



Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL

Adoption causing
evangelicals to
grapple with race

38



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'Contrary to our Faith'

Mel Williams tackles the
scourge of poverty 4

New Baptist Covenant
takes action 11



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BIBLE
STUDIES
for adults
17

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**Tommy Douglas shaped
Canada's commitments to
social justice**

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

30

IN THE NEWS

Drayton and Mary Etta Sanders
lead effort to support, strengthen and
secure news journal's mission **9**

Executions drop to lowest level
in two decades **12**

Jonathan Edwards' collected works
available for download **12**

Catholic groups rally against climate change
amid intense church debate **13**

Religious college presidents agree on
'calling,' common threats **13**

Rabbi Jack Moline succeeds Welton Gaddy
at Interfaith Alliance **14**

Pope's 'rabbits' comment heightens
discussion of birth control **14**

Temple in Iceland to honor Norse gods **15**

Turban confusion:
Americans clueless about Sikhs **35**

Science vs. religion:
Researchers find more of a
three-way split **42**

PERSPECTIVES

Thanks for 15 changing, challenging,
rewarding years **7**
By John Pierce

A grieving Christian, and that
which is to come **28**
By Bill Ellis

Learning to disagree agreeably **29**
By Bill Wilson

'I survived a short-term mission trip' **34**
By Brian Howell

FEATURE

Profoundly personal:
How adoption has forced evangelicals
to grapple with race **38**
By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Quotation Remarks	6
Editorial	7
Classifieds	26
In the Know	26
Baptists and the Civil War	27
Media	36
Lighter Side	37
Reblog	40

Photo by John Pierce. Mel Williams of End Poverty Durham greets Francine Shuller, an "everyday" volunteer at DERC, a warehouse shopping venue for low-income families that also provides job training and support.

Story on page 4.

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- Limit 200 words
- Email: editor@baptiststoday.org
- Include name, city, state, phone

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DIRECTOR EMERITUS

On April 24, during the Judson-Rice Dinner at Wake Forest University (see opposite page), *Baptists Today* will honor Mel Williams as director emeritus. He was pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., when the publication (then known as *SBC Today*) was launched by founding editor Walker Knight.

Williams and a bevy of church volunteers supported the effort with time and resources. The upstart, independent newspaper was one of several publications (including *PeaceWork* and *Seeds*) housed at Oakhurst.

Williams also served on the publication's Board of Directors. Later he became pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham that has faithfully supported *Baptists Today* with mission gifts.

'Contrary to our faith'

Mel Williams coordinates efforts to tackle poverty

DURHAM, N.C. — During his 24 years as pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church here, Mel Williams was well known for his community engagement. Mel served as president of Durham Congregations in Action, co-founded Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham, and co-founded End Poverty Durham 10 years ago.

In retirement (in 2012), he became coordinator of End Poverty Durham, an organization of interfaith and community groups working together for the single purpose found in the organization's name. He hangs his hat, he said, at MDC, a nonprofit think tank studying "pathways out of poverty."

The disparity between the privileged and the poor in Durham has long concerned Williams. He points to escalating poverty rates of 18 percent for adults and 28 percent for children. He calls the situation "unacceptable, shameful and contrary to the teachings of our faith."

He doesn't fight the battle alone. In fact, much of his work involves connecting the various resources from within the wider community. And the city's mayor is onboard with the effort.

End Poverty Durham brings together 15 to 20 leaders, representing diverse faith groups, each month to raise awareness of the needs and to develop plans to reduce and ultimately eliminate poverty.

The leaders identified five major areas that impact the poor: education, housing, health care, jobs, and family support — which includes daycare, transportation and "all the things that help families to work."

One successful program, started in 2007, is the Durham Economic Resource Center (DERC) — a warehouse where low-income residents can buy new clothes and other items at drastically reduced prices.

The contact made with shoppers, however, opens the door for supervised job training. And the program is working, said Mel, helping people move to self-sufficiency.

Working in collaboration, End Poverty Durham also addresses child poverty through a broader effort in East Durham called REAL Durham (Relationships, Equipping Allies and Leaders) that matches families in poverty with supportive allies.

A growing emphasis on child poverty led to a faith summit in January 2013 — hosted

by Union Baptist Church, the city's largest African-American congregation — that drew 540 people. Good ideas that have become good programs emerged, he said.

"We help children by helping parents get better jobs," he noted.

Churches have partnered with schools, and there is greater connectivity between the privileged and the poor now. And the related issue of race, he said, is being more directly addressed.

"We have to deal with race," Mel said. "That's become a crucial part of this."

Mel came from simple roots — "the edge of poverty," as he described it — to graduate from Wake Forest University and Yale Divinity School. He seeks to open opportunities for others as were opened for him.

While a ministerial student at Wake Forest, Mel's inclination toward social justice issues was enhanced by his professors, friends and especially one guest speaker. The then-sophomore is still inspired by the words he heard in chapel from Martin Luther King Jr. in 1962 — calling the church to be "headlights" rather than "taillights" in the cause of racial equality.

In Durham, N.C., Mel is indeed a headlight that illuminates the way ahead. However, he doesn't seek the spotlight for his own efforts.

"My role is in the background trying to make this happen," he said. "I'm convinced there are people with resources to make a difference." **BT**



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*Event sponsors: \$500 sponsorship gifts are requested to honor Dr. Leonard and support *Baptists Today*. Event sponsors will be recognized for their support, and will receive two dinner tickets with preferred seating.

quotation remarks

“Love is not always a sentimental love, but it’s a difficult love. It’s not always easy, and it’s not without risk.”

—Pastor Eric Spivey of First Baptist Church of Cornelia, Ga., after a man who stayed in the church’s cold weather shelter in January was later arrested for a brutal murder (nowhabershams.com)

“The congressional Republicans seem to think that pro-lifers will be satisfied with Ronald Reagan rhetoric and Nancy Pelosi results. They are quite wrong.”

—Russell Moore, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, calling House GOP leaders’ decision to not vote on the Pain-capable Unborn Child Protection Act “moral cowardice” (Baptist Press)

“As people of faith, we are summoned to push back against those who try to distort our religion — any religion — for their own nihilistic ends. Here at home and around the world we will constantly reaffirm that fundamental freedom: freedom of religion, the right to practice our faith how we choose, to change our faith if we choose, to practice no faith at all if we choose, and to do so free of persecution and fear and discrimination.”

—President Obama to the National Prayer Breakfast in February

Faith in the marketplace

Christian businesspersons, please check out the new **Faith Positive** blog at baptiststoday.org.

“They come to see the curiosity of a politician teaching the Bible.”

—President Jimmy Carter, 90, on the thousands of annual visitors to Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga.

“Our church is learning to move from a charity model to a justice model.”

—Pastor George Mason of Wilshire Baptist Church, sharing with New Baptist Covenant participants about collaborating with Friendship-West Baptist Church to address payday lending in Dallas (Story on page 11.)

“The Sunday service is going to be a first point of contact for the unchurched in the community and for people who, for whatever reason — beliefs, work — can’t come on Saturday.”

—Pastor Debleaire Snell of First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huntsville, Ala., on the growing congregation’s plan to add a worship time on Sundays rather than Saturdays only (Huntsville Times)

“Holographic technology neatly sidesteps several limitations of current digital Bible study and could potentially usher widespread, transformative, digitally assisted Bible study. Or they may be just too geeky-looking. We’ll have to see.”

—Stephen Smith, in a Christianity Today article on how a new Microsoft development might shape the future of intensive Bible study

“We must sit here and wait for our spirits to catch up to our bodies.”

—Jayne Davis, minister of spiritual formation at Wilmington (N.C.) First Baptist Church and co-author of *Hopeful Imagination*, quoting a South African tribesman whose words spoke to her own need to “create margin” (BNG)

“I got here fully expecting the worst... I never took (my gun) out, but I was ready.”

—Oklahoma County Deputy A.J. Graffeo, who responded to a call that someone had vandalized the pastor’s study at True Light Missionary Baptist Church, after discovering the culprit to be a raccoon (koco.com)

“If you are going to kick me, don’t kick me out; kick me into gear.”

—Pastor Kyle Henderson of First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas, on the difficulty in creating effective ecumenical and interfaith coalitions to address pressing community needs (BNG)

“His own vision was not simply derived from opposing fundamentalist or literalist Christianity. It was a very positive vision. He could talk about Jesus and he could talk about Paul and the positive vision they had.”

—John Dominic Crossan, emeritus professor of religious studies at DePaul University, on Bible scholar Marcus Borg who died Jan. 21 (New York Times)

“I am not going to sacrifice any more pastors to a church’s dysfunction... We don’t have enough good pastors to send into these situations, and a bad pastor is not going to help them.”

—Dennis Bickers, resource minister with American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, who works with bi-vocational churches, urging them to address conflicts and toxicity before calling a new pastor (ethicsdaily)

“It takes an idea to destroy an idea.”

—Mohamed Ahmed, a gas station manager in Minneapolis who uses his anti-terror website averagemohamed.com to counter the social media campaign used by the Islamic State to lure young Muslim Americans (RNS)

By John Pierce

Thanks for 15 changing, challenging, rewarding years

Fifteen years ago last month I embarked on a new and different journey as executive editor of this autonomous, national news journal. It has been a demanding yet rewarding experience.

At times the challenges seemed overwhelming — working at the busy intersection of fast-changing communication technology and ever-shifting sociological realities facing churches and faith organizations today. And sustaining an independent mission that relies on gifts from individuals and organizations is not easy.

The changing religious landscape — as well as shifts within denominational entities and congregations — has made for continual observation, evaluation and redirection. Long-range planning has given way to being nimble and alert — always open to seizing the good moments that arise.

Indeed, challenges are often opportunities for doing something better and different than before. The many changes within our own organization have been phenomenal when considered in whole.

Baptists Today has evolved from a tabloid publication to a 44-page, full-color news journal that contains the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge. These Lectionary-based studies are used by many classes and other groups around the nation — with access to excellent teaching resources online.

A few years ago *Baptists Today* leadership wisely formed Nurturing Faith, Inc. as a wholly-owned subsidiary to provide books and other good resources with the same commitment to creativity, quality and respect for deeper thinking.

The innovative book-publishing venture, a collaborative effort with the creative services firm, Faithlab, uses the latest publishing technology and in-house marketing advantages. It has exceeded our predictions and keeps growing. Thanks to all the Nurturing Faith book

authors, sponsors and customers.

Other resources such as an excellent church-based children's curriculum will be published when funding is secured. And the first volumes of the Nurturing Faith Bible Series, for short-term group study, will be available soon.

Last year, we launched Nurturing Faith Experiences with trips to Montana/Wyoming and Israel/West Bank. Both were wonderful opportunities for editors and readers to spend time traveling and learning together.



Responses from participants were so positive that we are planning more Nurturing Faith Experiences — often in partnership with another organization. (See the back-page ad.)

Independence doesn't mean isolation, but voluntary collaboration. We engage in a variety of projects with many partnering groups.

Our collaborative efforts are based on solid trust, shared responsibility and mutual benefit — with the ultimate goal of serving thoughtful Christians and their congregations.

So, thanks to all who bring their gifts and talents to combine with ours to do more than we could do apart.

Thanks to the amazing colleagues, past and present, whose commitments far exceed their job descriptions. Though a small,

scattered and busy staff, we are indeed a team.

Thanks to the Board of Directors — and those who served before — who counsel, affirm and direct this ever-changing, good work. These wonderful friends give of their valuable time, cover their own expenses to be engaged in this effort, and are among the most generous financial contributors.

Together we have shared times of challenge and celebration. Your faithfulness through both is greatly appreciated.

By nature, I am a reflective person. But with so much constantly ahead that needs attention — the next deadline, fundraising goal, Board meeting or event — there is not a lot of time for looking back.

When I do, however, the primary feeling is one of deep gratitude for the many persons who've shared the journey and supported the expanding mission with time, talent and financial gifts. Our future is as bright as the strength of our commitments and the abundance of the resources we invest in this unique venture.

Technology and sociology are ever changing — and will continue to do so. Finding the right balance of print and electronic communication will require ongoing efforts. Yet the need for thoughtful, reliable, and helpful information and quality resources remains.

So thanks to all who help fulfill and expand this mission in a context of freedom, creativity and hope.

Keep it up, please. We need you and others in order to move boldly and wisely ahead. **BT**

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VINCENT ASAMDAH MDIV '08
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Leading the way: Drayton and Mary Etta Sanders, here sailing on the Sea of Galilee as part of *Baptists Today's* Nurturing Faith Experience: Israel last November, are voluntarily leading an organized effort to support, strengthen and secure *Baptists Today*/Nurturing Faith. Want to know more? Please contact Drayton (706-226-2349 / drayton@optilink.us) or Mary Etta (706-278-1172 / maryetta@optilink.us) directly, or call *Baptists Today* at 1-877-752-5658. (Photo by Bruce Gourley.)

Baptists Today — and for tomorrow

Drayton and Mary Etta lead effort to support, strengthen and secure news journal's mission

Active lay leaders Drayton and Mary Etta Sanders of Dalton, Ga., are voluntarily heading up an effort to raise needed funds to support the autonomous news journal *Baptists Today* and its related Nurturing Faith church resources.

They are co-chairing a new campaign — to be launched widely next month — that addresses both short- and long-term needs to keep the publication ministry strong and growing.

“We are a small but important prophetic voice ... in a world that worships money, power and entertainment,” said Drayton Sanders, a retired physician and longtime missions volunteer, of the Baptist movement served by the 32-year-old, independent news journal. “As sure as the voice of the prophets in the Old Testament and that of John the Baptist in the New Testament were needed in their days, be assured the prophetic voice of *Baptists Today* is needed now.”

The campaign will address the three-fold need for sufficient annual operational funds, a growing reserves account and endowment

resources to secure the future. Attention is being given to estate planning designations that will make a significant impact on the expanded publication ministry.

Board Chairman Don Brewer of Gainesville, Ga., expressed appreciation for and confidence in those willing to co-chair this effort that will draw upon the leadership, counsel and generosity of many.

“I can think of no one more knowledgeable or respected than Drayton and Mary Etta to lead our campaign,” he said. “Their enthusiasm for this project amazes me.”

Vice Chair Cathy Turner of Clemson, S.C., described Drayton and Mary Etta as skilled mountain climbers who face each task with experience and perseverance.

“They bring wisdom and enthusiasm along with a lifetime commitment to make things stronger and better,” she said. “They value *Baptists Today* like countless others and are willing to help make it financially stronger. We all will be asked to be on the team!”

Drayton said their early contacts with others who value the publication's ministry provided much optimism. “The relationships have been established; the product is first rate; and the money is there. People are just waiting to be asked.”

Mary Etta served for many years on the

news journal's board and was among the first to be named as directors emeriti.

“Since the origin of *Baptists Today* I have appreciated and admired the dedication of this news journal to publishing informative and truthful articles from all areas of Baptist life,” she said. “I have seen firsthand how tenuous it is to adhere to this mission without institutional funding.”

“I have also seen how much *Baptists Today* means to readers of both the print and web,” she continued. “I have seen the development of Nurturing Faith, a first-rate Bible study curriculum and book-publishing arm of *Baptists Today*. We can be proud of the excellence of all these entities.”

“*Baptists Today* does more with less financially than anyone would believe possible; therefore I sincerely feel that the time has come for all of us to step up and make significant provision to secure the future of this autonomous publication,” said Mary Etta. “Drayton and I are committed to working toward this goal.”

“A number of years ago we decided to include *Baptists Today* in our estate plans, and now we have resolved to be careful to give more regularly to the operational fund,” she added. “Please join us in this endeavor. Together we can give *Baptists Today* the firm financial foundation it deserves.” **BT**

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- DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) has added new routes and is a convenient way to get from the airport to Assembly
- Spend a week laughing with and learning from 1500 other Cooperative Baptists

Call to action

New Baptist Covenant moves focus from meetings to ministry

ATLANTA — “Covenant is not just a pretty word; covenant is about action,” said coordinator Hannah McMahan, in a video presentation during the opening session of the New Baptist Covenant Summit that followed a reception at the Carter Center.

The two-day, mid-January gathering here highlighted “covenants of action” designed to engage Baptists, across racial and convention lines, in shared local ministries.

‘DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS’

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, in welcoming Baptist leaders to the Carter Center, commended the four current projects — “covenants of action” — tied to the New Baptist Covenant.

He referred to the projects in Birmingham, St. Louis, Dallas and Atlanta as “experiment stations” and “demonstration projects” that show how Baptists can work more cooperatively to impact their communities.

Carter noted the negative impact that payday lending has on “those who are most



Baptist lay leaders Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., greet participants at a January summit of the New Baptist Covenant that began with a reception at the Carter Center in Atlanta.



President Jimmy Carter hands a Covenant of Action pin to pastor Frederick Haynes III of Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, whose congregation partners with neighboring Wilshire Baptist Church to combat predatory lending in the city.

vulnerable” — charging interest rates that can add up to 500 percent annually.

Friendship-West Baptist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation, and Wilshire Baptist Church, predominantly Anglo, are challenging the practice in Dallas.

Wilshire pastor George Mason said there are 25 businesses practicing “predatory lending” within a five-mile radius there.

In St. Louis, three Baptist churches — St. Luke Memorial, Harrison Avenue and Kirkwood Baptist — are addressing payday lending along with other issues impacting the poor.

Three Birmingham congregations — Baptist Church of the Covenant alongside Tabernacle and Vestavia Hills Baptist churches — are working to curb childhood hunger by cooperatively filling school backpacks with food for the weekend.

Atlanta’s historic Ebenezer Baptist Church has joined with Greater Piney Grove and Park Avenue Baptist churches to address the problem of illiteracy. This cooperative effort is being led by young ministers from the three congregations.

MOVING OUT

The New Baptist Covenant began with a 2008 mass gathering in Atlanta that drew more than 15,000 Baptists from across North America and across racial and organizational lines to hear well-known speakers — including two former U.S. presidents and best-selling novelist John Grisham — call for a wider embrace of the “Luke 4 mandate” to bring good news to the poor, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.

Following some regional gatherings, the attention shifted from meetings to doing ministry out of the relationships formed through these earlier meetings.

The recent summit offered a variety of inspiring sermons and informative presentations and panel discussions, but the focus was clearly on the covenants of action in which two or more neighboring congregations from different Baptist traditions come together to address a pressing community need.

For more information on creating a Covenant of Action in your community, visit newbaptistcovenant.org. **BT**

Executions drop to lowest level in two decades

By Kevin Johnson
USA Today

WASHINGTON (RNS) — Driven in part by continuing legal disputes related to lethal injection drugs and state moratoriums on the death penalty, the 35 people executed in the U.S. in 2014 marked the fewest in two decades, according to a year-end report by the Death Penalty Information Center.

The center, which opposes capital punishment, also found that the 72 death sentences issued in 2014 represents the fewest in 40 years.

“What’s going on here is that we are seeing capital punishment slipping into irrelevance as a criminal justice tool,” said Richard Dieter, the center’s executive director. “The country is re-thinking this as an effective remedy.”

The declining numbers come as several states and the federal government are locked in disputes over their use of lethal injection drugs. The state of Oklahoma halted executions for the remainder of 2014 after a botched execution in April. The federal government, involved in a legal challenge to its lethal injection protocol, has not used its execution chamber since 2003.

Perhaps most striking about the 2014 report, Dieter said, was that Texas — the nation’s perennial leader in carrying out the death penalty — was no longer alone at the top after 17 years. It tied with Missouri for the most executions, with 10. Meanwhile, the seven states that carried out executions last year marked the lowest number in 25 years.

Connecticut state Rep. David Labriola, a Republican who helped lead an unsuccessful fight to maintain capital punishment in that state, believes there is strong national support for the death penalty, as long as it is applied fairly and efficiently.

But Labriola said there has been public “frustration” with an often-protracted appeal process and the costs associated with supporting the legal challenges of the condemned.

“It can take more than 20 years to resolve some of these cases,” Labriola said. “I continue to support the death penalty because I believe there are some crimes so heinous, that is the only appropriate punishment.” **BT**

Jonathan Edwards’ collected works available for download

By Jonathan Merritt
Religion News Service

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — The collected works of Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century preacher and one of America’s most famous theologians, are now available for download thanks to Logos Bible Software.

But for those who don’t want to cough up \$1,289.95 to purchase them, there’s good news: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale Divinity School lets you view them online for free.

The colonial preacher was instrumental in America’s Great Awakening and is known for fiery sermons such as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The 26-volume collection, “The Works of Jonathan Edwards,” comprises more than 10,000 sermons, articles and letters that were indexed between 1953 and 2008.

“Edwards is widely recognized as one of the most important American thinkers and religious figures and as a major figure in the history of Christian thought,” said Kenneth Minkema, executive director of Yale’s Jonathan Edwards Center. “Publication of his works is important for providing resources for those, such as students, who wish to learn for the first time about his influences, thought and legacies.”

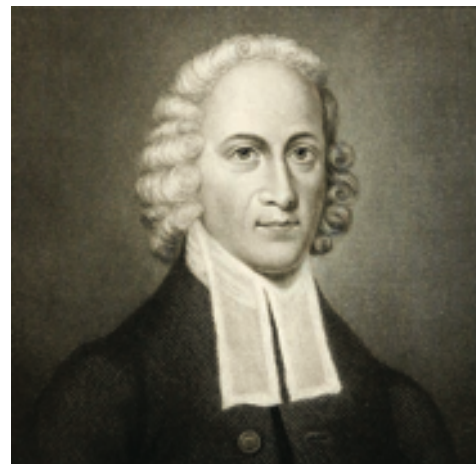
The release of Edwards’ work is more than a historical contribution. It comes at a moment of renewed interest in the preacher, especially among conservative evangelicals and “New Calvinists,” mostly evangelicals who are acolytes of Edwards’ brand of Calvinist theology.

According to Minkema, there are more than 4,000 books, articles, dissertations and other writings on Edwards, and they keep coming from publishing houses.

George Marsden, professor emeritus of history at the University of Notre Dame and author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, has also noticed newfound interest in Puritan thinkers like Edwards among some modern Christians.

Among the contributing factors, he cites the influence of Edwards and Calvinism on prominent evangelical pastors such as Timothy Keller of New York City’s Redeemer Presbyterian Church and John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis who seek to imbue their brand of Christianity with more intellectual and theological heft.

“Evangelicalism has brought many people



to Christian faith during the past generations, but many find the tradition to be a bit thin theologically and intellectually,” Marsden said. “Calvinism provides them with a very substantial intellectual and theological heritage.”

Douglas Sweeney, professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside Chicago, said many modern-day believers are rediscovering Christianity’s traditions and roots. In recent decades, many churches focused on trying to be culturally relevant, throwing off dusty hymns and rituals to embrace more modern, hipper worship experiences. Many now seek to re-connect with older forms of the faith.

“Modern evangelicalism was so pragmatic ... for much of the 19th and 20th centuries that its roots in the tradition shriveled up,” said Sweeney, author of *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word*. “Evangelicals today are into church history again, seeking nourishment for their faith.”

Even so, some question whether a full embrace of 18th-century Puritan thinking will work in a 21st-century context. Can a message that focuses on the damnation of sinners and torments of hell awaken the modern masses like it did for Edwards and others? Today’s preachers are working in a pluralistic culture that Edwards never could have imagined.

Regardless, the release of Edwards’ work is a boost for devotees who think his message didn’t die with him in 1758.

“The Yale project has been tremendously influential in enhancing Edwards’ study,” said Marsden, “and it is the availability of the whole range of his works that has helped many people realize that Edwards stands among the top Christian theologians of all time.” **BT**

Catholic groups rally against climate change amid intense church debate

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

Catholic environmental groups from around the world announced a new global network to battle climate change just as many Catholic conservatives are sharply criticizing Pope Francis' campaign to put environmental protection high on the church's agenda.

"We are certain that anthropogenic (human-made) climate change endangers God's creation and us all, particularly the poor, whose voices have already spoken of the impacts of an altered climate," the new Global Catholic Climate Movement says in its mission statement.

"Climate change is about our responsibility as God's children and people of faith to care for human life, especially future generations,



by caring for all of God's wondrous creation," the statement continues.

The GCCM said it intends to push for international treaties to battle global warming but said it is approaching the issue from a moral and biblical perspective and hopes to

"encourage the conversion of hardened hearts."

That could be a tall order in light of current arguments over climate change in U.S. politics and in the American church.

The GCCM is the first alliance of its kind and it was unveiled recently to coincide with Francis' trip to the Philippines, where Typhoon Haiyan hit in 2013. The killer storm was seen as evidence of the effects of climate change, a topic the pope has frequently addressed.

His focus has worried and angered many church conservatives, who view Francis' ecological push as further evidence of the liberal tilt of his papacy.

Conservative Catholic commentators have been trying to downplay the authority of any papal statements on the environment — they contend such statements are based on flawed science, not sound doctrine — while others have simply dismissed them. **BT**

Religious college presidents agree on 'calling' and common threats

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — Should religious colleges be bound by the same union and labor rules as secular universities? Or be rated by the same criteria?

Those questions and more are being tackled by the presidents of three major universities who say they are united in supporting the values that faith-based schools bring to higher education even as they grapple with government regulations that can challenge them.

For the first time, the top officials of Baylor University, Catholic University of America and Yeshiva University led discussions in Washington on the "calling" of faith-based universities.

Baylor University President Ken Starr said faith-related schools are charged with helping students learn about "living life purposefully," which he said goes beyond simply helping students get jobs and be productive citizens.

"That's very good, but is that enough?" said Starr, who leads the large Baptist university, in Waco, Texas. "We want to take the conversation to a broader level of what is in fact the education enterprise all about at its very best, at least from our perspective."

All three leaders see challenges to the religious freedom of their institutions from the U.S. government. Starr, who is a board member of the National Association of Independent

Colleges and Universities, cited plans by the Education Department to change how it rates universities.

"We're very concerned that the proposed approach of the Department of Education will lump all institutions into the same categorization system," said Starr.

"We're concerned that the rating system will fail to reflect, almost by definition, the enormous diversity in our pluralistic system of higher education."

CUA President John Garvey said there are numerous regulations that are challenging faith-based schools — from the Obama administration's contraception mandate to a December ruling by the National Labor Relations Board that permits some religious and other private university faculty members to unionize.

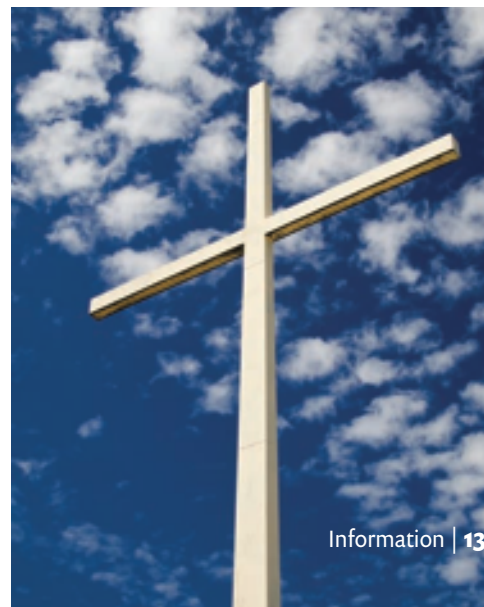
"They're telling religious schools who their faculty can be and what the terms and conditions of employment are, that is to say, what they can teach," said Garvey, whose Washington campus is the only school in the country overseen by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. "That the government ought to have some say over the people and the courses that are being taught at religious universities — that's a big deal for religious freedom."

Yeshiva University President Richard Joel — whose New York-based Jewish school was the subject of a 1980 Supreme Court decision about NLRB regulations — said there is always

"ferment" about such religious freedom issues. He said leaders of "purpose-driven" institutions are concerned not only about overreaching government but also accrediting agencies that need to "respect faith-based universities' rights to remain true to their ideals."

Starr and Garvey — both former law school deans — have jointly addressed religious freedom issues in the past, and Joel, who also is a lawyer, said he sees advantages to faith-based universities discussing the future of private higher education together.

"Faith-based universities are not about to deny their *raison d'être*," said Joel, whose university is a new member of NAICU. "I think that more and more universities, particularly private universities, have to say what we are about and what makes us indispensable." **BT**



Rabbi Jack Moline to head the Interfaith Alliance

By Lauren Markoe
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — Rabbi Jack Moline, a congregational rabbi who briefly led the nation's top Jewish Democratic group, is the new head of the Interfaith Alliance, a staunch voice in Washington for the separation of church and state and other progressive causes.



Jack Moline

Moline is the fourth leader and the first non-Christian to head the 20-year-old alliance, which represents more than 75 faith traditions and secularists, too.

Announcing Moline's appointment in January, the Interfaith Alliance cited his decades of work on civil rights and religious freedom issues and his 27 years leading Agudas Achim, the Northern Virginia synagogue where he is now rabbi emeritus.

"He has been a powerful voice in defense of religious freedom for everyone, regardless of his or her faith or belief," said Helio Fred Garcia, chairman of the Interfaith Alliance board. "He understands the value of bringing together diverse voices and perspectives to challenge extremism and build common ground."

Moline, 62, who last December resigned as director of the National Jewish Democratic Council after less than a year on the job, said it became clear that he wasn't the right person to lead the council. But he said the Interfaith

Alliance is an excellent match.

"I know this organization. I love this organization," said Moline, who chaired its board from 2006-2008 and was on the search committee that picked the alliance's last leader, Baptist minister C. Welton Gaddy, who stepped down in December after 16 years. "We will not lose any momentum as we continue to protect faith and freedom, challenge extremism and build common ground."

Said Gaddy of Moline: "When you care about an organization and its mission like I do, knowing that organization is in good hands is very satisfying, comforting and exciting.

"I couldn't be more pleased to have a leader with his qualities guiding the direction of an organization whose mission is probably more important today than it was when it was founded," Gaddy continued. **BT**

Pope's 'rabbits' comment raises issue of birth control

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

Pope Francis seems made for the Age of Twitter. A case in point were his remarks in which he affirmed the Catholic Church's ban on artificial contraception but derided the idea that "in order to be good Catholics we have to be like rabbits" and produce litters of kids.

"No," he told reporters on a flight home from the Philippines. "Responsible parenthood."

Moments earlier, Francis had signaled his approach to the vexed birth control issue when, with equally quotable verve, he said the contraception ban "does not mean that the Christian must make children in series."

He noted that during a parish visit some months ago, he even "rebuked" a woman who was pregnant again after having seven children, all delivered by Caesarean section. "But do you want to leave seven orphans?" Francis told her. "That is to tempt God!"

Birth control supporters said the analogy demeaned people, who should make whatever decisions they want about the number of children they have, and when they have them — or not.

Conservative Catholics and contraception opponents were also dismayed by the latest from a man who's been dubbed the "blabbermouth" pope. He appeared to criticize



traditional big families (the pope said three children seemed about right) as well as undermine advocates of natural family planning (controlling birth rates without using contraception) by seeming to give aid and comfort to the church's enemies.

But Francis wasn't breaking new ground. He himself told an interviewer last year that Pope Paul VI's famous encyclical reaffirming the artificial contraception ban, *Humanae Vitae*, was "prophetic" but said the real issue is "making sure that pastoral action takes into account that which is possible for people to do."

In other words, there is the rule, but the church must be merciful and understanding — and use common sense. Some church conservatives saw that as more lamentable

fuzziness from Francis and suggested that his predecessor, Benedict XVI, a theologian with a reputation as a doctrinal hardliner, would never have been so wobbly.

Yet in 1996, when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict said much the same thing. He told an interviewer that couples who already have several children should not be reproached if they do not want to have more, and that questions about regulating births are personal pastoral matters that "can't be projected into the abstract."

Moreover, Paul VI mentioned "responsible parenthood" in his 1968 encyclical and cited the various "physical, economic, psychological and social conditions" that could go into making decisions about when and whether to have children, stressing the primacy of individual conscience.

Francis clearly reaffirmed the ban on artificial contraception as "prophetic," especially given declining birth rates in the West.

Yet as Francis often does, he is shifting the focus from the "rules" to the principle behind the rules. He wants Catholics to be more open to life and family and children, however many they have, and he does not think that wealthy Western countries should be telling other societies how and when to procreate.

"For the poorest people, a child is a treasure. It is true, we must also be careful here," Francis said. "But for them, a child is a treasure." **BT**

Temple in Iceland to honor Norse gods

Thor, Odin and Freya are getting some new digs. A new temple is underway in Iceland, the first to honor these three Norse gods since the Vikings plowed the seas 1,000 years ago.

The construction of the new temple on a hill overlooking the capital city of Reykjavik was first reported by Reuters. It reflects a growing interest in Viking religion both in Iceland and beyond.

“I don’t believe anyone believes in a one-eyed man who is riding about on a horse with eight feet,” Hilmar Orn Hilmarsson, a high priest of Asatru, as the worship of Norse gods is called, told Reuters.

“We see the stories as poetic metaphors and a manifestation of the forces of nature and human psychology.”

Icelandic followers of Asatru — or Asatruars — reached 2,400 out of a population of 330,000 last year, government statistics show.

The new temple will be used for weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies — a big deal to the Vikings of yore and today. But don’t look for any animal sacrifices; contemporary Vikings make symbolic sacrifices instead and focus on values of hospitality, honesty, self-reliance and honor.

Belief in the Norse gods died out in Iceland and much of Europe about 1,000 years ago when Christianity swept through. But Asatru saw a revitalization in the early 1970s, when young people brought a renewed interest to many earth-based religions. It was recognized as a formal religion in Iceland in 1973.

There are now “kindreds” — communities of Asatru worshippers — in places the Vikings never saw, including Australia, New Zealand and at least 21 U.S. states, including Arizona, Mississippi and Idaho.

Stephen McNallen is considered by many to have fostered Asatru’s rebirth in the U.S. He


“Many people are looking for continuity beyond this little space and time. Another reason is some people feel the desire to get back to their ancestral roots.”

is a founder of the Asatru Folk Assembly, one of several Asatru organizations in America, and he estimates there are as many as 20,000 U.S. practitioners. People are drawn to Asatru for multiple reasons, he said.

“Some of it, I think, springs from a need to have spiritual autonomy in a world that is excessively complex and is inhibitive of individual freedom and expression,” he said. “Many people are looking for continuity

beyond this little space and time. Another reason is some people feel the desire to get back to their ancestral roots.”

That last bit has caused some trouble for Asatru practitioners in the past. The Nazis borrowed some aspects of Asatru to justify their pursuit of a “pure Aryan race.” And today, some white supremacist groups claim Norse beliefs. McNallen, however, said true Asatru has nothing to do with racism. **BT**



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April lessons in this issue

Season of Easter

1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Of First Importance
April 5, 2015

The Book of Love

John 1:2-2:2
Walking in the Sunshine
April 12, 2015

1 John 3:1-7
Children of God
April 19, 2015

1 John 3:16-24
Real Love
April 26, 2015



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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

April 5, 2015

Of First Importance

Easter: who doesn't like it? Beyond the colored eggs and candy, beyond the bright new clothes, Easter brings thoughts of springtime and renewal, of new hope and new life.

Far more than a spot on the calendar reserved for holidays from work or school, Easter is the crux of Christianity.

If there were no Easter, there would be no church and no Christian faith. There would be no hope for life beyond mortality aside from the vague aspirations of various world religions.

The Apostle Paul understood that when it comes to our hope and faith in Christ, everything hangs on the resurrection.

The gospel truth (vv. 1-2)

Our text comes near the end of a letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. 📖 It was not his first letter to the church, for Paul mentions a previous letter (1 Cor. 5:9), but it is the first one whose substance we can be sure of, so it's known as 1 Corinthians. 📖

In the letter, Paul calls for unity and deals with a number of thorny issues that have been raised by members of the church. These include questions about sex, both within marriage and outside of it (5:1-3, 6:12-20, 7:1-29); questions about lawsuits (6:1-11); questions about relationships within the community, especially with regard to those who were more sensitive about eating food that may have been ritually offered to idols before resale (8:1-11:1); questions about worship and the Lord's Supper (11:2-34); and



1 Corinthians 15:3 –

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures ...”

questions about spiritual gifts, including tongues (12:1-14:40).

As we come to chapter 15, Paul turns to questions about resurrection in general and Christ's resurrection in particular. The Gospel records are so clear about Christ's resurrection that it may seem strange to us that early believers would question it. The Gospels had not yet been written, however, or accepted as authoritative scripture. The emerging church depended on oral traditions passed on by witnesses of the events, sometimes second or third hand.

Although early witnesses made the resurrection a central teaching of the gospel, there were others who questioned it. The uncertainty in Corinth may have grown from Jewish believers in the congregation, or from the teaching of competing religions.

Jewish belief in a resurrection had begun to develop in the second century BCE, best illustrated by the apocalyptic sections of the book of Daniel from

that period. 📖 Many Jews had come to expect a day of resurrection at the end of the age, though others remained skeptical. Among those who did expect a resurrection, some thought everyone would be raised, while others believed only the righteous would rise again. Some anticipated a bodily resurrection, while others imagined a more spiritual return from the dead.

An emerging belief system that became known as Gnosticism (from the word *gnosis*, “knowledge”) brought questions from a different perspective. While there were different strains of Gnosticism, all put a heavy emphasis on the belief that one must gain secret knowledge needed to ascend to a spiritually higher plane of life. Gnostics considered one's physical existence to be relatively unimportant, flawed and relegated to the lower world. In their view, only the spirit mattered: the notion of a physical resurrection was unnecessary.

As such beliefs infiltrated the early

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The foundation of faith (vv. 3-7)

To counteract troubling questions about the resurrection, Paul underscored what he considered to be the heart of the gospel, the message he had received from the earliest witnesses and had passed on to the Corinthians as of first importance: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ... he was buried, ... he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ... he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (vv. 3-5).

This brief recitation bears the marks of an early confession of faith that was repeated in the churches. Verbs carry the freight in these brief statements: Christ *died*, and *was buried*. Both verbs are in the aorist tense, indicating completed action.

But death was not the end. Jesus *was raised* from the dead, and *appeared* to Cephas (the Aramaic form of “Peter”) and the twelve (disciples). The verb form of “was raised” is in the perfect tense, which in Greek indicates something that happened in the past but continues to be true and have significance for the present. Jesus rose from the dead, and remains alive. 📖

The verb is also passive in voice, showing that Christ did not raise himself, but was raised by the power of the Father (cf. Acts 2:23-24, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30).

The Old Testament canon had not been codified in Paul’s day, and the word translated as “scriptures” literally means “writings.” Still, many Jews considered most of the books we now call “scripture” to be authoritative. Paul does not name particular texts he believes Jesus fulfilled, but Deut. 21:23; Isa. 25:8, 53:5-12; Ps. 16:10; and Hos. 6:2 are good candidates.

The original confession may have ended at v. 5, but Paul strengthens his case by adding that Jesus later appeared to more than 500 people at one time, and to “all the apostles” (vv. 6-7).

The voice of experience (vv. 8-11)

To these testimonies Paul adds his own life-changing encounter on the Damascus Road. As recorded in Acts 9, Paul had been a zealous Jewish rabbi named Saul who was rabidly seeking out Christians to persecute when Christ appeared in a blinding light, manifesting himself to Paul “as one untimely born.” 📖

Paul believed Christ had literally appeared to him, so he had no qualms about calling himself an apostle who had seen Jesus and been called as his messenger. His purpose in writing was not to glorify himself, but to testify that the resurrected Christ was still alive and able to reveal himself. Thus, the change in Paul’s own life was further evidence of the resurrection: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (v. 10a).

God’s grace – manifested through the risen Christ – had brought Paul to salvation and given him strength to “work harder than any” (v. 10b). Thus, Paul insisted that his own life and work, no less than that of the original apostles, was convincing testimony of the resurrection of Christ and the validity of the gospel.

Paul believed that Christ’s resurrection was “of first importance” for believers. His own life demonstrated that the doctrine of resurrection involves more than the hope of a future transformation: It also transforms the present experience of Christians who are “raised anew” to a new and abundant life (see Rom. 6:1-14).

Consider spending some time meditating on Paul’s statement: “By the grace of God I am what I am.” What has God made you to be? Do others see evidence of the resurrection in you?

Is this promise also for us? Despite our culture’s current fascination with vampires and zombies, some modern believers may find it hard to believe in the notion of a bodily resurrection. The faith Christians hold in a bodily resurrection is a far cry from storybook notions about the living dead, however: it is the promise of a life that never really ends. **BT**

church, some adherents taught that there was a distinction between the human Jesus and a spiritual Christ, whom they believed had rested upon Jesus prior to the crucifixion. Christ had the necessary knowledge to ascend to the highest of spiritual levels, they argued, while the human Jesus, once crucified, remained dead.

Living amid this hodgepodge of competing claims, it’s little wonder that some believers began to question whether Jesus was really raised from the dead, and whether they could also look forward to a bodily resurrection.

Paul could not let such questions go unchallenged, for they denied a foundational truth of the gospel. So, he writes to remind the Corinthians “of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand” (v. 1).

Salvation comes only by means of this gospel, Paul insists, “through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain” (v. 2).

Notice that Paul uses the present tense to describe salvation as an ongoing process: “though which you are being saved.” Baptists have tended to compartmentalize salvation as a one-time event of “getting saved,” with the unfortunate result that many believers assume they are set for eternity, with no further participation required.

Paul would have none of this. He notes two conditions: 1) that believers “hold firmly to the message” and 2) that they have not “come to believe in vain.” For Paul, true believers continue to express and practice their belief. Failure to hold firmly to their faith suggests that there is no real faith to begin with.

The statement about believing in vain could be interpreted in two ways. First, Paul could be speaking rhetorically, with tongue in cheek: “unless all of our belief is in vain” – in which case no one would be saved. Secondly, the expression “believe in vain” could suggest that some who had gone through the motions of belief fell short of developing an effective faith.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

John 1:2-2:2

April 12, 2015

Walking in the Sunshine

The late Roger Miller had a hit in the 1960s with a cheerful tune that went like this: “Walkin’ in the sunshine, sing a little sunshine song; put a smile upon your face as if there’s nothin’ wrong. Think about a good time you had a long time ago, thinking about forgettin’ about your worries and your woes – walkin’ in the sunshine, sing a little sunshine song.”

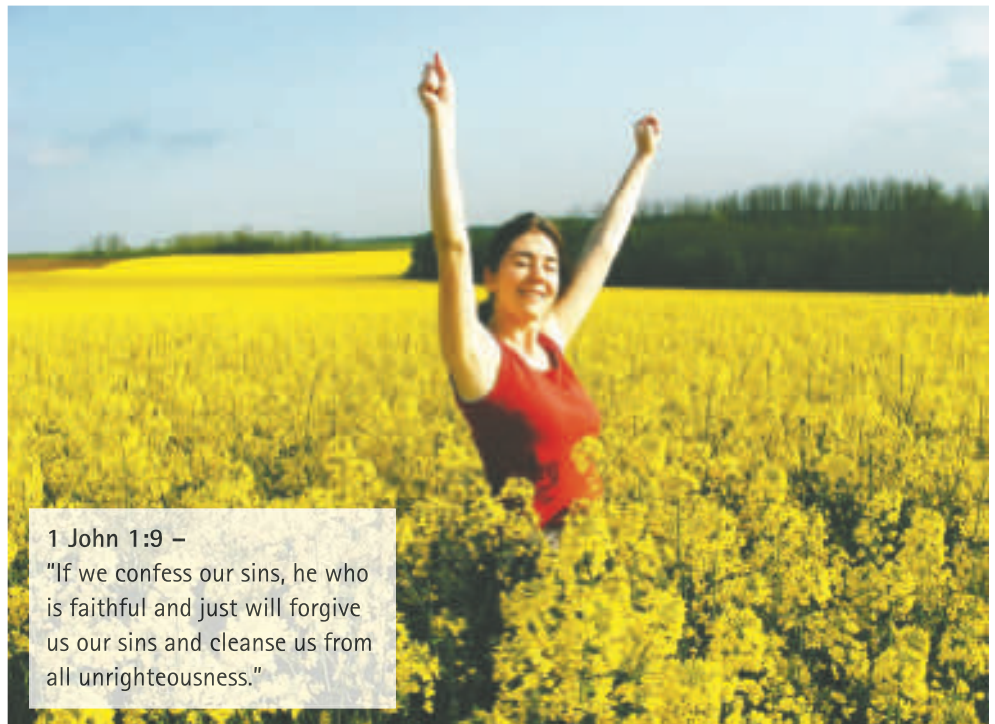
Most people prefer walking in the sunshine rather than gray and cold or stormy days, for obvious reasons, both literally and metaphorically. Miller’s song suggested that we can change our outlook by force of will: “pretending can make it real,” he sang: “a snowy pasture, a green and grassy field ...”

While positive thinking and a sunny disposition can help, we know that pretending doesn’t make it real. Today’s text also speaks to a way of walking in the light that *is* real – not the sun’s light, but the light of God. 📖

Knowledge and joy (1:1-4)

One cannot read the opening verses of 1 John without being reminded of the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-18). 📖 Both Scriptures speak of Jesus as the eternal Word of life who came to earth in Jesus, the Word made flesh. Both point to Jesus as the Son of God, through whose grace we find redemption and life. 📖

Some believers, perhaps influenced by an early form of Gnosticism, apparently claimed that a spiritual or heavenly “Christ” should be distinguished



1 John 1:9 –
“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

from the human man Jesus, upon whom the “heavenly Christ” dwelt for a while.

📖 Thus, it is important for John to emphasize from his personal experience that Jesus was both human and divine.

The author’s use of “we” in 1:1-4 serves to add the testimony of other apostles or eyewitnesses, strengthening his case: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1:1).

John wants to leave no doubt that the Word of life was made physically manifest in Jesus, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that the Word was present “from the beginning” (compare John 1:1). 📖

John is careful to stress his eyewitness testimony. He is not like a witness to a crime who caught a fleeting glimpse of an old blue sedan speeding away. He speaks of “what we have heard,” “what we have seen with our eyes,” “what we have looked at and touched with our hands” (1:1). “That

life was revealed, and we have seen it,” he insisted: “the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us” (1:2).

Having affirmed that he speaks from personal experience, John proceeds to denote two purposes in writing. The first is “so that you may have fellowship along with us” (1:3).

The word translated as “fellowship” is the familiar Greek word *koinonia*. The fellowship John has in mind is not a church dinner or social occasion. *Koinonia* comes from a root word that means “common,” and in the New Testament it describes the common bonds that Christians share as fellow children of God, saved by the same grace from the same sin to the same end of abundant and eternal life. In many cases, early believers shared not only a common faith, but also a common purse to be used for the common good.

John’s second purpose in writing is “so that our joy may be complete” (1:4). 📖 Here John includes his readers in the word “our.” If he enjoys *koinonia* fellowship with them, if they are partners

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in faith and devotion to Christ, then they are family. It is not just his own joy that concerns the writer, but the joy of all God's children.

Light and forgiveness (1:5-2:2)

Having warmed to his subject, John raises a concern that darkness threatens the church and its fellowship with God, who is light.

We recall again the prologue to John's Gospel, in which the Word is life, "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4-5). John the baptizer was described as one who came to bear witness to "the true light, who gives light to everyone" (John 1:9).

The metaphor of light versus darkness is common in the Fourth Gospel (see also John 3:19-21; 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46), so we are not surprised when the author of 1 John, who probably drew on the same traditions, turns to the same metaphor: "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" (1:5). One who claims to have fellowship with Christ while "walking in darkness" is a liar, while those who "walk in the light as he himself is in the light" find forgiveness of sin and fellowship with one another (1:6-7).

"Light" was a favorite term among mystics who claimed to have special "enlightenment" that others did not have. Their concept of light was abstract and apart from daily life, but for John, the concept of God as light is suffused with ethical and moral content. Those who look to the light of God perceive their need to pattern their lives after God's teaching.

This leads to a second metaphor, that of "walking" in the sense of how we conduct our lives. Those who walk in the light of God have fellowship with God, while those who claim to have fellowship with God "but walk in darkness" are lying and "not practicing the truth."

John calls on his readers to recognize the goodness of God and the moral

imperative of living as Jesus taught us to live. That means being honest with ourselves, with God, with each other. It means walking together in fellowship with God and with others, believing together that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Walking in the light of Christ leads to forgiveness: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin," John said (1:7). The word for "cleanses" is in the present tense in Greek, which denotes continuous action. The constant grace and continuing forgiveness offered by Christ is good news, for even those who want to walk in the light continue to struggle with sin.

Those who claim the light but walk in darkness are deceived, John said (1:8), perhaps having bought into the dualistic notion that flesh is inherently evil and the spirit is inherently good. Some believers were apparently influenced by philosophies that thought of God as an impassive heavenly spirit, unconnected with life on earth or with anything physical, including sin. Some taught that the body was not only evil but also inconsequential, and may have sought to prove it by indulging in all manner of gluttonous or immoral behavior, arguing that fleshly sins did not count.

John saw their argument for the lie that it was. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." He understood what Jesus and the prophets before him taught, that God cares deeply about what we do and how we treat each other. A good God calls for good people.

Those who confess their sin and seek God find forgiveness, while those who claim to have no sin make God out to be a liar (1:9-10), John said. The Old Testament scriptures speak often of the reality and the consequences of sin. In sending Christ to the world, God spoke

to our inability to live without sin, offering redemption we could never have gained on our own. To claim that sin is of no consequence is to live in open defiance of God's teaching and to devalue the death of Christ as unnecessary.

John does not want his readers to believe this aberrant teaching, but he knows how they might be tempted. Old Testament stories about God and Israel pointed to one failure after another as God's people traded the redemptive call of God's covenant for the siren song of idolatry. As the eighth-century Israelites forsook social justice and appropriate worship for selfish greed and temple prostitution, so the early church was threatened with those who would forsake the fellowship of those who walk in the light for the misguided ways of darkness.

John wants his readers to recognize the falsehoods inherent in the false teaching they were hearing and to confess their sins, trusting in the one who "who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1:9).

Thus, John specifies another motive for writing: "so that you may not sin" (2:1a). He wants to counteract the lies of those who would discount the seriousness of wrongdoing, while assuring the believers that "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:1b-2).

In opposition to those who would discount Jesus' death, arguing that salvation comes through a separate Christ as a spiritual guide, John reminds his readers that Jesus serves not only as our advocate but also as the one who reconciles us to God.

In some way beyond our full comprehension, Jesus himself has acted to grant us clean slates, second chances, forgiven sins.

We, no less than John's original readers, face competing ideas about faith and life. We can spurn God's offer of grace and go over to the dark side, or we can seek forgiveness and walk in the light. Which will it be? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 John 3:1-7

April 19, 2015

Children of God

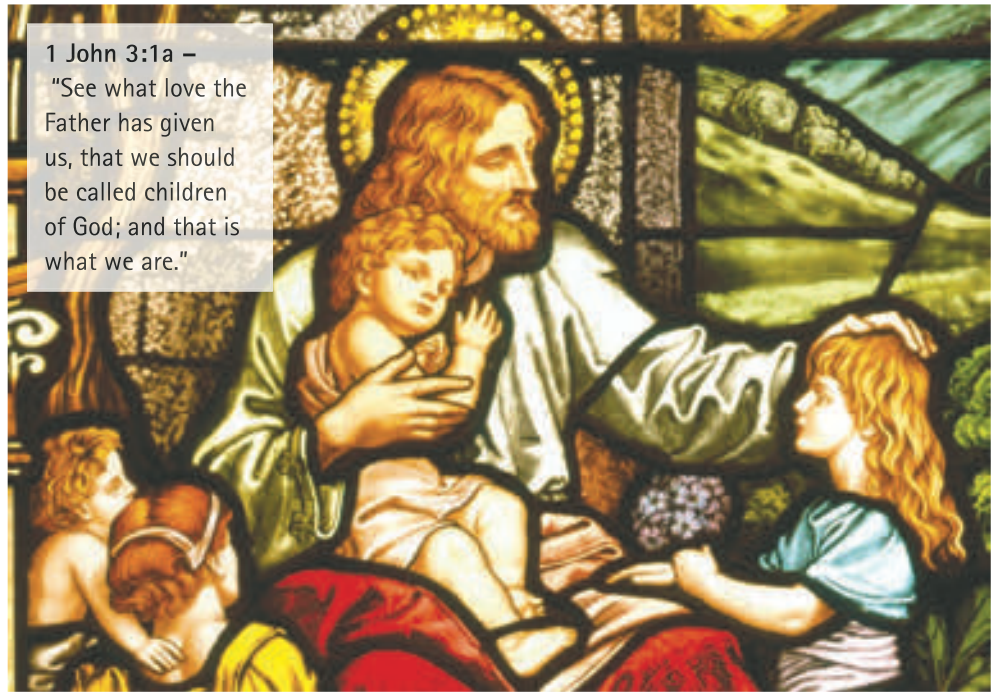
Does anything in the world have the power to touch us like children? For parents, teachers, or anyone who has regular contact with them, children can bring overwhelming pride – or devastating grief. Many of us have children, and all of us have been children: Think of ways you have brought delight or distress to your parents, or ways in which your own children or grandchildren might have blessed or bothered you.

The author of 1 John spoke forcefully of Christian believers as the children of God. As such, he believed, they should live like God's children with regard to their behavior, and be confident of God's care with regard to their security. 📖

The children of God (vv. 1-3)

John's writing takes on an added edge of excitement in 3:1, though the NRSV offers a rather reserved translation: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." In contrast, NIV11, HCSB, and NET conclude the sentence with exclamation points. 📖

The image of believers as God's children carries forward the theme of the previous verse: "If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him" (2:29). In the coming verses, John will stress the connection between the believer's nature as a child of God and its outward expression through right behavior. He concludes that all are either



1 John 3:1a –
"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are."

children of God (vv. 1-7) or children of the devil (vv. 8-10).

How could anyone be privileged to enter a relationship as children of God? It is because of God's great love for us, John says. We could not earn our way into God's heart with even our cutest behavior, but God loved us when we were neither cute nor particularly lovable. "We love," John will say, "because he first loved us" (4:19).

John describes God's love with the word *agape* (uh-GAH-pay), a term that was rarely used outside of Christian contexts. Early believers used it to describe the kind of selfless, generous, gracious love that God has shown to us and expects from us.

With the added phrase "And we are!" John assures us that we are not just called God's children: we *are* God's children. We stand, here and now, as children of a God who is faithful and true and loving, a God who will neither forget us nor fail us. The verse is reminiscent of John 1:12: "But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name..."

Life could be hard for early Christians in an antagonistic society, and some might have wondered how God's children could be treated so poorly. The reason, John says, is that the world does not know or appreciate believers because it doesn't know God; thus it can hardly be expected to show kindness to God's children.

While American believers are more likely to be ignored than attacked, the unpleasant truth is that believers in many places are still persecuted and prosecuted, arrested or shunned, sometimes even tortured because of their faith. This does not happen because they have done wrong, but because their oppressors reject God and thus reject the believer's life as a child of God.

We don't have to face hostility in order to know that life may be difficult. Heartache and tragedy can come even within a supportive community, even to God's children. Whatever our current state, John insists that a glorious future lies ahead, a day when heaven's mysteries will be revealed and we will learn to be more like God.


While we hope for what is yet to

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come, we live in the present, and our position is already secure. John says: “Beloved, we are God’s children now” (v. 2). In the light of that hope we strive to “purify” ourselves: to become more like the people God has called us to be (v. 3). 

John urges all believers to that same end, to look toward the day when we meet our ultimate parent, and hoping that when we meet, there will be a family resemblance.

The issue of sin (vv. 4-6)

For growth and maturity and God-likeness to take place, believers must take seriously the issue of sin. John doesn’t mince words on that account.

A surface reading of vv. 4-10, which seem to suggest that true believers never sin, can leave us wondering if any are truly secure. It can be helpful, as we read these verses, to understand something about verbal tenses in New Testament Greek. The *present* tense typically indicates ongoing or continuous action. The *aorist* tense generally indicates point action, usually in the past but sometimes in the present. The *perfect* tense describes something that happened in the past but continues to be true in the present.


In vv. 4-6, John addresses the subject of sin: “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness,” he says, but “No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.”

This statement seems strange, for John has previously argued that anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar (1:8, 10), but those who confess their sins can trust Christ to forgive (1:9), restoring the relationship.

There is some comfort in noting that the verb underlying “who commits sin” in v. 4 is a present participle, and the verb translated twice as “sins” in v. 6 is also in the present tense. This suggests the sense of continually practicing or living in sin, as opposed to one who strives to do right but occasionally stumbles.

The Greek word used for “sin” is

hamartia. Like its Hebrew counterpart, it reflects the idea of falling short of the mark, failing to live up to God’s standards, violating the ethical and moral ideals expected from a child of God.

Sin creates a barrier between humans and God, precluding fellowship. But, John reminds us, Christ “was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin” (v. 5). As we abide in Christ and strive to become more like him, we are less in thrall to sin and more open to fellowship with God. 


If Christ has forgiven our sin, we are free from its bondage. That is not to suggest that we become perfect and never fall short – we all know better than that. Still, those who “abide in him” strive to avoid sin and become more like Jesus. This truth may seem self-evident, but John needed to address it, probably because some people who had left the church (2:18-19) were teaching precisely the opposite, claiming that God is neither concerned with sin nor connected with Jesus.

Children of the devil (vv. 7-10)

John has little patience with those who hold flippant attitudes toward sin. Those who persist in doing wrong do so because they are not children of God, but of the devil, John says, who “has been sinning from the beginning.”

Thus, John paints the conflict as deeper than a disagreement between orthodox teaching and misguided notions arising within the church. The ultimate conflict is between the author of evil and the Son of God, who “was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (v. 8). In this verse, “practicing sin” and “sinning from the beginning” are also in the present tense.

The Greek word translated as “devil” is *diabolos* (from which we get the word “diabolical”), a term that means “slanderer” or “accuser.” The Old

Testament counterpart, though different in some ways and not yet considered evil, was called *satan*, which means “accuser.” John hopes that, as the adversary was unsuccessful in tempting Christ to abort his mission (Mark 1:12-13, Matt. 4:1-10, Luke 4:1-13), so God’s children will resist temptation and choose to live in righteousness rather than sin. 

The language in v. 9 is surprisingly graphic in its description of Christians being born of God because God’s “seed” (*sperma*) abides in them. As human parents pass on genetic materials that influence the development of their children, something of God’s nature is implanted in believers. Thus, John says, “they cannot sin (present infinitive), because they have been born of God.” John uses the perfect tense for “have been born,” indicating a past action that continues to have force in the present. Past forgiveness inspires present obedience.

This is how John says one can identify a child of God and a child of the devil: one’s daily walk – whether characterized by sin or by an effort to overcome sin – betrays one’s parentage.

Few movies portray the contrast between good and evil better than the *Star Wars* series, in which young Luke Skywalker engages often with the powerful and malevolent Darth Vader – a good man gone bad who happens to be Luke’s biological father. Darth Vader implores Luke to “come to the dark side” and serve the evil emperor, as he has done. Luke is briefly tempted, but remains true to what is good. Ultimately, Luke’s loyal love wins over Vader, who experiences a redemption of sorts as he dies while defending Luke from the emperor’s efforts to torture the young man into submission.

When watching *Star Wars*, it’s not hard to tell who is on the good side, and who is on the dark side. When observing those who claim to know God, John tells us, it is not difficult to distinguish between the children of God and the children of the devil: their actions tell the tale. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 John 3:16-24

April 26, 2015

Real Love

“All you need is love,” sang the Beatles in their number one hit from 1967. Peter Cetera’s “Glory of Love” reached number one in 1986, as did Steve Winwood’s “Higher Love.” According to bobborst.com, no less than 127 songs with “love” in the title have achieved number one status in the U.S. since Benny Goodman sang “Taking a Chance on Love” in 1943. 🇺🇸

We love the subject of love: we sing about it, talk about it, and fantasize about it. But popular notions of love are often far from the real thing. 🇺🇸 In today’s text, John points to Jesus as the prime example of true love, and challenges believers to follow the Lord’s example.

True love (vv. 16-17)

The theme of love first surfaces in v. 11, where John reminds readers of “the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” He then cites the story of Cain murdering his brother as an example of what happens when hate reigns (v. 12). The world might hate believers, but those who follow Jesus are to respond with love, knowing that they have eternal life. Those who do not love, John says, abide in death (vv. 13-15). 🇺🇸

But love can be risky, painful, or even fatal. With reference to Jesus, John says “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (v. 16).

The kind of love John describes is serious business. It is not a mushy or



1 John 3:17 –

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

sentimental affair that feels good and is mainly self-oriented, but a love that is directed toward others and willing to go not only the second mile, but also to the last mile. Christians in America are rarely faced with a situation in which they are called to put their life on the line for the sake of another, but we are to learn from his example that love means doing whatever it takes to meet the needs of others. This is especially true within the family of faith. 🇺🇸

While few are faced with making the ultimate sacrifice, all who follow Christ should be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of others, and no biblical text makes this more clear than v. 17: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

Earlier, John had charged that some believers claimed to have fellowship with God while walking in darkness, and urged them to demonstrate their faith by walking in the light (1:6-7).

Now, in essence, John is again challenging Christ-followers to “walk the walk” and not just “talk the talk.”

Suppose we see someone living in poverty or struggling to bear a heavy load without adequate resources. If we have the ability to help them but do not, can we claim that God’s love abides in us? The sense of “abiding” is central to John’s teaching: as believers are called to abide in God, so God’s Spirit, presence, and love abides in them. Our outward behavior gives evidence of what lies within: the presence of Christ should be manifest in what we do.

Not many people are called to give their life for another, but the call of the needy brother and sister is constant. We may never know if we would be brave or heroic or committed enough to die for someone else, but every day we have the opportunity to help those who are in need – or to ignore them. Our response in either case will reveal whether the love of God truly resides in us.

The scene John describes indicates

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that a believer has sufficient goods to live and to share, and becomes acutely aware of another's need, but looks the other way rather than offering assistance. U

We know what it is like to feel compassion, and how easy it is to look the other way so we're not plagued by the nagging needs of others. Our characteristic response reveals the relative health of our faith. When we consider our daily response to those who are in need, can we say that the love of God resides in us?

As noted above, in this context, John seems to be speaking to and about the Christian community, where believers are most aware of needs in the lives of their brothers and sisters in Christ. As Christ-followers, John's readers would have been a small minority in a hostile environment who may have needed one another to ensure survival. In that setting, it was appropriate to focus on needs within the community of faith.

The principle behind it, however, should certainly extend beyond the church. The ethic of caring for the poor and the stranger was an important element of Old Testament teaching, and Jesus echoed the importance of ministry to the needy on a regular basis. As the church grew from a persecuted minority to a larger and more popular place in society, church leaders put greater emphasis on caring for others outside of the faith community as well as within.

This remains a challenge for believers. If members of a church care only for their own and neglect the needs of homeless persons in their community, storm victims in other states, or persons suffering from disease or famine in any part of the world, can they claim that the love of Christ abides in them?

The bottom line (vv. 18-24)

In the following verses, John plows ahead, further elaborating what it means to share Christian love. Talk is easy, but John insists that true love is not found "in word or speech, but in deed and truth" (v. 18). Our actions speak louder than our words, even to us. A quick look at our checkbooks or our calendars

reveals how much time and effort we put into loving others as Jesus loved us.

In the next three verses, John turns to a discussion involving the heart, not as the seat of love, but as the source of a clean conscience for those who love as Jesus did. Modern folk commonly associate love with the heart, and the simple image of a bivalve heart is ubiquitous in Valentine's Day promotions, sweetheart cards, or surrounding initials carved on trees. The ancients associated feelings with the gut rather than the heart, which they saw as the seat of thinking, decision-making, and the conscience. U

When we love "in truth and action," John says, we can "know that we are from the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (v. 19). The word translated as "assure" typically means "to persuade" or "to convince." Thus, NET says we "will convince our conscience in his presence."

John seems concerned that some readers will be too hard on themselves, and given John's strong "either/or" language, that's not surprising. But the writer's purpose is not to make believers feel guilty, give up because they are not perfect, or feel unwarranted doubt that they are truly God's children because of uneasy hearts. Fortunately, our standing with God does not rest on our personal judgment. Rather, John reminds his readers, "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (v. 20). There may be times when we are uncertain, and we need to trust in God for the assurance we cannot find in ourselves.

On the other hand, "if our hearts do not condemn us," we can have confidence in our standing before God (v. 21), John says. Then we can pray with greater boldness, believing that God hears us and responds to our prayers.

We must not read too much into v. 22, as "prosperity preachers" and some surface readers tend to do. This

is no promise that confident prayer will persuade God to give us anything we want, or that God rewards obedience by saying "yes" to our every request.

Context is important: the promise of 3:22 must be read in the light of 5:14, where John also speaks of confidence in prayer, but conditions it on asking within the purview of God's will: "And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." U People who love unselfishly as Jesus loves can be confident in prayer because they will not ask for anything that is outside of God's will: they "obey his commandments and do what pleases him."

And what are God's commandments? What does it take to please God? For the writer, "this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us" (v. 23).

We might have expected John to echo Jesus' insistence that the two greatest commands are to love God with heart, mind and soul; and to love our neighbors (Mark 12:28-31). For John, loving God is entwined with investing one's life in God by believing in the name of Jesus. In this sense, "believe" means far more than giving intellectual assent. To believe in Christ is to devote one's self to God, which implies a deep love for God.

The love we have for God through Christ motivates us to love as Jesus loved, which means loving one another. Though John thought primarily of reciprocal love within the faith community, the call to compassion extends far beyond fellow believers.

Our trust in God and love for others is both evidence and assurance that we abide in God and God abides in us, a relationship experienced as well through the indwelling of the Spirit (v. 24).

Do you feel confident about your faith in God, sensing the Spirit's presence and of a joyous future yet to come? Do your actions of obedience and love match your assurance? If not, some serious reflection might be in order. BT

Classifieds

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala. (fbchsv.org) seeks a full-time senior pastor to lead our 200-plus-year-old church located strategically in a revitalized part of downtown "Rocket City." We are a centrist Baptist congregation of about 3000 members, dually-aligned with CBF and SBC, with ties to ALCBF, Alabama Baptist Convention and Madison Baptist Association. The church is mission minded, ordains both men and women to roles in ministry and leadership, and has strong lay leadership. We have dynamic traditional and contemporary worship services. Qualifications include a degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school and 5-10 years of pastoral experience. Applicants may confidentially submit a résumé with references to pastorsearch@fbchsv.org or to Pastor Search Committee, 600 Governors Dr., Huntsville, AL 35801.

Senior Pastor: First Baptist Church (FBC) in South Boston, Va., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. We are committed to being an innovative and inclusive Christian fellowship united in our desire to engage in meaningful worship, witness, education, ministry and service. We need a pastor who is a strong spiritual leader, missions minded and a good administrator. We seek candidates who are called to ministry with a seminary degree, at least 5 years of pastoral experience and a strong work ethic. FBC is associated with BGAV and CBF. Please send résumés to Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 815 N. Main St., South Boston, VA 24592 or to fbcpssc@fbcsouthboston.com.

Pastor: Lillington Baptist Church, Lillington, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a pastor who is biblically grounded and mission minded, with visionary leadership and strong communication skills. Our current church membership is 283 members, with Sunday school attendance averaging 123 and worship attendance averaging 158. The candidate must hold an advanced seminary degree, with a preferred minimum of 10 years experience as a pastor or commensurate experience. Please send résumé to Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 160, Lillington, NC 27546. Résumés will be accepted until March 31.

Second Baptist Church in Memphis is seeking an individual to fill the newly formed position of **associate minister for families and congregational care**. This position requires one to possess an awareness of and sensitivity to all ages in the life of the church, with particular emphasis on deepening spiritual formation in children, youth, and their families as well as to share in pastoral care and outreach. A full

job description may be found at 2ndmemphis.org. Second Baptist is a moderate church highly committed to missions and servant leadership, worshipping in a creative, traditional framework that embraces diversity. Send letters of interest and résumés by March 15 to John N. Avis, Search Committee Chair, 4680 Walnut Grove Rd., Memphis, TN 38117 or to associatesearch@2ndmemphis.org.

Music Minister: First Baptist Church of Spring Hope, N.C., is a warm, small-town church that affirms God's call in everyone's life. We are seeking a part-time music minister to join us in reaching our community. Responsibilities include playing and directing music for Sunday worship, choir practice and special events. Send résumés to firstbaptistchurch-springhope@gmail.com or to First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 177, Spring Hope, NC 27882.

First Baptist Church of Burnsville, N.C., a CBF-affiliated congregation with a long history of traditional and choral music and missional service in the community, seeks to fill positions with team-oriented candidate(s) for **minister of music and minister of youth and children**. Current positions are part time, but consideration will be given for a full-time minister who is properly qualified. The music applicant should have a degree in music, with seminary training preferred. Positions will be filled by June 1. Send résumé to employment@fbcburnsville.com.

Children's Minister: Neill's Creek Baptist Church (neillscreek.org) in Angier, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a part-time (20 hours per week) children's minister to continue growing a thriving children's ministry (20-30 preschoolers and children). NCBC is a traditional Baptist congregation affiliated with both the CBF and the SBC, and averages 150 in Sunday worship. For a list of qualifications and responsibilities and to submit a résumé, contact the church at ncbc@embarqmail.com or 4200 Neill's Creek Rd., Angier, NC 27501. For more information, call (919) 639-6126.

In the Know

William Fitzgerald Brown was ordained to ministry on Jan. 18 by University Baptist Church, Charlottesville, Va. He is the son of Kent Brown and Ann Brown, who serves as president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Robert Cochran is executive director/minister of the D.C. Baptist Convention. He previously served the Washington, D.C., fellowship of churches as associate executive director.

Rich and Laura Freeman of San Pedro, Calif., will serve as associate missionaries in Turkey through American Baptist International Ministries.

Jill Jenkins will retire in May as children's pastor at Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., where she has served for 20 years.

Bob Lee is pastor of Huguenot Road Baptist Church in North Chesterfield, Va., coming from New Highlands Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, Va.

Scott Stearman is pastor of Metro Baptist Church in New York City, coming from Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis.

Mark Wiggs will serve as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship volunteer at the United Nations representing the Baptist World Alliance. He is an attorney from Jackson, Miss., and longtime religious liberty advocate.

Ed Sunday-Winters is pastor of First Baptist Church of Phenix City, Ala. He previously served Ball Camp Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn. **BT**

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BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

150 YEARS AGO


 March 1865

The sun is setting on the Confederate States of America. With most of the South now under Union control, calls from Confederate officials and religious leaders to never give up appear to ignore reality and defy logic.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee, knowing the hour is near, contacts Union General Ulysses S. Grant in hopes of convening a meeting to “iron out the differences” between the North and the South. The North, however, having effectively won the war, has no interest in negotiation. Instead, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln addresses the future in his second inaugural address, the last paragraph invoking God’s help in finishing the fight and, afterward, in healing America’s wounds:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Part of the envisioned national healing takes the form of helping former slaves transition into lives of freedom and opportunity, to which the Freedman’s Bureau, established this month, is tasked. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of black Baptists acquire help from the bureau in the months and years to come.

Before freedom can fully reign, however, remaining Confederate armed forces must be subdued. Early in the month Union armies expand their control in North Carolina, in the process destroying many Baptist meeting houses and utilizing others as temporary hospitals. From sheer desperation the Confederate government allows the recruiting of “negro soldiers” to reinforce army ranks depleted by deaths and desertions. Even though there is an implicit understanding that military service will be rewarded with freedom, few slaves don the Confederate gray.

A bright streak of light flares ever so briefly across the darkening southern horizon

when Confederate forces momentarily break the Union line at Petersburg and drive toward the enemy’s supply lines. The Federals, however, easily turn back the advance and retake lost ground. By the end of the month Union troops are close to breaking through Rebel defenses guarding the Confederate capital of Richmond.

Black Baptists south and north, while yet awaiting the culmination of the war, are seizing the opportunity to establish autonomous churches. Among the black Baptist congregations founded this month are: First African American Church of Evansville, Ind.; Zion Baptist Church of Portsmouth, Va.; Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va.; and Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church in Klein, Texas. In addition, the “colored members” of the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tenn., petition to become a separate and independent church, eventually establishing the First Baptist Church Capitol Hill.

In Savannah black Union regiments, with Baptists well represented among the troops, arrive to assist in Reconstruction efforts. Charleston is the scene of a grand celebration led by freedmen. In both cities, thousands of former slaves are learning to read and write under the tutelage of missionaries from the North and other charity workers and, in some cases, local black Baptist leaders. Good and kind intentions notwithstanding, paternalism is common among white northerners working among the freedmen.

Some white Baptists of the South embrace the coming end of slavery and prepare to move

forward. The Cedar Fork Baptist Church in Tennessee this month resolves “that we declare a non fellowship against all aides and abettors of the rebellion until satisfaction be made by them to the church in the letter and spirit of the Gospel.” A judge writing in the Georgia Baptist *Christian Index* concedes that African slavery may be doomed, not because it is against the will of God, but because slave marriages have not been legally recognized and honored in the South.

Other white Southern Baptists, however, remain as confident as ever. White supremacy and black slavery are the unchanging will of God. The South may not be winning on the battlefield, but the many religious conversions that have been wrought in the armies of the South are an even greater victory.

“Triumph and joy, suffering and sorrow, hardships and peril, have all brought us near to our Maker; and the greater our peril — the more severe our calamities, the more have we felt the nearness of God,” declares a newspaper editorial. Embedded within this narrative of righteous victory despite earthly defeat is a post-war path for a decimated South, a re-writing of history that, upending logic, transforms losers into victors undaunted in their divine mission of upholding white supremacy.

During these final days of the Confederacy, even with the Reconstruction of some southern states already under way, it remains to be seen whether Lincoln’s hope of “malice toward none” and “charity for all” will overcome inherent racism both north and south, much less the biblically-infused militant white supremacy that drove the nation into war and even now defies defeat. **BT**

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

Editor’s note: This series commemorating the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War is coming to an end. However, Bruce Gourley has graciously agreed to let *Baptists Today*, through Nurturing Faith Books, publish this well-researched material in book form.

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By Bill Ellis

A grieving Christian, and that which is to come

*Friends die; one after another.
Each time a dark disorder.
A ceaseless banging of shutters.
Upstairs there, in the mind.*

After reading these opening lines of Rosemary Dobson's pessimistic poem "Grieving" at the British Museum last year, and now being in my 75th year, I think more and more about mortality and those I have said goodbye to over my lifetime.

It is not easy to mourn the loss of friends. They continue to bless me with memories.

"Earl," died on the football field at Georgetown College in 1962, not from an injury but from the effects of encephalitis. I wonder what his life would have been like.

"Aggie" served as a role model and mentor in my first teaching and coaching job at Harrodsburg High School in 1962. Adolph Rupp's first All-American, Aggie's wealth of stories has encouraged me to become a teller of stories.

"David," another teammate at Georgetown College, studied to become a Baptist minister.

Then his wife walked away while he was a seminary student and he was left to raise two children. We reconnected after many years, and then I watched him die of cancer before the birth of grandchildren. I have been fortunate to have five grandchildren grow up before my eyes.

"Hoot," another football teammate and a groomsman in our wedding, was a great Christian gentleman. He died in a farm accident a few days after his 75th birthday. He was always good for a story of the old days — though we often had different versions.

"Lin" I had known for more than three decades as a colleague at Eastern Kentucky University. However, there was never any closeness between us until I called on him for advice. As a prostate cancer survivor, he guided me through the early recovery process after I had surgery. And, then he died as the cancer returned. It was a blessing to visit him in his last days and hold his hand as two women by his bedside sang "Amazing Grace."

I did not see a lot of "Mitch," who was a teaching and coaching colleague at Shelby County High School in the mid-1960s. He was quiet but always insightful and humorous. When he called one of my columns in *Kentucky Monthly* magazine "your best damn one yet," I knew indeed it was good. And then he was gone.

"Tom" was Kentucky's historian laureate. This courtly southern gentleman from Mississippi mentored me from my earliest university teaching days. I was overwhelmed with teaching, but wanted to publish. "Do your research and then sit down and write," he said bluntly one day. Always on the right side of issues, he lived to be nearly 102 years old and had a clear mind to the last.

"Jerrel," a fellow history teacher from Indiana, and I didn't get together often, but when we did we discussed religion and history. With our wives we visited Auschwitz a few years ago. The only true unbeliever I have ever known well asked me, "Where was God?" I had no quick or glib answer. And then, he died a few months later before we could talk again.



"Charles," a long-time friend, was a master craftsman and teacher of industrial arts. He was a gentle, quiet man who replaced moldings around pillars on my front porch. I often think of his kind manner when I pass by them.

"Max," another colleague at Eastern Kentucky, taught accounting and had the mindset of an old-fashioned Baptist thinker. Our children grew up together. Though stricken with polio as a child in Arkansas, he persevered to become a great teacher and friend. Now dead more than a quarter of a century, I sometimes ponder how he would assess some Baptist issues.

"Dixie," the personification of an old-fashioned southern lady with her white hair tied in a bun, was a mentor in my earliest teaching days. She and my mother staunchly supported the WMU through the dark days of the late 20th century. I was privileged to be at her bedside when she died.

"Ted" and "Joy" rented us a "granny flat" during our six months in New Zealand at Massey University in 1989 and guided us in understanding the Kiwi lifestyle. They probably thought us a bit quaint as we sought out a Baptist church each Sunday.



When we visited New Zealand last year we stayed a couple of days with "Warwick," a former history colleague at Massey and a member of a Brethren church. I reminded him that he owed us a visit. With some health problems, Warwick said he would not be able to make the trip.

"Well, I reckon the next time we meet will be in heaven," he said in his distinctive Kiwi idiom. At first speechless, I replied, "Well, that won't be so bad."

That will be enough, won't it?

Before I meet up with Warwick I first want to see William Matthew "Liam" Ellis, my great-grandchild. Born 13 weeks premature, his lungs were too weak to sustain life. He died on Feb. 4 of this year. I never got to hold him, but in heaven he will greet me and hold my hand as I am welcomed home by my Heavenly Father. **BT**

—Bill Ellis, who taught history for 40 years, is the author of six books including a biography of E.Y. Mullins. He is currently writing a biography of humorist Irvin S. Cobb.



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Learning to disagree agreeably

By Bill Wilson

After one particularly frustrating performance by his Green Bay Packers, legendary Coach Vince Lombardi called his team together. He was determined to get the players refocused on the things that made for winning.

As they knelt before the coach, he held up a football. "Gentlemen, today we start over. THIS IS A FOOTBALL!"

I feel the need to call the local church around me and make a similar pronouncement: "Brothers and Sisters in Christ, when we disagree, Jesus said we are to talk TO one another, not ABOUT one another!"

Matthew 18:15 (NRSV) has not been excised from scripture. "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone."

In the midst of a series of direct teachings about how his followers are to relate to one another and the world, Jesus gives us crystal clear instructions on how to manage conflict. He goes on to suggest follow-up strategies for dealing with disagreements.

Unfortunately, we rationalize and justify ourselves as exceptions to this foundational component of New Testament community.

In our work at the Center for Healthy Churches we find ourselves invited into many opportunities to witness conflict firsthand. We do so willingly, as we believe that conflict is an opportunity for God's people to come to grips with issues that often are ignored or glossed over.

However, we are constantly amazed at how this basic component of congregational health is ignored or willfully violated. Rather than deal directly with those they disagree with, we frequently find situations where clergy and laity alike have managed to triangle, sabotage, ignore, gossip about, manipulate, and generally mistreat those with whom they disagree.

On more occasions than I can count, I have asked someone: "Have you gone and talked with this person about your concerns?"

Sadly, the vast majority confesses they have not.

Why not? What makes this level of conversation so difficult?

Part of the reason is our natural tendency to avoid conflict. Most of us were raised to be polite, respectful and non-argumentative. Thank God for those traits.

However, throughout the Gospels, Jesus invites us to a deeper level of relationship that delves into honest disagreement as an opportunity for greater intimacy rather than division.

Some of the people I loved best as a pastor and who taught me the most were those who had the gumption to disagree with me agreeably. I can name them and recall many a day when they came to me with a concern and I found myself having to admit they were right, or arguing against them with all my might.



Whatever the outcome, I knew we would walk out of the study as better friends than we entered. Those relationships were marked with some common threads: We did our disagreeing in private, we had a shared love for our church, we respected one another deeply, and we refused to talk about each other to others.

I am a far better minister because those men and women took Matthew 18 to heart and overcame their reluctance to speak hard words to me.

Another, more common barrier to our taking this habit to heart is that we have not cultivated our own emotional and spiritual health to the point that we are comfortable practicing Jesus' clear command. It takes significant ego strength to confront someone in a

healthy, non-anxious fashion.

Our culture seems to encourage indirect, malicious and mean-spirited conversation when we disagree with someone. Instead, the biblical call is to go to someone out of love, not anger, and to do so with an eye toward resolution.

Simply venting, or "getting things off your chest," is more about our self-centeredness than about building up the body of Christ. It takes thoughtful self-examination to expose the mixed motives and personal agendas that cloud our thinking. Often, our outrage is more about us than it is about the one who frustrates us.

Spiritual and personal maturity is a prerequisite to managing conflict in a healthy fashion. When it is not present in one party, the biblical mandate still exists, and requires us to work harder at containing and controlling our emotions.

Frustration, self-doubt and exasperation bubble up and gnaw at our spirit. Thankfully, Jesus encourages us to find others (Matt. 18:16) to help us in the midst of conflict.

Healthy churches will establish clear and well-communicated ways of dealing with conflict. Inviting the congregation into regular conversations about "pinch points," areas of frustration and unmet expectations help keep emotions at a civil level.

A personnel committee should have as one of its primary tasks to keep staff conflict on the radar and closely monitored. Dealing with conflict is an increasingly important practice of a healthy congregation.

Jesus had it right. Now we need to get back to the basics and follow his instructions. **BT**

—Bill Wilson is president of the Center for Healthy Churches.

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Editor's note: This is the first article in a series that highlights the Baptist principle of liberty of conscience. The series is supported by an endowment gift from the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society, whose mission is carried on through the pages of Baptists Today.

BAPTIST PROFILES IN CONSCIENCE

Tommy Douglas shaped Canada's commitments to social justice

In the summer of 1931, a Ph.D. student studying sociology at the University of Chicago encountered the depths of human hopelessness. Some 75,000 men were living in the city's Depression-era camps, barely staying alive.

Many had once been doctors, lawyers and bankers. This swelling sea of hollowed-out humanity stunned the young man studying societal problems. Seemingly everywhere were gaunt bodies and faces portraying a mixture of despair, fear and shame.

Only two years earlier the United States had been a land of prosperity. And now, as the observer would later recount of that summer in Chicago, there "were little soup kitchens run by the Salvation Army and the churches. In the first half-hour they'd be cleaned out. After that there was nothing... It was impossible to describe the hopelessness."

How could America allow this to happen? Why wasn't the government taking action to provide for the basic necessities of its neediest citizens? Had capitalism failed American society?

Some 71 years later the student who spent that summer among Chicago's hopeless masses was chosen by the citizens of America's northern neighbor as "the greatest Canadian of all time."

Thomas Clement "Tommy" Douglas was his name, and he was a Baptist minister.

BEGINNINGS

Canadians often scoff at how little Americans know of their northern neighbor. Few Americans know, for example, that Canada became a nation on July 1, 1867, at which time the Dominion of Canada officially became a self-governing entity within the British Empire.

The timing of Canada's independence impacted the nation's early identity. While the



United States was focused on national rebuilding following the recent conclusion of the American Civil War, the winds of economic change were sweeping throughout the Western world.

In 1867 German philosopher and economist Karl Marx, for two decades a prominent proponent of socialist theories, published *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, a significant volume that offered a stark rejoinder to Adam Smith's influential 1776 capitalistic tome, *The Wealth of Nations*.

Smith, a Scottish philosopher and economist and the father of modern economics, had established the classical definition of capitalism as regulated free markets buttressed by progressive taxation and government-funded public education and designed to combat wealth inequality.

An advocate of living wages for the working masses, Smith pointed out that nations collapse when too much wealth is accumulated in the hands of too few, a problem that capitalism in the ascendant industrial age could prevent.

Marx, however, disagreed. Declaring Smith to be too idealistic, he insisted that industrialization would create a greedy plutocracy that would impoverish workers. For Marx, Smith's goal of a prosperous working class could only be realized if the people at large, rather than a small group of elites, controlled the means of wealth creation.

As if to add weight to the economic debate, the new nation of Canada promptly, in the name of capitalism, blazed a path to the far right of Smith, in the process enacting Marx's nightmare scenario. From its inception into the early 20th century, Canada's government was dominated by elitist capitalist parties that gave industry free reign, enlarged the wealth gap between the poor and the rich, and provided little to no social services to the people or protections for workers.

In the midst of this storyline of corporatist-controlled Canada, Tommy Douglas was born into a working class family in 1904 in Falkirk, Scotland, some 20 miles from the birthplace of the economist Adam Smith.

In 1910 the Douglas family migrated to Canada, seeking work. Settling in Winnipeg, the family lived modestly.

In the months prior to the move to Canada, little Tommy had injured his knee and, when the leg became infected, underwent several operations in Scotland that seemingly alleviated the problem. Soon, however, the infection returned.

Too poor to afford an operation in Canada, Tommy's parents were resigned to their son having his leg amputated. Fortunately, a kind surgeon intervened and agreed to perform the operation for free, saving the young boy's leg. The experience would influence Douglas' view of the world for the rest of his life.

At 14, Tommy became a Baptist, a faith group that in Canada identified with common people. At about the same time, having already

experienced Canada's gaping class inequality, Tommy witnessed the even harsher realities of corporatist Canada.

BAPTIST EDUCATION

While labor unions were legal in Canada, employers were free to ignore the unions and to fire anyone at any time for any reason. In addition, corporations were allowed to ask the government to send military troops to quell worker strikes, a request the government was ready and willing to fulfill.

It was not unusual for military and police forces to maim and even kill strikers in order to put down labor disturbances.

In 1919 massive unemployment and soaring inflation led to what became known as the Winnipeg General Strike. Some 30,000 private and public-sector workers left their jobs simultaneously, crippling the city.

Winnipeg's business owners, bankers, and politicians quickly condemned the strike and invited the government to intervene. On what became known as Bloody Saturday, government police forces charged into a crowd of strikers.

Thirty strikers were injured. And from a rooftop on Winnipeg's Main Street, Tommy watched the Royal Canadian Mounted Police shoot and kill a worker.

While the memory of that day was forever etched in his mind, the teenager went on with life. Now healthy, he became a successful amateur boxer. He also apprenticed as a printer, earning his journeyman papers.

Douglas' growing Christian convictions, however, led him to return to school to pursue a career in ministry. He enrolled at Brandon College, a Baptist school affiliated with McMaster University, where he finished high school and studied theology and sociology.

An exemplary student, he became a champion debater, wrote for the school newspaper and became president of the student body. And during his six years at Brandon he studied under professors who advocated the Social Gospel.

From his professors Douglas learned of a Christianity that was concerned both with social justice and individual salvation. Earning his way through college by preaching in rural congregations, Douglas' sermons were often focused on social reform and helping the poor, about "building a society and building institutions that would uplift mankind."

A gifted speaker, the collegian also earned money by speaking at church suppers and service club meetings.

Completing his degree from Brandon in 1930, Douglas then enrolled at McMaster

University, where he earned a master's degree in sociology in 1933. While enrolled in McMaster, Douglas spent the summer of 1931 studying at the University of Chicago, also a Baptist school.

There he encountered the Depression-era hobo camps. Deeply disturbed by the American government's inability to prevent such dire poverty, Douglas also criticized members of the Socialist Party who, waiting for a revolution, quoted Marx and Lenin while doing nothing to help the destitute.

Douglas' troubling summer of 1931 in Chicago was followed by ill news from home. In September, in the province of Saskatchewan, miners went on strike over low wages and poor working conditions. The RMCP opened fire on the strikers, killing three.

As were his experiences with unaffordable health care and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the Social Gospel and Chicago's hobo camps alongside the murder of yet more unemployed men in 1931 were transformative experiences for Douglas.

'HUMANITY FIRST'

While continuing his education Douglas married Irma Dempsey, his college sweetheart, and took the pastorate of the Calvary Baptist Church in rural Weyburn, Saskatchewan province.

Inspired by H.L. McNeill, president of Brandon, and J.S. Woodsworth, political and Christian socialist in Canada, Douglas turned to the biblical model of the Kingdom of God in order to formulate a Christian response to Depression-era hopelessness and violence.

Douglas spoke of the Kingdom of God as "righteousness and justice" for "every person in it."

"Every person in the kingdom has a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," Douglas came to believe. "In this kingdom we are members of one another, and the strong must help to carry the burdens of the weak."

In the agricultural province of Saskatchewan some two-thirds of families experienced impoverishment during the early Depression years. The extreme poverty experienced by his own parishioners and other residents of Weyburn led Douglas to start a local unemployment association, a club to provide food, clothing, friendship and hope.

With the encouragement of church members, Douglas — by now a polished and forceful speaker — became involved in local politics on behalf of the poor and impoverished, a trajectory that eventually led him to leave the pulpit in order to minister among the larger flock of the general public in Saskatchewan.



Poor mother and children during the Great Depression. Elm Grove, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, 1936. Photo by Dorothea Lange/Library of Congress

In a world where the capitalism of Adam Smith had been abandoned in favor of thinly-veiled plutocracy, Douglas by now viewed Christianity and 20th century capitalism as incompatible. Yet he also opposed communism.

Informed by his Christian conscience, Douglas helped form a new political party in Canada, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The founding convention of the party, of which Douglas played an important role, established as its platform universal pension, health and welfare insurance; unemployment insurance; a minimum wage; and farm security.

The platform was a vast departure from Canada's historical corporatist, unfettered free-market ideology. On the other hand, CCF principles were quite similar to those of Adam Smith, the seemingly forgotten father of capitalism.

Thus, while the CCF was roundly criticized by many, including Christians, as socialist or even communist, the "socialism" of Douglas and the CCF was supported by the democratic process of popular votes and had roots in both the economics of Adam Smith and the teachings of Jesus. The party's ethos was summarized in its slogan: "Humanity first."

'GREATEST CANADIAN'

Tommy Douglas' Christian conviction that all persons were deserving of basic human rights echoed the convictions of early Baptists Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, John Clarke and others. Political involvement was for the sake of advancing the welfare of all of humanity, rather than Christianizing government or society.

Successful in local and regional politics, Douglas in Canada's federal election of 1935

was voted into the House of Commons, part of Canada's Parliament, as a CCF representative. He served in the House for the next nine years, during which time he was also elected as the leader of the Saskatchewan CCF.

In the 1944 provincial election Douglas led the CCF to win 47 of 53 legislative seats, thus becoming the premier of Saskatchewan and the head of the first democratic socialist government in North America.

For the next 17 years, provincial voters retained Douglas as premier. In Saskatchewan, Douglas led in the creation of government-owned utility enterprises (cooperatives), public education, the unionization of public service and the implementation of free hospital care for all citizens. The Trade Union Act the CCF enacted, providing minimum wages and other worker protections, was called "the most progressive piece of legislation on the continent."

At the same time, however, Douglas advocated and fostered responsible private enterprise. To the astonishment of his critics, Saskatchewan, long viewed as a backwards province, prospered financially and soon became one of the fastest growing provinces in Canada.

In addition, under Douglas' leadership in 1947 the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights was passed, guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religion for all (reflecting early Baptist convictions as written into the 1663 Rhode Island Charter penned by John Clarke) and forbidding discrimination in employment, lodging and services, as well as enshrining many other fundamental human rights.

The Saskatchewan Bill of Rights preceded the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights by more than a year.

Douglas' most monumental contribution, however, was yet to come. By the time he retired as premier of Saskatchewan in 1961 in order to become the first leader of the newly-formed New Democratic Party, he had long worked to enact universal health care for all provincial citizens. In 1962 Saskatchewan adopted Douglas' Medicare plan. Four years later, Canada enacted nationwide Douglas' universal health care coverage. Of his singular achievement of universal health care, Tommy Douglas said:

I felt that no boy should have to depend either for his leg or his life upon the ability of his parents to raise enough money to bring a first-class surgeon to his bedside. And I think it was out of this experience, not at the moment consciously, but through the years, I came to believe that health services ought not to have a price tag on them, and that people should be able to get whatever health services they require irrespective of their individual capacity to pay.... Improving people's economic condition is not an end in itself; it's a means to an end.... I never thought a man could save his soul if his belly was empty or that he could think about things like beauty and goodness if he had a toothache....

Douglas remained in political service to his country until 1979. During his many years of public service he refused to enrich himself as did so many other politicians. Instead, he often went into personal debt in order to finance his campaigns and political travels. In retirement Douglas lived modestly, passing away in 1986.

Douglas' political convictions, informed and inspired by his Baptist faith and conscience, transformed Canada by lifting up the working masses and providing hope to all the nation's citizens. In 2004 Douglas was voted by Canadians as "the greatest Canadian of all time" for his role as the father of Canada's health care system.

While he is little known outside of his own nation, one could reasonably argue that Canadian Tommy Douglas was the most influential Baptist of the 20th century, perhaps alongside Martin Luther King Jr. Few Baptists, after all, have altered the trajectory of an entire nation by living out their faith convictions. **BT**

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society and online editor/contributing writer for Baptists Today.



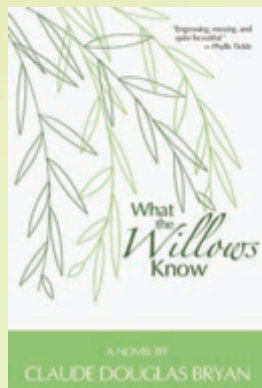
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Claude Douglas Bryan

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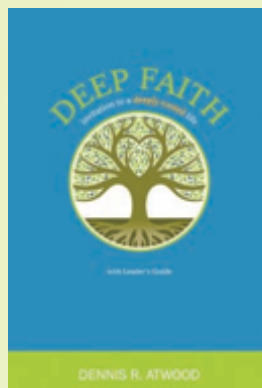


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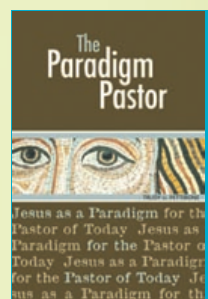


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By Brian Howell, SIGHTINGS

'I survived a short-term mission trip'

This past summer, as I waited for my plane in Tegucigalpa, I browsed one of the airport's many gift shops looking for something for my 14-year-old son and found, among the soccer jerseys and dried toads, a bright orange T-shirt emblazoned with a colorful bus and the black lettering: "I Survived a Short Term Mission Trip to Honduras!"

Waves of short-term missionaries will head out again during spring break. And, with summer, we'll again enter Short Term Mission (STM) season.

Combining adventure tourism with Christian charity, STMs have exploded in popularity in the past 20 years. Conservative estimates put the number of U.S. participants at 1.6 million per year.

These trips of service and evangelism range from domestic stints that may last only a few days to international voyages that last weeks or months. They provide members of every denomination significant encounters with new contexts, unfamiliar cultures and poverty.

As an anthropologist and a Christian, I have a conflicted relationship with STMs. I find them both fascinating and a bit repulsive.

These trips often take relatively naive U.S. Americans into vulnerable communities around the world. While the neo-colonial dynamics are inescapable, the host communities are savvy and the encounter is complex.

I have studied these trips, and it is clear that STM groups have served as links to powerful communities (creating "bridging capital") and provided important resources to under-resourced places. STM travelers attest that the trips are "life changing."

The changes may not always be expected (or desired) changes, but there's no doubt that these encounters cause some visitors to redirect their lives toward service and social justice.

A larger question is, "What does the popularity of these trips suggest about U.S. Christianity generally?" Is there something greater to the importance of these travels in the

lives of 21st-century Christians?

Scholars of tourism have long argued that tourism is a kind of secular ritual where alienated moderns create liminal spaces in which to experience authenticity and *communitas*.

Structuring tourist spaces as "sights," and tourist performances as "not home," vacationers use tourism to escape temporarily the anomie of contemporary life by indulging in hedonism and rituals of renewal.

STMers are well aware of the overlap with tourism, and, in many cases, work very hard to distance themselves from the identity of "tourist." The most withering critique of these trips is that they're "just Christian tourism."

Yet STM travelers employ much of the same language of seeking something "authentic," and of being renewed by their travels that scholars of tourism note as central to tourist narratives.

The difference is that STM travelers seek authentic *spiritual* experiences, rather than "the real Costa Rica" or "authentic Italy." The STMer finds "true faith" and people who "really know how to rely on God" among the poor.

Contemporary life, cluttered with technology, squeezed by competing demands, and oppressed by pressures to succeed, appears virtually un-Christian when compared with the (seeming) simplicity of the life of the poor.

Like retreats, camps and neo-monastic practices, STMs offer the fragmented Christian self a chance to re-imagine a more authentic and purer faith.

This is not to say that STM visitors exclusively or explicitly romanticize poverty. But even when they hear stories of suffering and exploitation and they express compassion and

righteous anger, participants in STM teams often fail to connect the poverty they witness to colonial history, the globalizing economy and institutional problems.

Too often, the take-away is that we, who enjoy relative wealth, have an obligation to help, but that there isn't really much we can do. The poor serve as a kind of shrine and the trip as a pilgrimage.

The solutions, if there are any, are internal to the country. The only difference we can make, as concerned outsiders, is to sign up for more trips and to build more houses.

Of course, there *are* models of STM that explicitly address the causes of poverty and the ways rich countries are both implicated and responsible. Christians themselves are some of the toughest faultfinders of STM, and they have in some cases sought to address these cultural dynamics in creative and effective ways.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the symbolic nature of the encounter in STM is fraught with overlapping meanings often unexamined by those planning and participating in these trips, some of which work against the intended goals.

As Christians everywhere gear up for the next STM season, we would do well to consider how we might make these travels an opportunity to thrive for all who participate on both sides of the trip, and not simply an encounter to survive. **BT**

—Brian Howell, professor of anthropology at Wheaton College in Illinois, is author of *Christianity in the Local Context: Southern Baptists in the Philippines (2008)* and *Short Term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience (2012)*, and co-author of *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective (2011)*. This Sightings column is distributed by the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School (divinity.uchicago.edu).

Scholars of tourism have long argued that tourism is a kind of secular ritual where alienated moderns create liminal spaces in which to experience authenticity and *communitas*.



Rana Sodhi, brother of Baldir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man who was shot and killed on Sept. 15, 2001, speaks at a news conference of the National Sikh Campaign at the National Press Club in Washington in January. Behind him, left to right, are Rachel Laser of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Leslie Copeland-Tune of Grace and Race Ministries, and Rajwant Singh of the National Sikh Campaign. RNS photo.

Turban confusion: Americans clueless about Sikhs

WASHINGTON — Most Americans know little or nothing about Sikhs and many mistake the turban-wearing faithful for Muslims, a new survey shows.

The survey, commissioned by a nonprofit seeking to build positive images of U.S. Sikhism, found that 60 percent of non-Asian-Americans said they had no knowledge of Sikhs (pronounced “siks”). Eleven percent said they were close friends with a Sikh person, and 31 percent said they had never interacted with a Sikh.

“We want to make sure that we pave a way for a conducive environment for our future generations so they don’t have to take off their turban to hide or to feel sorry for their identity,” said Rajwant Singh, a co-founder of the National Sikh Campaign, at a news conference at the National Press Club.

When researchers at Hart Research Associates showed images of Sikhs to people taking an online survey, more respondents said they were looking at Muslims than Sikhs. No one identified a woman shown without a turban as a Sikh.

Jaswant Sachdev of Phoenix, Ariz., recalled how he used to be called “ayatollah” before 9/11, and was compared to Osama bin Laden after it.

“It is always the turban which causes suspicious fear in the person who has seen me for the first time,” he said, adding that people grew more comfortable with him after he talked to

them and “they perceive that you are a human being like anybody else.”

The Washington-based campaign hopes to use the survey results to aid Sikhs in dispelling misperceptions about their monotheistic faith and reducing violence against its members. It recommends that Sikh gurdwaras, or houses of worship, and other organizations emphasize the faith’s focus on equality and explain the turban as an expression of their faith and values.

It has been difficult for Sikhs to communicate those values.

“We hold incredibly progressive values,” said Gurwin Singh Ahuja, another co-founder of the National Sikh Campaign. “Sikhs believe that men and women are equal, that all faiths should have the right to practice, and we have to do a better job of communicating those things.”

Researchers found that when survey respondents were given information about Sikh history and beliefs, their impressions grew from “neutral” to “warm.” Groups with the most significant change in views included Republicans, Hispanics and Americans ages 65 and older.

“When people learn this information, it creates a fundamental change in the way they think about Sikhs and it’s transformative,” said Geoff Garin, president of Washington-based Hart Research Associates, whose survey was conducted in August and September 2014.

Sikhism, which developed in North India five centuries ago, is the fifth-largest faith in the U.S., where Sikhs have lived for more than 100 years. Its key tenets include devotion to God, truthful living and service to others.

Earlier studies have documented mistreatment of Sikhs, including that half of Sikh students are bullied in school. A shooting at an Oak Creek, Wis., temple in 2012 that killed six was one of the deadliest acts of violence against a faith community in the U.S. since the 1963 church bombing in Birmingham, Ala.

Crimes against Sikhs have increased since 9/11.

Joshua DuBois, former faith outreach adviser to President Obama, joined other Christian and Jewish leaders at the announcement of the campaign and recalled traveling to Oak Creek with first lady Michelle Obama.

“Sikhs are beautiful threads in the tapestry of this country,” said DuBois, the founder and CEO of Values Partnerships, citing their contributions to the U.S. military, the medical community and youth service projects.

“I’ve seen what happens when we don’t know the Sikh story,” he added. “I’ve seen firsthand what happens when ignorance and bigotry reigns. But a new day is dawning in America because we’re finally getting to know our Sikh brothers and sisters.” **BT**

By Jocelyn McClurg, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Pure malarkey

Teen admits his book about going to heaven was fiction

A Christian publisher has stopped selling *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* now that the young subject paralyzed in a car crash says the story of going to heaven is not true.

Tyndale House told both NPR and *The Washington Post* that it has withdrawn the best-selling 2010 book by Alex Malarkey and his father, Kevin Malarkey.

The publisher made the decision after Alex wrote an “open letter” to the retailer LifeWay that said, “I did not die. I did not go to Heaven.” It was posted on the Pulpit and Pen website.

The Malarkey book is one of a spate of bestsellers about and by those who say they

have gone to heaven and returned. The best known is *Heaven is for Real* by Todd Burpo, a No. 1 *USA Today* bestseller that was turned into a movie.

The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven peaked at No. 46 on *USA Today's* list.

According to the publisher's description of the book, “in 2004, Kevin Malarkey and his 6-year-old son, Alex, suffered an horrific car accident. The impact from the crash paralyzed Alex — and medically speaking, it was unlikely that he could survive.

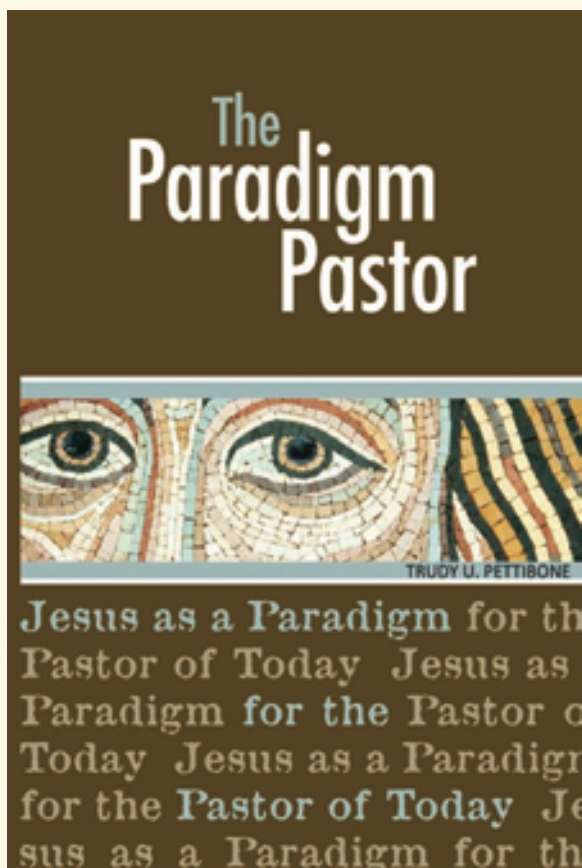
“I think Alex has gone to be with Jesus,” a friend told the stricken dad. But two months later, Alex awoke from a coma with

an incredible story to share ... of events at the accident scene and in the hospital while he was unconscious, of the angels that took him through the gates of heaven itself.”

But in his open letter, Alex wrote: “I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible.”

He also said: “Please forgive the brevity (of the letter), but because of my (medical) limitations I have to keep this short.” **BT**

“I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention.
When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible.”



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Tasting God's goodness

The first prayer many of us offered was a prelude to mealtime:

*God is great. God is good.
Let us thank God for our food.*

Some of us progressed to:

*Thank you for the world so sweet.
Thank you for the food we eat.
Thank you for the birds that sing.
Thank you God for everything.*

One grown-up version is:

*Bless the food upon the dishes
as you blessed the loaves and fishes.
As the sugar hides in the tea,
let me hide myself in Thee.*

If you had an older brother, you may have learned this grace for breakfast:

*Oh, dear God, with a kindly twist,
send down biscuits as big as your fist.*

This prayer sounds like one your favorite aunt might recite:

*We humbly ask thy blessing
on the turkey and the dressing,
on the yams and cranberry jelly,
and on the pickles from the deli.
Bless the apple pie and tea.
Bless each and every calorie.
Let us enjoy this big old dinner,
tomorrow we can all get thinner.*

Many people do not pray for food with the same gusto that they used to, because food now seems like the enemy. According to one study, 31 percent of Americans are “obese” while another 34 percent are labeled “fat.” The remaining 35 percent are categorized as “feeling superior.”

Supersizing was a big move outward. You order a cheeseburger value meal for \$4.74. Your server asks, “Would you like to biggie-size it for only \$5.47?”

The chain gets an extra 73 cents and you get an extra 400 calories, but you do not enjoy them. The sheer size of what we have lessens our appreciation. We have learned to think that bathtub-sized drinks and Chris Christie-sized portions are normal.

So then we try the latest diet: Atkins diet, Body for Life diet, cabbage soup diet, fruitarian diet, gluten-free diet, grapefruit diet, lacto-vegetarian diet, macrobiotic diet, Mediterranean diet, raw food diet, South Beach diet, taste-free diet, vegan diet, or the rotation diet — which took two of the longest months of my life.

We forget that food is central to faith. The Old Testament is filled with dietary laws, cooking instructions, and Rachael Ray-like details on how to share a good meal. The primary image of the kingdom of God is the royal feast. Isaiah describes the coming messianic banquet: “God will prepare a lavish dinner for all peoples, a feast of rich food, a banquet of aged wine.”

Jesus ate his way across Israel — accepting one dinner invitation after another, eating with the religious people and the not-religious-at-all people. He described the blessing of the kingdom as “sitting at his table.” The Pharisees responded by calling Jesus a “glutton and a drunkard,” but Jesus said that the kingdom of God is a feast.

Many of us learned to eat in church. The food at Baptist potlucks is comfort food — green bean casseroles with fried onion rings on top, macaroni salad (a wonderful oxymoron), and chocolate cakes with names like Mississippi mud and Coca-Cola cake that cannot be found in restaurants. We were down-home folks, so the only sauces allowed were gravy and ketchup. A few young Baptists mistook a love for fried chicken for a call to the ministry.

The menu for the heavenly banquet looks different in different churches. Catholics still eat fish on Friday. Greek Orthodox churches are famous for baklava. Latter-Day Saints eat funeral potatoes — hash browns mixed with mushroom soup — which does not explain why their congregations are getting larger.

Our lives are more sacred when we recognize that our food is sacred. Starting your day with a spinach omelet makes it a different day than if you begin with a Nutri-Grain candy bar on the way to work. A sandwich at your desk is less holy than lunch with a cherished friend. Sitting down for dinner with your family is more Christian than a frozen pizza scarfed down in five minutes. Eating reminds us of God's good gifts.

In the goodness of food we see the goodness of God. We need to enjoy our food more, even if some of us need to eat less of it. We should diet when we have to, and as strenuously as we should, but when we get that exercise out of the way, we should eat joyfully.

The world belongs to those with tongues to taste it. Savor the good food God has given. Give what you eat your full attention. Be grateful for the life it brings. Eat slowly and taste the goodness of God. **BT**

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





The Hargrove family plays a game during their game night. Photo courtesy of Linda Hargrove /RNS

Profoundly personal

How adoption has forced evangelicals to grapple with race relations

Before she and her husband adopted a son and daughter from Ethiopia, popular evangelical blogger Jen Hatmaker said she had a different view about race in America.

“A couple years ago, I would’ve said we’re moving to a post-racial society because I was so under-exposed to people of color and the issues they deal with on a daily basis,” said the white Christian author, whose home renovation to make space for their growing family of seven was featured on HGTV.

As evangelicals have turned their attention toward adoption in the past decade, families like the Hatmakers are grappling with race relations in a profoundly personal way, especially as national news spotlights racial

tension in New York City, Ferguson, Mo., and elsewhere.

And evangelicals aren’t alone: A new Gallup poll found that 13 percent of Americans believe racism is the country’s most important problem, the highest figure since the 1992 verdict in the Rodney King case sparked riots in Los Angeles.

And, as Gallup noted: “After barely registering with Americans as the top problem for two decades, race relations now matches the economy in Americans’ mentions of the country’s top problem, and is just slightly behind government (15 percent).”

That same Gallup poll also found that nonwhites are more than twice as likely as whites to call race relations or racism the country’s most important problem.

As the Hatmakers’ son Ben, 11, creeps closer to the ages of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown — unarmed black teenagers

whose deaths have put race into a national conversation — the family talks about race more frequently. Her son learned about America’s racial history in public school during Black History Month in February.

“Every time we talk about it, there are tears, there’s confusion,” said Hatmaker, who said her son lives in a “no man’s land” because he’s black but not necessarily African-American. “He didn’t understand he was coming into a culture with a racial bias.”

As the wife of a pastor, Hatmaker said her Austin, Texas, church of about 600 people is filled with an estimated two or three dozen adoptive families, including many who have adopted interracially. She and a number of female evangelical leaders and Bible teachers who have adopted interracially, like fellow Austin-based author Jennie Allen, are mulling ways to use their influence to discuss race.

“We have to do the humble hard work of

“A couple years ago, I would’ve said we’re moving to a post-racial society because I was so under-exposed to people of color and the issues they deal with on a daily basis.”

listening,” Hatmaker said. “We serve a God of justice and equality, and I’m anxious to see the transformation he’s prepared for us in our culture right now.”

Perhaps more than most religious groups, white evangelicals have a complicated history with race: The Southern Baptist Convention was born with a defense of slavery, and many southern Christians upheld Jim Crow laws.

Even as more recent generations of evangelicals began to oppose racism, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith’s 2001 book, *Divided by Faith*, found that most white evangelicals see no systematic discrimination against blacks.

Kathryn Joyce, author of *The Child Catchers*, who has raised questions about evangelical adoptions, has been surprised by the number of conversations about race on adoption forums.

“Self-critique is happening with a lot of conversations focusing on big issues like racial justice, social justice, class, privilege,” Joyce said, saying she first heard about Martin’s 2012 death on an evangelical adoption forum.

“These parents, mostly moms, were thinking about race early on because they had this personal connection.”

To be sure, Christians have cared for orphans for centuries, but the most recent wave of interest came alongside the focus on the global HIV/AIDS crisis, a shrinking world with the increase of technology and well-known Christians becoming adoptive parents, such as musician Steven Curtis Chapman and retired mega-church pastor John Piper.

Piper, a white pastor who grew up in the segregated South and has spoken on his own history of racism, now has an adopted daughter who is black.

“Nothing binds a pastor’s heart to diversity more than having it in his home,” Piper wrote in his 2011 book, *Bloodlines*.

In any given week, especially when there’s a flashpoint in the culture, Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore says he now hears from white evangelical parents of black children who

have concerns about race.

“If anything, adoption exposes evangelicals’ weaknesses as well as strengths,” said Moore, who is white and adopted two white children from Russia. “In any given month, I’m dealing with a couple adopting a child of another race dealing with relatives who object, sometimes in nakedly racist terms.”

Adoption has forced evangelicals to reconsider all manner of issues, from poverty to race to health and international relations, Moore said.

“I’ve seen predominantly white churches that have become more intentional about reaching out to African-American communities because now the ethnic barrier has been broken within the church,” said Moore, who is president of the Southern Baptists’ Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

“People who previously assumed that racial prejudice was back in the Jim Crow era are awakened by it with their own kids.”

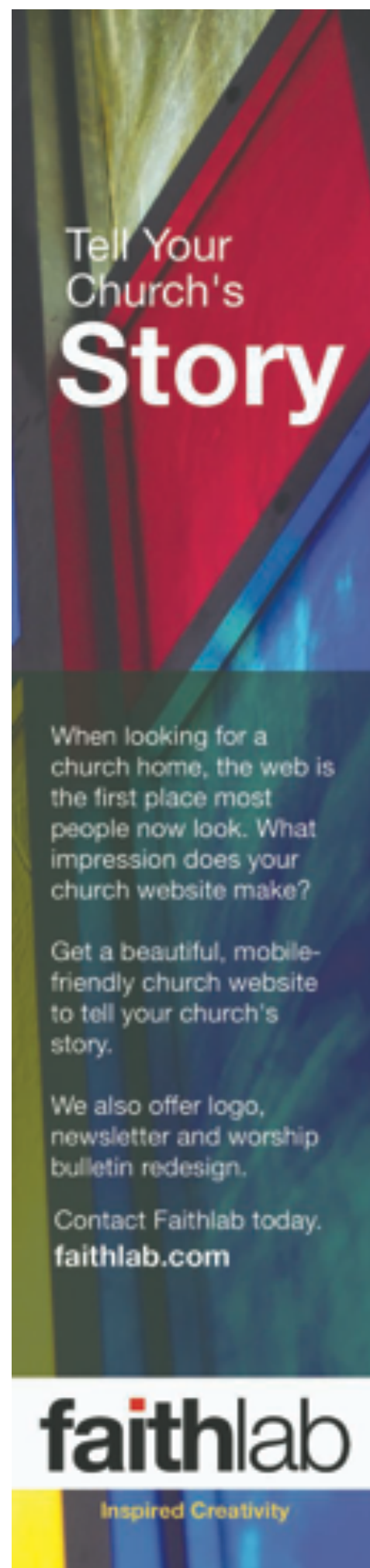
Interracial adoption can be fraught with unseen road bumps, as some white parents find themselves navigating cultural differences.

Linda Hargrove, a black mother of three black adoptive children who lives in North Carolina, said she encourages her white friends who adopt to go the extra step with their children, like helping their black daughters do their hair with up-to-date styles.

“It gets me when anyone says love is colorblind,” Hargrove said. “You want to be able to help them to do well in life, to be aware that some people might treat you differently.”

The colorblind mentality can be prevalent in evangelical churches, said Jaeran Kim, who was adopted into a white evangelical family and is researching evangelical adoption while working on her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota.

“There’s a difference between celebrating diversity and understanding racism,” said Kim, who is Korean-American. “While I’ve seen movement toward celebrating diversity, I think we have a long way to go when it comes to racism.” **BT**



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Something beyond idealism

By John Pierce

Recently, when reporting on the Islamic State's continuous barbarism, CNN's Wolf Blitzer discussed claims that an American hostage had been killed in Jordanian airstrikes.

The conversations were primarily, and appropriately, about the likelihood this information was propaganda — an attempt to drive a wedge between Jordan and the U.S.

However, I was struck by Blitzer's repeated references to the "idealism" of 26-year-old Kayla Mueller (whom the network named only recently). The Arizona native was captured in August 2013 while leaving a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders. (Sadly, later it was learned that the young woman was indeed dead.)

There is no level low enough for these militants who show complete disregard for humanity. Even one seeking to help others is considered a political target.

Indeed it takes some idealism to go to Syria to help alleviate the deep suffering of throngs of refugees. But it seems that something much more motivated this bright, young



woman: serious faith.

Is it idealistic to give oneself in sacrificial service to others? If so, Jesus was the most idealistic person to ever live.

Perhaps this young woman just read or heard the words of Jesus and (unlike most of us who claim to follow Jesus) decided to actually heed them.

Tagging her as idealistic is a dismissive way of saying, "She shouldn't have gone there."

However, Jesus' repeated calls to faith,

commitment, altruism, self-sacrifice and risky service say something else.

I wouldn't go to such a place at such a time, nor would I consent to that experience for those I love most deeply. Not because I dismiss such perspectives and actions as idealistic, but because my faith is not that deep and strong.

Putting oneself at risk for the sake of others is surely more than idealism. It is the way of Christ. **BT**

Old stuff making current news

By Tony W. Cartledge

Those who care about archaeology might be interested in a few tidbits about old stuff in the current news.

First, the Islamic extremists behind the ISIS movement continue to demonstrate their inhumanity. Not only do they indiscriminately murder and maim current residents of the land they're overrunning, but they also have taken to destroying priceless and irreplaceable artifacts of human heritage.

Iraq News has reported that ISIS militants have blown up large parts of the ancient wall of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian kingdom — modern-day Mosul.

Such behavior has no justification. The fact that anyone would participate in such atrocities is a sad commentary on the dangers

of using religion as a front for radical evil.

Second, and on a lighter note, French Assyriologist-cum-gourmet cook Jean Bottero recently translated three cuneiform tablets from Yale University's Babylonian Collection, and billed them as the world's oldest cookbooks.

The recipes contained on the tablets reveal that the ancient Mesopotamians were wild about onions of every variety. That's not too surprising, for onions continue to be the world's most commonly produced food crop according to *BBC Magazine*, which says 175 different countries produce onions — twice as many as produce wheat.

The top onion-eating nations are Libya, Albania, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where the average person eats about 34 kg (that's 75 pounds) of onions per year. That's more than three times the amount eaten in America

or Britain.

Third, researchers at Anglia-Ruskin University in Cambridge, England, report that they have found evidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among Assyrian soldiers as early as 1300 BCE.

Analyzing translations of Assyrian cuneiform texts ranging from 1300-609 BCE, the researchers found instances of soldiers being visited by "ghosts they faced in battle." That could fit with symptoms of what is now called PTSD.

Previously, the earliest reference to something like PTSD was from the Greek historian Herodotus, who described a case in which a soldier named Epizelus went blind during the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, "though nothing had touched him."

If only such symptoms would strike those misguided fighters who do the bidding of the would-be caliph of ISIS, and turn them against each other. **BT**



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Science vs. religion

Meet the “Post-Seculars” — the one in five Americans who seem to have gone unnoticed before in endless rounds of debates pitting science vs. religion.

They’re more strongly religious than most “Traditionals” (43 percent of Americans), and more scientifically knowledgeable than “Moderns” (36 percent) who stand on science alone, according to two sociologists’ findings in a new study.

“We were surprised to find this pretty big group (21 percent) who are pretty knowledgeable and appreciative about science and technology but who are also very religious and who reject certain scientific theories,” said Timothy O’Brien, co-author of the research study, released in the *American Sociological Review*.

Put another way, there’s a sizable chunk of Americans out there who are both religious and scientifically minded but who break with both packs when faith and science collide.

Post-Seculars pick and choose among science and religion views to create their own “personally compelling way of understanding the world,” said O’Brien, assistant professor at the University of Evansville in Indiana.

O’Brien and co-author Shiri Noy, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wyoming, examined responses from 2,901 people to 18 questions on knowledge of and attitudes toward science and four religion-related questions in the General Social Surveys conducted in 2006, 2008 and 2010.

Many findings fit the usual way the science-religion divide is viewed:

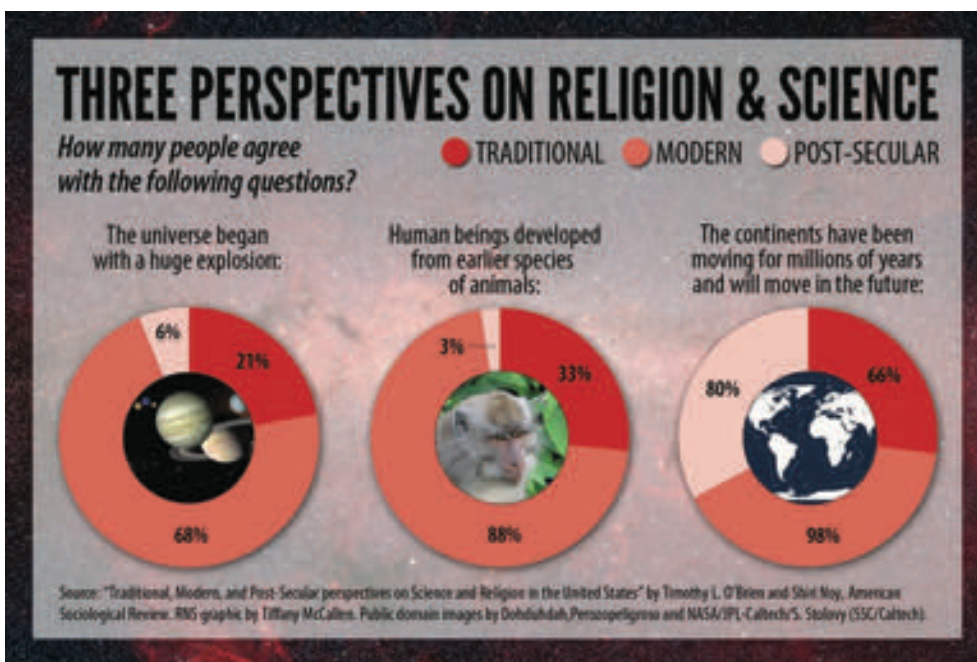
Moderns, who stand on reason, scored high on scientific knowledge and scored lowest on religion questions regarding biblical authority and the strength of their religious ties.

Traditionals, who lean toward religion, scored lower on science facts and were least likely to agree that “the benefits of scientific research outweigh the harmful results.”

However, the data turned up a third perspective — people who defied the familiar breakdown. The authors dubbed them “Post-Secular” to jump past a popular theory that Americans are moving away from religion to become more secular, O’Brien said.

Post-Seculars — about half of whom

Researchers find there is more of a three-way split



Religion News Service graphic by Tiffany McCallen

identify as conservative Protestants — know facts such as how lasers work, what antibiotics do and the way genetics affects inherited illnesses.

But when it comes to three main areas where science and Christian-centric religious views conflict — on human evolution, the Big Bang origin of the universe and the age of the Earth — Post-Seculars break away from the pack with significantly different views from Traditionals and Moderns.

Areas where the factions are clear:

The universe began with a huge explosion:

- Traditional: 21 percent
- Modern: 68 percent
- Post Secular: 6 percent

Human beings developed from earlier species of animals:

- Traditional: 33 percent
- Modern: 88 percent
- Post-Secular: 3 percent

The continents have been moving for millions of years and will move in the future:

- Traditional: 66 percent
- Modern: 98 percent
- Post-Secular: 80 percent

“Post-Seculars are smart. They know what scientists think. They just don’t agree on some key issues, and that has impact on their political views,” said O’Brien.

When the authors looked at views on the authority of the Bible and how strongly people said they were affiliated with their religion, Post-Seculars put the most faith in Scripture and were much more inclined to say they were strongly religious. And where science and faith conflict on hot-button issues, they side with the religious perspective.

For example, Moderns are the most supportive of embryonic stem cell research and abortion rights for women, but Post-Seculars, who are nonetheless largely positive about science and society, are more skeptical in both areas, O’Brien said.

Candidates running in the 2016 elections might take note. Where people fall in these three groups can predict their attitudes on political issues where science and religion both have claims, O’Brien said, even after accounting for the usual suspects — social class, political ideology or church attendance. **BT**



Photo courtesy of RNS

Leaving New York *American Bible Society heads to Philadelphia*

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

After almost two centuries in New York City, the nonprofit American Bible Society is moving its headquarters to Philadelphia.

“New York has become so extraordinarily expensive that nonprofit staff cannot afford to live in proximity to headquarters,” said Roy Peterson, the society’s president and CEO. “We don’t have a cohesive, synergistic global headquarters staff right now. And that’s why we wanted to find a city that was diverse, rich with culture and churches and language, but yet affordable.”

The headquarters in Philadelphia, a block from the Liberty Bell, will open around June. It will be housed on the eighth and ninth floors of a building shared with Wells Fargo & Co. under a 25-year leasing agreement that can be renewed for another 25. The Bible society also has proposed a ground-level “Bible Discovery Center.”

A small staff and the Museum of Biblical Art, which is independent but affiliated with the ABS, will remain in New York.

ABS leaders realized they were sitting on a valuable asset in midtown Manhattan. The 12-story building on Broadway is for sale and is estimated to be worth about \$300 million.

The society, which supports Bible reading and seeks to have the sacred text translated into all the world’s languages, expects a staff of more than 200 will occupy the Philadelphia building within two years. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter said the city is “honored to welcome American Bible Society to its new home.” **BT**



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Registration details to follow.

