prophet to quote, so he must have been citing a general tradition when he referred generally to “what had been spoken by the prophets.”

Efforts to explain this conundrum reach no certain conclusions, though several possibilities have been advanced. Matthew may have confused the Hebrew word “nazarite” with “Nazarene” in recalling a tradition that Jesus was called “the Nazarene,” as were his followers (Acts 24:5). ⤵

Matthew's account suggests that Jesus' early years were spent in a dangerous world and with no permanent home. Today we live in an increasingly mobile society where it's less likely that people will spend their entire lives in the same locale. Even for those who do, perhaps this story will remind us that we are also pilgrims and wanderers on this earth, beset by dangers but called to make the world a better place as we make our way toward a more lasting home.

And, even though we might find his exegetical methods suspect, Matthew also challenges us to trust in Jesus as the final fulfillment of all prophecy that pointed to a messiah who would come to deliver God's people from the exile of their sins. **BT**

By Timothy K. Snyder, Religion News Service



twitter & tragedy

Social media delivers new religious experiences

BOSTON — On my first Patriots' Day in Boston, I was enjoying lunch with several colleagues when someone rushed into the restaurant: There had been an explosion at the finish line of the Boston Marathon.

Moments later, caravans of ambulances and police cars raced, and the reports of casualties rolled in. In the hours and days that followed, social media became for me, and many others, a sacred space to share our prayers and words of disbelief.

The scene gave personal immediacy to research I've been conducting with a colleague about the use of social media as public memorialization in the wake of last year's shooting massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

We have spent countless hours sifting through thousands of tweets, amateur photos, and related media coverage that appeared in the aftermath. Our research can be framed as a simple question: Is using Twitter a religious act?

I'm convinced it can be.

Our research on Sandy Hook indicates that following a national tragedy, social media creates new possibilities for religious practice, allowing us to directly access firsthand accounts and to express our faith and solidarity in the face of unimaginable suffering from essentially anywhere on the globe.

We found that Twitter provides us a place both to offer condolences and compassion to those who have been directly impacted and to make meaning of such events for ourselves.

For example, in the wake of Sandy Hook, the hashtag #nowords, which began as a social commentary on the ridiculousness of the Internet, took on a more solemn and profound

sensibility. Indeed, many of us did not have the words to make any sense of it.

Social media offers a solution to this "speechlessness." Twitter, Instagram and Facebook allow users to express in images what they might struggle to express with words. We discovered that these visual articulations offer a surprisingly powerful tool for prayer.

When we compared tweets about Newtown, we found that those designated as prayers used photos and graphics 50 percent more than general condolences. These included photo memorialization of the victims, photos of prayer vigils and other images filled with religious significance.

Twitter and smartphones provided an unanticipated and soul-stirring alternative to conventional words of prayer, inviting us to forgo language altogether and bring the poetry of silence to our contemporary religious practices.

Beyond such creative practices of prayer, Twitter also provides a forum for human solidarity among people of diverse faiths. Following the Newtown shootings and the Boston Marathon bombings, we observed thousands across faiths "gathering" on Twitter and other social media, demonstrating their presence by proxy.

Some might suggest that the ease of sharing a photo on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook cheapens the religious significance of the act. But we found the opposite to be true — social media creates new avenues for innovative religious practices, like photo sharing as an offering of prayer.

It is important to note that these new religious practices don't replace religious

communities; rather, they add to them.

After the Newtown shootings, many Twitter users documented their participation in a crowd-sourced memorialization by sharing photos of candles lit inside white paper bags they'd placed in their driveways, a symbolic gesture to guide "home" the innocent souls of the victims. In this case, participation via Twitter didn't replace traditional religious practice; it improvised it.

These emerging religious practices documented through social media suggest something interesting to us about faith in America. Recent studies from Public Religion Research Institute and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life indicate that religious affiliation is declining in America. But those same reports also found the majority of those who claim no affiliation still say they believe in God.

Our findings suggest that religious practices and faith may not be declining, but they are shifting in surprising and exciting ways.

When religious leaders and everyday people of faith turn to social media to express their commitments to creative offerings of prayer, solidarity in the face of suffering, and love in the midst of violence, they demonstrate a positive use of religion in the American public square.

Religious leaders can learn from the ways people use social media in the aftermath of national tragedies. These folk practices point to the durability of contemporary faith and suggest our shifting world may require new ways of understanding religious belief and commitment. **BT**

—Timothy Snyder is a doctoral fellow in practical theology at Boston University.

'Twitter and smartphones provided an **unanticipated and soul-stirring alternative** to conventional words of prayer, inviting us to forgo language altogether and **bring the poetry of silence to our contemporary religious practices.**'

By Bill Leonard

Remembering the grace of a mountain preacher

Harold McKinnish was one of the great mountain preachers of his generation, a legacy stretching back to the Separate Baptist preacher Shubal Stearns who came to North Carolina in 1755.

When the 80-year-old McKinnish preached his last sermon on July 7, 2013, he urged the congregation to “get saved,” or reclaim their Christian faith, then “pass it on.”

Steadying himself on the pulpit of the Holly Springs Baptist Church in Rutherfordton, N.C., and knowing that he’d soon “go on to Glory,” McKinnish reminisced about a lineage of departed mountain preachers who, in churches and revival meetings across six decades of Appalachian ministry, had brought him to that very moment.



He recalled men and women who carried him from his conversion in 1944 to his call to preach in 1949, with special appreciation for his great mentor Joe Parsons, described by daughter Linda McKinnish Bridges as the man who nurtured her dad “out of legalism into grace.” And once grace found him, he just kept passing it on.

“Brother Harold” died on Aug. 21 having served nine churches in the Carolinas, preached more than 17,000 sermons and conducted 2,200 funerals. He recorded every sermon text and title, with comments on whether the congregation was “warm,” “cold” or “on fire for God.”

At 16 he was called as pastor of Liberty Baptist near Bat Cave, N.C. The members of Tuxedo Baptist Church elected him as their pastor three different times. One friend labeled him “the most-loved man in Henderson County,” a claim confirmed by the 1,200 folks who waited in line for hours to mourn with the McKinnish family the evening before his funeral.

Appalachian folklorist Loyal Jones’ description of Stearns fits Brother Harold like a glove:

Shubal Stearns was a major purveyor of a populist religion aimed at the religion-starved frontier people. It was a religion available to all, the learned or the illiterate, the well-to-do or the lean poor, man or woman, and children, too, at an earlier age than the old Calvinists would have thought proper. The gospel was preached with a desperate zeal to get the attention of sinners before they stumbled into an everlasting hell. That zeal also touched the equally desperate longings of some of the old Calvinists ... causing them to follow the bright eyed-preacher into a faith that was more optimistic than that offered by their predestinarian churches. Spiritually needy people in the mountains and elsewhere have continued to follow Stearns’s successors down through the years, not only in Separate, Freewill, Southern, and largely unaffiliated Missionary Baptist churches but also in the many other churches that have adopted Stearns’s New Light doctrine and his energetic and zealous way of proclaiming it.

In his own “desperate zeal” to get sinners’ attention, McKinnish could sing the gospel as well as preach it, writing songs and playing the mandolin in church and mountain bluegrass jam sessions.

“I was cut out to be a musician,” he confessed, “but sewed up to be a preacher.”

An unashamed conservative, Brother Harold’s theology was probably a little to the right of Jesus and at least half of the apostles. Sooner or later every conversation turned to theology, at least with me. Like the time he said I was too soft on serpent-handlers and too hard on fundamentalists.

For several years we did tag-team theologizing with students in the Appalachian religion course Wake Forest offers in the mountains each January. In our final conversation,

he was weak as a kitten but he re-preached his last sermon to me on the phone and made me cry.

The Spirit pushed Harold’s theology, too. One Sunday, when 12-year-old daughter Linda blurted out: “Daddy, why can’t women preach?” he responded: “Because God didn’t ordain it.”

Yet when he kept preaching, “Do whatever God calls you to do,” Linda finally took him at his word.

She went to Southern Baptist Seminary, then to Taiwan as a missionary, returning to the seminary for a New Testament Ph.D. Brother Harold ultimately celebrated her call to preach and pastor. At her Ph.D. graduation he wept uncontrollably.

Invited to teach Greek at the seminary amid the infamous Southern Baptist “controversy,” McKinnish Bridges was eventually told her contract would not be renewed due to conservative opposition to women in such a role.

When Brother Harold brought his truck to help her empty her office, he compelled her to kneel with him in front of Norton Hall, the school’s administration building, and shake the dust of the place off their feet. By chance I happened on them at that moment and thought: “My Lord, Harold’s put a curse on Southern!”

He didn’t. Rather Linda calls it a “sacrament of failure,” that took her beyond anger and bitterness.

Her dad’s enacted biblicism had set her free. Her call to preach had freed him too, a long way from that Sunday when she was 12.

Morgan Edwards, the 18th century Baptist historian, called Shubal Stearns “indisputably good, both as a man, a Christian and a preacher.” Robert Ballard of Zirconia said of Harold McKinnish: “He was everybody’s pastor, even if you didn’t go to his church.”

Two mountain preachers, in two different centuries, “energetic and zealous” about grace to the bitter end. Hallelujah! **BT**

—Bill Leonard is James and Marilyn Dunn Professor of Church History and Baptist Studies at Wake Forest University School of Divinity. This column is distributed by Associated Baptist Press.

BY RICHARD V. PIERARD, *Contributing Writer*



Participants in the Judson 200 Legacy Tour, sponsored by the American Baptist Historical Society, visited Myanmar in January to pay tribute to the early mission efforts of Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson and to build relationships with the Burmese Baptists who continue a faithful witness in the strife-torn nation. Contributed photo. A conference on the Judsons and modern missions will be held in Atlanta this month.

Two centuries of influence

Traveling Baptists celebrate mission impact of the Judsons

Yangon, MYANMAR — The sailing of five bold young men and their four equally intrepid wives for faraway India in early 1812 was a little-noticed event at the time.

They were the first appointees of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, founded just two years earlier, and their action marked the entrance of Protestants from the United States into the overseas missionary enterprise.

The group of New Englanders started out as Congregationalists, but three, Adoniram Judson, Ann Hasseltine Judson and Luther Rice, through studying the Bible during the long voyage, became convinced that believer's baptism by immersion was the correct position. Upon arrival in Calcutta, they asked some English Baptist missionaries working beyond the British East India Company's jurisdiction to "re-baptize" them in the "proper" mode.

The Company viewed the arrival of the Americans with a jaundiced eye. After all, the U.S. and Great Britain were at war, while the company had a standing policy against missionary work in its domains.

Such activity might result in conflicts with the local people and thereby be harmful to business, the East India Company's only reason for existence. So authorities ordered the immediate expulsion of the missionaries.

BANISHED BAPTISTS

The three were in a bind. By becoming Baptists they had cut themselves off from their support base.

Trying to determine what to do, they wandered around the Indian Ocean region for a while and finally landed in Rangoon, Burma, on July 13, 1813.

Felix Carey, son of English Baptist missionary William Carey, had earlier initiated a small work there that proved to be unfruitful. He decided to abandon it but remained long enough to help the Judsons get their feet on the ground.

Luther Rice returned home to raise funds and recruit workers for the new Baptist mission. From this humble beginning a substantial Baptist presence would come to populate Buddhist Burma.

In May 1814, Baptists met in Philadelphia and formed the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States. Commonly known as the Triennial Convention, it undertook supporting the Judsons and sending out more missionaries.

More importantly, for the first time this voluntary society brought together the scattered Baptists of America into a common endeavor.

JUDSON BICENTENNIAL

Formal remembrances of these significant events from two centuries ago began with several church and academic meetings in the Boston area in 2012. These were followed by related observances during the 2013 biennial convention of the American Baptist Churches, USA held in Kansas City.

A conference on the Judsons and their ongoing influence is set for Nov. 14-16 at Mercer University's Atlanta campus. Mercer's McAfee School of Theology is sponsoring the event in collaboration with the American Baptist Historical Society, Baptist History & Heritage Society, Baptist Women in Ministry and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The American Baptist Historical Society, founded in 1853, is now located on Mercer's Atlanta campus. It is caretaker of the world's largest Baptist library and archive, including a substantial collection of Judson memorabilia and Burmese materials.

TO BURMA

In January, the ABHS sponsored a "Judson 200 Legacy Tour" to Burma (now named Myanmar). Leading the 23-person group of academics, ministers, lay leaders and students were Rosalie Hunt, author of the Judson biography, *Bless God and*

Take Courage (Judson Press, 2005), and ABHS Executive Director Deborah Van Broekhoven.

Burma specialist Will Womack served as a consultant. A prime objective was to express goodwill to and fraternal solidarity with Baptist sisters and brothers in present-day Myanmar.

The timing of the trip was serendipitous. For decades harsh military rule had prevailed and, under the dictatorship, human rights violations were an everyday fact of life.

Civil liberties were repressed, economic development lagged, rebellion raged in the non-Burmese tribal areas, and tourism was minimal. Myanmar had essentially become a closed country.

But times were changing. The military was loosening its tight control and in 2010 ended the house arrest of the country's most noted dissident, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Now allowed to travel abroad, she was acclaimed as a hero.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attracted world attention with an official visit to Myanmar, and President Obama stopped by briefly on his Asian tour in November 2012. Never before had a sitting U.S. President set foot in this country, and the people welcomed him warmly.

BURMESE BAPTISTS

Arriving in Rangoon, now known as Yangon, our group was greeted by Saw Chit U, who stayed with us for the next 11 days. A Baptist himself, he was an invaluable interpreter of the places we visited and frequently enlightened us about situations in the Myanmar Baptist community.

On Sunday, January 20, our first full day in the country, we were welcomed at morning services in two historic churches that claim Judson as their founder — Immanuel Baptist Church and U Naw Church, named for Judson's first convert.

In the afternoon we attended worship at the Judson Memorial Church on the Yangon University campus. Built in the 1930s, this spacious structure originally was the chapel of Judson College. Independent now, it has an active congregation.

Tour member Elizabeth Hostetter, a music professor from Judson College in Marion, Ala., provided two well-received piano solos, and we met several Burmese Baptist leaders. The youthful choir even welcomed me to take part in their rehearsal.

The next day we journeyed to Myanmar Institute of Theology, the main Baptist seminary in the country. Students from various ethnic groups in Burma treated us to a program of singing and folk dances.

For registration and other information on "The Judsons: Celebrating 200 Years of Baptist Missions" conference, Nov. 14-16 in Atlanta, visit: theology.mercer.edu/programs-events.

Chancellor Jerry Cain of Judson University in Elgin, Ill., a member of the touring group, was among those who spoke. During a luncheon, Deborah Van Broekhoven shared with the Institute's administrators about ways the ABHS might assist in library development and forging closer relations with Baptists in America.

In Yangon we saw where the first baptism was held, and visited the location of the cemetery and the first mission house. However, streets and buildings cover these sites now — and there are no memorial markers.

We also visited Po Karen Seminary, another school with American Baptist ties.

Of course, we could not miss the magnificent Shwe Dagon pagoda, for which Yangon is world famous. It towers more than 100 feet into the air and is sheathed in 11 tons of pure gold and embellished with precious stones including 4,350 diamonds. At night it is even more spectacular, as it brightly glistens in the illuminating spotlights.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

After Yangon we traveled by air to the north. We spent a day in Bagan, a picturesque site of Buddhist piety with about 2,000 temples and memorials of all sizes and shapes covering many square miles of terrain.

We also stopped at a small, struggling Baptist church and learned about its ministry.

Then it was on to Mandalay, the center of Burmese imperial power in the 18th-19th centuries. It was in nearby Ava, where Adoniram Judson suffered as a prisoner during the Anglo-Burman War of 1822-23. Only the bold actions of his wife, Ann, in bringing food and caring for him, enabled his survival.

To reach the prison site, we crossed an arm of the Irrawaddy River on the most rickety boat imaginable and rode in horse-drawn carts to a banana field near the prison. We walked through the field to an ancient grove of trees where we spotted the vestige of a monument to Judson.

There we gathered in a circle and offered prayers of thanksgiving to God for the great work he had done.

Later in the day we returned to the river for a "sunset cruise." Given the condition of the boat, it is well that it did not go out very far.

The next morning we were welcomed at

Judson Memorial Church where we had prayers with the people and a long conversation with the pastor. We were shown a rare first edition of the Judson Burmese Bible.

In the afternoon we visited a couple of important Buddhist temples and went barefoot to the top of Mandalay Hill, a religious site, to view the sunset.

We flew back to Yangon and went by bus for the Sunday service at Judson Baptist Church in Moulmein (now Mawlamyine). We viewed the marble tablet on the wall listing the saints who had served there, saw the remains of the Judson compound, and visited the Christian Leprosy Hospital founded by Susan Haswell, who was born in Burma and spent her life there.

The next day we visited Amherst, where Ann Judson was buried on the grounds of the small church there. At her graveside we held a communion service, remembering both the sacrifice of our Savior and the heroic service of this amazing woman. This was the spiritual high point of the tour.

Along the way we crossed the Japanese World War II railway built with the slave labor of war prisoners, and then paused at a nearby POW cemetery.

SEEKING UNITY

The finale of our adventure was a most amazing event. We stayed at a country hotel at the foot of the sacred Zweekabin Mountain in the Karen region outside the city of Hap-A.

The three factions in the Karen resistance movement were holding a conference to reconcile their differences. They planned a dinner and entertainment at our hotel the night we were there.

Some of us met a key leader at a museum in the city during the afternoon, and he invited us to watch the Karen dancers that evening. Naturally, we could not pass up such an invitation.

This man spotted us there and began introducing us to high-ranking politicians. We got to participate in a historic moment. They invited us to join the dancers and be part of the happy throng celebrating unity.

This was a joyous end to a rewarding trip. We trust we made a contribution, albeit small, to the cause of Burmese national unity and the Baptist presence there.

—Richard V. Pierard is professor of history emeritus at Indiana State University and a member of the Baptist Heritage and Identity Commission of the Baptist World Alliance. He is a member of Providence Baptist Church in Hendersonville, N.C.

Classifieds

Minister of College Outreach and Student Ministries:

Blacksburg Baptist Church (BBC) (blacksburgbaptist.org), affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), seeks a full-time minister of college outreach and student ministries. BBC is one of Virginia's largest and most missional churches, and is located across from Virginia Tech. It is also within the ministry area of Radford University and New River Community College. Approximately 50,000 college students matriculate within our ministry radius. We seek a candidate who is dedicated to the faith, self-starting and energetic. He/she must hold baccalaureate and seminary degrees from accredited institutions. This minister must be highly involved on campus and in the church, and be capable of developing outreach/evangelistic ministries, personal counseling, spiritual growth, and mission projects involving students and working in and relating to a highly diverse community and a strong church staff. The position is open to males and females of any ethnicity. Please send résumés with references to Blacksburg Baptist Church, 550 N. Main St., Blacksburg, VA 24060 or to bbc@blacksburgbaptist.org.

Elizabeth Mangham Lott is pastor of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. She has served as associate pastor at Westover Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., since 2010.

H.K. Neely died Sept. 22 in Waco, Texas, at age 79. Chairman of the religion and philosophy division of Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene beginning in 1980, he became the founding dean of the university's Logsdon School of Theology in 1983. He is credited with leading Logsdon through its formative years including construction of the chapel and theology complex and development of the M.A. in Religion and M.Div. degree programs. He served the university for 18 years.

Stephen Reeves is associate coordinator of advocacy and partnership for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, coming from the Texas Baptist Life Commission where he was director of public policy and counsel. An attorney, his work will focus on collaboration with Fellowship partners and advocacy efforts on consensus issues.

Religious Herald, a historic newspaper with ties to Virginia Baptists, is merging with

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In the Know

Associated Baptist Press, an independent news service. **Jim White**, who served as editor of the Herald, accepted a severance package. Managing editor **Robert Dilday** will become editor of the new magazine-style publication to be launched in 2014.

Mark Snipes is missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia. He comes from Central Baptist Church in Richmond where he served as associate pastor of youth and young adults.

Neil Westbrook is pastor of Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, coming from Neel Road Baptist Church in Salisbury, N.C.

Howard H. Williams Jr. died Aug. 31 at age 56. He was minister of spiritual formation at Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala. A graduate of the University of Mississippi and Southwestern Seminary, he earlier served churches in Mississippi, Kentucky and Texas, as well as director of church relations at Baylor University.

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

1. Publication title: *Baptists Today*
2. Publication number: 1072-7787
3. Filing date: Oct. 1, 2013
4. Issue frequency: monthly
5. No. of issues published annually: 12
6. Annual subscription price: \$20 U.S.; \$35 Canadian; \$50 foreign
7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication:
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Contact person: Jackie Riley
Telephone: 478-301-5655
8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher:
988-1/2 Bond St.
Macon, GA 31201
9. Full names and complete mailing address of publisher, editor and managing editor:
Publisher: Baptists Today, Inc.
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Editor: John D. Pierce
Baptists Today
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Managing Editor: Jackie B. Riley
Baptists Today
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
10. Owner: Baptists Today, Inc. (nonprofit)
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Don Brewer (chairman)
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Cathy Turner (vice chair)
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
Julie Steele, (corporate secretary)
P.O. Box 6318
Macon, GA 31208-6318
11. Known bondholders, mortgagees and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities:
None
12. Tax status: The purpose, function and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months
13. Publication title: *Baptists Today*
14. Issue date for circulation data below:
September 2013
15. Extent and nature of circulation (average/Sept. 2013)
Total number of copies: *12,347 **12,025
Paid and/or requested circulation
(1) Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541: *11,697 **11,566
(2) Paid in-county subscriptions stated on Form 3541: *— **—
(3) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales and other non-USPS paid distribution: *— **—
(4) Other classes mailed through the USPS: *— **—
Total paid and/or requested circulation: *11,697 **11,566
Free distribution by mail
Outside-county as stated on Form 3541: *— **—
In-county as stated on Form 3541: *— **—
Other classes mailed through the USPS: *— **—
Free distribution outside the mail: *490 **299
Total free distribution: *490 **299
Total distribution: *12,187 **11,865
Copies not distributed: *160 **160
Total: *12,347 **12,025
Percent paid and/or requested circulation: *96% **97%
16. Publication statement of ownership: Publication required. Will be printed in the November 2013 issue of this publication.
*Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months
**No. copies of single issues published nearest to filing date

Older adult?

By Tony W. Cartledge

Like many other people (especially older ones), I took note of the announcement that cognitive scientists have tested a video game they say “can improve the short-term memory and long-term focus of older adults,” according to an article in the *New York Times*.

The game is a far cry from the graphics-intensive role player games that are all the rage these days, with simple graphics and little to do but guide a car and identify designated road signs without being thrown off by others.

Even so, researchers say that once older adults have been trained and used the game

for a while, they can perform better at it than 20-somethings who are playing it for the first time.

Following sufficient game time, older adults also perform better on other tests of cognition unrelated to the game, researchers said, and even show an increase in brain waves called “theta,” which are associated with attention.

Adam Gazzaley, who led the \$300,000 project at the University of California,

San Francisco, said: “We made the activity in older adults’ prefrontal cortex look like the activity

in younger adults’ prefrontal cortex.”

That’s quite a claim.

While the article contains several caveats from scientists who are concerned that having older adults

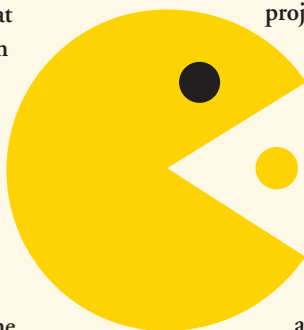
play video games could have unintended side effects, it’s good to see any progress being made toward helping golden agers maintain mental acuity.

I’m particularly interested in that because, according to the researchers, I’m an “older adult.” The project involved people in their 60s to their 80s, and I’m in the lower end of that spectrum.

I don’t feel old and try not to act old, and I’d like for it to stay that way. So, tricks to keep the brain young are always welcome. I can add them to my repertoire of Sudoku puzzles, keeping a running total of groceries in my head, and generally trying to maintain mental vigor.

I know the math sounds off, but for those who stay fit and active, I figure 60 can be the new 40, with or without video games.

Any other old codgers with me on this? **BT**



Conversations about collaboration

By John Pierce

Independence is a good thing. But it is often wise to use such freedom in cooperation or collaboration.

Those of us who lead organizations that cooperate with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship had such conversations over a couple of days recently. They were constructive.

It is naïve, however, to think that every person or group can work hand-in-hand. Sometimes missions and methods don’t mesh. And there are other ingredients for successful collaboration.

The directors and staff of *Baptists Today* and Nurturing Faith publishing, although fully independent, value collaboration highly. In fact, the various partnerships we are engaged in at this time are too numerous to name easily.

The challenge of building effective collaborative relationships is in both identifying a good partner and in clarifying the shared mission. Clearly-stated and firmly-held criteria are essential.

Our organization’s partnerships are built on these criteria or ingredients:

TRUST is the first ingredient. Without it, there is no need to move on to another step.

Leaders of the collaborating groups must feel assured that agreements will be upheld and loyalty will be strong. Healthy partnerships cannot exist if one has any fear of being treated unfairly. I want to partner with those whom I’d trust with a blank check.

SHARED WORK is the second requirement. Collaboration works well when both partners work well — and with different skills in their respected areas of expertise.

Competence for and commitment to carrying out the project (or projects) to completion are needed. A lazy or disengaged partner who doesn’t share the load violates the essence of collaboration.

Partnerships are not designed so one does less, but so that more gets done together.

MUTUAL BENEFITS are why collaboration makes sense. Each organization gets something beneficial from this arrangement that could not be achieved, or achieved as easily, if done alone.

However, those mutual benefits should be tied to shared values — and ultimately result in greater benefit to a shared mission.

In the case of our organization and many others that relate to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, as well as the Fellowship itself, which is designed organizationally on a partnership model, the focus of our collaboration is to provide high-quality resources and services to thoughtful Baptist Christians and churches.

“Who ultimately benefits from this collaboration?” is a good question when considering a partnership. Self-serving cooperation is not worth the effort. There must be an impact beyond what either party sees in an annual report.

Squeezing in several hours of conversation — amid proofreading and making preparations for an upcoming Board meeting — was challenging. But anything that leads to more and healthier collaboration for good causes is worth the investment.

Whether one leads a congregation or other organization, or works independently, it is good to create and clarify criteria for collaboration — and then go find those whose good match will lead to good results. **BT**

Reach young adults through hope, creativity

By Will Dyer

Thirty of us gathered at the Monkey Barrel in Gainesville, Ga., at 6 pm. Over the course of two and a half hours, we ate pizza, talked about life, and considered how God is at work in the midst of our community.

As I was getting ready to leave, the waitress came over and asked who we were and why were we in there. Her eyes brightened as she heard that we were a group of folks from First Baptist Church.

She told me how much she enjoyed listening in on our conversation and how nice it is to know that the church is still a place of hope. Hopeful enough, in fact, that she came to see for herself the very next Sunday.

I came to this congregation in January 2012 to serve as pastor to young adults. I was given the task of bringing younger people to a church that had been told that if they wanted millennials to join they would need screens in the sanctuary (and call it a worship center), a band that plays Mumford and Sons, smoke machines, and most important, a hip pastor with faded jeans and a soul patch.

Our church has adopted none of the ideas mentioned above, yet we have developed a large number of faithful disciples of Jesus who happen to be in their 20s and 30s. I have an idea why we have been successful with this almost mythical "young adult" group.

I tell the story about the Monkey Barrel,

not so you would think free food and drink attracts this coveted age group — though it probably does — but so you could see an example of our community of faith engaging the culture around us.

As a church we have decided that we will no longer be confined to the four walls of our buildings. If we are called to be the church for the world, then it will necessarily mean that we go out and spend time with people who aren't likely to enter the sanctuary on Sunday.



Once a week, many of our young adults go to the local homeless shelter and spend time with children who are faceless in our society. We love on them and tell them they matter, simply because they do.

Our experience is that not only will new people come into your church as a result of engaging your culture, but those already in will become more faithful followers of Jesus. So the first question I would ask a church that is hoping to appeal to young adults is, where are you engaging your culture? Where are the places in your city where the outcast and the voiceless can count on you to spend time and spread love?

Most churches think they need to be

"relevant" if they want to grow. We have been told this means rock bands and sermon series about marriage and finances. Please, please, please don't fall into this trap.

The best advice I can give is to stay true to who you are as a church. If you enjoy the organ, then jam out to Bach. If your church loves Southern gospel, then sing with the Gaither family until you are blue in the face. Be who you are as a church.

At First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., we worship with an orchestra and we follow the lectionary. We sit on rock-hard pews, and most of our people still wear suits on Sunday morning.

We celebrate our history. Rather than apologize for not offering a coffee bar and a bookstore, we invite people to experience the richness of a tradition that is far deeper than the latest consumer trend. Stay true to who God has called you to be in your community.

N.T. Wright, in his masterful book *Surprised By Hope*, says "the church, because it is the family that believes in hope for new creation, should be the place in every town and village where new creativity bursts forth for the whole community, pointing to the hope that, like all beauty, always comes as a surprise."

I think those words, more than any other, sum up why our church has been successful in growing a community of young adults. We are a community of hope and creativity. We dare to do new things and trust that God is with us, even when we fail.

Our church has decided to open our doors to skeptics, doubters, poets, un-churched and de-churched. Our people show grace to liberals and conservatives, fundamentalists and atheists alike.

We hope that God can handle our serious doubts as well as our arrogant certitudes. And we hope, above all, that God is love. It's a message that all people, not just young adults, love to hear. **BT**

—Will Dyer is associate pastor to young adults and discipleship at First Baptist Church of Gainesville Ga.

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Happy Hallows' Eve

On the night of Oct. 31 as it begins to get dark, the doorbell rings. You open your door to zombie hunters, Navy seals, stealthy ninjas, Barbie, Batman, Elmo, Skylanders, Buzz Lightyear, Super Mario Brothers, Lil' Mermaids, Alices from Wonderland, three-foot-high aliens dressed in Reynolds Wrap, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles — and aren't we glad they are back! — but they threaten you and demand gifts. You may want to ask, "Whatever happened to clowns?"

These monsters and cowgirls raise several questions: What are we teaching our children? Doesn't "trick or treat" sound like extortion? Who decided this was a good idea? Do thinking mothers buy their daughters a Xena the Warrior Princess costume?

For most of us there comes a day when Halloween seems less fun than Arbor Day. At a certain age toilet papering your teacher's yard no longer has much allure. For at least four years soaping windows has seemed infantile to me. I know it was the right decision, but I look back with mixed emotions on the Halloween when as a seventh grader I refused to go with the gang to throw slices of bologna on the windshields of moving cars.

Some of us do not have good memories of Halloween costumes. I had to go as a baseball player during my Little League years, because I already had the uniform. During a few politically incorrect years I went as a bum, because my mother felt that I already had that uniform too. Some of my friends cut holes in sheets and wore them, but my mother vetoed this—not because it was wildly inappropriate for a white child in Mississippi in the 1960s, but because she was afraid I would not see cars driven by those who aim for ghosts.

One of the cruel ironies of life is that when we are old enough to buy as much candy as we want, it no longer tastes as good. When my grown children last came home with Nerds, Airheads, Snickers, Skittles, Twizzlers, Bubble Yum, Butterfingers, Sweet Tarts, Smarties, Dum Dums, and Pixie sticks (nobody makes popcorn balls anymore), I found that after a bag or so I had had enough. Condolences



to the health-conscious adults who risk unpopularity by giving out raisins, apples, or toothbrushes. You are not going to win.

On Halloween night, some of us are tempted to skip it all, turn out the lights and hide in the back room. Others respond to the cries of "trick or treat" with a firm "trick." Preschoolers don't have a clue what to do next.

Part of the problem for me is that I am not particularly afraid of black cats, creaking doors, vampires, werewolves, the undead, paranormal activity, Texas chainsaws or Hannibal.

Different American horror stories haunt me. I find pollen, losing my edge and accepting mediocrity spooky. If someone comes to my door dressed up as the ghost of college bills, I will be terrified.

We are probably stuck with bats and goblins. In a wonderful, ironic twist, the British newspaper *Independent* recently printed a bitter complaint from pagans that Halloween is becoming too commercialized and trivialized.

We would do well to remember what the holiday used to be. For more than a thousand years, November 1 has been marked on Christian calendars as All Saints' Day or All Hallows' Day — a day to remember the saints. The eve of this important day, All Hallows'

Eve, has become Halloween.

While millions of children dress up in costumes to pretend to be someone else, we can do some imagining of our own. Most of us have given up our dreams of being a ballerina or a football star, so what do we want to be now?

William Stringfellow describes saints as "those men and women who relish the event of life as a gift and who realize that the only way to honor such a gift is to give it away."

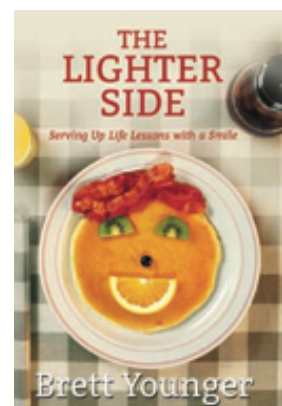
While you eat stolen Gobstoppers, consider Noah's audacity, Abraham's faith, Ruth's loyalty, David's nerve, Peter's daring, Zacchaeus' generosity, and Paul's fearlessness.

While you are chewing on Laffy Taffy, remember Saint Francis' boldness, Martin Luther's mettle, Lottie Moon's faithfulness, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's commitment, Rosa Parks' defiance, and Oscar Romero's dedication.

While you are munching on someone else's Milky Way, think about being as enthusiastic as your Sunday school teacher, as caring as a children's Sunday school teacher, as courageous as a prophetic pastor, as joyful as a choir member, as prayerful as a faithful deacon, and as compassionate as a Meals on Wheels volunteer.

Happy Halloween to all the saints. **BT**

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‘It is about time for our young men to **disband their baseball clubs** ... and go to work.’



Baptists & Baseball

Myths, musings and memories

All across America, millions of citizens are waking up to the November blues: the bats are silent, the bases are packed away and the crowds are gone. Baseball season is over.

For the lucky fans of this year's World Series champs, wistfulness is tempered by the forever-glorious memories of October. Yet the harsh reality is that the great American pastime has given way to autumn chill, leaving fans out in the cold, wondering what magic awaits next season.

Baseball, the subject of mythology, owes much to a Baptist family. Or so the legend goes.

While baseball's roots can be traced as far back as the 14th century and an English game called "stoolball" (forbidden in churchyards) that preceded "rounders" and "cricket," an American myth places the beginnings of baseball in Elihu Phinney's cow pasture in Cooperstown, N.Y., in 1839.

Phinney was the first printer in Cooperstown, and the publisher of regional Baptist associational annual minutes. Now the quaint village is home to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

In this mythical story, Abner Doubleday, a 20-year-old from an established Baptist family is the inventor of baseball. His father, Ulysses F. Doubleday, was a prominent Baptist deacon and writer of religious literature.

Following his recreational pursuits in Cooperstown as a young man, Abner enlisted in the military and served in the American Civil War. At Fort Sumter, Captain Abner Doubleday fired the first shot of the Civil War from the Union side, returning fire from Confederate forces.

At Gettysburg, Doubleday served as the commanding Union officer during the first day of fighting. In November 1863, Doubleday rode on the train with Lincoln as the president traveled to deliver the Gettysburg address.

Yet for all this, Doubleday is best remembered, without adequate historical evidence, as the inventor of baseball. And for many years, Baptists were not particularly fond of such recreation.

The first mention of baseball in the North Carolina Baptist newspaper, *Biblical Recorder*, appeared in 1860 and was innocuous enough.

In an editorial on "Physical Education," the writer gave his approval of "a general awakening in various quarters to the importance of physical education and discipline. The corporation of Yale College, at the suggestion of the faculty, are about erecting a large gymnasium for the whole University. Cricket and base-ball clubs are coming rapidly into favor."

Many other Baptists, however, were not keen on physical recreation. An 1867 Baptist article offered a somber warning about playing baseball: "Lemuel G. Perry, a student at Brown University, died last week of abscess brought on by excessive exercise at the time of the University match game of baseball between the students of Harvard and Brown, some two weeks since."

The following year, during the hard times of the post-war South, a Baptist editor declared "it is about time for our young men to disband their baseball clubs, and dispense with their tournaments, and go to work."

In 1869 the first professional baseball team took the field. The Cincinnati Red

Stockings (later the Cincinnati Reds), the first team in America with salaried players, traveled from coast to coast and amassed a 57-0 record in their first season.

Baptist divines, however, were not impressed. As the Cincinnati team racked up wins, a Baptist editorial scolded such frivolous activity:

“Students in the agricultural and manual labor schools perform farm work and their parents approve it. Baseball implements cost more than hoes and axes, and this game, though more popular, is more laborious and more dangerous than working on old fields.”

An 1875 Baptist commentary on “Laziness and Crime” implicated baseball as a hindrance to southern progress, declaring “... too great familiarity with base-ball implements and fishing tackle, must all be entirely cured or greatly modified, and more of our young men ‘take up the shovel and the hoe,’ before we shall see much sign of the ‘good time coming.’”

By the 1880s, however, baseball was a common Sunday activity on sandlots and in backyards throughout America, much to the consternation of Baptists.

Scandal rocked the larger world of baseball in 1881 when the Cincinnati Red Stockings were banned from the five-year-old professional National League for playing on Sunday and selling beer during games.

In 1882 the Red Stockings and a number of other teams formed the American Association, allowing Sunday play and beer sales. At the end of the season, the National League champion Chicago White Stockings played the American Association champion Red Stockings in what some consider to be the first “World Series,” with each team winning one game.

Baptists, ever paternalistic, were not amused. The 1880s were a decade of Baptist railings against the insidious sport, with entire editorials devoted to the evils of the game.

One writer in 1885 thus summarized: “And even the poor negroes have organized their nines and are out playing match games. This week, I hear, they ended one of their games here in a fight, in which deadly weapons were used. Is the whole country to be demoralized on the subject again this season? God forbid. Let the older men engaged in these sports seriously reflect upon the irreparable damage they are doing to the youth of our land and the end will come.”

In 1890 the National League finally relented in its campaign against alcohol. The now-Cincinnati Reds returned, and beer and baseball have since been inseparable at major league ballparks. Ironically, baseball embraced

alcohol at the very time that Baptists were in a period of transformation from open acceptance of alcohol to ardent prohibition.

The early 20th century witnessed a doubling-down of Baptist opposition to baseball due to the popularity of Sunday games, widespread alcohol consumption, gambling associated with the game, the alleged dangers inherent in playing baseball, and the charge that playing baseball promoted professionalism.

Resistance to baseball continued but was soon rivaled by Baptist abhorrence of an even newer invention in American life — the automobile. Baptist editorials of the 1910s frequently criticized “Sunday motoring” as driving people away from church.

A 1919 letter in a Baptist newspaper captured the changing times: “The automobile is driving more people to hell in a day than all the [base]ball games — Sunday games and all — ever will in a thousand years, yet never a word of protest from the people who claim to see so much sin in Sunday baseball. Why not fight the greater evil? ‘Joy riding’ on the Sabbath, or riding in a car at all for pleasure on Sunday, is certainly as wrong as ‘Sunday ball.’”

Eventually, both baseball and automobiles were embraced by most Baptists and other Christians. Church and Baptist Student Union softball games became common throughout the South.

A 1945 Baptist article titled “Softball and Fried Chicken” reflected the place of softball in the life of B.S.U. by the end of World War II: “Softball and fried chicken ... make a tasty

combination. The one hundred students present did a first class job of putting away the chickens, potato chips, pickles, rolls, doughnuts, and coca-colas. A feeling of contentment rested on the group after the food disappeared.”

Nonetheless, the sale of alcohol at baseball stadiums remained a sore spot. A 1957 Baptist editorial titled “Baseball, Liquor and Gambling” signified the progress that Baptists had made by that time.

While “America’s most popular sport” was not evil, according to the author, the use of alcohol and gambling so long associated with the game of baseball remained a big problem: “We must not let up in our fight against liquor and gambling. With their lust for money, the liquor interests are doing all they can to provide a market for their nefarious trade.”

And thus the matter stands for many Baptists of the 21st century. Survey the multitude of Baptists in attendance at a professional baseball game, and many will enjoy the game but avoid the beer. Some will enjoy both.

But now it is November. The door has closed on this year’s baseball season. The memories — good or bad — are safely stashed away inside the mind and chronicled in endless statistics.

A Sunday drive and a little fried chicken may help fill the long winter days of the Baptist baseball fan until the crack of the bat and the call for “Peanuts, get your fresh peanuts!” once again fills the air and the magic returns to the diamond.

So here’s a toast to next year. **BT**



‘The automobile is **driving more people to hell** in a day than all the [base]ball games.’

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

President Abraham Lincoln visits Gettysburg on Nov. 19 to dedicate the battlefield cemetery. Lamenting over lives lost and dwelling upon the themes of sacrifice, redemption and higher purpose, the president gives a two-minute speech that is later recognized as one of the greatest addresses in American history.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead

150 YEARS AGO

November 1863

we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Otherwise, Chattanooga is the focus this month. Union Gen. William T. Sherman and his Army of Tennessee reinforce the besieged federals and dislodge Confederate forces holding the high ground near the Union-controlled city in a series of battles from Nov. 23-25.

The Confederates retreat across the state line to Dalton, Ga. Confederate hospitals in Dalton (including the hospital housed in the First Baptist Church), Marietta, Atlanta and Macon receive an influx of wounded soldiers. Despair again sweeps across the South. Georgia Baptists, facing the prospect of invasion by the enemy, hold days of fasting and prayer.

Following Chattanooga, slave Dick Gray, serving alongside his owner during the battle, returns to Texas with the one surviving son of his dead master. Following emancipation, Gray changes his name to Richard Henry Boyd, becomes a Baptist minister, helps organize the Negro Baptist Convention of Texas, and later becomes one of Nashville, Tennessee's leading Baptist citizens.

Northward, Nov. 26 is a day of Thanksgiving as proclaimed by Lincoln. The event will become the first of annual thanksgiving observances henceforth in the United States. For the occasion, Baptist pastor I.S. Kalloch of New York City's Laight-Street Baptist Church preaches from 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In every thing give thanks." His sermon declares, in part:


Thanksgiving is a duty. Under all circumstances and in all things we are to give thanks. It is never so bad with us as it might be. It is never so bad as it would be if we had our deserts. Even in time of war, there is much to be thankful for. War, even civil war, is not the worst thing. Degradation, stupidity, the insensibility that can neither feel nor resent an injury, is as much worse than war, as war is worse than holy peace. As death is preferable to life purchased at the price of honor, so is war, in its bloodiest strides and ghastliest calamities, infinitely preferable to national peace purchased at the price of national degradation.... Brave-hearted bleed that we may rejoice; gallant heroes fall that our liberties may stand.

In Minnesota, the first black Baptist congregation in the state, comprised of former slaves from Missouri who escaped via the Underground Railroad, acquires a meeting space and is soon accepted as a mission arm of the First Baptist Church of St. Paul.

Meanwhile, on Union-occupied Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River near Memphis, Joanna P. Moore from Illinois, with \$4 in her pocket, arrives as the first American Baptist-commissioned home missionary appointed to the South. Her mission field consists of "1,100 colored women and children in distress" and a Union Army encampment. Moore remains in the South for 40 years, serving as a missionary among the region's poor, destitute, and uneducated and becoming known as the "Swamp Angel of the South." **BT**

—For a daily log of "This Day in Civil War History," see civilwarbaptists.com.

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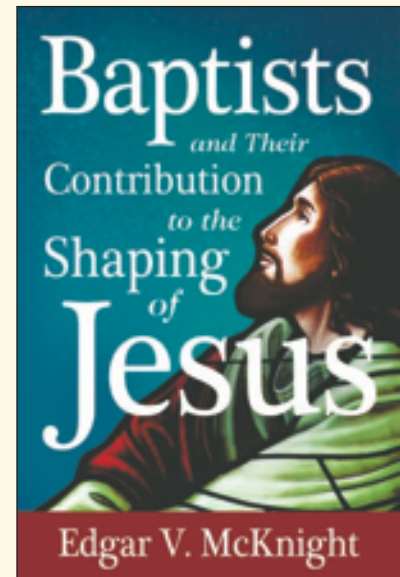
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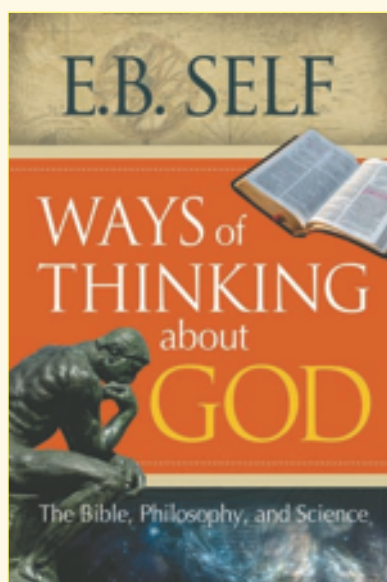
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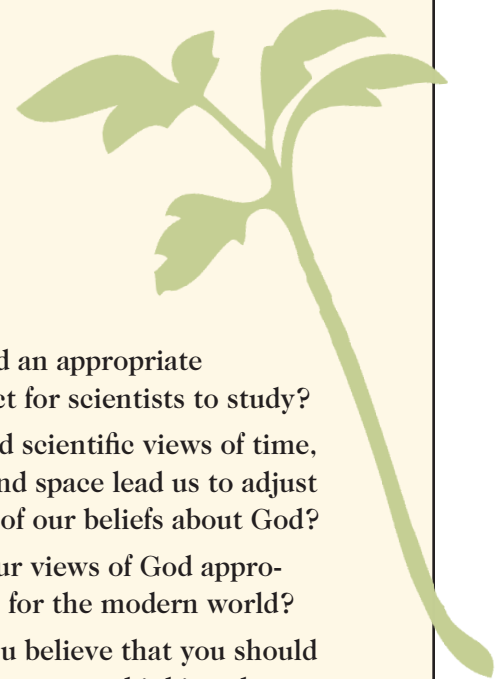


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TRAIL MARKS

Students, parents, ministers share the journey of faith

Like most churches, First Baptist Church of Asheville is working to address the declining young adult involvement in local congregations, the divide between parents and ministers regarding the spiritual nurture of young people, and the growing sense that one graduates from church in the same way one graduates from school.

On a long drive home from a conference, we decided to get creative and constructive, and started brainstorming. We had looked at resources from various faith traditions, and our ideas evolved into what we now call Trail Marks.

Trail Marks is a ministry model that invites parents, students and ministers into close collaboration in an effort to provide holistic spiritual formation for the entire faith journey. By working together to achieve shared goals, we believe we can create a partnership for lifelong discipleship of our children and youth.

The core values of Trail Marks include intentionality, consistency, communication and partnership. We are accomplishing these goals by working in two areas.

The first is to increase communication and partnership among families, ministers and adult volunteers. The second area of focus is the ongoing work of helping students to gather

tangible markers along their faith journey.

The best ministry ideas are almost always based in partnership. When we first hatched our idea for Trail Marks, our conversation was a steady back-and-forth of “What if we ...” and “Don’t you think ...” And we realized that we needed to replicate that flow of energy into our ministry with young families.

We begin each year with individual conversations between parents/guardians and ministers. We ask families to complete a questionnaire that helps us guide the conversation. Then we talk about short- and long-term goals for their family, communication and learning styles, the spiritual self-care of parents, and best parenting practices.

We have found these conversations provide us with the opportunity to minister to these parents through our presence as well as a way to learn surprising and deeply relevant information about students. In a recent

conversation, we had a set of parents tell us they worry that the privilege with which their daughters are growing up might prevent them from developing compassion and responsibility for others.

We have learned about leadership potential, spiritual gifts, special needs and anxious moments within our students. These conversations have given us the opportunity to affirm our parents and to be affirmed in our ministries.

Additionally, within our youth ministry we are finding it helpful to have similar conversations with our students about their goals and needs for the year.

Following these key conversations, we are able to equip our teachers and leadership more fully with information about how to best minister to our children and youth. While maintaining confidentiality and privacy, we now have better information about how to train our teachers more effectively.

We can be specific about the learning styles, relationship dynamics and abilities in the room. Leaders are also given the opportunity to share stories, ideas and best practices.

In addition to sharing vision, ideas and energy with families, Trail Marks also contains a storytelling component. Each student in our

ministry has a bowl that he or she receives at parent/child dedication (or, as we retroactively implement this, at the initial parent/minister conversation).

Over the course of the student's faith development, he or she receives stoneware markers stamped with symbols that represent a variety of defining moments. Each marker is individually rolled from raw clay, shaped and stamped, and then fired in a kiln, glazed, and fired again.

These markers represent life events such as parent/child dedication, first grade Bibles (one of our church's traditions), transition to youth group, and senior rites of passage.

Additionally, we have markers to remember other experiences such as a major loss, profession of faith, baptism, first Lord's Supper, testimony, and worship leadership, among others. Finally, each of the fruits of the Spirit has a symbolic marker.

As students grow and develop, their bowls will fill up with these tangible markers along their faith journeys. These markers serve a variety of purposes.

Markers are a way of remembering and telling stories, and these bowls become an altar

Student faith

"These bowls become an altar and gathering place in the home. We imagine parents asking, 'When did you get this? Tell me about it.' Students also have the opportunity to hear what their parents remember about the experience."

and gathering place in the home.

We imagine parents asking, "When did you get this? Tell me about it." Students also have the opportunity to hear what their parents remember about the experience.

Giving and accepting these markers are a way for teachers, ministers and students to connect. Parents are also able to give markers to their students, undergirding their child's spiritual development.

As these bowls grow with markers symbolizing moments and spiritual gifts, they become a self-fulfilling prophecy. A student may recognize that she is a joyful person because her bowl tells that story. Perhaps a young man leaves for college knowing he is kind, because he has many markers that pronounce it to be true.

For us, Trail Marks is a practical extension of the Deuteronomic commands to teach our children to grow up in faith. Our hope is that through sharing with one another, hearing stories, and creating altars in our homes, we are finding ways to keep these words in our hearts: We "recite them to [our] children and talk about them when [we] are at home and when [we] are away."

Our prayer is that when our children ask about the meaning of faith, we can point toward these relationships and markers — so they might know how their stories fit in with the story of God. **BT**

—Tommy Bratton is the minister of Christian formation and Jenny Lee is the minister with students at First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C.

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