



Baptists
ODAY
NEWS JOURNAL



'ANGELS IN BLUE JEANS'

Volunteers bring hope to Appalachia

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A Conversation with
**JUNE SCOBEE
RODGERS 34**



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Cover photo by John Pierce from a 2008 visit to the Challenger Learning Center at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. A recent conversation with educator and founding director June Scobee Rodgers is on page 34.

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Angels in blue jeans

Ministry brings volunteers, hope to places of need in Appalachia

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — “We never turn down volunteers,” said Walter Crouch, president of Appalachia Service Project (ASP). “There are plenty of needs out there.”

Like most visionaries, Crouch, a Baptist minister and former vice president for church relations at Carson-Newman University, sees the greater possibilities. “Last year we helped 700 families,” he said. “But we were unable to help 3,300 applicants.”

TUCKED AWAY

Methodist minister Tex Evans started ASP at Union College in Kentucky in 1969 to make homes “warmer, safer and drier” (still an ASP theme) for impoverished families in Central Appalachia. Targeted sites (based on poverty assessments) now include communities in Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Most visitors to Appalachia no longer witness the insufficient housing tucked away in hollers and on hillsides, said Crouch. “Interstates keep people from seeing the poverty.”

Crouch said ASP leaders recently discovered a woman named Becky who was living in two rooms of a dilapidated house with no kitchen or bathroom. The only power source to her house was a 110-watt extension cord.

Her home, however, was not found deep into the sparsely populated mountains. Rather, it was just a couple of miles from the ASP headquarters in Johnson City.

After volunteers descended on her home with extensive improvements and needed additions, she responded appreciably: “It means I get to bake cookies with my grandkids.”

Such comments remind Crouch, and others who carry out this ministry, that ASP has a higher purpose beyond the nails, roofing, insulation, ramps and mortar that they leave behind.

“We’re a relationship ministry, not a construction ministry,” he affirmed, noting that follow-up contacts are made with the families over the next five years after construction.



Appalachia Service Project president Walter Crouch points out the region, that covers parts of five states, where his organization assigns and equips volunteers to make poverty housing “warmer, safer and drier.”

VOLUNTEERS

Funding for the expansive work of ASP comes from gifts (from individuals, organizations and foundations) and fees paid by volunteers. Projects are carried out in more than 30 communities throughout Appalachia.

The construction services are provided at no cost to the homeowners who are simply unable to pay.

The full-time ASP staff of 31 is small for the scope of the projects. A Lilly Endowment grant provides for 16 “Lilly fellows” — mostly college students or recent graduates — to serve for nine months beginning in May.

But it is the horde of volunteers — swarming the houses in need of roofing, structural support, and safe, sufficient electricity and plumbing — who make the biggest difference.

They have become known — in ASP parlance — as “angels in blue jeans.”

STUFF NEEDED

Construction supplies don’t grow on trees — though some come from trees. So ASP leaders are always looking for the least costly way to acquire the building materials needed.

Wooster Brush Company donated a

three-year supply of paintbrushes and rollers, said Melisa Miller, whose volunteer experience with ASP led her to major in construction management at the University of Florida. She is now ASP’s chief ministries officer and executive vice president.

Bartering works also. Once ASP traded windows for doors with a Habitat for Humanity affiliate.

Building supplies and equipment are stocked at some 30 summer centers — usually schools or churches — throughout the service area, along with four permanent centers. A fleet of approximately 160 vehicles carries materials and volunteers to the various worksites.

“And you never have enough buckets,” said Crouch, pointing to a towering stack of donated five-gallon, plastic containers in the Johnson City warehouse.

While some volunteers work over school breaks and at other times during the year, the overwhelming impact of ASP occurs during the summer when workers are more plentiful and the weather is more favorable.

Then the many tools and unused supplies are warehoused during what Miller terms “post-summer craziness.”

“We’re in a relationship ministry, not a construction ministry.”

A CALLING

Crouch, who spent many years as an electrician and then a general contractor in Florida, graduated from Palm Beach Atlantic University. Sensing a call to ministry, he left the construction world for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He then earned a Ph.D. from Baylor University and taught at Baylor's Truett Seminary. He then became a pastor in Texas before moving to Tennessee to join the faculty at Carson-Newman.

When contacted about the possibility of leading ASP, Crouch wondered if his dual training and experiences in construction and ministry might be the right mix.

So did one of his daughters. He noticed her posting on Facebook, asking for prayer for him.

She wrote: "My dad is interviewing for a job that God seemed to make for him." He took the helm of ASP in January 2011.

FLOOD OF BLESSINGS

While home repair is its niche, ASP did build new housing following a 2012 flood in Washington County, Tenn., where Johnson City is located.

Using mostly volunteers, these replacement homes were built quickly and at no cost to homeowners who had lived, primarily, in washed-away, substandard mobile homes.

The focus, said Crouch, is on "a pocket of people the affordable housing market can't help," due to extreme poverty.

A big celebration of the 25 newly constructed houses — where floodwaters had ravaged a community — caused one reporter to call it "Miracle Day at Dry Creek."

"Resources came from everywhere," said Crouch, adding that ASP has received a grant to build more new homes in the Tri-City area.

MORE TO DO

Strategically located ASP centers allow for identifying community needs and needed supplies. Applications are spread to those in need of work on their homes by social workers, convenience store owners and others in the communities.

Often, said Crouch, these applicants are "the poorest of the poor."

When applications are approved, ASP staff makes sure the sites are safe for volunteers and coordinates both workers and supplies.

Last summer more than 14,000 "angels in blue jeans" ascended on ASP projects in central

Appalachia, mostly but not exclusively in coal mining country.

The summer program includes youth as young as 14, generally working in groups of five youth and two adults. Construction experience is not required, but Crouch said skilled workers are greatly welcomed.

"The relationship factor is the most important thing," he said.

CLEAR FOCUS

Motivation for continuing the ministry of ASP can be found in both the testimonies of volunteers and homeowners. A photo of a family and volunteers — which hangs in the ASP headquarters — tells the story well.

Near Hazard, Ky., ASP found a family of eight, covering three generations, sleeping on the floor and eating out of cans. Volunteers did more than reconstruct their weakened home.

They personally bought bunk beds and other furnishings for the family. The grandfather told them it was the first time the kids had ever slept in a bed.

Also, ASP showed up at two sites — in Knoxville, Tenn., and Lincolnton, N.C. — where the reality TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* replaced a modest home with a grander one.

They took away the stoves and other materials — before the house was dismantled — knowing that those simpler items would be warmly welcomed in some of their Appalachian homes.

HELP WANTED

Since its founding, ASP has mobilized more than 300,000 volunteers to repair more than



"You never have enough buckets," said ASP president Walter Crouch of a donated supply of five-gallon containers used at construction sites. The organization also received paintbrushes and rollers from the Wooster Brush Company.

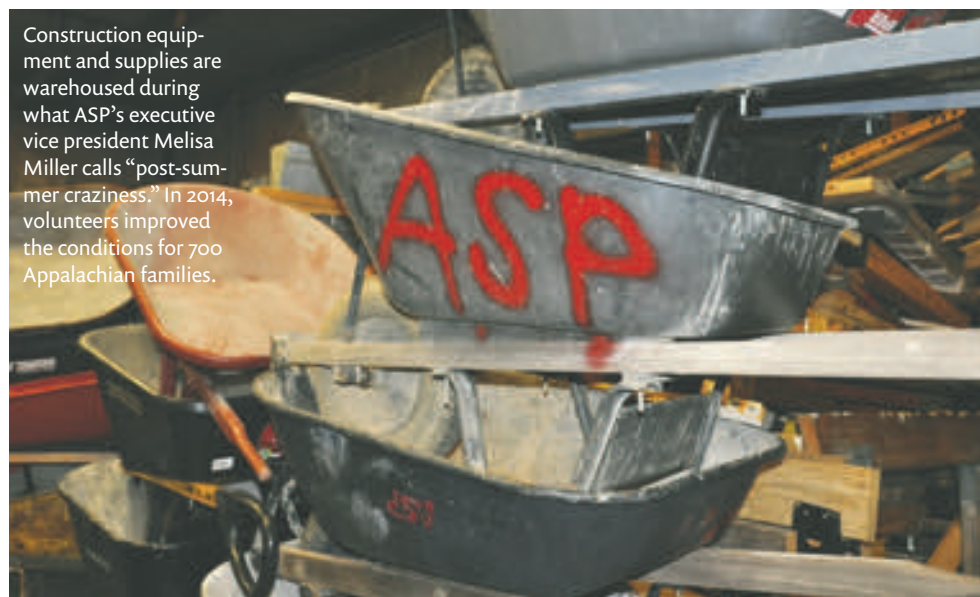
15,000 homes. Yet so many needs remain throughout Appalachia.

While poverty often gets tucked away, it doesn't disappear. Welch, W.V., for example, said Crouch, once had its own town orchestra. Today it resembles a ghost town.

"Get off the Interstate," said Crouch, and such poverty will be more easily found.

Or, better yet, come volunteer with Appalachia Service Project — where one not only sees poverty up close, but also does something about it.

For more information on Appalachia Service Project, visit BuildANewYou.org. **BT**



Construction equipment and supplies are warehoused during what ASP's executive vice president Melisa Miller calls "post-summer craziness." In 2014, volunteers improved the conditions for 700 Appalachian families.

quotation remarks

“We don’t need more to tell people who and what we are.”

—Steve Green, founder and funder of the simply named but high-tech, \$800-million Museum of the Bible set to open in Washington, D.C., in 2017 (RNS)

“That’s the day that I quit being blind to hunger.”

—Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, speaking to the *Together at the Table: Hunger & Poverty Summit* at Baylor University last month, telling how as a reading teacher she discovered one of her students was collecting pencils to eat the erasers

“If we are to be God’s people, then we must publicly teach that domestic violence is sin, acknowledge our complicit silence in this area, provide safe havens for those seeking freedom, regularly pray for those trapped in abusive situations, and model healthy and life-affirming relationships.”

—Elijah Brown, assistant professor of missions at East Texas Baptist University and a Bible study teacher at First Baptist Church of Marshall, Texas (ABP)

“If I’m going to get my heart worked on, I don’t really care if the cardiac surgeon is a believer or not. I want the best.”

—Kay Warren, whose son took his life last year, disagreeing with a recommendation of *Focus on the Family* resources for pastors regarding mental illness that include “practical tools and tips about how to make a referral to a trusted Christian colleague” (RNS)

“Instead of letting them go outside to play, parents filled their kids’ spare time with organized activities, did their homework for them, resolved their conflicts at school with both friends and teachers, and handed out trophies for just showing up.”

—Mickey Goodman in a blog titled “Are we raising a generation of helpless kids?” which traces helicopter parenting to obsession with safety following the 1982 Tylenol lacing scare (HuffPost)

“Some situations, of course, are oppressive and justify complaint. But it’s hard to sort those out for attention when we are whining about everything.”

—Religion News Service columnist Tom Ebrich

“Most people (overwhelmingly Christians) view this as a bad thing. That unhappiness may be behind their desire for more religion and politics.”

—Greg Smith, associate director of Pew’s Religion & Public Life Project, following a Pew Research Center survey that found 72 percent of Americans saying religion’s influence is declining in society (RNS)

“All pastors are interim pastors. All churches will face a transition. Developing a plan sooner rather than later is the wise approach to an inevitable reality.”

—William Vanderbloemen, co-author of *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* (RNS)

“The evangelicals are taking this harder because for years they promised if churches stayed with their conservative ideology, the declines of the liberal, mainline churches would not occur [to them]. Demographics and pluralism have caught up with them.”

—Church historian Bill Leonard of Wake Forest University on studies showing the decline in religious affiliation in America (ABP)

“What is the difference between provocation and bad taste?”

—An editorial on the Italian website *SIR*, backed by the Italian bishops conference, denouncing the work of two artists who depict Barbie and Ken dolls as the Virgin Mary, the crucified Jesus and other religious figures (RNS)

Counterquotes

“Practically, if a choir is going to be top shelf, people have to come at least one night a week and rehearse at least two hours. Then, a top-shelf choir is going to want to sing every service and do Christmas cantatas and special events. That takes staff, an orchestra, a big-enough stage. That costs money. When we were starting up in 2003, we decided we would be better stewards not to invest in that.”

—Pastor James Merritt of Atlanta-area Cross Pointe Church, saying he’s “not knocking choirs” but explaining why his church doesn’t have one since “the younger generation doesn’t gravitate toward choirs” (RNS)

“Churches are struggling to find the style that is most engaging. But there’s a reason choral music is called ‘traditional.’ It’s been around a while. Contemporary music may not have as much staying power.”

—Eileen Guenther, professor of church music at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington and former president of the American Guild of Organists (NS)

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IN MEMORY OF:

ROB PIERCE

From Vineville Baptist Church

JOE PRIEST WILLIAMS

From his widow, Emily Williams

Finding faith beyond our fears and excuses

Excuses, excuses, excuses ... and fear. That's what came to mind when reading a recent denominational newspaper.

Or perhaps it was fear, fear, fear ... and excuses. The overriding messages from these Baptist voices held more panic than Chicken Little.

There was fear of the growing pluralism that threatens cozy, comfortable civil religion ...

... Fear that the familiar is giving way to that which is unfamiliar — as if that which is familiar now was not once unfamiliar.

... Fear that their personal influence was waning and their corporate presence was shrinking — though not stated so honestly and succinctly.

Faith seemed to take a backseat to such fear — except when used to fortify one's resolve to face down all that appears to be threatening.

Then there were the excuses. Any denominational or congregational decline was everyone else's fault except for the denomination.

Blame those who dare to live out their faith in ways unlike the past. And shame those who give less or give elsewhere. Any critic, loyal or not, is to be dismissed.

A very helpful but never considered question, of course, would be: What could possibly be attractive about such a fearful perspective that denies any personal blame?

But that would require looking inward rather than without, where the blame and fear purportedly and solely lie.

Some of this fear-based, excuse-happy perspective is understandable. There is great temptation in being held hostage to self-preservation.

It is easier to see the changes around us as

fearful — and the result of someone else doing that which threatens us and our preferred ways of living — than to wrestle with the problems within.

Rightly, it's been said that "fault finding is like window washing; all the dirt seems to be on the other side."

Faith is hard to muster in face of fear — whether the threats are real or imagined.

Introspection and especially confession require more of us than casting blame toward anything and anybody that might be offering alternatives to our ways of believing and doing.

However, we all need to ask the hard questions of ourselves about whether faith trumps the fears in our lives — as individuals and as communities of, yes, "faith."

It is wiser to avoid easy, excusing and blaming pronouncements such as: "It's the young people." "It's the old people." "It's the new people."

Faith, historically and biblically, is built for those times that are most challenging, even threatening. If faith were easy, wouldn't everyone have it all the time?

So how do we continually move from fear to faith as individual believers and communities of faith? There are some possibilities.

Honestly identify and evaluate our fears to see which ones are truly threatening and which ones simply threaten our comfortable ways of thinking and living.

Introspection can help. Are my attitudes

and inaction (or poorly-placed actions) contributing to this tension? Is my inflexibility a hindrance to faith trumping fear? Do I bring more fear than faith to the conversation?

Ask whether those things that we fear might somehow become opportunities for learning and ministry. Some may not. Yet some most certainly could.

Perhaps the hardest, most needed question of ourselves is this: How are we being perceived? Honestly.

That answer might help us to understand why others don't want to be a part of that which seems so inflexible and fearful of anything that threatens our power and the status quo.

Fear of change is not nearly as appealing as faith in the midst of change.

Now back to the newspaper: The intended message was surely one of how "we" stand up for timeless truth even though so many wayward others keep threatening our God-endorsed way of life.

Reading clearly between the lines (and sometimes the very lines themselves) is the clearer message: Times are changing, but we will fight it tooth and nail — because we are afraid that it may require us to see the world differently or rethink what we believe it means to be Christian and to be the church.

Making excuses and blaming others may spare us the pain of thoughtful introspection and possible change. But it sure is unattractive, especially compared with a firm and affirming Christian faith that willingly looks inward as well as outward toward the changes all around.

But if we don't muster faith in challenging times, who will? And where will others look to find it? **BT**



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‘What the pastorate taught me’

David Hull reflects on lessons learned in pastoral ministry

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — David Hull, who recently retired as pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., opened the September *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting here by sharing lessons learned from more than 35 years of pastoral ministry. He enumerated and expanded on these five lessons:

“The process is as important as the product.”

Whether preparing a sermon or launching a new program, wise pastoral leaders will pay attention to the process rather than just the product in the making, said Hull.



David Hull

“We can lose sight of the process to get there,” he noted, adding that “church conflict can result from poor process.”

Hull, who chaired the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s 2012 Task Force, credited the

group’s willingness to listen intently and extensively to the opinions of so many with the wide embrace of the report.

“Trust is the currency used in ministry.”

Pastoral leaders must build trust in order to be effective in addressing the needs of the congregation and in guiding the church in its ministries, he said.

“Change is the canvas on which ministry is painted.”

Since God and the Bible don’t change, Hull said he assumed as a young pastor that he wouldn’t have to deal with change that much. But he was wrong, he admitted.

He graduated from seminary and began

as a pastor in 1980 — when “the world changed.” That year, he noted, the personal computer arrived on the scene and 24-hour news was launched by CNN.

“We require choices now,” said Hull. “I was trained to minister in a world that did not exist.”

In June 1980, Bailey Smith was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, signaling a clear move toward fundamentalism and an effort to exclude those unwilling to align.

“I sat there and listened to (Baptist scholar and statesman) Herschel Hobbs being booed,” Hull recalled.

In March 1980, Saddleback Church in Southern California had its first service. “That launched a whole redesign of the church” to reach people who don’t go to church, he noted.

By the mid-’80s, AIDS was in the news along with new discussions about homosexuality — “today, the most polarizing topic in churches.”

“It is no longer an option to dig in your heels ...,” said Hull. “Change is a given, but growth is a choice.”

“Teamwork strengthens the church and makes the journey more fun.”

Too much “Lone Ranger ministry” is not effective, said Hull, adding: “Some of the greatest experiences of ministry are when there is collaboration.”

He reminded his fellow *Baptists Today* directors of Paul’s words to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:9) that “we are laborers together with God.”

“God always works for good.”

Hull said he used to believe Romans 8:28 (“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”) simply because it is in the Bible.

“Now I believe it because I’ve experienced it,” he said.



News journal welcomes new directors, re-elects officers

The Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*, meeting Sept. 18 at First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., re-elected its officers and welcomed new directors.

Lay leaders Don Brewer of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., and Cathy Turner of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C., will serve second terms as chair and vice chair respectively. Jack Glasgow of Zebulon, N.C., chairs the marketing/development committee while Charles Schaible of Macon, Ga., chairs the budget/finance committee.

New directors beginning three-year terms are Becky Matheny of Athens, Ga., Edwin Boland of Johns Creek, Ga., Doug Dortch of Birmingham, Ala., Charlotte Cook Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C., Bob Cates of Rome, Ga., and Kenny Crump of Ruston, La. **BT**

In his new work with the Center for Healthy Churches, Hull said he looks forward to working in helpful and hopeful ways with congregations in transition or conflict.

He wants to help churches to discover healthy processes, to face inevitable change, to build trust and to work collaboratively toward that which is good. **BT**

What 'first churches' can learn from food trucks

By Alan Sherouse

First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C., held its first "Food Truck Sunday" this summer. It was part of the ongoing efforts to build our relationship with our city.

Hundreds stayed after worship to enjoy lunch on our front lawn, courtesy of several local food trucks. More than barbecue or tacos, these vendors provided an organizational model for a church seeking to pour out of its sanctuary into wide space, new initiatives and a hopeful future.

Long a staple of downtown street corners and urban construction sites, food trucks have gained broad popularity in the U.S. over the last few years. The trend stems, in part, from the obvious economic reality that a truck is cheaper than a conventional restaurant.

Additionally, however, the popularity of food trucks reflects deep cultural trends with which any healthy organization — culinary or otherwise — is seeking to be conversant.

Churches — and "first churches" in particular — have traditionally adopted what might be called a "cafeteria" mentality. They have served a large amount of people a wide range of options through the most efficient means.

Historically, people were drawn in from all around to the church situated in the heart of the city or the seat of the county. Like any K&W Cafeteria, such churches were built to provide a variety of options for a variety of people.

On Sundays at the prime hour, most seats were full. From Jell-O cubes to fried okra, it was all there and it was all pretty good. Some of it was great.

The structure has changed, of course. Our corporate and individual lives are less church-centered, and less dependent on established institutions in general. People of faith are finding new ways of congregating that are less focused on traditional growth metrics and scale.

To many, the menu of services and programs matters less than the quality of community. With shifting vocational realities, participants seek a community of faith that will help them live faithfully outside the walls and apart from the central structure.

Amid such cultural trends, what can the first churches learn from the food trucks?

We can learn about mobility. Food trucks go to where the people are; they don't wait for the people to find their way to them. They are not bound to any central structure, nor do they expect their audience to be fixed.

We can learn about focus. Due to their size, food trucks don't try to match the scope of a full-service restaurant. They typically have a limited menu, or "niche." Instead of trying to do everything, they do certain things with excellence and distinction.

Food trucks teach us about quality. With limited offerings, every ingredient counts. Often food is locally sourced, with attention to sustainability and other ethical concerns that surround food growth and production. While concerned with quality of taste, the business model often gives equal attention to the aesthetic and ethical quality of the food.

We learn about collaboration. As our First Baptist team learned in the process of planning our Food Truck Sunday, the truck operators and chefs know one another and are accustomed to working together. They don't mind being parked next to fellow vendors competing for customers, but instead act as though

their individual success is tied together with the success of the whole.

Food trucks teach us about adaptability. They can (quite literally) turn on a dime. They can shift to new locations. They can experiment with new recipes or new preparation methods depending on the present need. They can even change their Sunday lunch plans to set up shop in a church parking lot.

Food trucks, finally, help to initiate new community. As the *LA Times* said of a particularly popular Korean barbecue truck: "[The trucks] have become a sort of roving party, bringing people to neighborhoods they might not normally go to, and allowing for interactions with strangers they might not otherwise talk to."

We sensed this energy and community across the First Baptist lawn as people clustered together in pods of lawn chairs or on shared blankets, strangers became friends, conversation lingered, and children played until they left with grass stains on their church clothes.

The food truck trend is not without its detractors. In Greensboro, as in other growing cities, the presence of food trucks has sparked controversy, with opposition from those who see the trend as a betrayal of the "brick and mortar" restaurants, or merely an effort to be "trendy and cool." More than anything, many are concerned about what could happen to the places that have been serving people for years.

Others are embracing the opportunity. Chet Stamey, whose Stamey's Restaurant is one of Greensboro's most popular barbecue spots, was one of our parking lot vendors on Food Truck Sunday.

"We'll always have our restaurant," he told us, "but the truck has helped us to get out and do things we have not done before. The truck has made the restaurant stronger."

We'll always have the restaurant, but maybe a food truck mentality can lead us to do things, find people, and go places we have not before. **BT**

—Alan Sherouse is pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C.



A wider embrace

Frankfurt's Bethel International Baptist Church finds strength in diversity

FRANKFURT, Germany — It was a time for firsts. I had never taken public transportation to church. I had never preached in a congregation that provided simultaneous translation into German and Farsi. I had never gathered with people from Brazil, Cameroon, Germany and Burma for Bible study. I had never talked with Christians from Iran, Moldova or the Ukraine.

But all of that changed last spring during my three months at Bethel International Baptist Church in Frankfurt, Germany, as part of my sabbatical leave from Mercer University.

In preparation for my visit, my friend Bob Marsh had suggested that I contact Rodrigo Assis da Silva, the pastor of Bethel. He responded warmly, picked me up at the airport, and invited me to preach for his congregation.

Easter was my first Sunday in Germany. The morning dawned bright and clear, with cool temperatures and low humidity.

I walked a mile to the train station from my apartment and boarded the southbound

train, getting off two stops later. After a steep, mile-long incline to the middle of the city district of Berkersheim, I spotted the blue wooden A-frame of Bethel International Church, standing out against rows of rectangular stucco houses.

Established in 1958 by American military families living near the military base there, Bethel had thrived for its first 30 years. These Americans built their sanctuary in a unique style to remind themselves of their status as resident aliens and sojourners.

Like Abraham and Sarah, they had experienced the call of God to a foreign land where they would stay “for a time, living in tents” (Heb. 11:9). Underneath the sanctuary, the congregation constructed Sunday school space, a kitchen and a fellowship hall.

In its early years, Bethel focused on connections to other English-speaking Baptist congregations. Along with Immanuel Baptist Church in Wiesbaden, the congregation sponsored 19 mission churches and founded the International Baptist Convention, which has grown to include more than 70 English language churches in Europe and around the world. Today, Bethel is also a full member of the German Baptist Union and affiliated with the Council of Christian Churches in Germany.

The departure of the American military in the early 1990s decimated the congregation, reducing its membership from 400 to 15. But those who remained were committed to keep the congregation going. They focused the church's identity around internationals, seeking to become a multicultural English-speaking congregation.

Because Frankfurt is home to the European Central Bank and other international banks and businesses, it is one of Europe's most international cities. Its skyscrapers, which include the tallest office building in Europe, have earned this city on the Main River the nickname “Main-hatten.”

Two years ago, the increasingly multicultural congregation called Rodrigo, a young Brazilian, as pastor. He had studied theology in Brazil and at King's College in London, and then served as an assistant pastor and interim pastor of congregations in London for several years. Under Rodrigo's leadership, Bethel has

reached out with new effectiveness to a diverse group of internationals.

The church worships in English, but English is a second language for the pastor and most who attend. On any given Sunday, the congregation includes worshipers from more than 30 nationalities, including Afghans, Koreans, Latvians, Nigerians, Iranians, Ukrainians, Ghanaians, Germans and Americans.

Romanians shake hands with people from Myanmar and India. Families from Spain embrace their friends from Togo and Ethiopia.

Members from Brazil, Romania, Philippines and India lead worship each week. The accompaniment includes guitar players from Burma, India and Germany; keyboardists from Northern Ireland and Brazil; drummers from Brazil and Germany; and percussionists from Nigeria and Ghana.

Pastor Rodrigo describes the worship style as eclectic, with a mix of contemporary music and traditional hymns, often with Afro-Caribbean rhythms. Sometimes the worship leaders translate a chorus into different languages, reaffirming the international nature of the church.

A potluck meal follows worship once a month, and the dishes reflect the church's diversity. The table might be spread with feijoada, a Brazilian dish of pork in a black bean sauce; chicken adobo from the Philippines; Iranian dolmeh (meat wrapped in grape leaves); or assorted curries from India and Sri Lanka.

One unique gathering every week is the Tuesday evening games and sports fellowship at Frankfurt's Ostpark. This gathering began as the “football fellowship.” But in Germany, “football” means soccer.

As an international sport in which Africans, Germans and Brazilians all delight, soccer provided a time of fierce competition and friendly fellowship. But the gathering soon grew beyond soccer to include other games including Uno and ultimate Frisbee, as well as an occasional picnic dinner.

Though the current congregation does not have the wealth of its early years, its commitment to ministry and mission glows brightly.

On Saturday mornings the Eritrean



Frankfurt's Bethel International Baptist Church meets in an A-frame structure designed to remind members that they are sojourners called to a foreign land.

Orthodox Church uses Bethel's sanctuary for worship, and the Lighthouse Chapel Ghanaian International Church meets there on Sunday afternoons.

Bethel offers conversational German language courses four times a week, a ministry that is vital for immigrants who must pass rigorous language examinations to integrate into German society.

The congregation, with the help of members from Faith Baptist Church in Kaiserlautern, recently hosted a weekly Holiday Bible Club (Vacation Bible School) for children in the congregation and the surrounding neighborhood.

One growing area of ministry has developed in response to the recent influx of visitors and new members from Afghanistan and Iran. Many of these families have come to Germany as refugees, seeking a home where they may worship God openly, without fear of reprisals for their Christian faith.

But the German government sometimes orders deportation of refugees, denying requests for residency when paperwork is not in order or when the government believes that another country should take responsibility for a particular refugee.

When two men attending Bethel were denied resident status and sentenced to deportation, the members of the congregation unanimously voted to offer the men asylum at the church. For centuries, churches in Germany have legally offered asylum for refugees, providing refuge on the church grounds and interceding with the government on their behalf.

Bethel's members bring food and clothing and come regularly to visit and encourage these refugees. After six months the sentence of deportation will expire, and the men will be granted the right to apply for residency.

At times, Bethel's diversity poses challenges. In worship, Filipinos become anxious when someone from another culture puts a Bible on the floor. In business meetings, Ghanaians and Nigerians tell stories or anecdotes to illustrate their line of reasoning, while European nationals prefer discussions that cut to the chase instead.

These challenges require efforts to understand other cultures and traditions and a commitment to focus on the centrality of faith in Christ.

Bethel faces other challenges, too. The building, now 51 years old, needs repair. The heating system is old, and the boilers recently failed. The roof leaks, and the fellowship hall floods when it rains.

Though the current members are faithful

Its skyscrapers, which include the tallest office building in Europe, have earned Frankfurt, Germany, on the Main River, the nickname "Main-hatten."



in their giving, most of them have meager incomes, and Germany lacks a tax-exempt status for churches.

Despite these challenges, this church finds strength in its diversity and in its members who support it financially and who work to create a friendly, welcoming atmosphere that attracts new people to the congregation and to the message of Christ.

Drawing on these strengths, Bethel serves as a model for churches facing the changes and challenges of the 21st century.

The congregation's history demonstrates that change brings the death of old dreams and old identities. But congregations can face that challenge as they embrace new dreams and a mission that fits their current context.

When Bethel's initial mission — to be a church for American servicemen and their families — ended, the church discovered new life reaching out to internationals. Embracing that change and living into that new identity was not as simple as adding "international" to the church name.

There were several difficult years of transition. But with the coming of a new pastor who himself embodied the dream of a multicultural church, the difficult decisions about a new identity are now bearing fruit.

Bethel also discovered that new programs must replace traditional programs that no longer serve a vital purpose. In the place of a poorly attended traditional Wednesday evening prayer meeting, the congregation now hosts five house groups.

These groups meet on different weeknights in homes or apartments throughout the city, and each involves more people than the previous Wednesday evening gathering. As a result of these groups, members have increased

opportunities for Bible study, prayer and fellowship.

Bethel's location in the midst of a secular European city reflects the increasing secularization within American society as well. Bethel seeks ways to reach out to the wider community through its children's programs, language classes and cooperative efforts with other congregations. Its awareness of its identity as a pilgrim people, important from the start, continues to shape its mission and worship.

Finally, Bethel reminds us that the future for almost all of us is more diverse than the past. As mobility increases, cities and neighborhoods and even families become more racially and ethnically mixed. The old labels and categories become less clear.

As we move in the midst of this new mosaic of cultures, our churches must adapt to new expressions of worship and congregational life with flexibility and with joy. In doing so, we affirm that our God makes a way in the wilderness, working something new among us (Isa. 40:19).

The promise of Pentecost remains open for our churches as a source of vitality and renewal. Although our individual contexts vary, all of us can welcome people from diverse backgrounds and dream new dreams for mission.

John's vision of God's people, after all, includes "saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Churches such as Bethel that embrace this kind of diversity, pastor Rodrigo suggests, will find that their multicultural worship is "like practicing for heaven." **BT**

—Bryan Whitfield is associate professor of Christianity at Mercer University in Macon, Ga.

SBC leaders cut ties with 'third way' church

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

The Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee voted unanimously in September to break ties with New Heart Community Church in La Mirada, Calif., after determining it was condoning "homosexual behavior."

"We believe that, following the lead of Pastor Danny Cortez, New Heart Community Church has walked away from the Southern Baptist Convention's core biblical values," said Roger Oldham, a spokesman for the committee.

Oldham said Cortez attended the meeting and indicated that he had officiated at a same-sex wedding.

The move came less than two weeks after the California Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Board voted unanimously to withdraw fellowship from the congregation because of Cortez's announcement that he affirmed gays — including his teenage son — and his church had taken a "third way" on homosexuality. **BT**

Large southern churches pay pastors best

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

Large churches in the South tend to pay their senior pastors the highest salaries, a new survey finds.

That's one of the conclusions on churches and finances released in September by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based church think tank, and the Vanderbloemen Search Group, a Houston-based executive search firm for churches and ministries.

A total of 727 North American churches with attendance ranging from 1,000 to more than 30,000 answered questions, more than double the number of congregations featured in previous studies.

The survey found that 14 percent of large churches have a financial bonus structure for their top leader. And one in five of the big congregations find ways to collect their money other than passing the proverbial offering plate. **BT**

Muslim scholars to Islamic State: You don't understand Islam

By Lauren Markoe

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — More than 120 Muslim scholars from around the world joined an open letter to the "fighters and followers" of the Islamic State, denouncing them as un-Islamic by using the most Islamic of terms.

Relying heavily on the Quran, the 18-page letter released Sept. 24 picks apart the extremist ideology of the militants who have left a wake of brutal death and destruction in their bid to establish a transnational Islamic state in Iraq and Syria.

Even translated into English, the letter will still sound alien to most Americans, said Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council of American-Islamic Relations, who released it in Washington with 10 other American Muslim religious and civil rights leaders.

"The letter is written in Arabic. It is using heavy classical religious texts and classical religious scholars that ISIS has used to mobilize young people to join its forces," said Awad, using one of the acronyms for the group. "This letter is not meant for a liberal audience."

Awad said its aim is to offer a comprehensive Islamic refutation, "point-by-point," to the philosophy of the Islamic State and the violence it has perpetrated. The letter's authors include well-known religious and scholarly figures in the Muslim world, including Sheikh

Shawqi Allam, the grand mufti of Egypt, and Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem and All Palestine.

A translated 24-point summary of the letter includes the following: "It is forbidden in Islam to torture"; "It is forbidden in Islam to attribute evil acts to God"; and "It is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslims until he (or she) openly declares disbelief."

This is not the first time Muslim leaders have joined to condemn the Islamic State. The chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, Aiman Mazyek, for example, recently told the nation's Muslims that they should speak out against the "terrorist and murderers" who fight for the Islamic State and who have dragged Islam "through the mud."

But the Muslim leaders who endorsed the Sept. 24 letter called it an unprecedented refutation of the Islamic State ideology from a collaboration of religious scholars. It is addressed to the group's self-anointed leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, and "the fighters and followers of the self-declared 'Islamic State.'"

But the words "Islamic State" are in quotes, and the Muslim leaders who released the letter asked people to stop using the term, arguing that it plays into the group's unfounded logic that it is protecting Muslim lands from non-Muslims and is resurrecting the caliphate — a state governed by a Muslim leader that once controlled vast swaths of the Middle East. **BT**

O'Brien to lead Dallas mission, ministry center

By Mark Wingfield

Associated Baptist Press

DALLAS, Texas — Baptist missiologist Bill O'Brien has been named the first executive director of Gaston Christian Center, a new mission and ministry center in north Dallas that aims to create a collective of faith-based agencies and churches to serve the needs of the region.

The center is an emerging project created in partnership between Gaston Oaks Baptist Church and Wilshire Baptist Church, both in Dallas, with plans to engage other congregations as supporting partners. The goal is to ensure the future missionary use of the property currently owned by Gaston Oaks Baptist

Church, at one time one of the largest congregations in the city.

It relocated in 1990 to its current location — a former office building in a mixed-income neighborhood in northeast Dallas.

The property currently houses five congregations: Gaston Oaks, which is primarily Anglo; La Promesa Iglesia Bautista, a Spanish-language congregation; the Karen Fellowship; Afrika Fellowship; and Bhutanese Fellowship.

In addition, the property houses several nonprofit ministries, including Healing Hands Ministries, a medical and dental clinic for the uninsured; Gateway of Grace, an interdenominational ministry focused on refugee resettlement; and the Korean-America Sharing Movement. **BT**

Same-sex marriage debate heating up among evangelicals

As more states affirm same-sex marriage, U.S. evangelicals continue to wrestle with homosexuality, setting boundaries for what's acceptable and what's not, and setting the stage for a heated election season.

Things have gotten hotter. A new group called Evangelicals for Marriage Equality launched in September and is collecting signatures from evangelicals who support same-sex marriage.

Its advisory board includes author and speaker Brian McLaren, former National Association of Evangelicals vice president Richard Cizik, and former USAID faith adviser Chris LaTondresse. Cizik resigned from his NAE position over his support for same-sex civil unions.

"Our organization is not taking a theological position on the issue of the sacrament of marriage," said spokesman Brandan Robertson. "We just want evangelicals to see that it is possible to hold a plethora of beliefs about sexuality and marriage while affirming the rights of LGBTQ men and women to be civilly married under the law."

Testing evangelical boundaries didn't work well for World Vision earlier this year when it decided and then reversed its position on same-sex employees. The new marriage equality group is already facing challenges from evangelical institutions.

An ad it placed with *Christianity Today*, *World* and *Relevant* magazines was rejected by all three evangelical mainstays.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission hosted a conference in Nashville, Tenn., in October on "The Gospel, Homosexuality and the Future of Marriage," urging faith leaders to oppose same-sex marriage.

At the other end of the spectrum, author Matthew Vines will lead a gathering in November in Washington focused on LGBT inclusion in churches. Vines is hopeful the new group might change evangelical minds.

"We still haven't arrived at a sea change among evangelicals, but the tone and passion around the issue of civil marriage equality has certainly been changing as more evangelicals are accepting that same-sex marriage will soon be the law of the land, whether they are pleased about it or not," Vines said. "I think they have a chance to persuade more evangelicals to lay down their arms in this culture war battle that has been so harmful to the primary

mission of the church."

Research on evangelicals suggests that younger evangelicals are more likely to support same-sex marriage than those of an older generation, though many still resist it.

In 2012, Pew found that 29 percent of young white evangelicals (age 18-29) expressed support for allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally, higher than older evangelicals at 17 percent. That's far below the level of support for same-sex marriage expressed by young adults as a whole (65 percent).

A 2014 Public Religion Research Institute survey suggested that white evangelical Protestant millennials are more than twice as likely to favor same-sex marriage as the oldest generation of white evangelical Protestants (43 percent compared to 19 percent). **BT**



Atheist coalition wants you to know they are 'Openly Secular'

By Kimberly Winston
Religion News Service

DECATUR, Ga. — A new coalition of atheists, humanists and other non-religious groups is taking a page from the gay rights movement and encouraging people to admit they are "openly secular."

The coalition — unprecedented in its scope — is broadening a trend of reaching out to religious people and religious groups by making the secular label a catchall for people who are not religious.

"We wanted to rise above who is an atheist, who is an agnostic, who is a humanist, who is a secular Jew," said Todd Stiefel, founder of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation and a main force behind the coalition. "This needed to be about something everyone could rally behind so

we intentionally used the word secular because it was one thing we could all agree on."

The campaign, "Openly Secular: Opening Minds, Changing Hearts," was unveiled at the 65th annual gathering of the Religion Newswriters Association here in September. It includes a website, resources for families, employers and clergy, and a YouTube channel featuring both prominent and rank-and-file nonbelievers announcing their names followed by the declaration, "I am openly secular."

To raise awareness of discrimination against nonbelievers, Openly Secular looked to the "It Gets Better" project launched several years ago by gay rights activists. In that campaign, openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people sat down in front of a video camera and told their stories of discrimination and bullying and encouraged closeted LGBT

people to do the same. Many sociologists credit the "It Gets Better" project with the growing acceptance of same-sex relationships.

But as innovative as the campaign claims to be, it has a major hurdle. One of the main backers of the campaign is the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, headed by the famous evolutionary biologist who is one of the most outspoken critics of religion and religious people. Project Reason, founded by vocal anti-theist and *New York Times* bestseller Sam Harris, is also a supporter.

But Stiefel, who frequently works with religious people in his philanthropic work, said, "In this campaign we are not going to be critical of religious people or organizations. That does not mean there won't be member organizations that continue to criticize religion." **BT**

Nurturing Faith: *Texts and Themes for 2015*

BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

*Order the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies within *Baptists Today* at 1-877-752-5658 or nurturingfaith.net.

Season of Epiphany

January 6-February 15
One Step More

Jan. 6 – Matt. 2:1-12

“Meaningful Gifts”

What wise folk do when knowledge is not enough

Jan. 13 – Acts 19:1-7

“Powerful Hands”

What the Spirit does when water is not enough

Jan. 20 – 1 Samuel 3:1-20

“Listening Ears”

What followers do when eyes are not enough

Jan. 27 – Jonah 3:1-10

“Surprising Acts”

What penitents do when words are not enough

Feb. 1 – Psalm 111

“Inspiring Deeds”

What believers do when awe is not enough

Feb. 8 – Mark 1:29-39

“Missional Plans”

What Jesus did when our efforts were not enough

Feb. 15 – Mark 9:2-9

“Mountaintop Moments”

What to do when human perception is not enough

Season of Lent

February 22-March 29

Heavy Days

Feb. 22 – Psalm 25:1-10

“Healthy Regret”

Penitent tears are a good start for the season of Lent

Mar. 1 – Mark 8:31-38

“Self Denial”

Matching two words that don't like each other

Mar. 8 – John 2:13-22

“Righteous Anger”

Jesus had a temper, and was not afraid to use it.

Mar. 15 – John 3:14-21

“Light Living”

Darkness may be familiar, but life is in the light.

Mar. 22 – John 12:20-33

“Dead Wheat”

Some things have to die before they can live.

Mar. 29 – Mark 14:32-42

“Hard Praying”

Sometimes it's easier not to know what's next.

Season of Easter

Apr. 5 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

“Of First Importance”

Paul knew that everything hangs on the resurrection.

April 12-May 17

The Book of Love

Apr. 12 – 1 John 1:2-2:2

“Walking in the Sunshine”

John speaks of truth, light and the Christian way.

Apr. 19 – 1 John 3:1-7

“Children of God”

God knows, children can turn out good or bad.

Apr. 26 – 1 John 3:16-24

“Real Love”

Jesus' kind of love involves much more than words.

May 3 – 1 John 4:7-21

“Deep Love”

Knowing deep love means knowing God, too.

May 10 – 1 John 5:1-6

“Water and Blood”

Can believers really conquer the world?

May 17 – 1 John 5:7-13

“Testimony”

These could be the original “wonderful words of life.”

Season of Pentecost

May 24-July 5

Spiritual Matters, OT Style

May 24 – Ezekiel 37:1-14

“Can These Bones Live?”

With God, our driest days are not beyond hope.

May 31 – Isaiah 6:1-13

“You Want Me To Do What?”

Did God really want Isaiah to encourage bad judgment?

June 7 – Genesis 3:1-19

“The Inevitable Apple”

Can we really put the blame on Adam and Eve?

June 14 – Ezekiel 17:1-24

“Cedar Mountain High”

Could fallen humanity really climb a holy mountain?

June 21 – Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

“Gratitude Squared”

Being lost and found calls for a special kind of thanks.

June 28 – Lamentations 3:22-33

“Goodness – and Grief”

Troubled people need a God who won't give up.

July 5 – Ezekiel 2:1-3:11

“Eat My Words!”

God's command puts a sweet twist on a common saying.

July 12-July 26

Mind-Stretching Matters

July 12 – Ephesians 1:1-14

“An Amazing Inheritance”

Paul leaks a mysterious secret, and it boggles the mind.

July 19 – Ephesians 2:1-22

“A Sacred Trio”

Grace, faith and reconciliation: what's not to like?

July 26 – Ephesians 3:14-21

“It's All Beyond Me”

God's riches are above understanding – but not beyond imagining.

August 2-August 23

The Trouble with Kings

Aug. 2 – 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

“You're the Man!”

Nathan sets a trap for a royal miscreant, and bags his prey.

Aug. 9 – 2 Samuel 18:1-33

“Paying the Price”

Sin happens, trouble follows, and no one is immune.

Aug. 16 – 1 Kings 2:1-3:15

“Redeeming a Shaky Start”

Solomon's prayer for wisdom was badly needed.

Aug. 23 – 1 Kings 8:1-61

“Prayers for Now and Later”

A dedication prayer designed for people who weren't there

August 30-September 27

Serious Church

Aug. 30 – James 1:17-27

“Real Religion”

“Religion” doesn't sound so unsavory when it's done right.

Sept. 6 – James 2:1-26

“True Faith”

Faith understands that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sept. 13 – James 3:1-12

“Pure Speech”

James unleashes a tongue-lashing about tongue-taming.

Sept. 20 – James 3:13-4:10

“Highborn Wisdom”

Wise believers understand that selfishness is a dead end.

Sept. 27 – James 5:13-20

“Fervent Prayer”

The true power of prayer goes deeper than the surface.

October 4-October 25

Following Jesus on Hwy. 10

Oct. 4 – Mark 10:1-16

“Hard Words and a Soft Heart”

Jesus speaks about marriage, adultery and children.

Oct. 11 – Mark 10:17-31

“Of Treasures and Troubles”

Wealth and discipleship can make for a difficult combination.

Oct. 18 – Mark 10:32-45

“First and Last”

When cherished notions are turned upside down and inside out

Oct. 25 – Mark 10:46-52

“What Do We Really Want?”

Jesus’ question to a blind man sparks helpful introspection.

November 1-November 22
A Time for Gratitude

Nov. 1 – Ruth 1:1-2:23

“You’re All I Have”

The book of Ruth is really about Naomi, who should be grateful.

Nov. 8 – Ruth 3:1-4:21

“An Odd Road to a Happy Ending”

Naomi’s scheme was risky, but Ruth made it work.

Nov. 15 – 1 Samuel 1:1-28

“Transformational Tears”

A painful prayer, a baby boy, a promise kept

Nov. 22 – 2 Samuel 23:1-7

“Thanks for the Promises”

Not really David’s last words, but maybe the last happy ones

Season of Advent

November 29-December 20

Hope Waits

Nov. 29 – 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

“A Time for Anticipation”

A reunion with friends is a foretaste of future things.

Dec. 6 – Luke 1:68-79

“A Time for Praise”

When a mute man speaks, it’s good to listen.

Dec. 13 – Zephaniah 3:14-20

“A Time for Joy”

Patience pays: long waits do come to an end.

Dec. 20 – Micah 5:2-5a

“A Time for Peace”

Big things can come from small towns.

Season of Christmas

Dec. 27 – 1 Samuel 2:18-26

“A Time for Growth”

Good growth can happen, even in bad company.

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Bible Study

2 Peter 3:1-15a

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 7, 2014

While We Are Waiting

Have you ever been promised something, but the fulfillment was so long in coming that you despaired of it ever happening?

Think of a young husband who tells his apartment-dwelling wife, “We’ll have a house of our own one day.” As years pass and their income remains lean, she may wonder if they will ever own a home.

Think of a politician who makes grandiose promises of how his or her administration will increase prosperity, lower taxes, or decrease crime rates. Grand plans, however, often run aground on the shores of political opposition, global events, or financial unrest.

Most of us have known people who make promises they never intend to keep, while others have the best of intentions but are unable to follow through. Our familiarity with unfulfilled expectations may feed a tendency to doubt promises we’ve read about in the Bible, too.

The presence of such doubts is at the heart of today’s text. Will there really be a day when Christ returns and the world will be judged? ↓

Be assured (vv. 1-7)

The short letter we call 2 Peter was probably written in the first half of the second century, long after the apostle Peter had died. It was common in that period for religious leaders to write in the name of a more famous predecessor, and the pseudonymous author of 2 Peter almost certainly followed that pattern. ↓



2 Peter 5:13

“But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

The letter is generally called a “General Epistle,” meaning that it was addressed to believers in general, rather than to a specific church. Whether its initial recipients lived in Rome, Asia Minor, or Palestine, they faced an ongoing crisis of identity as the church with its Jewish roots adapted to a pervasive Hellenistic society. People coming into the church were more familiar with contemporary philosophies than with the Hebrew Bible, and various attempts to combine the gospel with popular thought led to a confusion of beliefs.

The author had two primary concerns. A group of influential people he called “scoffers” were disputing that Christ would return or that humankind would face a day of divine judgment. Without the ethical motivation of a future hope (or fear), they saw little need to worry about current behavior. Eschatological skepticism led to moral libertinism. ↓

Jesus himself had predicted a coming day when cosmic catastrophes would herald the return of the “Son of Man” and introduce a time of judgment

(Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

From the time of Jesus’ ascension into heaven, his followers had been looking for his return with either hope or dread, depending on their measure of faithfulness. Had not Jesus said “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Matt. 24:34)?

The word *genea* typically referred to a family generation, suggesting a period of 20 to 40 years between the age of parents and children. It is obvious that Jesus’ prediction was not fulfilled in a literal sense, so modern readers are required either to assume that Jesus was wrong, or to interpret “generation” metaphorically. Most writers prefer the latter. Perhaps Jesus considered the age of Israel as a former generation and was speaking of the “church age” as a new generation that would culminate in the “end times” when Christ would return (the *parousía*). ↓

Jesus’ contemporaries, however, expected Christ’s return to be sooner rather than later, and possibly in their own lifetimes. Paul echoed this belief

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in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11, urging readers to be hopeful and faithful as they watched for the *parousía*. Multiple times, the Apocalypse of John includes the admonition “See, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, cf. 2:16, 3:11).

As years (and generations) passed without any evidence of cosmic conflagration or blowing of Gabriel’s horn, some believers began to doubt that there would be a “second coming” or a judgment at all. Possibly influenced by the philosophy associated with Epicurus, some of them argued that if there were no eternal consequences to fear, there was little need for moral restraint or ethical behavior.

As he came to chapter 3, the author of 2 Peter imagined the time was being fulfilled when “in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging in their own lusts and saying ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’” (vv. 3-4).

The apostolic ancestors had predicted a quick return of Christ, but none of them saw it, for they were all dead – nothing had happened. Thus, the “scoffers” argued that neither Christ nor the judgment would ever happen, so why not indulge a little lust?

The author presents four arguments against their position. First, he insists that God’s words are reliable. He recalled how God had not only fashioned the heavens and the earth “by the word of God,” but also had spoken a word of judgment that was fulfilled by the deluge (vv. 5-6, cf. Genesis 6-8). Now, he insisted, “by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire” that would bring judgment to all and destroy the godless (v. 7).

Be alert (vv. 8-10)

The second argument is a call for perspective. Quoting Ps. 90:4, the author asserts: “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.” God and humans don’t understand time in the same way

(v. 8). One cannot claim that God is slow about keeping promises when time is relative and we know only the human side of it.

The author’s third defense appeals to God’s mercy. He insists that the delay in Christ’s return is evidence that “God is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance” (v. 9). What some saw as apostolic ineptitude in predicting a judgment that was nowhere in sight, the author saw as evidence of God’s mercy and an opportunity to repent while there was still time.

A final reply is a reminder that the timing of judgment was unpredictable by design. As both Jesus (Matt. 24:43-44) and Paul (1 Thess. 5:2) had taught, Christ’s return would be like a thief in the night, when least expected. On that day, though, judgment would be sure. Everything between heaven and earth would dissolve in fire, he said, leaving all human works laid bare (v. 10). ⬇

Be at work (vv. 11-15a)

Having presented his arguments for the reality of a coming judgment, the author asks the same question that we should be asking: “If judgment is coming, but we don’t know when, what sort of lives should we be living? What kind of godliness and holiness should we be demonstrating?” (v. 11). ⬇

If a worker knows at what time a supervisor typically makes rounds, he or she is likely to work harder at that time than at others. But if the timing of the boss’ appearance is uncertain, the employee is motivated to remain engaged at all times.

The author believed that the certainty of judgment, combined with the uncertainty of its timing, should provide adequate motivation for believers to live in holy and godly ways, and not just for their own benefit. They would also

be “hastening the coming of the day of God” (v. 12).

We can’t be sure exactly why the writer believed that faithful living would speed the timing of God’s judgment, unless we are to presume he hoped the positive influence of Christ-like believers would lead to the conversion of so many persons that God would no longer need to wait “for all to come to repentance” (v. 9).

In any case, the text insists, believers’ patience will find their reward in “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home” (v. 13). This is one of the most beautiful images in the Bible. We live in a world that seems dominated by people who are motivated by power and greed, or by the desire to impose their religious or cultural standards on everyone else. We live in a world of violence and corruption and despair, so much so that a righteous person stands out like a spring daffodil in a burned-over field.

How lovely to imagine living in a land “where righteousness is at home” – but that’s not just a future hope. We are called to live rightly where we are (vv. 14-15a). While we live, while we are waiting for the culmination of all things, we should “strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish,” the writer says, unlike the scoffers he had described as “blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation” (2:13). God’s patience is an opportunity for salvation, and should not be impugned, but cherished.

If the author of this letter were to jump ahead nearly 2,000 years in which the *parousía* still has not occurred, what do you think he might say to our churches, to us as individuals? Would he find us living godly lives, striving toward a land where righteousness is at home? ⬇

Time remains relative, and God’s time is not our time. Whether we expect to meet Christ through an end-times scenario or at the time of our own death, we have no way of knowing when that time will be. How should we then live? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Dec. 14, 2014

Imperatives Abounding

Do you like being told what to do? Imperative statements can be hard to hear. If someone has a word of advice, we would rather hear “let’s consider doing this,” or “why don’t we try ... ?”

That wasn’t Paul’s style. He happily spoke in bold imperatives, as we discover in these closing verses from 1 Thessalonians. Paul concluded the letter to his friends with a rapid-fire list of imperative statements calling the church to develop positive attitudes and an openness to God’s Spirit they would need for difficult days. 🇺🇸

Be joyful (v. 16)

“Be joyful always,” Paul says. What? Does Paul know anything about what our lives are like? How can he say “be joyful always”? Doesn’t he know the troubles we’ve seen?

No, Paul didn’t know our struggles and trials, but he knew something about his own difficulties and the trials of his friends. He knew what it was like to be sick and hungry and tired. He knew what it was like to be rejected by the people who were once the closest to him. He knew what it was like to live beneath a heavy load of guilt for past sins and mistakes. Paul knew what it was like to be arrested for his faith, to be beaten and jailed and left with the rats in the dungeon. And still he said, “Be joyful always.” 🇺🇸

When we hear the word “joy,” we may think of carefree happiness or spontaneous smiles or giggles erupting



1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

like Vesuvius. That may happen occasionally, when joy bubbles over, but it is possible to have a deep sense of inner joy even when it is impossible to smile and we wouldn’t think of laughing. We can hold joy in our heart even when our faces are lined with tears. Because of the Spirit who lives in us, that joy does not leak out even when our heart is broken.

Perhaps you have known people who have suffered a great tragedy in their lives, and though they experienced grief to the fullest, they did not allow it to drown out their joy. Holding on to the hope we have in Christ, they kept their heads above water and persevered, trusting in God for a good future yet to come.

When you think of hardships in your own life, how have they affected you? Have they eclipsed your sense of joy and confidence in Christ, or have you been able to remain hopeful and keep looking up?

Christian joy has a beginning, but it really doesn’t have an end. It comes into our lives when we experience the grace of God through Jesus Christ, and it remains as sure as the love of God for his children. 🇺🇸

Be prayerful (v. 17)

One way to fulfill Paul’s encouragement to be joyful is to take seriously his second imperative: “pray without ceasing.” That’s a literal translation of the Greek, but is it possible?

Some mystics through the years have sought to fulfill these words to the letter. They adopt a short prayer such as “Glory to God,” and they repeat it over and over – “Glory to God. Glory to God. Glory to God.” At every possible moment, they repeat the mantra. When they cannot attend to giving voice to the prayer, they ask God to consider every heartbeat as a repetition of the prayer. 🇺🇸

That is one way to understand the verse, but probably not what Paul intended. Perhaps Paul’s meaning is not just “pray constantly,” but something like “don’t give up on praying” or even, “pray any time.” Some of Paul’s early readers could have come from religions that practiced prayer at fixed times during the day, or in which only certain people were authorized to address the gods. Paul insisted that believers can turn to God at any time, any day, under any circumstances. Other people may turn away, but God never “tunes us out.”

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How would you describe your prayer life? Do you pray only in a ritual sense, before a family meal, perhaps, or when the Lord's Prayer is repeated at church? When you bow your head as a worship leader is praying, are you praying along or planning lunch or taking a nap?

Sadly, many of us have little to say to God unless we find ourselves in trouble, in need, or in grief. Paul reminds us that we can pray any time, not just at bedtime, at church, or in times of crisis. Paul's imperative suggests that habitual prayer is not only something we *can* practice, but *should*. Along with joyfulness and prayerfulness, it is part "of the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (v. 18b).

Be thankful (v. 18)


Here's a quick math question: Can $16 + 17 = 18$? In this text, it can. Believers who put vv. 16 and 17 into practice can also grow into v. 18. If we learn to be always joyful and persistently prayerful, we may also learn to "give thanks in all circumstances." Verses 16-18 are a small literary unit: Paul described joyfulness, prayerfulness, and thankfulness as "the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Note carefully that this verse does not claim that all circumstances are God's will, as a careless reading might lead one to believe. Many things happen that are clearly not God's will. When we sin, God's will is not being done. When our sin affects other people, we can hardly call the suffering or hurt they experience God's will. Many evil and tragic things happen in this world, and none of them are God's will.

Paul did not call us to be thankful for all circumstances, but in all circumstances. We should not think everything that happens in our lives is God's will, but it is God's desire for us to have an overriding attitude of joy and prayer and thankfulness in every situation.

Be attentive (vv. 19-22)

The inner attitudes described in vv. 16-18 grow from fellowship with the

Holy Spirit, but we can dampen the Spirit's work if we fail to trust, if we turn away from God's message to us, if we turn our hearts toward evil. For this reason, Paul goes on to say: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil" (vv. 19-22). 

The word translated "quench" was normally used for extinguishing a fire. From the time of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been symbolized by the image of fire. Like the flames of a benevolent blaze, the Holy Spirit warms our heart and energizes the attitudes of joyfulness, prayerfulness, and thankfulness.

But if we turn our minds to selfish greed or impatience, if we ignore the teachings of scripture, if we focus on what is wrong instead of what is right, we douse the blaze. A fire has to have something to work with. Our attitudes of trust and prayerfulness are like fuel for the fire. When we turn from God and become self-focused, there is nothing for the Spirit to act on, and so we don't experience the promises of God.

Be blessed (vv. 23-24)

Paul reminds us of those promises in a benediction: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this" (vv. 23-24).

All of God's blessings combined can be summed up in the word "peace." The spiritual gifts of salvation and grace and joy, the more tangible gifts of provision and presence, the assurance of a greater life that is beyond this earthly life, all contribute to the sense of peace. Paul prays that the God of such peace will sanctify us completely – that is, God will make us both whole and holy.

God cares about every facet of our lives. God wants us to be whole in spirit and soul and body. God cares about our emotional health, our spiritual health, our physical health. God wants us to be sound and whole. God also wants us to experience the purifying and comforting touch of the Spirit in every aspect of our being, not just in worship, but every day of our lives.

In one sense, the goal is to grow constantly in our experience of God, so that when Christ returns, he will find us faithful and true. In another sense, the goal is to live so that, until Christ returns, we will experience the abundant life that God wants us to have. Paul wants us to know that this is not a dream or a wish. The God who calls us to such a life is faithful.

We can be whole. We can be holy. And, in the process, we can know joy that will carry us through every day – even while we are waiting, even while we are hurting. We can be confident that the grace of Christ is at work in us (v. 28) to accomplish God's purpose and promises in our lives. **BT**

An Advent text? – Why was Paul's advice to the church in Thessalonica chosen as an appropriate text for the Advent season? The third Sunday of Advent – typically marked by a pink or red candle among the purple ones in the Advent wreath – was traditionally a day when ministers were ordained (the color red is associated with the clergy). Paul's cogent advice, expressed in a string of imperatives, would serve as a good text for an ordination sermon.

Also, a popular Advent tradition highlights a theme on each Sunday of Advent: hope on the first, peace on the second, joy on the third, and love (or salvation) on the fourth. Paul's advice to "be joyful always" is an appropriate text for the third Sunday, which celebrates joy.

Youth

December 7 — December 28, 2014

Youth Lessons by
David Cassidy
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teaching resources
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DECEMBER 7

Waiting

2 Peter 3:8-15a

These days we don't have to wait very often. Answers to questions can be found in the devices we have in the palms of our hands. The world news pops up on our phones and computers as it happens. Even packages from around the world can be delivered overnight.

But when we do have to wait, it can seem like eternity. Maybe that is because in so many other areas of our lives things happen so quickly.

The writer of 2 Peter offers some ideas about what we should be doing while we wait for the coming of the Lord.

Those followers of Jesus who had walked and talked with him expected his return before the end of their lifetimes.

Later generations of followers began to doubt that Jesus would soon return and also began to doubt the judgment that came along with his return. If there were no judgment, they wondered, then why should they have to live the way that Jesus had taught?

Second Peter responds to both of these arguments. First, the writer debunks the timing of Jesus' return by explaining that we do not know how long one day is to God. He also reminds us that God is patient and wants everyone to have time to repent.

Second, the writer says that we need to continue to live a virtuous life so that we can have a righteous home here and also in the new heaven and the new earth.

Think About It:

When we wait, we sometimes give up what we are waiting on and do our own thing. This is no different with our faith. Where do you lose patience in matters of faith?

Make a Choice:

Every day we make choices that either create the new heavens and earth described in this passage or tear it down. How will you choose to help build the new heavens and new earth this week?

Pray:

Dear God, we give you thanks for taking what we have done and forming it into a new creation.

DECEMBER 14

Here It Is

1 Thessalonians 5:14-24

I don't like being told what to do. In fact, if you tell me to do something, even if it is something that I like to do, my first reaction is to do the opposite.

There are times when this is beneficial, such as when others are trying to get me to do something that is wrong. There are other times when it hurts me, such as when someone is trying to help me out.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul uses a commanding tone that can feel quite "bossy" when he writes to the church at Thessalonica. His words may have been a little easier to stomach if he hadn't used the qualifiers "always," "without ceasing," "all," "everything" and "every."

Being joyful, praying, giving thanks, testing and abstaining from evil are all things that we are able to do on a regular basis. But Paul calls us to live in a way that we do these things at all times.

While it is easy to see the good in "always" being thankful and avoiding evil, we also know that we are imperfect and will sometimes miss these goals. That is why it is encouraging when Paul reminds us that God blesses each of us and offers us "peace."

This peace will help us live an abundant life until Christ returns. When we are at peace we are better able to be joyful, prayerful and thankful. No longer do we push against these things, but we are at peace to live into these things.

Think About It:

Sometimes it can be hard to be told what to do. Other times we need to be told what to do to correct what is being done wrong. What type of correction do you handle the best?

Make a Choice:

Most of us are well aware of our flaws. Sometimes we take these to heart and change them, and other times we let them slide. How do you choose to make yourself better?

Pray:

God, may we accept your blessings and peace so that we may live grateful lives that honor you.

Unexpected Gifts

Luke 1:26-38

Have you ever received an unexpected or surprise gift? Can you remember that initial feeling of joy as you thought, "Is this for me?"

Unexpected gifts are usually heartfelt and born from a place that is not expecting anything in return. The gift doesn't have to be large or expensive to portray its true meaning — it just has to be given. Many times we don't even know what to say when we receive an unexpected gift.

In today's scripture passage we watch as Mary is given a completely unexpected gift, one that will change not only her life but all of eternity. She accepts the gift, not with utter joy but in obedience.

The story from Luke 1 is probably not new to you, but it is still amazing to read. Mary is in her early teens, as young as many of you reading this. She has been promised in marriage to Joseph. Then an angel appears on the scene — but not just any angel.

The story almost becomes unimaginable when the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will have a son — but not just any son. Her son will sit on the throne of David.

Mary wonders how this can be since she is a virgin. Gabriel answers Mary, and her response is one that echoes Samuel and Isaiah: "Here am I ... let it be with me." She finds the strength to be obedient even though she doesn't fully understand the gift she is being given.

Think About It:

Mary accepted the message from Gabriel without hesitation. She opened herself up to God and the gift that God had given to her. How open are you to the gifts that God has given to you?

Make a Choice:

We have all been given unique gifts from God. How we use those gifts is up to us. Will you use your gifts to build up the kingdom of God or to build up your own kingdom?

Pray:

Dear God, may we be as open to receiving your gifts as was Mary. May we use our gifts to build your kingdom.

Abba

Galatians 4:4-7

Most of us wear many different labels. Some are placed on us that we don't have a lot of control over: "child" or "young." Others are meant to demean us: "geek" or "fat." There are also labels that we wear proudly: "teammate" or "friend."

But there is an important label that we get to choose: "child of God."

Galatians 4 is a reminder to each of us that no matter where we come from or what other labels we are given, we are a child of God.

In the preceding verses of chapter 4, Paul reminds readers/hearers that the good

news of Jesus is not only for the Jewish people and that all people are one. He continues the theme of oneness into chapter 4 by focusing on "who" the people belong to.

Paul reminds us that Jesus was human and lived a human life with a human family. Like us, Jesus knew what it was like to be part of a family, but he also knew that he truly belonged to God. He lived to redeem those under the law so that they might also be God's children.

But we are not children of God simply because of Jesus; we have to choose to be children of God. God does not force this relationship upon us; we have to choose to be part of it. It is then that the Spirit cries out "Abba!" and you are a child of God.

Think About It:

Although they may not be our biological parents, there are people in our lives who we consider mom and/or dad. How do they make you feel part of a family?

Make a Choice:

The greatest gift God gives us is whether or not we wish to be part of the family of God. You get to make that choice anytime. Will you choose to be part of the family of God?

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for choosing us to be part of your family.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 1:26-38


Dec. 21, 2014

When Heaven Comes to Earth

Do you believe that God's call extends to all people, and that God can use both men and women to accomplish the divine purpose?

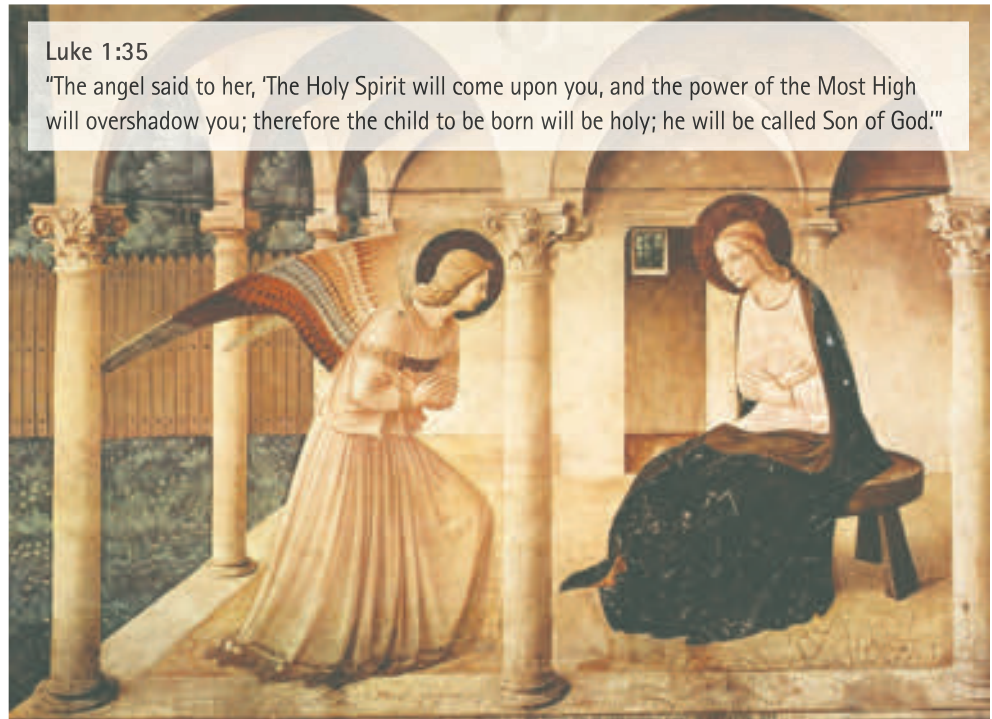
Today's lesson is a reminder that God has blessed each of us with the gift of potential beyond our imagining. God's grace is at work to help each of us discover that gift and learn to exercise it. From this story we learn not only about Mary's call, but also about how each of us may claim the gift of potential that lies within, and respond to God's call.

A special woman

Why would God choose Mary as the person responsible for becoming the mother of the messiah? It seems unlikely: Her hometown of Nazareth was a hamlet in Galilee that was originally populated by Gentiles.  In addition to being a village of commoners, Nazareth may have had an unsavory reputation. Some years later, when disciple-to-be Nathaniel was first told about Jesus, he sneered: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Mary had no special ancestry. Her intended husband was descended from the line of David, but so were thousands of other people: The teeming mass of pilgrims who Luke says crowded Joseph and Mary from the inns of Bethlehem were there precisely because they also belonged to the lineage of David.

Like most women of her social standing, Mary probably had no formal



education, and she may have expected little more than to marry a common man, to cook and clean, to bear children and raise them in love. Then again, that is precisely what God wanted her to do. The most important work done in this world is not in academic libraries, scientific laboratories, or economic boardrooms. The most important work is done in our homes, and Mary was prepared.



Few of us can claim a famous pedigree. Even if we could, our lineage alone does not set us apart from everyone else. What makes us special is our willingness to let God be at work in our lives: to be like Mary.

A special night (vv. 26-30)

We often envision Mary as a mature woman, but she was probably a teenager when Gabriel came in the night and spoke to her. It was customary for Jewish girls of that time to be betrothed at a very young age, so Mary may have been in her early teens.

The text is careful at a number of

points to emphasize that Mary was a virgin (vv. 27, 34). She was engaged to Joseph, and engagement was a legal contract tantamount to marriage, but Luke leaves no doubt that the marriage had not been consummated in a sexual sense.

Can you imagine what it would be like to have an angel suddenly appear? We have no idea what Gabriel looked like. Angels were described as appearing in various guises in biblical stories, so we have few clues to Gabriel's appearance, but it was close enough to Mary's idea of an angel so that she recognized him as such, and she was greatly frightened.  

When the angel began to speak, Mary was both scared and confused. "Greetings, favored one!" he said. "The Lord is with you!" (v. 28). Luke tells us that Mary "was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be" (v. 29). Modern readers may be perplexed, too. "Favored one" translates a word that means "one upon whom grace has been bestowed." This is the source of the familiar line in the Catholic liturgy: "Hail Mary, full of grace."

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



The address does not mean that Mary was so filled with innate grace that she could give it to others; it simply means that she was chosen by God. God looked past her smallness, past her human sinfulness, past her questions – and chose her as a living vessel to bring God’s embodied grace into the world.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God,” the angel said (v. 30). The word for “favor” is the root word from which “favored one” was formed in v. 28. Its basic meaning has to do with grace. Mary had not done anything to earn or deserve the privilege of bearing the child who would be known as the Son of God: God’s choice of her was a matter of grace. She had found favor with God.

A special son (vv. 31-38)

Favored or not, Mary was confused, and the longer the angel spoke, the more bewildered she became. Wouldn’t you be? “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus” (v. 31). Before Mary could begin to digest the enormity of those words, as Luke tells it, the visitor went on:

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (vv. 32-33).

Let’s step back from the shock factor to look at the coming child’s name. It was to be “Jesus.” In Greek it is *iēsous* (pronounced *yaysoos*), a Graecized form of the Hebrew *y^hoshua* (Joshua) and Aramaic *y^hshua*, both of which mean “Yahweh is salvation,” or “Yahweh saves.” Luke does not define the name, as does Matthew (1:21), but his entire gospel is an elaboration of its meaning.

The angel’s predictions about the coming child were expressed in such words that Mary could have taken them to mean that her son would be the longed-for messiah. His words are vaguely reminiscent of Isa. 9:6-7:

“For a child has been born for us, a

son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.”

When Mary composed herself enough to speak, however, she gave no hint that these words about Jesus as messiah or a new David had sunk in. She was more concerned with that first part of the prophecy, the part about conceiving and bearing a son. “How can this be ...,” she asked incredulously, “... since I am a virgin?” (v. 34).

The angel’s elliptical response simply promised that God would take care of it. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (v. 35).

This verse does not suggest, as some have supposed, that “come upon you” and “overshadow you” should connote the sexual imagery of a nocturnal visit from God in human form. The angel did not speak of a normal conception, but a new creation, as Malcolm Tolbert once put it (“Luke,” in *Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 [Broadman Press, 1970], 23). God was bringing something new into the world: Paul referred to Christ as a new Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). For this reason, even “Son of David” was an inadequate title: the child would be called the “Son of God.”

Surely the angel’s response did not fully answer Mary’s incredulous question or satisfy her natural curiosity, but it was apparently all the explanation she would get.

As Mary struggled to comprehend and to accept Gabriel’s mind-boggling proposition, the angel offered two words of assurance. The first was an


improbable announcement: Mary’s elderly relative Elizabeth, considered barren throughout her long life, had now conceived and was in her sixth month of pregnancy (v. 36). This news led to a second encouragement: “For nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37).

Modern readers who struggle to accept the truth of this story may find it comforting to remember that Mary may have been doubtful, too. After expressing her submission to God, her first response was to go and visit Elizabeth (vv. 39-56). Some commentators imagine that Mary’s long journey was simply to share her good news, but we can imagine that she also was checking out the angel’s story, because we would have, too.

Including this motivation in her journey would not mean that Mary had no faith: the entire story points toward Mary’s compliant response in v. 38. With no more to go on than the angel’s implausible promise, Mary answered: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (v. 36a).

Presumably Mary’s pregnancy began soon thereafter. That would have furnished an added incentive for her to leave the village for awhile, as gossip would surely have mounted.

What was so special about Mary? She had spunk. She had confidence. She had courage to live on the edge. She was willing to believe the angel’s wildly improbable story, and willing to serve the Lord despite the many inevitable misunderstandings and explanations that would lie ahead.

God called. Like Samuel and Isaiah before her, Mary said “Here am I.” This story offers more than a lesson in obedience or humility. Mary did not just acquiesce to the Lord’s will. At the same time, she accepted the gift of potential that God offered. She opened her life, her heart, and even her womb to the work of God in her. As a result, Christians everywhere continue to bless the name of Mary – God’s highly favored one, Jesus’ own human mother, the believer’s consummate model of believing faith. 

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Galatians 4:4-7

Dec. 28, 2014

Children of God

From the time I learned to talk, I have called my father “Daddy.” I have never known a person who routinely referred to his or her male parent by the formal title “Father,” though I did grow up with a boy who called his parents by their first names. Most of us have some special name, whether it be “Dad” or “Pops” or some other family favorite.

When I say the word “Daddy,” I experience a whole range of feelings, thoughts, and memories. When I hear the word voiced by one of my children, the feelings are redoubled. There is something very special about the relationship it suggests.

If we had been born into a first-century Jewish home in Palestine, we would most likely have learned to call our fathers “Abba.” The Hebrew term for “my father” is “*abî*,” but most people spoke Aramaic at home, where it would be “Abba.” Like our word “Daddy,” either children or adults could use the term with a variety of connotations.

Jesus and his Abba

Many writers now avoid male-centric language for God, acknowledging that the God of the universe is beyond any human conception of gender. In biblical language, however, there is no getting around the fact that God was generally perceived as male, and as a father figure. The specificity derives from the limitations of human language and the realities of ancient culture. The authors of the Bible lived in a largely



Galatians 4:4-5

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.”

patriarchal world in which men tended to hold greater power, so it was only natural for them to describe God with masculine pronouns. God is occasionally described as more of a mother figure, but the feminine imagery is clearly secondary.

Jesus was a master communicator. To connect effectively with others, he chose to use the common vocabulary of his culture, though in challenging ways. Thus, although Jesus sometimes used “mother” terminology with reference to his own sorrow over Jerusalem’s rejection (see Matt. 23:37 or Luke 13:34), he commonly spoke of God as father.

With the exception of the cry of desolation on the cross (Mark 15:34, “*Eloi Eloi*,” or “My God, my God ...”) – a prayer quoted from Ps. 22:1 – every recorded prayer of Jesus has him referring to God as “father” or as “Abba.”^U The gospels tell us very little about the young Jesus’ relationship with Joseph, his adoptive earthly father. They insist, however, that Jesus thought of God as father, even as a child. In the familiar story of his tarrying in the Jerusalem

temple at age 12, Jesus responded to his parents’ scolding by saying “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49).

As an adult, Jesus’ teaching was replete with paternal terminology for God. Matthew quotes him as saying “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (7:21).

In Mark, Jesus instructs his followers to forgive others when they pray, “so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses” (11:25).

To illustrate the grace of God, Luke recorded Jesus’ story about a prodigal son and a forgiving, searching, joyful father (15:11-32). John quotes Jesus as saying “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places” (14:2).

When Jesus prayed, so far as we know, he addressed God as father. He taught disciples to pray “Our Father in heaven ...” (Matt. 6:9, cp. Luke 11:2). When the gospel record describes Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, it recalls him praying “Abba, Father, for

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



Resources to teach adult and youth classes

are available at
nurturingfaith.net

you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14:36, cp. Matt. 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42).

According to Luke’s account, as Jesus hung on the cross, he offered grace to his executioners with the prayer “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34). Even in the moment of his physical death, Jesus prayed “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit” (23:46). ☵

Adoption as children (vv. 4-5)

The Apostle Paul not only recognized Jesus’ pattern of describing God as father, but also argued that Jesus’ desire was to bring others into relationship with God as their ultimate parent. In 2 Cor. 6:18, he freely paraphrases 2 Sam. 7:14 (originally spoken to David) as a promise that “I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” In today’s text, Paul says more about this potential relationship.

The text follows a line of argument in which Paul insisted that the Jews did not have an exclusive claim on God. Though they considered themselves to be heirs of the promise, Christ’s work had eliminated distinctions between male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free (3:28). Paul argued that all who belong to Christ have become “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (3:29).

Just before today’s text, Paul continued the theme of being heirs of God, arguing that even heirs, so long as they remain minors, are bound by the law and cannot inherit (vv. 1-3). Only when the time is right, such as when they reach a certain age, does a parent’s bequest become theirs.

The time of fulfillment arrived with the incarnation of Christ, Paul argued, and it did not apply to Israel alone. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law ... v. 4). ☵ When the time was right, God entered our world

through the person of Jesus, who was born as other people are born, born to a particular woman and born within a particular culture: the people of Israel. As a human child, Jesus learned by experience what it means to live in a family relationship with earthly parents.

As he grew, Jesus devoted his earthly life to helping others discover that same kind of relationship with God. Thus Paul says “God sent his son in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (v. 5).

As Paul saw it, the process that began with Christ’s incarnation set in motion his work of redemption, leading to the possibility of our adoption as God’s children. The Greek word translated “adoption as children” in the NRSV was a technical term used to mean “adoption as sons, with full rights of inheritance.” ☵

Even though first-century women had only limited inheritance rights, we are not amiss in removing the gender component and translating the term as “adoption as children.” Most translations (KJV, NIV, NIV11, NAS95, HCSB, NET) retain the word “sons” or “sonship,” but Paul did not intend for the term to suggest male exclusivity. Just a few verses before, he had argued that in Christ gender distinctions become moot (3:28).

Christ came to redeem all and bring them into relationship with God, and that includes everyone – Jew and Gentile, sons and daughters, slave and free.

Many children in our world (especially older ones) are unwanted and in need of someone to redeem them from their legal limbo and adopt them into their families. All children of the world (especially the older ones) face the experience of becoming spiritually lost, and need someone to adopt them into

an eternal family that extends beyond this world. The good news is that Jesus Christ has paid our legal fees, cut all the red tape, and swung wide the door into the family of God. The only thing lacking is our acceptance of the offer. ☵

Adoption as heirs (vv. 6-7)

Those who trust in Christ’s redemption can experience a totally new kind of relationship with God, Paul said. The proof of our adoption is the presence of the Spirit: “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (vv. 6-7). ☵

Paul insists that our relationship with God can go far beyond the unappealing image of a heavenly master served by earthly slaves. We do not serve God out of fear, but out of love. We don’t have to be motivated by the worry of what God will do to us, but by gratitude for what God has already done for us. We need not think of God as a demanding taskmaster, but as a loving, caring, forgiving father. Empowered by the Holy Spirit within us, we have courage to live faithfully and the confidence to pray to God from the perspective of a child who is loved, one who can cry “Abba, Father.”

Paul would want us to know that our privileged standing as children of God does not apply to our time on earth alone. As the children of God, we are also the heirs of God. We stand to inherit all the good things prepared for God’s adopted children. We possess the promise of an eternal home – not only with our heavenly father, but also with all of our sisters and brothers who have become God’s children through the work of Jesus.

The good news of Christ’s coming through the season of Advent culminates in a miracle that extends beyond Christmas. The child born in the manger of Bethlehem becomes the medium through which countless other children are born into the kingdom of God. **BT**

'Ask the Theologian' brings continuing conversations

EDITOR'S NOTE: The "Ask the Theologian" series with Fisher Humphreys, which ended last month, elicited much good response and dialogue. Continuing conversations on these important theological issues are occurring within and beyond the news journal. Concerning one of the questions raised and Humphreys' response, Gary Cook, pastor of Gaston Oaks Baptist Church in Dallas, asked, "Is it time for a conversation?" His letter below is followed by Humphreys' additional comments expanding on the topic.

RESPONSE from Gary Cook

In the September issue of *Baptists Today* (p. 38) I read the response of Dr. Fisher Humphreys to Dr. Roger Paynter's question: "Every young clergy person I interview is all about social justice and concern for the poor. While this is most encouraging, I never hear anything about a personal relationship with Jesus. How do we address this?"

I have tremendous respect for Dr. Humphreys and was not present for this exchange, but may I respectfully suggest that I think Dr. Humphreys missed Dr. Paynter's point with the question?

The question, I suspect, was not about the words we use to describe conversion or evangelism but whether or not it is a relevant concern among young moderate Baptist clergy.

Recently I was in a conversation with two persons who were outstanding leaders in the old Southern Baptist Convention and who are moderate Baptists. They expressed to me that their high hopes for the moderate Baptist movement had not been realized.

I asked them to tell me what they meant by that statement. Their answer was a direct reflection of Dr. Paynter's question. So, my question is, "Is it time for a conversation about this matter among moderate Baptists?"

RESPONSE from Fisher Humphreys

Dr. Cook and I have understood Dr. Paynter's question differently. I agree with him that moderate Baptists could benefit from a conversation about whether there is a place for evangelism in their common life.

Here are some things that I would like to contribute to that conversation.

The first is an observation: The moderate Baptists and their young clergy that I know

are trying to model their ministries, including their evangelism, on the ministry of Jesus.

The central image in the message of Jesus was the kingdom of God. The Gospels say that Jesus embedded his preaching of the kingdom in the context of his other ministries: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people" (Matt. 4:23).

I see moderate Baptists embedding their preaching of the good news in a context of teaching and healing of various kinds.

Following the first Easter, the center of gravity of God's good news shifted for the early church. Jesus the messenger became the message. Shortly before his ascension Jesus told his followers, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

The classic summary of the post-Easter gospel is 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. There Paul wrote that the gospel is about Jesus and in particular about his death and resurrection: "Christ died for our sins ... he was raised on the third day" (vv. 3-4). Without exception, every sermon in Acts affirms the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the common life of moderate Baptists are numerous reminders of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We meet for worship on the day of Jesus' resurrection, Sunday, rather than on the Sabbath.

We immerse people in water as a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection. We eat bread and drink wine together in remembrance of Jesus' broken body and shed blood.

We observe Holy Week and especially Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We use the cross as a symbol for our religion.

We compose, play, and sing hymns and other music about Jesus' death and resurrection.

We read and study the four Gospels that emphasize Jesus' death and resurrection so much that one scholar described them as "passion narratives with extended introductions."

We attempt to understand the meaning of Jesus' obedience, suffering, blood, cross, death and resurrection in terms of "theories of atonement."

If moderate Baptists did just these things — if we never proclaimed the gospel — we would be, I believe, a "fellowship in the

gospel" (Phil. 1:5). As a matter of fact, there are places in the world where these things are all that we can do.

Some moderate Baptists live in Muslim countries that allow Christians to be present but do not allow them to preach (or, as they would say, to proselytize). Despite the fact that they cannot preach the gospel, those moderate Baptists are as much gospel people as Billy Graham.

But, of course, the gospel is to be proclaimed. The proclamation may be verbal, written, broadcast or expressed through art.

Here, Dr. Cook's letter seems especially valuable. Are moderate Baptists and their young clergy proclaiming the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday as good news for the world?

I know that many are; I have heard them do it. I assume that all are, but that is an impression rather than a result of a survey.

There is a further issue. Some Christians, heavily influenced by the revivalist movement launched in the 18th century, believe that evangelism involves not only remembering the gospel in our common life and preaching the gospel, but also working to persuade people to respond to Christ.

It is not clear to me how much the church of the New Testament era did this. Certainly many Christians today believe that it is their responsibility to persuade people, and we know that numerous people have become Christians in response to these efforts to persuade.

On the other hand, some people have been deeply offended by intense efforts to persuade them, much as they might be offended by intense efforts to get them to buy real estate. I am not talking about people who are offended by the gospel itself; I am talking about people who have been offended by the manner in which the gospel was presented to them.

Other churches think that efforts to persuade are intrusions into work that should have been left to God. Most of them invite people to respond to the gospel, but they do not try to persuade them to do so.

They believe in friendship evangelism. They count on the common life of the church to provide a winsome, credible presentation of the gospel. I expect this is true of many moderate Baptist churches.

Some of them point out that too often the result of intense efforts to persuade has been

By Marion D. Aldridge

to bring into the church people who have not themselves really received the good news into their hearts. This, of course, does not trouble the persuaders: they see that the situation (which they have created) is that the church is “the world’s greatest mission field,” as I once heard it expressed by someone who should have known better.

To me it seems wise for the church always to celebrate the gospel in its worship services, and to preach the gospel, but to be very cautious about engaging in persuasion.

Finally, some individual Christians have a special gift for evangelism. Paul mentioned this when he wrote, “Some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists” (Eph. 4:11), and he told Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5).

But individual evangelists are not the sole bearers of the good news. In fact, in its corporate affirmation of the gospel in worship as well as in its proclamation, the whole church may be the best evangelist of all. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

In the Know

Jamie Jones died Sept. 9 at age 91. He served as Baptist Student Union director at the University of Arkansas for 37 years. He was a deacon, teacher and long-time member of First Baptist Church of Fayetteville, Ark.

Adalia Gutiérrez Lee will become area director for Iberoamerica and the Caribbean for American Baptist Churches International Ministries May 1, 2015, after service as a missionary in Mexico.

Mike Queen and Jayne Davis are co-coordinators of the Center for Healthy Churches-Carolinas. They served together on the staff of First Baptist Church of Wilmington, N.C., and are co-authors of *Hopeful Imagination: Traditional Churches Find God’s Way in a Changing World* (Nurturing Faith).

Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III will retire Oct. 30, 2015 as executive director and CEO of American Baptist Home Mission Societies and Judson Press.

Caution needed to understand people’s pain and grief

Once upon a time, I had assumed my job as a minister was to bring good cheer into a hospital room. I’m an upbeat, extroverted kind of guy.

Smile and make sad people happy, right? Make small talk to keep people’s mind off their pain, right?

Not necessarily. Alexander Pope wrote that “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

One of the first lessons I learned in seminary was counter-intuitive: “Shut up and listen!”

Let the patient take the lead. If he’s sad, let him talk about his sadness.

“How are things going?” is the right question, even if the patient is smiling when you enter the room.

The patient may be putting on a brave front for the pastor, the family and even the doctor. She would love for someone to let her talk about her pain and fear.

Also, I was dead wrong about grief. (Yes, that’s a pun.) As a young man, I had experienced almost no trauma worse than getting cut from the high school football team.

When people spoke of grieving for a pet that died, I thought they were silly. During my seminary studies, I learned how wrong I was.

When the professor told us a person might grieve when a family heirloom breaks, I knew I had a lot to learn.

God save us all from people who feel the need to speak for God in a crisis with

platitudes such as “God needed another flower in his garden.” Remember that Jesus wept when his friend died.

Mother’s Day was celebrated in my childhood church almost as if it were Christmas. Awards were given to the mother with the most children, to the oldest mother, and then to the youngest mother, which was a bit weird because, one year, that was a 14-year-old girl.



While at seminary we were taught that Mother’s Day is not a universally happy occasion. Consider the 50-year-old women,

married and unmarried, who wanted children but never had them. Some of them avoid church altogether on Mother’s Day.

Consider the women whose sons and daughters have died or are incarcerated. Mother’s Day does not bring happy memories for everyone.

Well-intentioned people do not necessarily know the right thing to say or do when someone is in distress, pain or grief. Caution and quiet humility may be the most helpful approach. **BT**

—Marion Aldridge is a retired minister in Columbia, S.C., who blogs at “Where the Pavement Ends,” where this column first appeared. (marionaldridge.wordpress.com)

Pastor: First Baptist Church of Mobile, Ala., an urban historic church, petitions God’s guidance in calling a full-time pastor. Our congregation of 150-plus is theologically moderate, has a welcoming fellowship, and is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. It is composed of diverse (in age and ethnicity), prayerful, faithful servants of God. Prospective candidates should demonstrate enthusiasm for preaching God’s Word, acceptance of the priesthood of all

believers, affirmation of women in leadership and ministry, availability to encourage and work equitably with all church members, eagerness to foster ecumenical relationships with other denominations, and a heart for missions. Candidate must be an ordained Baptist minister and have at least an M.Div. degree. Résumés will be received until Nov. 28 at pastorsearchteam@fbcmobile.com or Pastor Search Team, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 2485, Mobile, AL 36652-2485.

Baptist theology

PART
5

This is the fifth in a series of six articles on academic theology written by Baptists since 1950. In this article we will survey five controversies in which Baptists engaged in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

The Christology Controversy in the Baptist Union (1970s)

In the 1970s, British Baptists experienced a brief but intense controversy concerning the person of Christ.

In 1971 Michael Taylor, principal Northern Baptist College, read a paper titled “How Much of a Man Was Jesus Christ?” at the general assembly of the Baptist Union. Many British Baptists were alarmed by what they felt was Taylor’s deficient understanding of Christ.

Taylor himself did not participate in the ensuing controversy, but in 1972 the Baptist Union affirmed a more traditional view of Christ than Taylor seemed to have affirmed. The controversy seems to have been conducted with maximal courtesy and minimal ecclesiastical politicking.

The Inerrancy Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention (1980s)

Courtesy and lack of politicking, however, cannot be said about a controversy that occurred in the SBC in the 1980s.

As a result of that controversy in the world’s largest Baptist body, agencies of the convention are being taken in new directions by new leaders, and the SBC is now officially committed to biblical inerrancy.

During the controversy the original leaders sometimes argued that the issues were political rather than theological, but this seems not to have been an either/or matter. The issues were political, but they also were theological.

The Christian church has always affirmed that the great message of the Bible is true. The defense of the truth of Scripture by means of an appeal to the original manuscripts of the Bible is a modern

innovation that gained traction at Princeton Theological Seminary in the 19th century and then moved into the wider church through the Fundamentalist coalition of the early 20th century.

The best defense of the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible ever written may be Baptist theologian Clark Pinnock’s *Biblical Revelation* published by Moody Press in 1971. A decade later Pinnock presented a more irenic view in *The Scripture Principle* (1984).

During the Southern Baptist controversy the original leaders affirmed that the great message of the Bible is true, but the new leaders argued that this affirmation was inadequate, and they called for an affirmation of the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible.

Tom Nettles and Russ Bush wrote a book titled *Baptists and the Bible* in which they argued that the majority of Baptists had always been committed to biblical inerrancy. In fact, of course, most Baptists have believed in the message of the translations they read, not in the original manuscripts.

The new leaders’ appeal to the original manuscripts is presented effectively in a winsome 1991 denominational study book by David Dockery titled *The Doctrine of the Bible*.

Despite these and other books, the transformation of the SBC was carried out principally by political actions rather than by theological writing.

The Resurgence of Calvinism (1990s)

Except for the first quarter-century of their 400-year history, Baptists have debated predestination continually. Different Baptist bodies have arisen as a result.

Primitive Baptists are Calvinistic, Free Will Baptists are Arminian, and many other Baptist bodies are in the middle.

In my judgment, a mediating view is incoherent. That conviction is shared by many of those who have led a resurgence of Calvinism that began to occur late in the 20th century.

Those leaders include able, influential Baptist pastor-theologians such as John MacArthur and John Piper. Their theological opponents include other influential Baptist pastor-theologians such as Herschel Hobbs and Greg Boyd.

An academic theologian who is forcefully resisting the resurgence is Roger Olson of Truett Seminary at Baylor University. He has written two books on this subject: *Arminian Theology* and *Against Calvinism*. Olson is one of the most insightful and productive contemporary Baptist theologians and ethicists.

Another academic theologian who effectively resisted Calvinism is Leroy Forlines, who taught at the Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville for an astonishing 57 years. He is the author of a large systematic theology titled *The Quest for Truth*. Part of that book relevant to this controversy have been collected and published with the title *Classical Arminianism*.

Southern Baptist Calvinists have an effective organization called the Founders Ministries. In the 1990s, Calvinism made progress in the SBC because some of the leaders chosen in the wake of the inerrancy controversy were Calvinists.

Most of the men — and they were all men — who came into leadership roles as a result of that controversy were not Calvinists, but they did not exclude Calvinists from leadership roles in the convention. In June 2013, the SBC adopted a statement that outlines an accord between Calvinists and non-Calvinists.

Open Theism (1990s)

Another controversy that surfaced in the 1990s concerned open theism. The controversy was centered in the Evangelical Theological Society in the United States. Baptists participated on both sides of this controversy.

One of the most articulate open theists is Greg Boyd, the founding pastor of a Baptist General Conference mega-church in St. Paul, who for 16 years served also as a professor at his denomination’s Bethel College.

‘The defense of the truth of Scripture by means of an appeal to the original manuscripts of the Bible is a modern innovation that gained traction at Princeton Theological Seminary in the 19th century and then moved into the wider church through the Fundamentalist coalition of the early 20th century.’

One of the most articulate opponents of open theism is John Piper, who is pastor of another Baptist General Conference megachurch in neighboring Minneapolis and who also has taught at Bethel.

In 2000 the Southern Baptist Convention issued a revision of its *Baptist Faith and Message* that, among other changes, explicitly rejected open theism.

Open theism differs from classical Christian theism on the subject of God’s attributes. Open theists think that the church acquired some of its understanding of God’s attributes from Hellenistic philosophy rather than from the Bible. While they don’t reject all philosophical ideas, they do say that the putative attributes of God that are incompatible with biblical teaching should be dropped.

The most contested divine attribute is omniscience. The classical view is that God knows everything without qualification.

Open theists affirm that God knows everything there is to be known, but then they add that some things that do not yet exist are not available to be known, even by God. In particular, future free decisions of humans do not yet exist, and therefore God does not know them.

God knows the probabilities of their being made, God knows them as soon as they are made, God understands them better than those who make them, and God deals resourcefully with them. But until decisions are made, God knows them only as possibilities, not as actualities.

Open theists are theological conservatives whose principal argument is scriptural. For example, after Abraham shows that he is prepared to sacrifice Isaac and God stops him from doing so, the Lord says: “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Gen. 22:12).

Open theists argue that the natural reading of this passage is that God tested Abraham and thereby learned that Abraham really feared God.

The revisions proposed by open theists amount to a new understanding of God, a fact its supporters acknowledge. They believe that Protestants especially should understand

that sometimes the church’s traditions need to be reformed in the light of Scripture.

Clark Pinnock, an open theist and a Baptist, admits that he does not know whether open theism will prevail, or be forgotten, or continue to be debated, or whether the church will simply remain divided over some of the issues open theists have raised.

Relationships among the Three Persons of the Trinity (1990s)

Like the open theism movement, a controversy concerning relationships among the three persons of the Trinity also originated among conservative evangelicals, many of whom were members of the Evangelical Theological Society. And, some of the principal participants in this controversy have been Baptists.

Theologians on both sides of this debate reject Arianism and affirm that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equally divine. They reject tritheism and affirm that there is only one God. They reject modalism and affirm that the Father, Son and Spirit are persons.

They disagree, however, on whether or not the Son of God and the Spirit of God are eternally subordinate to the Father.

Baptist Wayne Grudem, for example, says they are. In his *Systematic Theology* he crafts a careful phrase to describe his view: the Son and Spirit are “equal in being but subordinate in role.”

He argues: “If the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally ‘Father’ and the Son

is not eternally ‘Son.’ This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed.”

Grudem writes: “Though all three members of the Trinity are equal in power and in all other attributes, the Father has a greater authority. He has a leadership role among all the members of the Trinity that the Son and Holy Spirit do not have.”

Participants on both sides of this debate recognize that what is being said about the Trinity has implications for the relationships of women and men. Are those roles complementarian (men have God-given authority over women), or are they egalitarian?

In 2009 Baptist Millard Erickson wrote a monograph about the controversy regarding the Trinity. In *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity?* he surveys the current state of the controversy. In the last chapter, titled “So Who’s Right?”, he finds for the egalitarian view.

He thinks that, even though the participants on both sides are orthodox Christians, the complementarian view is unstable and “contains elements that logically imply an unorthodox dimension of the doctrine of the Trinity.” He wonders how long the complementarians can continue to hold their view without resolving its inconsistency.

His message to complementarians is: “Go back. You are going the wrong way.” **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. This series is a revision of part of a longer article titled “Baptist Theology Since 1950,” published in *Baptist History and Heritage* (Fall 2013) and used by permission.

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BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

One of the most pivotal moments of the war takes place this month with the re-election of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. With Lincoln's re-election, the prosecution of the war against the rebellious southern states continues unabated. While southern political and religious leaders remain defiant, the odds that the Union will emerge victorious over the Confederacy have never been better.

George Dana Boardman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, preaches a sermon this month declaring that the U.S. government, in its devotion to freedom and liberty for all, is divinely ordained. His is one of hundreds of similar sermons delivered during the war thus far.

New Jersey Baptists voice similar feelings, while also declaring that

since the war into which we have been forced is essentially a conflict between freedom and slavery, we see no method of terminating this conflict, and desire no other, than by the utter extinction of the system of slavery throughout all the national territory.

Meanwhile in the Confederate capital of Richmond, gang warfare — a wartime problem involving boys mired in poverty and seeped in racial hatred — breaks out near the Second Baptist Church of Richmond, as reported in the *Richmond Sentinel*:

Emmett Ruffin and Thos. S. Dodge were yesterday evening arrested, by officers Chalkey and Griffin, on 6th street, near the Second Baptist Church, while with a good many other boys, they were engaged in a rock battle with some "basin cats." None of the "basin cats" were arrested, as they fled to their fastnesses on the approach of the officers.

This practice of throwing stones in the streets has become an intolerable public grievance. — Every evening a crowd of boys collect on Navy Hill, and, with slings, stone every negro that passes within two hundred yards of them. We expect to hear of some of the negroes being killed, as even a very small boy



can throw a stone from a sling with sufficient force to break the adamantine skull of a negro.

In central Georgia, legions of makeshift hospitals house many thousands of wounded and ill Confederate soldiers. Many of the hospitals are housed in churches, including the First Baptist Church of Griffin.

Some congregations, like the First Baptist Church of Macon, hold overflowing worship services filled with local members as well as Baptist refugees from the Atlanta area.

Also in Georgia, a new war tactic is unveiled. Union Gen. William T. Sherman's army of 62,000 troops on Nov. 15 leaves Atlanta on a march to the seaside town of Savannah. In so doing, Sherman's goal is to "make Georgia howl" by destroying resources that the Confederacy depends upon, in an effort to bring a quicker end to the war.

Some 50 miles wide north to south — between Athens and Macon, initially — the vast army lives off the land, cutting a swath of destruction as they proceed. Cattle and food crops are confiscated, while many sawmills, foundries, cotton gins and warehouses are destroyed.

150 YEARS AGO

November 1864

The Federals encounter little military resistance. The state capital of Milledgeville falls before Sherman on Nov. 23. Slaves are liberated daily. Southern morale, or what is left of it, plummets. Sherman's name quickly becomes a byword in the state. And still the march continues.

With Union victory over the Confederacy seemingly assured, what will the future of the South look like? Hints of what might be can be found up and down the southern coast, where a number of freedmen's villages have been established in Union-controlled areas. One such place is St. Augustine, Fla., where Northern Baptist minister I.W. Brinckerhoff is the government-appointed superintendent of the work among freedmen. Brinckerhoff reports:

The Nat. Freedmens Association have at this post, four excellent and fully competent teachers of the colored school. Their schools are confessedly equal to any in the Department and surprising progress is being made.

Lincoln remains president of the United States, Sherman's march is casting a wide net of destruction in the southern heartland, Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia is stretched ever thinner in the trenches of Petersburg, youth gangs plague the Confederate capital, some two-thirds of Confederate soldiers have deserted the army while many others are hospitalized, tens of thousands of former slaves are being taught to read and are learning how to live as freemen, and a harsh winter with a severe shortage of food supplies in the Confederate armies and on the home front looms close.

If the Confederate States ever needed a miracle of biblical proportions, now is the time. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. For a daily log of "This Day in Civil War History," see civilwarbaptists.com.

My Canterbury Tale

Photo by Ed Fuentes



The caption under this photo could be “Who doesn’t belong?”

I am the one photobombing these very nice archbishops, bishops and priests. I am the one who is not Anglican, the one from North America, and one of only two — the Archbishop of Canterbury being the other — who does not speak Spanish. I am the answer to the question “Where’s Waldo?”

We assembled bright lights, television cameras, lots of candles (even for Anglicans), three dozen robes, at least that many medallions, and a few pointy hats for a visit from the principal leader of the Church of England, the head of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Our congregation, Santiago Community Church, polished the silver and pulled out our wedding outfits for Rev. Justin Welby, the 105th in a line that goes back more than 1,400 years to Augustine of Canterbury. The diocesan bishop of Southern Argentina exclaimed, “What a show!”

I felt like I was at someone else’s family reunion. Because we are in Chile, there was more kissing than at most Baptist gatherings. I confess that in my unsophisticated moments “Archbishop of Canterbury” still sounds like a medieval version of the “Sultan of Swing.”

During lunch, which began at 2 o’clock because these people are not from the United States, each of six tables had the chance to ask one question.

The questions were offered by bishops and priests — ministerial professionals — which means they were long and meant to reveal the intelligence of the questioner.

They were also in Spanish — a language in which I am not *fluides* — but here is a translated abridged version of the questions and the Archbishop’s answers:

Where are we on the ordination of women?

The Archbishop pointed out that women’s ordination is less controversial than 10 years ago: “The church will continue to make progress, even as we care for those congregations with different ideas.”

How do we improve the reputation of our denomination?

The hope is that the Anglican Church will be known as a home for Christians who disagree but work together: “We can be a church that gathers in the love of Christ.”

What is going to happen concerning gay marriage?

He quoted statistics concerning gay marriage in England — 85% of adults are in favor — and said, “Those with a more conservative viewpoint are seen as mean-spirited and not at all like Christ. We must proceed, whatever our opinions, in a Christ-like manner.”

How can we be more evangelistic while being true to who we are?

Rev. Welby suggested that the decline of the Church of England is not without precedent. On Easter Sunday 1800, in St. Paul’s Cathedral, the heart of the Church of England, can you guess how many people received Holy Communion? Six. He admitted, “We did some excellent church planting in the 19th century. Not so much since then.”

How do we care for ministers’ families?

Caroline, Justin’s wife, answered this one: “When Justin was ordained, I insisted that he be home from 5-7 o’clock six nights a week. During this time no one in the family — we had six children — was allowed television, a computer or a telephone. That’s helped.”

How do we respond to the changing culture?

The Archbishop said, “We have been in worse places. Our history of war and sexual violence is at least as disturbing as our current situation. The church’s job is to introduce a broken world to God, to be priests doing Christ’s work, to speak the words of God to the ways of the world. Stanley Hauerwas says, ‘The church should live in a way that makes no sense if God does not exist.’”

The conversation sounded vaguely familiar. Those six questions could have been addressed to any denominational leader in the United States. How would it be different for Baptists, Methodists or Presbyterians? We are facing the same questions. We are struggling for the same answers.

Carol and I got to spend an hour in the manse talking with Justin and Caroline. We talked about our families and what foods we miss when we are in Chile, but mostly we talked about the future of the church because we knew they needed the perspective of two Baptists from Georgia.

I would have guessed that the senior bishop of the Church of England would be consumed with institutional success, but he sounded like the kind of servant leader Christ needs when he said, “As we talk about the church, we need to make sure that we do not hear ourselves, but hear the cries of the poor and the war-torn.”

I started out feeling lucky for the opportunity to photobomb someone else’s family reunion and meet the Archbishop of Canterbury. I ended up feeling blessed by the hope that comes from meeting other family members who are giving their lives to Christ’s church. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology.



Photos by John Pierce from a 2008 visit to the Challenger Learning Center at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

A Conversation with June Scobee Rodgers



CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. —

A dinner event on September 18 at the Chattanooga Country Club, sponsored by local friends and hosted by Joel Avery, a retired physician and member of First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, was held in conjunction with the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting

Following music by the Chatt Town Strings, executive editor John Pierce interviewed June Scobee Rodgers. She holds a Ph.D. from Texas A&M and has taught every grade level from kindergarten through college.

She is married to retired Army Lt. Gen. Don Rodgers. Her late husband, Dick Scobee, was commander of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* that exploded at the outset of its 10th mission, on Jan. 28, 1986.

The following conversation is adapted from a larger interview posted on video at baptiststoday.org.

BT: While the *Challenger* accident is a defining moment, we know that everyone's life is a series of experiences. What are some earlier experiences that have shaped your life?

JSR: As teachers, we have show and tell. So what I have here is from when I was 6 years old: the New Testament that my mother gave me. It's so old now and crinkled that I have to carry it in a baggie. But this little book has traveled with me all my life.

We moved many times when I was a child. Either my dad would be bankrupt and



MISSION CONTROL

we'd leave or my mother, who was mentally ill, would be hospitalized. My younger brothers and I lived in foster homes or with grandparents.

Sometimes we'd only be able to pack a grocery bag full of things. And this was always with me. So it's the only treasure I have from my childhood.

But that little Bible came in handy at a major turning point in my life when I was 8 years old. I had been into about a half dozen schools by that time in Texas, Florida, Alabama and back in Texas.

When I enrolled in school they said, "Your education is so spotty we're going to put you back a year." So back I went into a second grade classroom for mentally disabled children, and it was very discouraging.

Throughout those first few months I knew it was wrong. But I was told that's where I belonged.

Then a most miraculous thing happened. We lived in the inner city in San Antonio, and someone brought to our home a basket of fruit, which was marvelous — we seldom had fresh fruit in the winter — and a book that they gave to my mother titled, *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

I remember digging into those tangerines and peeling them back when I looked over and noticed the name of the author on the book was Peele, just like the peelings from a tangerine. So I began flipping through it. It had a wonderful message about getting through life, and how you can overcome adversity — big words for me then — and belief, and so forth.

So I studied the book, and I decided that it could help me. I made a system of which I call ABCs. So the "A" I learned from the book was to accept who you are and accept your

challenges, to have a good attitude, to have a positive way of life. So "A" was for attitude.

And "B" was to believe in yourself — and I thought, "Well yes. I'm a pretty good kid" — but, more important, to believe in a power greater than yourself.

And the "C" I decided would be courage to make a commitment, courage to be persistent with what you believe in. And those ABCs would follow me throughout my life.

Shortly thereafter we were moved back to live with my grandmother, who went to a Baptist church in San Antonio. I accepted Christ and was baptized — and the ABCs led me to that.

Then all the problems in that classroom shifted. I was moved and tested and things began to improve for me, and I changed. I owe a tremendous amount to that stranger who brought us the fruit and that book.

There was another challenge in my life that was a major turning point. When I was 13 we lived in Odenville, Ala. We were in Birmingham when my dad went bankrupt and my mother was hospitalized for another year.

We lived on a farm. Odenville was between Gadsden and Birmingham, a little pink dot on a map between those two cities.

My little brothers and I were teased. Kids would sit next to us on the school bus. They chanted: "The Kent kids stink. They got no kitchen sink."

The school was rough as well for us. One day we were asked to talk about what we wanted to be when we grew up. And I said I wanted to be a teacher.

Well, the kids laughed and said "You're so poor you will never see the inside of a college — much less be a teacher."

Attitude: OK, I can accept who I am. Believe: I know I can work hard. I can be a teacher, by golly, because God will take care of me. I know God will help me. And "C" — I wanted the commitment.

I started picking up Coca-Cola bottles, because you could get two cents for every bottle, and started saving my money way back then so I could go to college.

Childhood swiftly moved into adulthood because at the age of 16, back in San Antonio, I was living with my grandmother again. At our little Mayfield Park Baptist Church, a young man walked up to me, put out his hand and said, "Hi. My name is Dick Scobee."

From that day on my life changed, a major turning point in that someone really loved me. Within the year we married after I graduated from high school.

My brothers came to live with us. And for the first time in my life I had stability. We worked hard. Dick Scobee and I helped each other.

We took turns with our jobs. We took turns with our education. He wanted to be a pilot. I wanted to be a teacher.

All those wonderful years I still used my attitude, my belief, and my commitment. And I committed us to a wonderful 26 years of marriage and two wonderful children who've grown up to be fantastic people.

He finally reached his goal of being a pilot and then was assigned as an astronaut. And I had been a teacher all those years. Wherever the military took us, I took a new job. Finally, I was a college professor.

I'll just finish that first question, Johnny, by saying years later the governor of Alabama invited me to the mansion proclaiming "June Scobee Day," and said we'll invite whoever you want to join us. So I invited all those Odenville students.

BT: That's not just revenge; that's sweet revenge. We can only imagine the grief you and other family members felt Jan. 28, 1986, while the nation watched in shock as well. What do you remember most about that tragic experience?

JSR: It was the morning of the most joyful day in my life. Finally, for my husband, who had been a pilot, his dream had come true.

Then to pilot space shuttle mission 41C where they repaired a satellite was a big deal. He came home from that first mission and said, "It was great. I want to tell you first what it's like to fly in space because we grew up together. And it's more meaningful that I share that with you."

As the evening wore on, I said: “But President Reagan forgot to say your name. Didn’t that make you mad when you’re up in space and he mentioned everyone else’s name?”

He said, “No, June. What was important was the mission. It was a great, successful mission.”

Then on the day of the launch of 51L, Dick was the commander. It was a joyous day. I mean there’s nothing more exciting for an astronaut than to fly in space, but then to be the commander of the crew.

It was especially joyful to me because it was an education mission. I had grown to love and be a part of the crew, especially the teacher Christa. We were fast friends, and it was the most glorious day.

All of our children, all of the *Challenger* crew families, were with us at Kennedy Space Center — standing on a rooftop watching the launch. The day that started with the greatest joy plummeted to the depths of sorrow.

BT: At what point did the idea of doing something constructive arise from your grief, and why something educational?

JSR: NASA sent a plane for us to fly back to Houston. The following day President Reagan and Nancy Reagan came to visit with the families.

We sat on the campus of Johnston Space Center in a memorial service. And as a part of that service, a missing man formation flew over. That symbolically represents those who are gone — flying straight toward the heavens — and those remaining in flight will carry on the mission. It was on the front page of newspapers all over the country.

When I looked at the sky, I cried. And I knew at that moment that the education mission had to continue.

There were children everywhere waiting for the lessons. If I could take my simple ABCs and organize us so that we could show the world that we have a positive attitude — and that we believed in this mission and we believed in a power greater than us to help us. I didn’t know how in this world I could commit to something that I had no idea how to do, but I did.

Now the funny part of the story: On the day of the accident, Vice President Bush and [former astronaut] John Glenn and Sen. Jake Garn came to Kennedy Space Center and met with us. And the vice president slipped us his home phone number and said to call if he could help.

Once I brought the families together in my home and we decided we would continue

that mission with an education program. I said I think I’ll call [Mr. Bush]. So I did.

He returned the call the next morning, and my strapping teenage son, Richie, came to the back of the house and said, “Mom, would the vice president be calling you?” I said, “It could be, Rich.”

I talked to the vice president, who said: “We think this is a great idea. Come to Washington. We want to help — and, by the way, that’s quite a character that answered the phone.”

So I asked, Richie, what did he mean? He said, “Honestly mom, I didn’t answer: ‘Scoobe’s Bar & Grill.’”

“OK,” I said. “What did you say?”

He said, “Well, this strange man was calling you at 7 o’clock in the morning. I wanted to know who he was. And he said he was the vice president. So I said, ‘The vice president of what?’”

Years later, he’s the president of the United States and Rich is in the audience, a brand new lieutenant in the Air Force, and the president tells that story.

Richie said, “Oh no. I will never get promoted.” But he’s a general today.

So the families came together and, to a person, said that we wanted to continue the mission. They said, “June, you’re an educator. You go do it. We’ll make you chairman.”

Luckily, I knew a lot of fine, young people who were smart and brought them in to help. But the greatest advice came from my visit to Washington when the vice president said: “Now you’re thinking about building this center in Houston, but I think you should have centers all over the country ... You need a board of directors, not just those few people in Houston. You need to have university presidents. You need senators. You need CEOs, corporate business leaders. You need all these people on your board of directors.”

I said I’m a teacher. I can’t be a chairman of a board of directors like that. And [Mr. Bush] said, “June, tell me about how you teach your students. What do you do?”

Well, I said, I try to inspire them to want to learn this lesson. I motivate them. They better learn this lesson. And then, I test them to see if they learned it.

He said that’s what you do with a board of directors. You inspire them. This is what we’re going to do. You motivate them. That’s why it’s so important. Then you test them.

So the Challenger Center has grown now until there are 50 all across the United States, England, Canada, South Korea, and now we have a tremendous number of people who will be building one in Israel next year.

We’ve reached one million students. We’ve had letters from youngsters who have been challenged to go into the careers to study science, technology, engineering and math.

BT: Many of us were fascinated by the idea of the teacher-in-space program. Can you tell us a little more about Christa McAuliffe?

JSR: It was such fun to know Christa. First, the competition was to bring more attention to the activities of space travel. And they were trying to decide if they wanted a musician, an artist, or a reporter to fly in space with a trained astronaut crew when they settled upon a teacher.

Eleven thousand teachers competed. I was married to an astronaut, and they wouldn’t let me. But 10 teachers were finalists and then narrowed down to Christa McAuliffe, and her backup was Barbara Morgan.

Christa was feisty and spirited. She was a great spokesman. She loved her children. We planned lessons together. We worked together. We believed in field trips for our students.

I was teaching a college class at the time, and I invited Christa and Barbara to come meet the students and see our final project. As a gift, I gave them and the students bookmarks with “To teach is to touch the future.”

So for any of you who can remember those years when she was on Johnny Carson and all those wonderful shows talking about her experience, she coined the phrase: “I teach. I touch the future.”

BT: Personally, how did you draw on your faith during that difficult time, and how has your faith continued to guide your life?

JSR: Well, I was that youngster who was given the little Bible. I studied my ABCs and used them.

My faith transitioned over time. Certainly Jesus Christ was my savior. But as I grew older, I needed a father. And God the Father is the one I pray to.

The power, greater than the universe, was God the Father. And I knew he loved me and believed in me. And I treasured my relationship with God.

I had memorized 1 Corinthians 13 as an 8-year-old to prove I knew something. That love chapter stayed with me.

At the loss of the *Challenger*, when with that private grief we were thrust on this public stage, I felt that love. I finally understood the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It took a long time, but I finally gained that understanding — and that certainly has been a reward. It’s guided me in so many ways.

In addition to our work with *Guidepost* and our churches, I'm also the token female Protestant on the Vatican Observatory Foundation — and it's thrilling. I mean, we just celebrated the 400 years since Galileo invented the telescope.

People of faith can't help but admire and honor the glory of God — to see the beauty, and grow to understand the beauty of this universe.

So many people think that science and religion contradict each other. Science and religion are a great complement to each other. It's a tremendous reward to be a part of something that honors both science and religion because I've feared it so many years.

BT: How did you meet Don and start this new chapter in your life.

JSR: Don and I have so much fun. We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary.

Don and I met several years after the accident, when I was living in Washington D.C., and he was stationed there in the Army. We met at Arlington National Cemetery at an Easter sunrise service.

A group of widowed people was sitting together, and we were all weeping. I was so distracted by the handsome general there, and learned that he had just lost his wife suddenly.

We visited later that day with one another and the entire group. We grew to be friends. Our children encouraged us to marry.

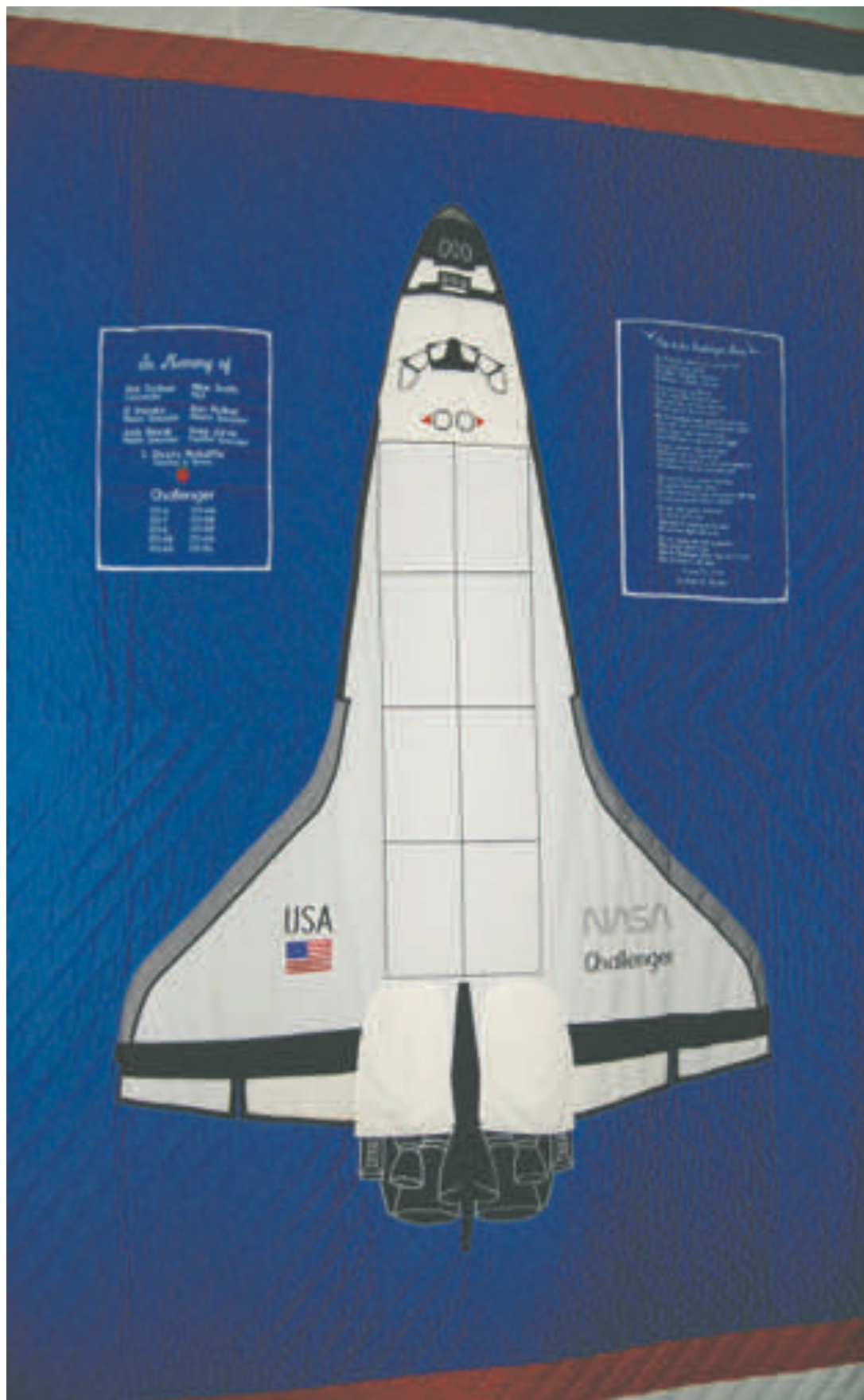
My son was a captain or major by that time — and Don was a great father figure to him. And my daughter, who loved her dad dearly, has grown to love Don as her father.

Together we have nine wonderful grandchildren. And he has the best time whether he's taking the boys out to see what it's like to be an Army ranger or playing Barbie dolls with the little girls. He's great.

We were married for two years before he chose to retire. It felt like *Downton Abbey* — living in a home with all the aides and the servants, the people caring for us those first two years in this beautiful Georgian house in Washington, D.C., just up the street from the White House.

Then we moved to Chattanooga, and a congresswoman wanted me to invite some folks over to talk about building a Challenger Center here. Don said, "Can you cook a meal for these people?"

Now, for 10 years, Don had had these aids, chefs and people working for him — and cooking when we were married. I said, "Don, I think I remember how to cook a meal."



‘It’s not so much what happens to you, as it is how you react to what happens to you that makes a difference.’

So we had the president of the university and the congresswoman and a CEO and some of the folks from the city council and county. We had about 12 or 15 around our table.

I had prepared a wonderful recipe that President George H.W. Bush gave me, his favorite chicken. And our plans were to have rice or potatoes — I hadn't made up my mind — and a salad. We hired some gentleman who worked in a restaurant to come and help serve.

So there we were all at the table. Lee Greenwood came and was going to play the piano for us.

But anyway, I had to hop up and work with the fellows in the kitchen and bring out the salad and the plates. Then they put the chicken on the plate and sat it down.

"Where is the rice?" they asked. I said, "Rice, what rice?"

I had forgotten to cook it. So I just said, "There's a bunch of parsley over there; just put the chicken and parsley on the plate and bring it in."

I looked at everyone and I said I'm so sorry but I promise a great dessert is coming. The group began laughing and enjoying each other.

Many of you know Fred Obear [then chancellor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga]. The first time we had an event at the university he invited us to be seated and said, "June, in honor of your being here, we're serving rice."

So Don and I have been married 25 years this last summer, but we go around saying we've been married for 50 years because we both share in the love of his first wife Faye and my first love Dick. They were our high school sweethearts.

Don and I continue to love with those first marriages and the children from those marriages.

BT: Why did you decide to tell your story in the book, *Silver Linings*, and then decide later to update it?

JSR: Ten years after the accident, there were 25 Challenger Centers. I had been on Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power* at the Crystal Cathedral. He asked me a number of questions and one of them was, "Why don't you write your story?"

I thought, "Oh, could anyone possibly be interested?" But when I returned home, Don encouraged it.

It was important to give honor to that crew. The first book, *Silver Linings: Triumph of the Challenger 7*, was about each of the crewmembers and their families and the marvelous mission that was planned, and the tribute to

them through the Challenger Centers.

You asked about the second book. About 15 years later, I was still dodging reporters.

President Bush had told me one time the reporters can be your friends. And I said, "No, they're the enemy. They ask the tough questions that make me cry."

He said, "No, they will help you."

I had danced around my childhood. I had fear of some reporter asking about my mentally ill mother, the trials of my childhood, and I was hiding them.

I talked to Don and my children about telling the story before the *Challenger* and after. And they encouraged it.

Don said if you can help just one person it will be worth it. I've had so many individuals tell me how the book helped, that if I could get through that childhood they could do anything.

Just recently a woman told me that she had been a drug addict, an alcoholic, and after reading the book and with some other help, she was able to put those years behind her. To hear stories about widows who had lost their loved ones and didn't know how to go on, they said it was a model of how you move forward in your life.

So, Don was right. It did help one person or more.

A number of great people endorsed it. One of them was Neil Armstrong.

He said, "June, I don't endorse any books." And I said, "Well, there's a chapter about you in there."

He read it and said, "I will [endorse it]. It's a good book, and I want it to be a great book." So he gave me advice about things that I should do to improve upon it. And I took his advice.

There were moments when I would write and cry. Don would hold me and see me through those rough times. Those are the reasons I wrote the book.

BT: The Psalmist said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." How have goodness and mercy followed you in your life?

JSR: Everywhere I went in Houston after the *Challenger* accident people recognized me, and had great compassion for me. I learned that everybody has difficulties in life.

They all wanted to tell me their stories. Everyone loses loved ones. They have great illness. There are challenges, tremendous losses.

It's not so much what happens to you, as it is how you react to what happens to you that makes a difference.

That love I felt was majestic enough that



'Death may end a life, but it doesn't end the love. The love is with you, through you and for you. The love is there.'

it guided me through difficult times. And attitude is so important. And to believe in that power that's greater than all of us to guide us and to make the commitment.

Death may end a life, but it doesn't end the love. The love is with you, through you and for you. The love is there.

Being a part of a national tragedy has been difficult, except that I've seen the beauty that comes from the developments behind that. Probably the story that best illustrates that was when we lost the *Columbia* space shuttle.

My daughter wrote a letter to the children of the parents who were on that space shuttle. She said, "The country's grieving with you. They want to say good-bye to space pioneers. They feel they know them too. And it's a very public forum that you're a part of now. And I understand you just want to remember your mother or your dad the way they were."

She said, "Everyone wanted to say good-bye to the astronauts. Me, I just wanted to say good-bye to my daddy."

Taking a family's private grief and putting it on the public stand made it so difficult. And throughout all those years I was running away from that grief by doing something positive and continuing the education mission.

But it was when Don embraced me and we felt that loss of both of our first loves that we realized goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. And it is with the greatest of these: faith, hope and love. Love is what it's all about. **BT**

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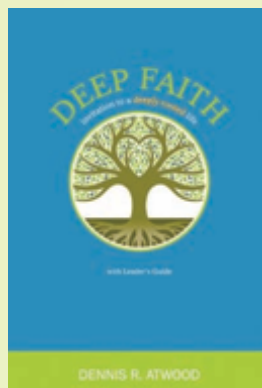


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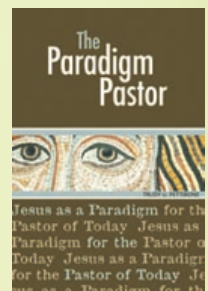


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For what do Americans pray?

When Americans aren't busy praying for themselves or their own needs, many are seeking divine intervention on behalf of a favorite sports team or the golden ticket in the lottery, according to a new survey.

About 13 percent of Americans who pray say they pray for sports teams, compared with about one in five (21 percent) who say they have prayed to win the lottery, the new survey from LifeWay Research suggests.

A survey earlier this year from Public Religion Research Institute suggested that more Americans (26 percent) pray for their sports teams, while more than seven in 10 (73 percent) say they have never done this.

Some of LifeWay's new findings include:

- 48 percent of Americans pray every day.
- 82 percent who pray typically pray about family or friends.

- 20 percent pray for people of other faiths or no faith.
- Equal numbers of Americans (7 percent) pray behind the wheel, either for a good parking space or not to get a speeding ticket.
- Smaller numbers of people, around 5 percent, pray for someone's relationship to end, someone to get fired or for someone else to fail.

In the New Testament, Paul encourages Christians to pray for those in authority. However, only about 12 percent of Americans who pray say they pray for government officials, according to the survey.

Jesus also directs Christians to pray for their enemies. About 40 percent who pray say they have done so, while four in 10 (41 percent) have prayed for people who have mistreated them.

Prayer is receiving attention this fall from at least two Christian leaders with books coming out: prolific writer Max Lucado, whose book *Before Amen: The Power of a Simple Prayer* came out in late September, and New York City megachurch pastor Tim Keller, whose book *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God* will be released Nov. 4.

About a third of survey respondents say they pray several times a day, according to the survey. About two-thirds (65 percent) of Americans say they pray at least once a month. **BT**



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Elevating hope

N.C. preaching conference encourages hopeful sermons

DURHAM, N.C. — North Carolina's sixth annual "Elevating Preaching" conference encouraged preachers to address needed issues while also incorporating elements of hope into their sermons.

Held Sept. 22 in Duke University's Goodson Chapel, the conference was co-sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina; the divinity schools at Campbell, Gardner-Webb and Wake Forest universities; and the Baptist House at Duke Divinity School.

Susan Sparks, a former trial lawyer who serves as pastor of Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City while moonlighting as a standup comedian, built her remarks around the image of a mulch pile into which people can throw away their organic trash and see it transformed into life-giving soil.

Individuals and churches, she said, should learn the hard skill of discerning what needs to be put on the metaphorical mulch pile where it can be transformed into something more positive: for example, turning loose of anger that can give rise to forgiveness.

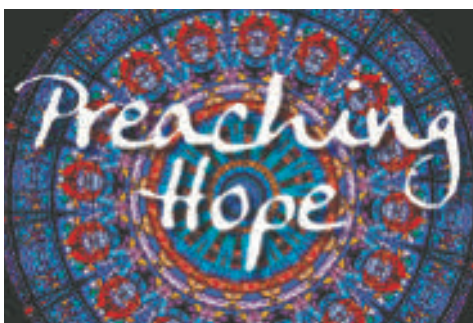
Richard Lischer, a Lutheran minister who teaches at Duke Divinity School, offered a lecture on "The Priority of Hope." Beginning from what he noted was an unusual starting point, he named three questions that philosopher Immanuel Kant said we all must ask:

1. "What can I know?"
2. "What should I do?"
3. "What can I hope?"

The most important of the questions has to do with hope, Lischer said. He cited Romans 8, in which Paul delineated a list of "hope killers" before moving on to teach resurrection hope.

"You begin with a cup of faith, add a bit of suffering, then shake or stir and watch hope emerge," said Lischer.

When grounded in hope, Lischer said, believers can know more and do more than



they thought possible. It's important, then, that preachers speak in ways that engender hope in others.

Instead of focusing on the long and difficult road ahead in the civil rights movement, for example, in 1955 Martin Luther King Jr. focused on the privilege of being present at the "daybreak" of a new era. Ministry is a hopeful endeavor, he said: prophets should not come across as angry, but hopeful.

Leonora (Nora) Tubbs Tisdale, a Wilmington, N.C., native who teaches homiletics in the Yale University Divinity School, looked to the Hebrew prophets as proclaimers of hope. Prophetic preaching is, at the heart, good news, she said — "very good news."

Today's ministers "need to rekindle prophetic preaching," she said, because it has the capacity to break through despair and fear, apathy and indifference, offering needed hope. She cited multiple factors that produce fear, including terrorist groups, an unpredictable environment and political polarization.

Tisdale pointed to Hosea, who spoke in a precarious political time of much fear, but proclaimed God's anguish and love for the people. Though he pointed to the people's sins, she said, Hosea proclaimed a loving God who would come in judgment, but not vengeance.

To counter fear, she said, proclaimers need first to name the fear, then offer a word of grace and hope in place of it.

Many people who struggle with poverty or injustice are in danger of despairing, Tisdale said. To engage despair, she suggested "preaching as an invitation to lament," noting that Jeremiah, Amos and Micah all lamented deeply over Israel's woes.

Preachers should "invite people to let their

hearts break over the things that break God's heart" and refuse to be consoled until justice prevails and hunger ends. To go beyond despair, she said, people need to then move beyond lamenting to capture a new vision of a better day.

When preaching hope in the face of apathy and indifference, Tisdale suggested that ministers look to the examples of Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, all of whom engaged in prophetic actions as well as words. She pointed to those who have been involved in "Moral Monday" demonstrations in North Carolina, and to the many pastors who helped bring calm to the streets of Ferguson, Mo., after recent riots, while also calling for justice.

Prophetic preaching is neither all judgment nor pie in the sky, she said, but a window of truth and hope and vision.

Howard John Wesley, pastor of the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., challenged preachers to be faithful lest they share the fate of Moses, who failed at a crucial point and was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Wesley turned to the familiar story in Numbers 20 of how God told Moses to speak to a rock to produce needed water, but Moses struck it instead. Many readers sympathize with Moses and think the punishment didn't fit the crime, Wesley said, before identifying what he saw as three important failures on Moses' part.

Moses "wasted his worship," Wesley said, by having a conversation with God but leaving God's presence with his anger at the people intact. This led Moses to offer a "wrongful witness" for God as he vented his wrath at them before striking the rock twice, giving the wrong impression of divine anger when they needed a message of hope.

God was gracious and sent the water despite Moses' disobedience, which "withheld the wonder" of God from the people. Moses took credit for what was wholly God's work, Wesley said, an act of "sanctified plagiarism" that got him "kicked out of the program."

In contrast to Moses' moment of weakness, Wesley insisted, preachers should seek to be always in touch with God's Spirit and pointing to God as they preach a message not of anger, but of hope. **BT**

North Dakota has passed Alaska in domestic oil production and is now second to Texas, and daily production by 2017 is expected to nearly triple to 1.2 million barrels. Photo courtesy of Diocese of Bismark.

Oil Boom

North Dakota 'man camps' prime territory for evangelism



Sven Hauge goes every Thursday to the “man camps” surrounding the oil fields near Williston, N.D., and holds worship services that feature preaching, praying and singing. Sometimes a few men show up, and sometimes, nobody does.

“That can be discouraging if you put great importance on counting heads,” he said. “But most of us have learned that it isn’t about numbers. It’s about doing what the Lord has called us to do and being faithful about it.”

Three years ago, Hauge heard God calling him and other members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association to minister in the booming Bakken oil fields, where hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling pump out more than 450,000 barrels of oil a day.

North Dakota has passed Alaska in domestic oil production and is now second to Texas, and daily production by 2017 is expected to nearly triple to 1.2 million barrels.

It takes a lot of people to fuel the boom — thousands of them coming to towns like Williston and Watford City, which are now stretched to meet the needs of this mostly

transient population. Some live in rows of man camps on the prairie; others park RVs in make-shift campgrounds or live in their cars. Few can afford housing in town.

The hard-working, lonely and boring lifestyle lends itself to all manner of sin and vice, and that makes it prime territory for an itinerant evangelist like Hauge. The results have been awesome, he said. Not big, but awesome.

“What’s one soul worth?” said Hauge, who said he’s seen half a dozen men commit to following Jesus. “If you ask that question, it makes it all worthwhile.”

Robert and Stephanie Newberry came up from Missouri nearly three years ago and settled into Watford City, where the population has exploded from 1,700 to 8,000 or more. He calls himself a Bible-believing, Scripture-quoting, sword-wielding spiritual warrior itching to get into battle.

Newberry, a self-described former bad dude from Georgia, survived childhood abuse, addictions, gangs, homelessness and incarceration. At one time he was alone, destitute and suicidal.

“I went from being a ninth-grade dropout to having a bachelor’s degree in business administration,” he said. “I went from being a thug to being a minister.”

Many men drawn to the oil fields are rough-and-tumble like he was, so he understands their lives and where they came from.

“I’m here to let people know that God is here and he loves them,” he said.

Newberry provides Bibles, shelter, food and gas money for the men to get to and from work. He leads Celebrate Recovery, an ecumenical worldwide ministry to addicts that’s “kind of like AA and NA meets Jesus.”

“To be honest, I really didn’t want to be here,” he said. “The idea of 50-below-zero weather didn’t appeal to me, but God wouldn’t leave me alone. He kept trying to get me to open my eyes and see what he wanted me to do. I finally gave in.”

Like a scene out of the old Wild West, people arrive with broken dreams and high hopes. They hear that you can make \$80,000 a year, but then realize that's only for skilled workers employed directly for the oil companies. Laborers more likely make \$20 an hour or less, which doesn't go far when monthly rent on an apartment can go for \$2,500 or more.

Those stories touched the heart of Jim Konsor who arrived from South Dakota in 2012 to mine an igneous rock used in the oil fields.

"God told us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to feed the hungry and take care of the least of our brothers in need," he said.

He returned to Watford City with his wife, Kathie, in April 2013 and met with pastors, community leaders and social service agencies to see what they could do. They asked the Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church for \$100,000 — and got \$270,000.

The couple drives a 29-foot converted RV stocked with donated household goods, clothing, blankets, coats and shoes that they give away. One of the recipients was a pair of cousins, living in an RV with their husbands and children, 12 of them in all.

The local Catholic parish struggles to meet a surge in demand for all manner of sacraments.

"There's definitely an increase in people coming to the door," said Brian Gross of



Robert Newberry, carrying a cross far left, and his wife Stephanie came up from Missouri nearly three years ago and settled into Watford City, where the population has exploded from 1,700 to 8,000 or more. Newberry is a licensed minister, evangelist and preacher and calls himself a Bible-believing, Scripture-quoting, sword-wielding spiritual warrior itching to go into battle. Photo courtesy of Robert Newberry.

Epiphany Catholic Church. "They need money because they can't get a job, or they need money for gas or for a bus ticket back home."

Some churches are expanding to meet the need. But no one knows when the boom will go bust.

"Where are we going to be 10 years down the road?" Gross wondered.

For now, the churches and traveling evangelists say they'll focus on the most immediate needs in front of them — spiritual, physical or otherwise.

"We have a sense for the right harvest," said Jeff Ruggles, pastor of CrossPoint Church in Watford City. "In their struggles, we tell them, 'Here's the answer: You need Jesus.'" **BT**

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