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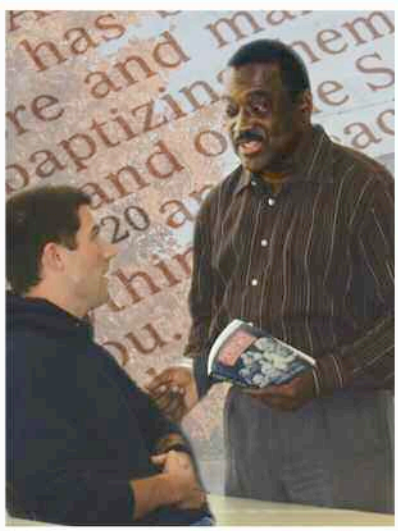


A conversation
with **Brian
McLaren**

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Street Question

'Are Baptists Calvinists or not?'

By Doug Weaver

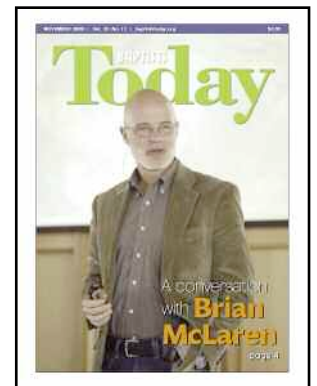



Photo by Tony W. Cartledge. Postmodernism attempts to transcend and include conservative and liberal elements, says author-speaker Brian McLaren.

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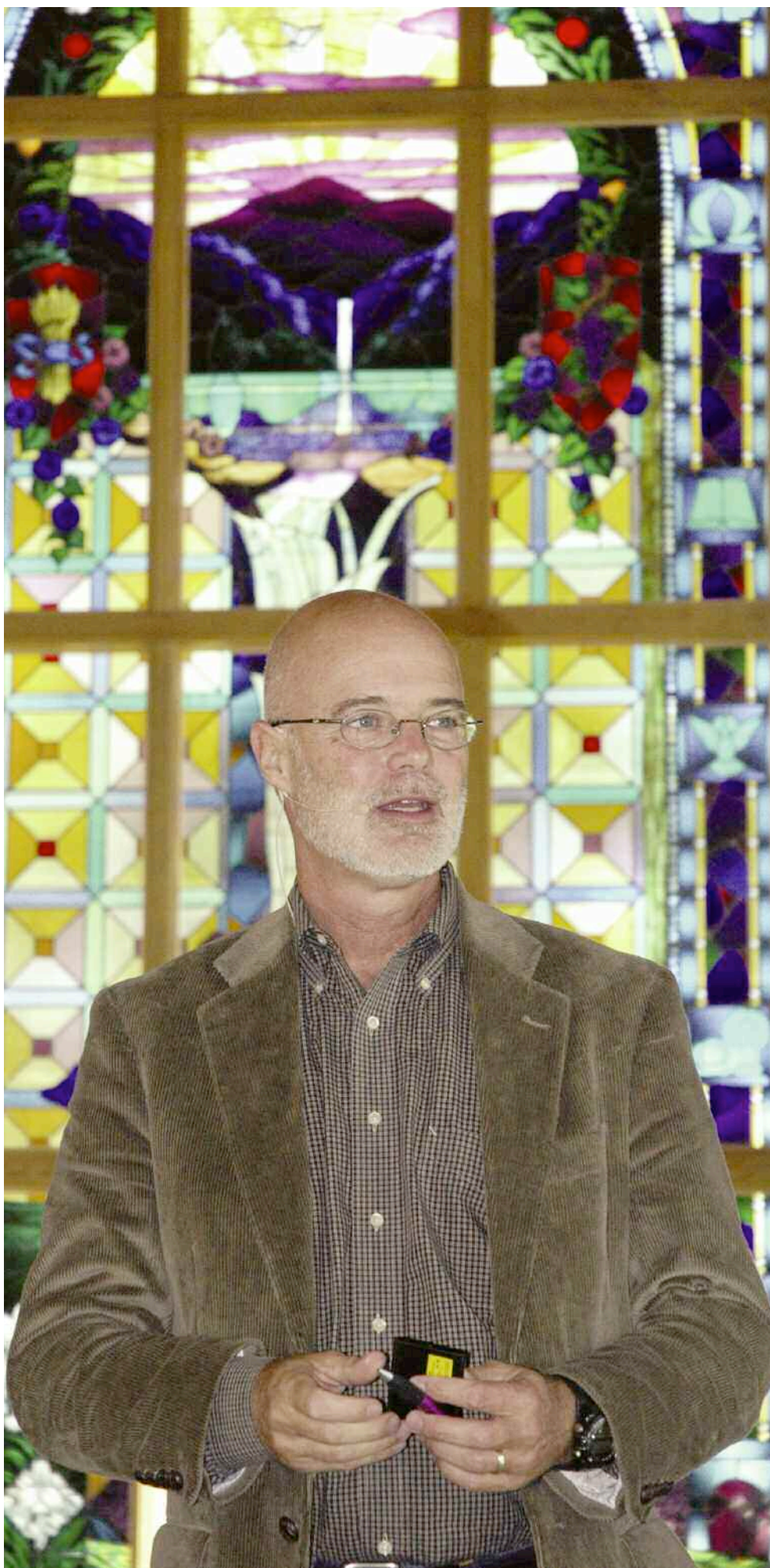
Special feature

An Advent devotional guide

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isaiah 12:3)



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A conversation WITH Brian McLaren

Few students and practitioners of contemporary Christianity have garnered more admiration — or criticism — than Brian McLaren, a former English professor who left academia in 1986 to found Cedar Ridge Community Church, near Washington, D.C., and to pursue the question of what it means to live as an authentic Christian in a postmodern world.

A gifted communicator, McLaren ultimately left the pastorate to devote full time to helping other church leaders understand both the realities and the challenges of a culture in transition from the “modern” period of rational thinking and institutional loyalty to a “post-modern” age that puts more trust in personal experience and individual empowerment.

McLaren is the author of more than a dozen books and maintains a regular connection with readers through his blog at www.brianmclaren.net. He has served in leadership roles with Christian networks including Emergent Village, Sojourners and International Teams, a missions organization. In 2005 he was recognized by *Time* magazine as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America.

McLaren frequently lectures and writes on topics as diverse as postmodernism, evangelism, social justice, ecology and church planting. During a visit to the Campbell University Divinity School, where he presented the L.B. and Mabel Griffin Reavis Lectures on church leadership, outreach and development, McLaren took time for a conversation with contributing editor Tony Cartledge, who is also a professor in Campbell’s divinity school.

BT: Brian, I know you have many interests. What are you most passionate about these days?

BM: I'm especially excited about this book I just edited [with Elisa Padilla and Ashley Bunting Seeber] called *The Justice Project*. We got over 30 writers from around the world, most of them completely unknown, but people who are doing some very wonderful things in very difficult circumstances — we got them to write about different dimensions of the biblical call to social justice. That's a great, great project.

BT: What's the focus of your next book?

BM: My next major book will be out in February. I'm very excited about that. It's called *A New Kind of Christianity: 10 Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*. What's been kind of fun is that since I finished the first draft, almost everywhere I go, when I do Q&A sessions, people are asking the questions in the book. So I feel like, OK, these really are the right ones.

BT: I know you speak well of the *Poverty and Justice Bible*. Were you involved in its development?

BM: No, but I am so enthusiastic about it. You can become a little cynical about all the Bible versions out there, like the "Teenagers with Acne Bible," or something like that. But this is a great thing. It's color coded so as you are reading through it just makes more visible these issues related to poverty and justice that a lot of us have been so well trained to ignore. There's something about the visual effect of it that just wakes you up.

BT: Have you learned anything new about postmodernism or adjusted your views on postmoderns lately?

BM: It's so interesting to watch that term go through its own evolution, and it's so hotly contested. The main thing is I try to keep current with how the term is evolving.

I think a mistake many people make is they freeze their definition of the term — in 1995 or 2000 or 2005 ... It's very interesting to see how the conversation continues to unfold. It's different to talk about contemporary philosophy than it is to talk about 17th or 16th or 12th century philosophy because

we're watching it evolve. That probably helps us to go back and see that philosophical schools we see as completed projects actually unfolded over decades.

Just as an example, there's been a big debate in postmodern philosophy between local narratives and what people call meta-narratives. I think many Christians made a big mistake of saying that the gospel is a meta-narrative, because they didn't understand that meta-narrative is a polluted word, a word like "propaganda."

So, it was actually insulting to the gospel to call it a meta-narrative. What Christians didn't want to happen is they didn't want the gospel reduced to a "local" narrative. In just the last few years there's this movement in postmodern philosophy to try to recapture what they're now calling "big narratives," something bigger than a local narrative, but less totalitarian than a meta-narrative. These are moving targets and living conversations.

BT: Beyond the philosophy, thinking of younger people we consider post-moderns, are you seeing any shifts in their lifestyles or the way they see things?

BM: Actually I'm reading a very good new book called *Get There Early: Sensing the Future to Compete in the Present* by Bob Johansen, one of the leading futurists. Every so often they release a report on the future.

His main first word about the future, for the next decade, is volatility. So they're basically saying "Our prediction for the next decade is darker and more uncertain than any we've done so far." So it's very hard to make generalizations because we're at a very volatile moment.

For example, I live just outside of Washington, and in certain sectors of government that will go nameless, there is a real fear that we're going to have major right-wing violent uprisings. There are all these guys showing up at meetings with guns ... and there's this big thing, "Bring your gun to church Sunday." There is this fear that we could end up with uprisings that are a pretty scary kind of violence.

The people I'm really interested in, what about 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds coming of age at this moment. How is this going to affect them? Will there be a resurgence of racism? When a 13- or 14-year-old is 30, are we going to see the full fruition of some of the rhetoric on current topics?

And then you think about that Southern Baptist guy who is praying for Obama to die ... how will this affect the generation coming of age? My personal hope is it will force young people to make a choice, and that more of them will choose away from that approach to faith.

BT: We just heard about a census worker in Kentucky who was found hanged with "Fed" written across his chest.

BM: Yes, and I live just outside of D.C. where the guy at the Holocaust Museum was killed a few months ago, and then there was the abortion doctor in Kansas. So, I think the soul of Christianity is up for grabs right now.

What is terribly disturbing to me is to see how few conservative Christian leaders are willing to stand up and vocally oppose some of this violent rhetoric. It's staggering. The lack of moral courage, to me, the moral authority of these religious leaders is nearing bankruptcy for their failure to stand up.

BT: You are interested in postmoderns, evangelism and church planting. How do you develop a church for postmoderns, who by definition won't support it?

BM: This is the subject that comes up whenever I talk to denominational leaders. A few weeks ago [in a conversation with high level people in a denomination], when we got to this question, I could just tell that they didn't want to hear what I needed to say, because they had two questions in their minds.

One is, "How do we develop a church that will connect to this emerging generation?" But the other question is "How do we keep our existing churches going?"

I think the first thing we have to do is to separate those two questions — in the short run we have to separate them. Because, if we're only going to solve the second one simultaneously with the first one ... if we want to do the younger generation within the existing congregation, I just don't think it's going to work in the short run.

So here's what I think we have to do. I think we have to think of the difference between going to the post office to buy stamps and envelopes versus sending email, or going to a travel agent versus booking online, or paying a contractor versus going to

Home Depot and buying your own stuff to do it yourself.

We need to recognize that we're in this period of phenomenal individual empowerment. It's the difference between watching the news and having your own YouTube channel; there's this massive democratization.

In many ways this is the impulse that the Baptists seized better than anyone else. They seized the move toward democracy in the past two centuries in a remarkable way, but now it's going even further.

A couple of years ago I got a phone call from an Episcopal priest who wanted to meet me for lunch, and didn't tell me he was flying in from Chicago. He said: "I lead a prosperous congregation in which almost every family owns a beach house, so from May to September our attendance goes from 300 to 80 because everyone goes to their beach house. So I always complained about this, but a few years ago I started developing a liturgy that they could do around the table at the beach house, a simple liturgy, and I empowered them to actually have their worship."

He said, "People have grown more spiritually from that experience than by anything they do by coming to church." So the reason he wanted to have lunch with me was he said: "I'm nearing retirement, and I think I'm hearing my vocation. Do you think this could help all the people who've dropped out of church, instead of trying to get them to come some place, that we actually resource them to do it where they are?"

Now, that creates a thousand problems, and I'm not saying I'm happy about it, but that's the way you have to think.

I think we have to stop thinking on the level of style and structure and we actually have to think about content. I think our biggest problems at this juncture are theological and not stylistic.

If we want to connect with the postmodern culture, we've got to realize the degree to which our gospel has already been syncretized or meshed with modernity, and we have to do some serious reflection.

BT: How do you respond to someone who says, "I know what the Bible says, but I really don't care"?

BM: The invitation to argue with the Bible is something the Jewish community at its best has always encouraged, that to be part of the community of faith is to argue with the text.

I think we're going to have to become more Jewish in that way.

And in a sense, to discover how the Bible is filled with arguments against itself, then people are invited into a biblical conversation, and that doesn't have to drive them away from the faith. But there aren't many pastors in our existing churches who wouldn't go ballistic about something like that.

BT: What would you advise someone who loves the message of Jesus and wants to believe, but can't get past their doubts about whether God really exists as more than a construct of human needs?

BM: First, that's such a great question because I am amazed at how many people, including pastors, come to me and say, "I'm on the verge of atheism." This is obviously terrifying.

One of the things we have to do is take the role of a spiritual director. One of the things a spiritual director helps you do is listen to your soul. They don't try to fix you; they try to help you listen. So one of the things I would do for folks in that situation would be to say: "What might you be trying to tell yourself by these doubts and questions? You might be trying to tell yourself that your vision of God, your view of God is no longer worthy."

Then what we have to do is help people distinguish their view of God from God. ... A lot of people have never been able to slip a scalpel between their view of God and the realization that the real God is bigger than their view of God. Those are some of the ways I would start: the only way to get a bigger view of God is to doubt your existing view of God.

We have a lot of reasons for that ... A hundred years ago, nobody knew that we live in an expanding universe. A hundred years ago, few people believed that our universe was a million, much less 14 or 15 billion years old. Our view of the universe has changed so much. In many ways, people are two or three centuries behind in their view of the creator.

BT: You're often criticized, especially by some conservative Christians. What do you say to people who say you're just a liberal wolf in postmodern sheep's clothing?

BM: Like so many things, the issue is how you define your terms. If you're a

conservative and you define anyone who's not conservative as liberal, and if they define conservative as anti-Muslim, anti-gay, pro-war, ... then I'm not a conservative.

That kind of language is usually just a more or less sophisticated form of name-calling. My perspective is that name-calling doesn't tell you much about the person who's being called names, but it tells you a lot more about the person doing the name-calling.

But, if they understood what postmodernity really is, they would understand that it's a critique of both the conservative and liberal ways of approaching life in modernity. Liberal and conservative are two ways of being modern. What the postmodern move is in many ways is an attempt to transcend and include elements of liberal and conservative.

BT: You've been lambasted for your recent decision to observe Ramadan. Tell me about your decision, and what you did.

BM: The fast of Ramadan for Muslims is that you don't eat, drink or have sex between sunrise and sunset. I did that. The not eating was easy compared to the not drinking. The first day I did it I realized that it was the first time in my life I'd gone through a whole day without drinking anything.

The reason I did it, I explained on my blog. I know this will sound crazy to some people, but I felt the Holy Spirit leading me to do this because I'm very worried that Christians are developing a hateful attitude toward Muslims that is not unlike the racist attitudes toward blacks two generations ago.

I see hateful language and downright lies about Muslims being spread in the Christian community. So, as a Christian, I want to not just complain about that, but try to do the opposite: I want to try to demonstrate in my life what it means to love my Muslim neighbors as myself. For me, this is one of many ways because there are a lot of things I do in my life to try to build friendships with Muslims. My Muslim friends are worried that millions of Muslims are going to die because American Christians are going to vote to drop bombs on them.

Because it was on the Internet, I received hate mail and damnation from some Christians, but I received some amazing emails from Muslim folks who basically just said, look, "Thanks for recognizing us as human beings." **BT**

editorial

Is unbelief coming into vogue?

By John Pierce

The Secular Student Alliance, a national organization for the secular student movement, reports that the number of atheist or agnostic student groups on U.S. campuses has more than doubled over the past two years from 80 to 162, according to a recent story from Religion News Service.

In the article, outspoken atheist PZ Myers, who teaches biology at the University of Minnesota, points to popular books (such as Christopher Hitchens' *God is Not Great* and Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*) as "saying that it is okay to be 'godless.'"

Most of the SSA affiliate groups are on college campuses — although four are in high schools. Lyz Liddell, who organizes the campus groups, told RNS that college is the time when beliefs are questioned and young people often break away from their familiar religious backgrounds.

She also noted that social networking sites — like Facebook — have given students and others a forum for processing a change in belief — often anonymously.

What challenges come from a more aggressive presentation of unbelief that creates community and takes on a positive, public face? It is a question church educators, student ministers, Christian parents and all other alert believers cannot afford to ignore.

Historically, only a very few Americans have self-identified as not believing in God. Though still numerically small, the increas-

ingly public face of atheism — through popular books, social networking and student organizations — may boost those numbers.

Finding reasons to not believe takes little effort: bad theology, obnoxious believers, conflicting biblical texts, religiously justified abuse, and inconsistencies between the words and deeds of those professing faith.

Of course, stated belief and related

behavior are often compartmentalized — in that some of the worst atrocities have come from the hands of those claiming to believe in God and often professing divine cause for their behavior. Such realities place a large checkmark on the side of those making the case against belief in God.

In my many years on college and university campuses (as a student and then a campus minister) it was rare to hear someone outright state a belief that God does not (or probably does not) exist. Usually the struggles were healthy — though at times painful — destructions of belief systems that needed to be rebuilt on better theology and practice.

Others moved away from their childhood faith traditions more significantly, but still seemed focused on finding a different way to understand and acknowledge the divine.

"I tried Christianity for awhile and it



didn't work for me," one student told me. But I could tell that his search was continuing. He wanted to come back and talk some more.

The route from belief to unbelief often travels the road that theologians have long called "the problem of evil": How could a loving God let such horrible things happen?

In his book, *Reasons to Believe: One Man's Journey Among the Evangelicals and the Faith He Left Behind*, John Marks (a producer for CBS' *60 Minutes*) kindly gives his reasons not to believe. He too ends up at the troublesome place for both believers and nonbelievers.

"A god who can't stop it has no right to my loyalty or belief ... Leave me behind," he writes in conclusion. The "it" referenced by Marks is the incredible suffering of the Holocaust, Rwanda and other atrocities of great proportion.

Our response to a growing (or more public airing of) unbelief cannot be shallow attempts to answer such unanswerable questions or defensiveness when they are raised. Doubt plays such a significant role in faith that to suggest these very questions do not trouble us as well is both counterproductive and dishonest.

In all of our current debates over Calvinism, theories of biblical interpretation and mission methodologies, we might need to give more attention to basics of belief in God. And it must be done carefully, thoughtfully and compassionately.

Dismissing doubters or atheists as nuts or evildoers is wrong on more than one level. According to the RNS story, the Students for Freethought at Ohio State University joined with the Coalition for Christian Outreach in spending their spring break doing community service in New Orleans.

And it may well be that unbelief is carving out space as a position of intellectual superiority.

For some Christians (and other theists), the case for belief can be argued intellectually and perhaps even convincingly. For most, however, the best case is made by professing that Jesus is Lord — and then acting like it. **BT**

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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

Editor's note: This is the 11th article in a series titled "Street Questions about Baptists," in celebration of 400 years of the Baptist movement.

'Are Baptists Calvinists or not?'

I have covered Calvinism in college classes for years, but I couldn't resist heading to the Internet to get some other "takes" on what it means to be a Calvinist outside academia.

Given the interest in the topic both in Christian history and among Baptists today, I wasn't surprised to see the plethora of web pages dealing with Calvinism — some serious, many full of humor and sarcasm.

Playing off Jeff Foxworthy's line, "You might be a redneck if ..." I found a few definitions that, depending upon one's disposition, might draw a smile or a frown:

- You might be a Calvinist if you think that J.C. stands for John Calvin instead of Jesus Christ.
- You might be a Calvinist if you pause before laughing at a joke to ask, "What would John Calvin do?"
- You might be a Calvinist if you always spell out TULIP in your alphabet soup.

Of course the standard Calvinist joke is, "What do Calvinists say when they've fallen downstairs? Thank goodness that's over with."

My favorite ditty, which shows my age, is the revision of the hymn "Rise Up O Men of God":

*Sit down O men of God
There's nothing you can do.
We're all depraved
The elect are saved
What Calvin says is true!*

Generally speaking, Calvinists find these quips and songs somewhat funny (or tolerate them) because it reveals that Calvinism has indeed been, and remains influential, as the way of understanding Christian doctrine. Before we attempt to answer the question, "Are Baptists Calvinists or not?" a more serious definition of Calvinism is needed — though using the TULIP in the soup will still work.

John Calvin was the 16th-century reformer of Geneva who wrote the most influential theology of the Reformation era, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. His theology, broad and comprehensive, was "reduced" to several key points in a battle with some wayward Calvinists who became known as "Arminians," named after Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius.

At the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), Calvinism, called "Reformed theology" or the "doctrines of grace" by its adherents, accentuated five foundational points to oppose Arminianism. These "five points of Calvinism" (but not necessarily the five points of Calvin) were put in an acronym by some later Calvinist and are now known as TULIP theology:

T: Total Depravity. Humans are born with a sinful nature — original sin — and are incapable of turning to God.

U: Unconditional Election. God chose/saved the "elect" without the involvement of human choice before the foundation of the world.

L: Limited Atonement. Salvation through Christ's death was limited to a particular number of people, the elect.

I: Irresistible Grace. If elected by God, a person will accept God's grace.

P: Perseverance of the Saints. The elect are eternally secure and will not fall from grace.

The "P" does not stand for predestination, but the TULIP is a doctrinal system that affirms "double predestination." People are predestined by God, based upon God's unchangeable sovereign will before the foundation of the world, to heaven or hell.

So what is an Arminian? In short, Arminians affirm the "T" and oppose the rest of the flower. They opt for:

Conditional Election. God initiates the salvation process with the offer of grace, but humans can respond with their free will.

General Atonement. The benefits of Christ's death are available to all who choose to accept grace.

Resistible Grace. Grace can be accepted or rejected.

Apostasy. It is possible to be a Christian and then forsake Christ and lose salvation.

So are Baptists Calvinists or not? The answer is "yes, no and in-between." Founders of the first two Baptist churches (1609, 1611) — John Smyth and Thomas Helwys — came out of the Calvinistic Puritan-Separatist movement in England.

However, their theologies changed and their churches birthed the General Baptists. These earliest Baptists affirmed the "general atonement" and other aspects of Arminian theology.

Another Baptist tradition formed — Particular Baptists — around 1640, and they were Calvinists ("particular" meaning limited atonement). Early American Baptist life also had both types of Baptist groups. In fact, it was not uncommon to have both theologies in the same congregation.

Baptist life, matching the dominant ethos of American religion in the 18th century, was mostly Calvinistic. Regular Baptists formed the influential Philadelphia



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Baptist Association and adopted a confession of faith in 1742 (essentially a reproduction of the 1689 *Second London Confession* of the English Particular Baptists).

Separate Baptists, heirs of the First Great Awakening (1740s), were “softer” Calvinists. They were wary of theological systems and creeds that might get in the way of heart-directed evangelism.

For example, Separate Baptist John Leland affirmed total depravity and eternal security, but emphasized the general atonement. Some historians note the Separate Baptists’ pioneering use of the revival “invitation.” While they affirmed some Calvinism, they acted “Arminian” in aggressively inviting all to accept Jesus.

The 19th century missions movement led by English Baptists William Carey and Andrew Fuller was rooted in “evangelical Calvinism.” These Baptists were Calvinists, but believed that it was a biblical “duty” to offer the gospel to all sinners.

Like Separate Baptist evangelism, missions methodology helped to “arminianize” Baptist attitudes about salvation. Other prominent 19th century Calvinists included Charles Spurgeon of England and James

Boyce of Southern Seminary.

Much of the anti-missions reaction on the 19th-century American frontier — the Primitive Baptist tradition — was staunchly Calvinistic. Some of these “hyper-Calvinistic” Baptists believed it was an insult to God to offer salvation to all since God had already predestined some to hell.

On the other hand, the Free Will Baptist movement, popularized in the early 19th century and still vibrant, repudiated Calvinism. African-American Baptist traditions have been found among both Calvinists and non-Calvinists.

At the turn of the 20th century, Baptists began further modifications of Calvinism. Baptists oriented toward progressive social gospel moved away from the pessimism that they believed characterized Calvinism.

Leading Southern Baptist theologian E.Y. Mullins affirmed God’s sovereignty in salvation, but his focus on voluntary faith and soul competency emphasized individual freedom to respond to the Lordship of Christ. Current Reformed Baptists dislike Mullins and declare that his loss of Calvinistic moorings led to the “doctrinal

minimalism” of today’s moderate Baptists.

There is currently a resurgence of Calvinism in Southern Baptist life led by seminary presidents Al Mohler of Southern Seminary and Danny Akin of Southeastern Seminary, along with leaders of Founders Ministries. They have episodes of conflict with other Southern Baptists who affirm that “whosoever will” may come to Jesus.

In today’s Baptist setting, it is no exaggeration to say that you might be a Calvinist if you like to read John Piper’s books or you might become a Calvinist if you attend “passion youth conferences.”

Lest I leave you with too much clarity, note that some of today’s “evangelical Calvinists” identify themselves as “four-point Calvinists” because they claim that Calvin didn’t emphasize limited atonement. Non-Calvinists have wondered if there is any real final difference between four- and five-point Calvinism.

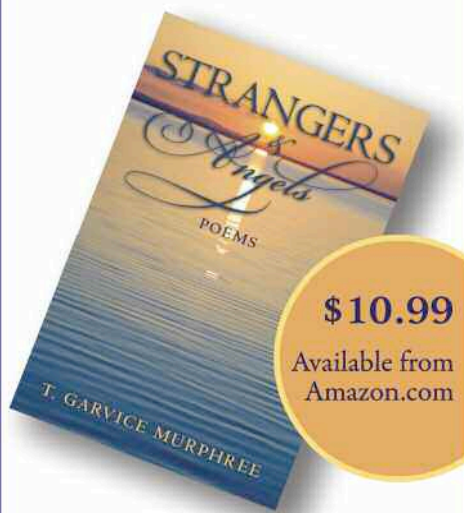
Calvinists usually assert that Calvinism is simply the correct reading of Paul in the Scriptures, but non-Calvinists usually find all forms of Calvinism a bit too “hyper.”

So are Baptists Calvinists or not? Yes, no and in-between. **BT**

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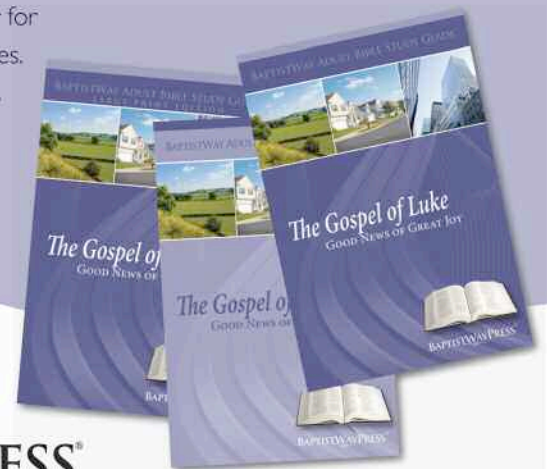
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Quotation

“ remarks ”

“This was the first time potential conservative candidates could present their vision for change.”

—*Family Research Council Action President Tony Perkins on the group's Values Voter Summit in September at which former Arkansas governor and Southern Baptist pastor Mike Huckabee won a presidential straw poll over fellow Republicans Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin, Tim Pawlenty and others (BP)*

“The church is never more authentically the church than when it gathers to give thanks for the life of one of its own and commend his or her life to God's eternal love in the promise of the resurrection.”

—*John M. Buchanan, editor of Christian Century, on funerals*

“The world seems to have today a schizophrenic mind about Freemasonry. There seems to be an alternating fascination and loathing of our fraternity.”

—*Most Worshipful Brother Rev. Terry Tilton, a retired Masonic leader from Minnesota, who hopes Dan Brown's latest novel, The Last Symbol, will renew interest in Masonic membership that has been in decline since the early 1960s (RNS)*

“Now, with Baptists raising their hands during loud praise music — and speaking in tongues, and prophecy and faith healing increasingly left to independent Pentecostals — what makes the Assemblies (of God) distinct?”

—*Religion writer Cary McMullen exploring some AG leaders' concern that denominational distinctives are being lost in a broader appeal for members (Christianity Today)*

“God's interest in us extends beyond ‘Thou shall not.’ God is also concerned about us when we face ‘the valley of death.’ Those who suggest otherwise only serve to drive a wedge between those who hurt and the one who can heal.”

—*Jim Evans, pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala. (EthicsDaily.com)*

“For Christians, truth has a name: God. And goodness has a face: Jesus Christ.”

—*Pope Benedict XVI urging a highly secular Czech Republic, now 20 years after communist control, to return to its Christian heritage (RNS)*

“The greatest thing about being a truck driver is that you have a lot of time to think. The horrible thing about being a truck driver is that you have a lot of time to think.”

—*Chaplain Joe Hunter of Hunter's Truckstop Ministries Inc., with its main chapel along I-75 near Jackson, Ga. (CNN)*

David Currie ... has worked hardest to make leadership opportunities available to everyone — from country pastors to Cowboy church pastors to the humblest layperson to members of every ethnic group. And David's only criteria are that you love Jesus and love freedom.

—*Texas Baptists Committed editor Bill Jones on longtime executive director David Currie's retirement from leading the advocacy group*

“There's nothing like being locked down 23 hours a day with nothing to do but think about what I did.”

—*NFL quarterback Michael Vick, who served a 23-month prison term for dog fighting, speaking Sept. 29 to Covenant Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. (Washington Post)*

“Over the years I've realized that I have as much in common with the performance artist, the standup comedian, the screenwriter, as I do with the theologian.”

—*Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., on preaching (Boston Globe)*

“Part of the reason ... people have turned away from Christian movies is because historically they've been very cheesy and painful to watch.”

—*Alex Kendrick, who along with his brother, Stephen, both associate pastors at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., wrote and produced Fireproof, the No. 1 independent movie of 2008 (RNS)*

In the news, 25 years ago . . .

Former first lady Rosalynn Carter received the first distinguished Christian service award at a two-day conference sponsored by Southern Seminary's Woman's Committee... Carter expressed concern about the continuing debate in Southern Baptist life over the role of women.

—*SBC Today, November 1984*

10 minutes with **Julius Scruggs**

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

After a contentious election process, Julius R. Scruggs was elected in September as the new president of the National Baptist Convention, USA. By a vote of 4,108 to 924, Scruggs defeated Henry J. Lyons, a former president of the NBCUSA who had served time in prison for embezzlement.

In the days before the election, Lyons sued the NBCUSA over its election process but the case was dismissed shortly after the meeting. Scruggs, 67, the pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., talked with Adelle Banks of Religion News Service about the meaning behind his presidential win and his plans for one of the nation's historic African-American denominations.

Some answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: You won overwhelmingly against your challenger, Henry Lyons. What do you think that says about your denomination?

A: I think that the people of our denomination spoke in a very decisive way and their speaking, I think, was inspired by God because they wanted credible leadership for the National Baptist Convention, USA.

Q: Does it demonstrate that, though church members may be able to forgive Lyons for grand theft and fraud, there is a limit to redemption and he couldn't be viewed as a denominational leader again?

A: I think you are correct. I put it this way when we were speaking at the convention: I think that all of us are willing to forgive former President Lyons and we have forgiven him. But the issue in the election was not about forgiveness.

The issue was about trust. They

needed a leader in whom they could trust and they didn't believe they could trust — I don't believe — Dr. Henry Lyons.

Q: You've been pastor of your church in Huntsville for 32 years, and you'll continue in that pulpit while leading the NBCUSA. How will you juggle those roles?

A: It is going to take some superb time management on my part. Others have done it before me, so I believe I can do it as well.

Q: What are your primary goals as president?

A: Initially I want to work on unifying our convention because of the nature of the campaign and election. We have some healing that needs to take place. I want to address that.

Then I want to go on to seek to unify the convention by bringing churches in that have been on the fringes. That will give us more strength fiscally and financially. We can do more ministry when we are stronger.

Q: During your campaign, you mentioned an interest in forming a public policy commission that would address public education and health care. Is that still on your list?



Julius Scruggs

A: Yes. We certainly want to address public health care, socioeconomic and political issues ... and I would like to address them under the umbrella of our public policy committee. We are addressing them to some degree already, but I would like to see that increased and strengthened. I'd like for us to be able to help President Obama as he advocates for the health care program that he's trying to get through Congress right now.

Q: What do you see as the biggest challenges ahead for your denomination?

A: We have so many important ministries that are ongoing that we need to support, and revenue is going to be one of our largest challenges.

We support American Baptist College in Nashville, Tenn., which is the only college that is owned lock, stock and barrel by the National Baptist Convention, USA. That's one of our challenges is to increase our giving to American Baptist College because it is the institution that produces a lot of our pastors.

Q: Any other final goals ahead?

A: I really want to see young pastors embraced and mentored and recruited and integrated into leadership roles in our convention in an intentional way. I want to do everything that I can to embrace them, to help them understand that they are part of the convention, bring them into the mainstream of the convention and integrate them into leadership roles. **BT**

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Popular preacher Wellborn remembered

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

GEORGETOWN, Ky. — Retired Florida State University professor and former “Baptist Hour” radio preacher Charles Wellborn died Oct. 1 at his home in Georgetown, Ky.

Contemporaries described Charles Wellborn, who died Oct. 1 at age 86, as one of the best and most prophetic preachers of his generation.

Wellborn accepted Christ at age 23 amid the Southern Baptist youth revival movement of the 1940s and 1950s. He began preaching on the “Baptist Hour,” a weekly program produced by what was then called the Radio Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, in 1948 while still a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After graduating from seminary, Wellborn served 10 years as pastor of Seventh

& James Baptist Church, adjacent to the Baylor University Campus in Waco, Texas. After the congregation voted to open its membership to people of all “races and colors” in 1958, the young pastor received threatening phone calls and a cross was burned on the lawn of the parsonage.

Wellborn left Seventh & James in 1961 to begin doctoral studies at Duke University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1964. He taught at the Baptist-affiliated Baylor — his alma mater — and Campbell College in Buies Creek, N.C., until his marriage ended in divorce, effectively ending his preaching and teaching career in Southern Baptist ranks.

He found a niche at Florida State

University, first as chaplain to the university, then as professor of religion and finally as dean of FSU’s British campus in London before his retirement in 1990.

Influenced by seminary professors including T.B. Maston, Southwestern’s legendary professor of Christian ethics, Wellborn continued to speak to Southern Baptists through his writing. Over the years he wrote seven books, two plays and more than 100 articles in scholarly and popular journals.

He was a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*, an independent journal started in 1995. In 2003 Smyth & Helwys published a book of Wellborn’s essays and sermons collected over 50 years under the title of one of his writings, *Grits, Grace, and Goodness*.

Wellborn was a member of Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown, Ky., where his memorial service was held Oct. 10. **BT**



Charles Wellborn

Former SBC President Page going to NAMB during well-discussed transition

By John Pierce

ATLANTA — Trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board (NAMB) elected former SBC President Frank Page as vice president despite an opening in the agency’s presidency and widespread discussion over whether a newly formed SBC task force might consider merging NAMB with the International Mission Board (IMB) whose president, Jerry Rankin, is retiring next year.

Page, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Taylors, S.C., was elected Oct. 7 to lead NAMB’s evangelism group. He holds a doctorate in Christian ethics from Southwestern Seminary.

The decision was praised by acting interim president Richard Harris, who according to Baptist Press, said that Page “brings expertise, experience; he brings visionary leadership; and he brings relationships that few have throughout this convention. There are few leaders in this convention that have as much vision and passion to see the Great Commission fulfilled in North America, and

ultimately the world, as Frank Page.”

The future of NAMB has been widely discussed since the agency’s board chairman Tim Patterson, a Jacksonville, Fla., pastor, stated earlier this year that he favored a merger between the two mission boards in order to avoid duplication of properties, personnel and programs. The impending vacancies in the top leadership spots at these agencies have heightened that discussion.



Frank Page

Geoff Hammond resigned as NAMB president on Aug. 11 under pressure from trustees. His short tenure of less than two years came on the heels of previous president Bob Reccord’s departure amid charges of extravagant spending and low morale among staff.

Current SBC President Johnny Hunt’s appointment of a new task force this summer to evaluate the effectiveness of the convention in fulfilling the Great Commission has stirred the debate over

whether the current SBC structure is “a bloated bureaucracy” — as some have charged — or an efficient system for cooperative missions and ministries.

J. Robert White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention and a member of the SBC’s Great Commission Task Force, has called for keeping NAMB as a separate entity.

“In cooperative agreements with 42 state Baptist conventions, NAMB works to support the effort of missionaries in language missions, resort missions, and various other ministries that reach our nation for Jesus Christ,” White told the GBC Executive Committee on Sept. 15 according to *The Christian Index*. “Those joint efforts are unique to NAMB and are not shared by any other missions agency.”

What signal Page’s election to the NAMB staff sends — while the presidency is vacant and a study of denominational structure is ongoing — remains a subject of speculation and discussion. **BT**

Hispanics tackle ‘machismo’ culture in churches

By Steven Vegh
Religion News Service

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — As the new pastor at Vino Nuevo Church, Gladys Mejias-Ashmore has been teaching a lot about family, parenting — and the dangers of machismo.

In Latin culture, the macho man looms large as boss of wife and family. But more than a few Hispanic evangelical pastors are teaching that machismo violates Christian norms for husbands and fathers.

It’s a message Mejias-Ashmore said she never heard in church in her native Honduras. “I used to think the Christian let the man do whatever he wants — even extramarital relationships.”

But after being “born again” and studying Bible passages on marriage, Mejias-Ashmore said she challenged her first husband about his drinking and adultery.

“He drank so much and would come home violent; he once hit me and knocked me out.” As a Christian, she forgave him. As a woman, she finally sought safety in divorce.

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” she said of machismo. “Jesus came to restore dignity to woman.”

Cocky, masculine, tough, sexist and self-important are traits often conjured up by “macho,” as in, “Es muy macho” — “He’s a real man.”

Although domineering men can be found anywhere, macho behavior generally looms larger within Hispanic culture, said Jose Gonzalez, a Spanish-language blogger for the Christian Broadcasting Network.

Gonzalez, who grew up in Uruguay, runs Semilla Inc., which provides leadership training in Latin America from a biblical perspective. He has taught at Regent University, an evangelical school founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson in Virginia Beach.

“Too many Hispanics measure our manhood by how we dominate our women, socially, emotionally or sexually. This inequality destroys happiness, reducing many women to a secondary role,” he wrote in a recent posting.

Machistas, or male chauvinists, expect their wives and family females to be chaste, but “the man is free to do whatever — have affairs, have another woman,” said Juan Gonzales of the local Tidewater Hispanic

Evangelical Ministers Association.

The macho man often dominates the whole family, as Jesus Rodriguez of Virginia Beach recalled from his Mexican boyhood.

At gatherings at his grandfather’s house, “everyone had to line up at the door and wait for him to come and, one by one, kiss his right hand and his left cheek.”

Machismo’s staying power is fueled partly by Latin American religious perspectives, including Marianismo, the cult of the Virgin Mary.

“The Virgin Mary is the image or symbol for resignation, for acceptance of your lot, and the victim,” said Mavel Velasco, a Latin American literature scholar at Virginia Wesleyan College. But Velasco, a native of Bolivia, said Mary also can be a symbol of strength for women during crisis. Latin men, meanwhile, sometimes excuse their macho behavior by citing the apostle Paul, who wrote that among Christians, the man should be the head of the wife.

That interpretation ignores Paul’s further advice that Christian men should love their wives just as Jesus Christ loved and served the

church, Gonzales said.

Italo Gil of Nueva Vida Christian Church in Virginia Beach tells his Latin congregants to trade machismo for “servant leadership” in which spouses treat each other as partners.

Whether they go to church or not, Latin men may find their machismo challenged by American openness to working women and gender rights. Ricardo Martinez, an auto-body repair technician living in Virginia Beach, said he took machismo for granted before moving from El Salvador to the United States as a teen.

But in Bible study and classes led by Gonzales, Martinez realized he was being macho when, for example, he refused to let his wife work outside their home.

“The Bible says the man should love woman the way he loves himself,” said Martinez, who attends Iglesia Bautista del Camino in Norfolk.

Now, he’s glad his wife has a job that helps support their family.

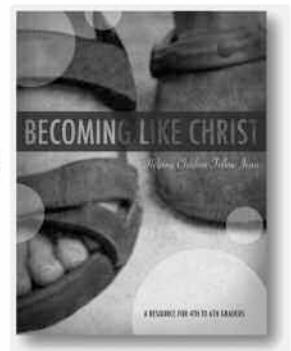
“I’m more Americanized, and in this culture,” he said, “I need to help her, looking after the kids, picking up the laundry. I’ve got a different view.” **BT**

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FELLOWSHIP

One pastor's perspective: The Bible and homosexuality

By Richard S. Hips

Joseph C. Weber in his article “Does the Bible Condemn Homosexual Acts?” suggests there are two important factors to consider in discussing homosexuality: First, there is absolutely no agreement as to the cause or causes of homosexuality. Second, there is recognition



of the many socio-psychic components in homosexuality.

For example, is a homosexual anyone who at anytime engages in a sexual act with someone of the same sex? Or, is the

homosexual one who can find sexual satisfaction only with a person of the same sex?

In light of such questions, Weber asks whether the Bible does indeed justify the absolute and sweeping condemnation of homosexuality found in the Christian tradition.

My purpose is not to discuss the possible cause or causes of homosexuality or to explore the possible socio-psychic components of homosexuality. Rather, the purpose of this article is, first, to determine what the Bible says about homosexual activity, and, second, to propose a Christian response.

Although the Bible condemns homosexual activity, it is silent with regard to homosexual orientation or desire. Biblically, the act, not necessarily the desire, is sin.

Tim Stafford, in his review of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott, sums up this point: “The Bible is generally disinterested in the condition we are in when temptation comes to us; it speaks to our response.”

It may very well be that there are complex socio-psychic components and experiences that shape the desires of homosexuals. However, the Bible nowhere sanctions the activities of homosexuals who choose to act out those particular desires. Rather, it very pointedly condemns homosexual activity in general.

Clearly, heterosexuality is the biblical norm. Throughout the biblical revelation heterosexuality is affirmed clearly as God's order of creation. Genesis 1:27 bears witness to this fact: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. Male and female created he them.”

Although Jesus never spoke about homosexuality, he clearly presupposed and promoted heterosexuality. While speaking on the subject of divorce, Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 affirms heterosexual orientation as God's created norm by stating: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said,

as the only reason for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, if indeed it is a reason at all. Scanzoni and Mollenkott in their work *Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?* convincingly argue that the sin of Sodom described in Genesis 19 was not the sort of homosexuality lived by most modern homosexuals. Rather, it was homosexual rape — an act of violence quite probably not even committed by people with homosexual orientation.

Yet evangelical homosexuals are guilty of much interpolation with regard to Genesis 19. They argue the sin of the citizens of Sodom was that of being guilty of

AT ISSUE: Homosexuality and the Church, Part Two

Editor's note: This opinion piece is part of a series on the controversial issue of Christian responses to homosexuality. Your viewpoint can be shared at editor@baptiststoday.org.

for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh; what therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

Fred Craddock in his article “How Does the New Testament Deal with the Issue of Homosexuality?” suggests that the reason Jesus said nothing on the subject of homosexuality — or the church found no reason to preserve it — may be that Jesus found no reason to agree or disagree with the strong condemnation of homosexual activity by the rabbis.

The Sodom and Gomorrah story (Genesis 19) is commonly taught by concluding that homosexuality was the reason fire fell from heaven upon the cities and destroyed the people thereof. However, no homosexual act took place in the Genesis 19 account. Ezekiel 16:49-50 lists the sins of Sodom as pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, haughtiness and abominations in general.

Homosexuality is not to be singled out

breaking rules of hospitality. But the context of Genesis 19 demands a definition of something much stronger than just an angry greeting party.

Two commonly quoted sections of scripture that unequivocally condemn homosexual acts are found in Leviticus: “You [masculine] shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (18:22) and “If a man lie with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them” (20:13).

Walter Wink in his article “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality” offers several reasons why such an act was regarded as an abomination, including: “The Hebrew pre-scientific understanding was that male semen contained the whole of nascent life. With no knowledge of eggs and ovulation, it was assumed that the women provided only the incubating space. Hence the spilling of semen for any non-procreative purpose ... was considered tantamount to abortion or murder.”

In addition, the Hebrews felt that when a man acted like a woman sexually, male

dignity was compromised. Whatever the rationale for their formulation, however, the text condemns homosexual acts and persons committing such acts are to be executed. The book of Leviticus is a holiness code, and there are other prohibitions besides those mentioned concerning homosexuality that no one would think of requiring today. They have been superseded or abolished under the New Covenant.

Evangelical homosexuals ask: Why not adopt the same attitude toward homosexuality? Harold Lindsell in his article "Homosexuals and the Church" responds: "The answer is plain. The New Testament also condemns homosexuality while it does not repeat nor advocate some of the other prohibitions of the Old Testament. Paul declares that homosexuals shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10)."

Lindsell states also that Paul does not single out homosexuals as special offenders but says that idolators, adulterers, thieves, coveters, drunkards and extortioners shall not inherit the Kingdom, either. He also says the Corinthians had been delivered from these sinful habits: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11)."

Probably one of the most important passages on homosexuality is Romans 1:26-27 in which the Apostle Paul clearly denounces homosexual behavior. Some would argue that Paul was not condemning homosexual activity, but rather condemning changing one's sexual orientation. That interpretation is clearly unacceptable. Whether it is stated three times or three thousand times, the Bible says no to homosexual activity.

In Romans 1:26-27, Paul concludes: "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."

J.W. MacGorman in his *Layman's Bible Book Commentary* lists four teachings on homosexuality as found in this passage. First, we see that men chose to worship not the Creator, but the creature. Because of this confusion between deity and creatureliness, a confusion of the orders came about. Thus

The biblical commandments about homosexual activity cannot be set aside. Yet the lack of compassion many Christians show for homosexuals is inexcusable. They need food, shelter, jobs, education, just as all other humans do.

men worshiped animals as gods and expressed themselves sexually with members of their own gender, thereby dishonoring themselves.

Second, homosexuality is unnatural (v. 26). Those who practice homosexuality are acting contrary to God's order of creation. The human race would become extinct within a matter of time if homosexuality was practiced universally. Homosexuality is unnatural and contrary to the biblical norm.

Third, homosexuality involves shameless acts (v. 27). The capacity for shame is essential for moral guidance. We can violate that which is right so many times as to lose the capacity for shame and eventually it hardens and dies. When this occurs, men are consumed in their own lusts and therefore do without remorse what is contrary to the teachings of God.

Finally, homosexuality is sexual perversion and results in a serious breakdown for those involved (v. 27). The New English Bible and The New International Version translate the word "error" as "perversion." MacGorman feels that the context favors the stronger term, "perversion." It seems that the Apostle Paul is arguing that homosexuality is more than a mistake; it is perversion. Those who would propose that homosexuality is a legitimate alternate lifestyle are proposing something that is completely contrary to the teachings of the Word of God.

These teachings are echoed in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 where male homosexuals are cited along with murderers of parents, kidnappers and perjurers, and are condemned for acting contrary to the law of God. It should be noted that this passage convicts not only homosexuals, but also lists several offenders who dishonor God with their actions.

In light of the biblical view of homosexuality, what should be the attitude of churches toward homosexuals? As the

Church of Jesus Christ we must be concerned, sensitive, perceptive and compassionate. If we confirm that homosexual activity is sin, then we must do so without rejecting the person. We must stand upon the Word of God in full, not only in those passages that condemn homosexual acts, but also those that present the regenerative power of Jesus Christ.

Many people feel that homosexuality is a permanent condition and impossible to escape. This may be true for many homosexuals but some have, with God's help, been able to overcome their sinful activity. Although their condition may remain the same, their activity is curbed. Once again, I would argue that homosexual activity is sin, not necessarily the orientation.

What should we expect of the Christian who discovers he or she is homosexual? There is no easy answer. We must accept the fact that homosexual orientation for many cannot be changed or reversed. Through prayer, professional counseling and the grace of God, some will be able to escape their homosexual conditioning. For those whose homosexual condition persists, they must be advised to abstain from homosexual activity. Biblically, without a high view of singleness, we have little to offer the person who has no erotic interest in the opposite sex.

Chastity and celibacy are never easy, but the Bible that condemns homosexual activity also promises God's presence and help. Although some would propose that if celibacy is impossible, then a permanent relationship with another homosexual is the lesser of two evils; however, this too is still condemned by Scripture.

The biblical commandments about homosexual activity cannot be set aside. Yet the lack of compassion many Christians show for homosexuals is inexcusable. They need food, shelter, jobs, education, just as all other humans do. The church can and should support legislation that would give homosexual persons equal rights in employment, housing and public accommodations.

In exercising love, compassion and understanding, the isolation and defensiveness of homosexuals are no longer necessary and thus, the desire for obedience and full embracement of God's best in Jesus Christ is more optimal. **BT**

—Richard Hips is pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn. This is a condensed version of a larger research effort.

Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion

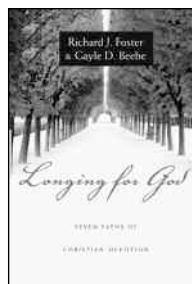
By Richard J. Foster and Gayle D. Beebe

The questions arise in every follower of Christ and in every seeker of spiritual awakening: What is the meaning of life? Where is the presence and purpose of God within my life?

One of the best-known champions of personal spiritual growth, Richard Foster, has worked for three years with one of his prominent students and co-teachers, Gayle Beebe, to present a way of finding some answers in their new volume, *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion*.

Foster and Beebe use material they developed for a university course titled “The History and Practice of Christian Spirituality” as the basis for the new book, hoping “to explain the seven primary paths to God that have developed throughout Christian history” and to awaken the reader’s own spirituality and desire for the presence of God. The result is an excellent survey of two centuries of Christian practitioners, whose names might be more familiar to readers for their prominence

as movers and shakers, historians, activists, preachers, reformers, writers and teachers than for their stories of personal spiritual growth. The authors provide a fresh way of knowing them, not only as great figures of Christian history, but also as ordinary people who found themselves on their knees, hoping for a transformation of their own souls.



The sequence of the book follows seven distinct primary approaches to spiritual awakening:

- The right ordering of our love for God
- Spiritual life as journey
- The recovery of knowledge of God lost in the fall
- Intimacy with Jesus Christ
- The right ordering of our experiences of God
- Action and contemplation
- Divine ascent

Each approach is developed with examples of three or four familiar personalities, from ancient Origen to modern Thomas Merton, all important contributors in the course of Christian history, theology and thought. In this way, the authors have tied together persons from vastly different chronological periods with a common thread of spiritual perception. Julian of Norwich, who recounted her 16 revelations of God, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, best known as the Father of Modern Theology, have become spiritual sister and brother together in the category of “right ordering of the experiences of God.”

A fascinating aspect of this book is the “Reflecting and Responding” follow-up conversation the authors have with each person of history. Understanding how Foster and Beebe, two modern pilgrims, react personally deepens the reader’s comprehension of each spiritual example and helps the reader incorporate into her own practice these lessons from the footsteps of great Christians.

The three appendices are helpful and easy to use. One includes additional information about pre-Christian influences such as Plato

and Aristotle and their formative effect on later Christian thought. Since the corpus of the book treats only Western Christianity, a second appendix recounts in much briefer form the ideas of notables among the Eastern Orthodox tradition, such as St. John Chrysostom. An appendix on Women and Spirituality provides a nice compendium of important contributions by those relegated to a lesser role in a patriarchal religious world. Many women presented here, particularly the great mystic Hildegard of Bingen and St. Therese of Lisieux, she of the “little way,” bear closer examination and should have been included in the body of the book.

Longing for God will serve as a good introduction for a young layperson beginning the adult spiritual journey, as a welcome and nourishing break from study for a seminary student, or as a refreshing re-examination for an old preacher. It could be used well by Sunday school classes for a study of several weeks and easily divided into sections for Wednesday night church study programs. Readers will be disappointed that each section is not followed with a guide to practical application of the discipline described. The extensive endnotes feature books for further reading, which will surely prove irresistible to readers for whom this book and its necessary brevity may only whet the appetite.

Foster and Beebe make clear their conviction that the seven paths may overlap for a particular person and that no path is always right or wrong. But the followers of these paths have found uniquely for themselves an awakening to the spirit of God. They have been transformed, and then they helped to transform the Christian world. If our current culture is a forest of distraction dominated by “real” housewives, bad news and political pundits, then this book is a calm and sunlit clearing from which any path might take the soul of the reader closer to God. **BT**

—Kelly Belcher is a minister living in Spartanburg, S.C. She serves as vice chair of the Board of Directors of Baptists Today.

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

The Disturbing Galilean: Essays about Jesus

By Malcolm Tolbert

The *Disturbing Galilean* is a great book by a great man about the greatest subject of all.

Malcolm Tolbert, now 85 and living in his hometown of Baton Rouge, La., was a teenager when he began serving as pastor of Baptist churches. He has served as a missionary to Brazil and as a professor of New Testament at Baptist seminaries in New Orleans and Wake Forest.

He has written books on the church, the charismatic movement, Matthew, Luke, Acts, 1 John, and on the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

The Disturbing Galilean is about Jesus' life and teachings as displayed in Gospel texts that have grasped Tolbert's mind and heart. The first sentence is, "I am captivated by Jesus."

The book overflows with wisdom about Jesus and about our lives.

"Why did people believe what Jesus was saying?" It was because "the sayings of Jesus possessed an inherent authority" — they still do.

Jesus' baptism was "the ordination of the Messiah," and his temptations were a test to see what kind of Messiah he would be; ministers today are tested to see what kind of pastors they will be.

Of Psalm 8:5 he said: "No evaluation of a human being's worth exceeds God's." The only alternatives to forgiveness are retaliation and withdrawal. Jesus' demand for perfection is a call to maturity.

"Jesus gave us our clearest understand-

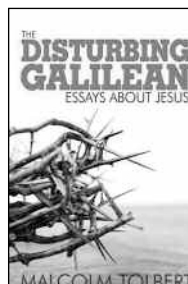
ing of God." His teaching about God differed from the Judaizers' legalism and from Marcion's rejection of the God of the Old Testament.

Jesus' political views fell midway between the positive attitude toward government of Romans 13 and the negative attitude toward government of Revelation 13.

In Jesus' world as in our own, "Wealth was a possible rival to God." We western Christians are the rich man in the parable about Lazarus and the rich man.

"Jesus' inclusiveness reached Zacchaeus like nothing else." Jesus doesn't call us to brag about him but to follow him.

"The greatest commandment has two aspects, love for God and love for neighbor. However, the illustrations given by Jesus have to do only with loving our neighbor.



He does not illustrate how we express our love for God. There is a simple reason for this. The way we show our love for God is by loving our neighbor. No pious activity or churchly duty can substitute for that."

Dr. Tolbert thinks there are two kinds of knowledge about the Bible. Most church members already know how to live faithfully, but they can benefit from the information Scripture scholars can give them.

"What I tell you that you do not know is important, but it is not as important as what you already know."

I agree, and in this book I found help for faithful living. I bet you will, too. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is a retired theology professor from Beeson School of Divinity at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Christian coaching

Players on the athletic field and in other “games” have an innate ability to move the ball down the field.

The coaching relationship encourages that natural ability. As Gary Collins describes it in his book *Christian Coaching*, a coach is a vehicle to get people from where they are to where they want to be.

To help others achieve their full potential, the coach uses a toolbox of skills without ever directly telling the “players” exactly what move to make next. That toolbox may include keen listening skills, a forward-looking agenda, intense dialogue, the power to focus, a caring nature, an emphasis on strengths and positive change, the assumption that a person’s life is integrated, and an incisive and acute ability to ask penetrating questions.

Coaching is not counseling or therapy or mentoring. A qualified counselor can help an individual deal with past history and move forward to the present time and a healthier life. A therapist cares for someone’s well-being where the physical, mental or emotional problem is rooted in the past. A mentor can help a person learn a new skill.

Coaching does not deal with moving a person from an unhealthy past to a healthy present, nor does it deal with teaching new skills. Instead, coaching helps persons in the present moment utilize their uniqueness and giftedness to move toward self-imposed future goals as they realize their full potential.

Christian coaching is concerned with the things of Christianity. It is about helping others live out the Christian faith both as individuals and in groups.

Suggested Resources

Bandy, Thomas G. *Coaching Change: Breaking Down Resistance, Building Up Hope*. Abingdon Press, 2000.

Collins, Gary R. *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential Into Reality*. NavPress, 2001.

Miller, Linda J. and Hall, Chad W. *Coaching for Christian Leaders: A Practical Guide*. Chalice Press, 2007.

Whitmore, John. *Coaching for Performance: Growing People, Performance and Purpose*. National Book Network, 2002.

www.coachfederation.org

Individuals may be coached in understanding a vocational call, in seeking to depart from old ways and habits, in using their time wisely, in loving their neighbors, in doing good deeds or in building up the fellowship of believers.

Groups of two or more may be coached in working as a team to achieve clear objectives for the benefit of the whole. For example, a couple may desire assistance in developing a stronger relationship or a church long-range planning committee could work on a project for the benefit of the entire community.

Both individuals and groups may collect immense benefits from coaching,

thereby enhancing their performance and ultimately reaching their full potential.

Benefits for either individuals or groups will not come without change. The Christian belief system is rooted in change, and the Christian life is embroiled in change. Reaching goals and achieving full potential will include change as an inevitable part of that process. We cannot remain who we are if we are to become the people we want to be.

A coach is similar in nature to the biblical term *Paraclete* as one who comes alongside to assist. Jesus used this term when describing the role of the Holy Spirit, who would be a helper for God’s people as they moved through and toward a full and abundant life. The coaching relationship encourages coaches to be used by God in the *Paraclete* role as they come alongside others to assist them in reaching goals and achieving their full potential.

All of us have goals for what we desire to achieve in life or goals for our personal Christian walk. The assistance of a vehicle can be instrumental as we intentionally reach and stretch ourselves to meet our life goals. The coach intentionally uses skills from the toolbox to become the vehicle we need. Persons being coached intentionally utilize the innate gifts and strengths given to them by God.

The power to accomplish our goals is held within us as a seed is held within the acorn’s hard shell. A Christian coaching technique is the vehicle to get us out of our shell so that we might grow to our full potential as persons and as a people embodying the kingdom of God. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Keith Vaughn of Milledgeville, Ga., the business manager for Glasrite and a supply preacher. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

2009 Formations Commentary

Bible Study resources for the adult Formations lessons available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing (www.helwys.com)

LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, Nov. 29-
Dec. 7, 2009

Written by Mark
Wingfield, associate
pastor of Wilshire Baptist
Church in Dallas, Texas.



Nov. 29, 2009

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Isaiah 7:10-17, 8:1-4, 9:2-7

Two dark eras of history. Two times when a glimmer of hope was needed desperately. Two promises of salvation. These are the links between today's Scripture passage and the well-known hymn from which our lesson takes its title.

Upon first reading this passage from Isaiah, Christians will no doubt be tempted to look backward and create a messianic prophecy, a promise of salvation fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. There is a problem with such a view, however. The prophet Isaiah was speaking hope to Ahaz, king of Judah, in the eighth century B.C., about the current threat of invading nations against the king. The first verses of chapter 7 spell this out in more detail. It was a dark time, with stern prophecies of an impending invasion, destruction of a way of life. Ahaz needed hope for today, not a prophecy about something to happen nearly 800 years later.

But what about the word "Immanuel"? How can anyone but Jesus be called by such a title? The Hebrew word means literally "God with us." The promise of God walking alongside us, taking up our cause, has brought comfort to the children of God for centuries — both before and after the birth of Christ. From Abraham leaving his home in Haran to the children of Israel following the pillars of fire and smoke through the wilderness, God

demonstrates from the earliest of days a desire to abide with us. To call God's provision in the time of Ahaz "Immanuel" should point us toward the fullest meaning of the title and not cause us to doubt the hope yet to come.

It is true that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day — a statement about God's eternal view of time that differs from our earth-bound view of linear time. God's eternal perspective would be of little comfort to Ahaz, who had an immediate need for rescue. Yet how God comes to the aid of Ahaz may impact our understanding of the ways in which God intervenes in linear time to bring about eternal purposes.

The Old Testament is littered with foreshadowing of God's biggest surprise of all time — coming to live among us in the form of a human in order to save us from our sins. Why, then, should we be surprised that God would speak to Ahaz through Isaiah with a plan that foreshadows the greatest good news ever? We do not have to twist Isaiah 7 and 8 to be *only* a prediction of the birth of Jesus. Instead, we may see in God's provision for Ahaz and the people of Judah a small foretaste of God's eternal plan of salvation. The prophecy may have both an immediate application and an ultimate application.

A similar thing could be said of the origin of one of the church's most somber Advent hymns, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," which echoes the words of Isaiah. The text of the hymn is believed to date to what we commonly call the Dark Ages, probably prior to the ninth century A.D. This is an era of Western history considered like unto an exile or a time void of enlightenment.

The ancient hymn was built around seven antiphons, called the "Great O's." Each antiphon began with a salutation to the Messiah and one of his attributes, such as "O Wisdom," "O Lord" or "O Root of Jesse." And thus out of a time we would consider to be least likely for inspiration, a song of anticipation arose, a song of ascending praise for God's work in the world. It is a song that has

gone around the world, creating a cycle of encouragement and inspiration.

In the mid-19th century, John Mason Neale, an Anglican priest, while ministering on the Madeira Islands off the northwest coast of Africa, heard the chant and translated it into English. It was published in 1851 in London. In the darkness of a library in Spain, Thomas Helmore discovered a haunting tune that had its origin in a 15th-century community of French Franciscan nuns. He adapted the tune for a hymnal published in London in 1856. The tune and text eventually united to create a favorite hymn of the church through the centuries.

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Advent, a time in which we relive the anticipation of those who waited longingly for the Messiah throughout the ages and in which we anticipate the Second Coming of the Messiah. For the modern believer, Advent must look backward and forward simultaneously. As we recall God's faithfulness to those who came before us, we are encouraged to trust that God will be faithful to us and to those who come after us. And because we know God transcends the bounds of our time and space, we believe that God is continually bringing hope to the world, is continually coming to walk among us.

We join the chorus of a great cloud of witnesses as we plead "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel" and then answer with the assurance of God's intervention: "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!"

Dec. 6, 2009

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Luke 2:1-7; Micah 5:2-5a

Do you know what it's like to be from a small town? Like Rodney Dangerfield, most small towns just can't get any respect. Despite the quaintness, despite the sense of community,



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despite the low crime rate, despite every positive attribute, the world does not expect grand things to emanate from small towns.

Such was the case with Bethlehem, which could have been voted “least likely to produce the Messiah.” With a population of maybe 500 in the first century, Bethlehem was considered to be a backwater village in the shadow of Jerusalem, which is located only six miles away.

God’s choice of Bethlehem as birthplace of the Messiah shows once again the upside-down nature of the gospel. What human wisdom considers insignificant or unworthy, God deems to be fit for a king. This is a recurring theme of the New Testament and particularly of Jesus’ teaching, such as when he said, “The first shall be last and the last first.”

Bethlehem holds historic significance for Jews, Christians and Muslims. It was here that the matriarch Rachel died and was buried (Gen. 48:7), and it was here that Samuel found David, son of Jesse, and anointed him king of Israel. It was here that the Islamic prophet Mohammed said the angel Gabriel took him on the midnight journey to Jerusalem.

It is sadly ironic that the birthplace of the Prince of Peace has become a battleground for centuries of aggression, pitting Christians against Christians, Jews against Christians, Christians against Muslims, Muslims against Jews and the secular against the sacred. Even the cave where Mary and Joseph are believed to have taken shelter on that holy night has been turned into an ornate shrine, erasing from view the humble origins of him who would be called King of Kings.

Did you know that the Hebrew word “Bethlehem” literally translates “house of bread”? This is a beautiful foreshadowing for the birthplace of the one who would declare himself to be the “Bread of the World” and the “Bread of Life.” From the manna given to sustain the children of Israel in the wilderness, to a stable in Bethlehem, God has provided the sustaining food of eternal life.

Such sustenance was found in Bethlehem in 1865 by Phillips Brooks, then pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. On Christmas Eve, the young pastor rode a horse from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, then to the nearby fields where the angelic host announced the Messiah’s birth to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. After his return to Philadelphia, he wrote the stanzas of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” for the children in his church’s Sunday school to sing

in a Christmas program. He drew upon the memory of his trip and the imagination of that night long ago. The church organist, Lewis Redner, provided the tune that for more than 100 years has helped believers envision “how silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.”

Bethlehem and the Scriptures for today’s lesson all point to a truth expressed in a more modern gospel song: “Little is much, when God is in it.” Two of the verses of this song, written by Kittie Suffield in 1924, speak specifically to our lesson: “Does the place you’re called to labor seem too small and little known? It is great if God is in it, and he’ll not forget his own. Are you laid aside from service, body worn from toil and care? You can still be in the battle, in the sacred place of prayer.”

We can debate the exact date of Jesus’ birth (did you know it might have been as late as 6 A.D.?), the true nature of the census taken at that time and many other details of Luke 1, but the abiding truth is that God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27).

Like Elijah (1 Kings 19), who could not hear the voice of God in the whirlwind or the earthquake or the fire, but only in the silence, we are called in this Advent season to tune our ears anew to God’s still, small voice. Joy will not be found in the sparkling ornaments or glistening lights or pretty packages. Look instead for the calm amid the storm, and then take time to listen. Tune in, rather than tuning out.

The Messiah is to be “the one of peace,” according to Micah. Consider how often you seek peace. Are we not tempted, instead, to seek happiness, success, advancement, toys, even love? Yet to be at peace offers more benefit than any of these.

A few years ago on a trip to New Mexico, I visited the village of Chimayo, just north of Santa Fe. In this humble place sits Santuario de Chimayo, a small Catholic church that has been called “the Lourdes of America.” Pilgrims flock here year-round to seek healing, the results of which are attested by the canes and walkers left behind. Some believe there is healing power in the dirt in a back room of the chapel.

I entered and departed a skeptic of the healing powers of the dirt, but I did pick up a lasting sense of the power of a sacred place. Those who travel to this little village, which is much like Bethlehem of old, find peace in humility. At least I did. Sitting on a carved

wooden bench in the chapel, I was engulfed by silence and opened myself to listen for God’s voice. In that moment, I prayed that with God’s help I could become a person of peace for those who are seeking God. There was no visible angelic visitation, but on that day, Chimayo became my Bethlehem. Like the shepherds of old, I received a mission and heard the voice of God in a place I considered most unlikely.

Where is your Bethlehem? And what is God speaking to you that cannot be heard over the whirlwind of your life?

Dec. 13, 2009

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Luke 2:8-20

Anyone who’s ever seen *A Charlie Brown Christmas* has heard today’s Scripture. This is the passage Linus reads at the climax of the animated story of Charlie Brown and company attempting to put on a Christmas play. Lucy leads the charge for everything to be bigger and better and brighter and bolder. Charlie Brown, lacking a suitable part to play, is sent to find a Christmas tree and returns with the most pitiful tree imaginable. Lucy is outraged.

And then the spotlight hits Linus, holding his blanket, on the stage. The kid thought to be the most insecure of the group boldly seizes the moment to tell it like it is. This, he says, is the true meaning of Christmas.

Thanks to this one animated television show, millions of people have heard the true meaning of Christmas. But that doesn’t mean the same number of people have responded to the angelic news. Hearing and responding are two different things.

Ponder for a moment what would have happened if the shepherds keeping watch that night had not responded to the good news. Luke says the shepherds “went with haste” to see the child and then “made known what had been told them” about the Messiah. But what if they hadn’t? What if they were too afraid to leave their flocks untended? What if the pressing duty of their work was too important to run away and tell about the angels? What if they were too tired? What if they didn’t want to walk in to town in the dark?

Surely God would have made another way to tell the news. But just like Mary, these humble shepherds were chosen by God to



believe the unbelievable and to become front-line interpreters of the incarnation.

Why, then, doesn't everyone who hears the story of Luke 2 respond in a similar fashion? Why do not all who hear believe and act? Must we all have angelic visitations in the darkness of night?

Perhaps the answer is that we too often pay too little attention to God's work around us. Some of us have such chaotic lives that an angelic visitation might blend in with the scenery. There is simply no time, no space for hearing the word of God. Others will work themselves into knots trying to explain away the obvious, especially if it smells of the miraculous. Maybe those weren't really angels. Maybe it was a hallucination. Maybe it was a dream. Maybe ...

The shepherds could have said all these things as excuses for not hurrying to Bethlehem. Yet even if they didn't understand what they had seen and heard, they were curious enough to investigate. And in this they shared an important trait with Mary, whom Luke says "pondered these things in her heart."

"Metacognition" is a new buzzword that describes the process of thinking about thinking. In simple terms, it involves monitoring your progress as you learn and making changes or adapting based on what you learn. When we ponder what we see and do not understand, we may open ourselves to new possibilities of interpretation. When you replay in your mind a conversation or experience and speculate on what might have happened if you did this or that differently or said this instead of that, you are thinking about thinking. Metacognition is driven by curiosity.

Despite the obvious dangers, the shepherds were driven by their own curiosity — call it belief if you will — to learn more about what they had experienced. Like Charlie Brown, who saw a beautiful Christmas tree where others saw only a switch, the shepherds allowed themselves to believe the unbelievable.

Sometimes we consider older adults senile when they tell the same stories over and over. But we learn from the shepherds and from Mary that there is value in rolling over in our minds the things we have seen and heard. The Greek word used in verse 15 to describe the shepherds speaking to one another about what they had seen suggests repetition. In other words, they kept saying to one another what they had seen, hoping the more they said it the more it would come to make sense. The

same was true of Mary who "kept on keeping together" these things.

The failure of all humanity to act upon the story told by the angels is, at its root, driven by a lack of holy imagination — a willingness to think about what you're thinking until the pondering becomes poetic.

In addition to the Charlie Brown special, we know the first part of this passage as the lyrics to one of Christendom's most popular Christmas hymns. The text of "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" is a simple adaptation of Luke 2. This text dates to the 17th century. While modern Americans associate this text with one particular tune, the text has been sung to more than 100 tunes around the world. Perhaps that speaks to the universal message of the Scripture. And by singing the song — over and over again — we lead ourselves to a more thoughtful interpretation of God's greatest work.

Dec. 20, 2009

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Luke 1:26-38

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." With these words, William Carey sparked the modern missionary movement. And thus, on this year in which we have celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement, it is helpful to remember that our forebears were not always "missions minded," as we say today.

When Carey, a Baptist minister, preached what is called "The Deathless Sermon" on May 31, 1792, at an associational meeting at Friar Lane Baptist Chapel in Nottingham, England, he put the final nail in the coffin (at least for that time) of a doctrine known as Hyper-Calvinism. This theology, popular among Baptists and others in the preceding era, taught that not only had God already predestined who would be saved and who would be damned but that God needed little help from humans in calling the elect to salvation. Thus, the notion of missions was deemed unnecessary.

Carey's sermon, based on Isaiah 54:2-3, asserted that while expecting God to do great things, Christians also must attempt great things for God. He deftly combined the sovereignty of God with the Christian's duty to labor for God. This was a radical idea, but it was one Carey had been moving toward for

several years prior.

Within months of Carey's now-famous sermon, the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, and Carey was appointed its first missionary. His work in India earned him the widely accepted designation as the "father of modern missions."

Carey understood the meaning of the angel's message to Mary, recorded in Luke 1:37, "For nothing will be impossible with God." He also was motivated, no doubt, by the spirit of verse 33, "and of his kingdom there will be no end."

We could, in a sense, call Mary the "mother of modern missions," even though she is not a modern figure. Her willingness to submit herself entirely to the work of God in the world is the epitome of the missionary spirit. Her "here am I, Lord" parallels that of Samuel in the Old Testament and the words with which many others from the time of William Carey forward have submitted themselves to God's agenda for the redemption of the world.

We must be careful in telling the story of Mary, however, not to make Mary the focal character. Mary's role is important, even vital, to the story of redemption, but she is not indispensable. God could have chosen another, but God chose Mary. When the angel says Mary has "found favor with God," it is a comment more on God's character than Mary's. That is not to say Mary was not a woman of character, but it is to say Mary was not chosen by God because she was sinless or had lived a life full of meritorious good works. Luke is telling us that God's favor came to rest upon Mary because of God's grace, not that Mary attracted God's favor because of her own righteousness. The Greek word used in verse 28 says that Mary was "endowed with grace," meaning as a gift or indwelling by God.

Let us not forget that throughout biblical history, God often chooses the least likely vessels to be his hands and feet and voice in the world. Consider Abraham, Moses, David, Paul and all the disciples, just to name a few. Thus we are not called to worship Mary but to worship the God who called to Mary, filled her with grace, created in her womb and caused her to be the mother of our Lord.

Remember that Luke, the author of this account, was a physician who well understood the normal way babies came into the world. For him to report the words of the angel, that the Holy Spirit would "overshadow" her, is a clear indication of the unusual, the miraculous. This overshadowing is like unto the



transfiguration of Christ on the Mount of Olives and the *shekinah* glory of God that passed by Moses.

It is because the Spirit overshadows her womb that the child “will be called holy,” not because Mary herself is holy. And it is because the Spirit of God dwells in us that we may “attempt great things for God,” as Carey urged.

Our focus is to be upward, not inward. The beloved Christmas hymn drawn from this Scripture passage illustrates this truth: “Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o’er all the earth. Ye who sang creation’s story, now proclaim Messiah’s birth.” And then the call to humans and angels alike: “Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn King.”

Dec. 27, 2009

Of the Father’s Love Begotten

John 1:1-18

What is the role of the Trinity in the Christmas story? That’s not a question we often discuss, because our revivalism roots as Baptists cause us to focus almost exclusively on the role of Jesus at Christmas. Jesus is the reason for the season, right? In reality, Jesus is only one part of the Christmas story.

The fourth century poet Aurelius Clemens Prudentius pointed early Christians toward a more fully developed view of the incarnation in his poem we now know as the lyrics to “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.” Prudentius wrote personal hymns after retiring to a life of poverty and seclusion, ultimately joining a monastery. He wrote in Latin, but numerous English translations have been made of his work. Both the original and the translations have as many as nine stanzas, far more than we find in most hymnals today.

The last of those stanzas sums up the role of the Trinity in the incarnation: “Christ, to Thee with God the Father, and O Holy Ghost to Thee, hymn and chant with high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises be: Honor, glory and dominion, and eternal victory, evermore and evermore!”

This fourth century poet knew better than we what John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

It all goes back to Genesis: “In the begin-

ning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” When we combine this teaching of Genesis 1 with that of John 1, we see a full portrait of the Trinity at work at creation.

The same Trinity is at work in the Incarnation. The love of God the Father sends the Son to be impregnated into the womb of the Virgin Mary by a miraculous work of the Spirit. It takes all three parts of the Trinity to make the Christmas story happen.

The doctrine of the Trinity, of course, has been controversial in the church for ages. It is an inferred teaching from Scripture, as the word “Trinity” appears nowhere in the Bible. Yet the basis for teaching the Trinity is strongly biblical, when the Bible is read in a systematic and holistic way. The doctrine of the Trinity also is a major stumbling block between Christians and Jews and between Christians and Muslims. All three religions claim to be monotheistic, but to Jews and Muslims, we Christians appear not to be monotheists at all.

John shows us a way through this apparent discrepancy in the opening lines of his Gospel by explaining that Jesus, the Word of God, was present with God at creation and is in fact himself God. Jesus affirmed this in his own teaching: “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

Some Jews of John’s day rejected the claims of Jesus because they could not reconcile those claims with their understanding of Scripture, and Scripture trumped anything Jesus said. To these people, John argues that Jesus predates the Hebrew Scriptures and pre-existed with God before creation. Some Greeks of John’s day placed no authority in the Hebrew Scriptures and saw the gods as untrustworthy. To these people, John appealed to the trustworthiness of Jesus as a way to establish authority for the Scriptures.

Verse 10 paints a picture of a creation that does not recognize its Creator. An inability to see the Messiah not only as God’s messenger but also as part of God himself created spiritual blindness. A primary problem the Jews had with Jesus was that he was too much of the Messiah — both Savior and Lord, not just a messenger or earthly king.

In the 1985 movie *The Jewel of the Nile*, we see a simple illustration of this phenomenon. The novelist Joan Wilder and her swashbuckling partner, Jack Wilder, are on a quest to find “the jewel of the Nile.” Along

the way they rescue an imprisoned holy man. Of course, it turns out that this man *is* the jewel of the Nile, but it takes Joan and Jack until the end of the movie to figure this out, because they are looking for an object, not a person.

Sometimes we can’t find what we desperately need because we’re looking for the wrong thing. When God sent salvation to humankind, it did not come in the form of an idea, a program or an object of worship. Instead, God sent salvation in the form of a person.

Verse 14 explains that the Word of God “dwelt among us,” conveying the meaning of pitching a tent. This is a parallel thought to be the tabernacle in the wilderness, when God came to dwell among the Hebrew exiles.

Even so, John presents what could be viewed as contradictory images, calling Jesus the “Word of God” (implying something to be heard) yet also someone to behold (implying something to be seen). In context of the entire passage from John 1 alongside Genesis 1, however, these ideas merge. If Jesus was present at Creation as God spoke the world into being, the sound and the image may be considered part of the same whole. Further, the four Gospels portray a clear consistency between what Jesus said and what he did. His words and actions are part of a unified whole.

What God has spoken, what Jesus has embodied, what the Spirit has knitted together is one and the same thing: salvation. The Father’s love has begotten a work of the Spirit in the person of Jesus. It sounds unbelievable, yes. But to those who believe — to those who are willing to see the unexpected jewel right before their eyes — God offers the hope of redemption, adoption into the family of God. **BT**

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in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

PEOPLE

Richard Childress is pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C.

Wesley Coffman, dean of the Music School at Hardin-Simmons University from 1981-1995, died Sept. 13. During his service at Hardin-Simmons University, he formulated the plans for building the Hemphill Music Building and the complete restoration of old Caldwell Hall. He was also instrumental in establishing the University School of Music Foundation.

Nilson do Amaral Fanini, president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) from 1995-2000, died Sept. 19. Fanini was a 14-time president of the Brazilian Baptist Convention, and founded the Baptist Theological Seminary of Niterói in Brazil.

Joan Friesen has been elected to serve as the next executive minister for ABC Greater Indianapolis (ABCGI).

Husband and wife **Preston and Eydie Jones** were each ordained to the gospel ministry by Shades Crest Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., on Sept. 30. They are both members of

the First Baptist Church of Jasper, Ga., where Eydie serves as the associate minister to families. Preston is the North Georgia representative for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Both Eydie and Preston are graduates of McAfee School of Theology.

Charles Gatwood, former director of the church music department of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, died Sept. 18. Gatwood previously served as chair of the music department at North Greenville Junior College in Tigerville, S.C., and as minister of music at First Baptist Church of Greer, S.C., and Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C. Gatwood also formed the "Singing Churchmen," a men's choir composed of ministers of music in North Carolina.

Eddie Hammett, who served 19 years with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, has been contracted as church and clergy coach by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina (CBFNC) to do clergy training, lay-leadership and church-staff development, spiritual formation, transitioning issues for churches, and discipleship and deacon ministry.

Michael Mohr is pastor of Rock Falls Baptist Church in Orrick, Mo.

Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy, a champion of the Baptist and broader Christian community in the Indian province of Andhra, died in a helicopter crash Sept. 2.

Walker N. Stockburger died Sept 14 at the age of 90. He served as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., for 32 years.

EVENTS

The **Baptist History and Heritage Society** invites submissions for papers on the theme of "Baptists and Revivalism" for its 2010 annual meeting to be held June 3-5 at Georgetown (Ky.) College. The deadline for submissions is Nov. 23. Contact: Dr. Delane Tew, Christian Women's Leadership Center, Box 292295, Samford University, Birmingham, AL 35229, or delanetew@gmail.com. **BT**

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Trinity Baptist Church of Moultrie, Ga. (www.trinityofmoultrie.org), is seeking a **senior pastor** with excellent preaching ability and a heart for pastoral care. Located in southwest Georgia, our warm and welcoming 250-member church, dually aligned with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention, has a tradition of community ecumenism, an active committee system, a deacon family ministry (we ordain both male and female deacons), a strong Sunday school program, and a dedication to missions. As church administrator, our new pastor should take a hands-on role in these ministries. Our worship style would best be described as traditional-blended, though our quarterly youth services have introduced our congregation to a more experiential worship style. Our prospective pastor should be a people-person and encourager to the church's well-established staff. Direct all inquiries and résumés to: Pastor Search Committee, Trinity Baptist Church, 201 12th Ave. SE, Moultrie, GA 31768, or tbcpastorsearch@gmail.com.

Minister to Young Adults and Students/ University Chaplain: West Main Baptist Church and Averett University of Danville, Va., are creating a joint position focused on innovative ministry to young adults and students. We are seeking a creative, highly motivated, spiritually mature, seminary-trained person who loves young people in both the church and college. This position will be one-third devoted to university chaplain duties at Averett University, and two-thirds to young adult and student ministry at West Main. West Main and Averett are located next to each other and enjoy a vital partnership. We are seeking someone with biblical maturity, Rob Bell-style inventiveness and a strong passion for hands-on mission service. This will be a great position for someone who wants to work in a healthy setting that encourages new ideas and relevant Christian expression in a traditional framework. Send résumés to: Billie Jo Reynolds, West Main Baptist Church, 450 W. Main St., Danville, VA 24541, or billiejoreynolds@comcast.net.

CLASSIFIEDS

First Baptist Church of Rockingham, N.C., a mid-sized moderate church aligned with the CBF and SBC, is prayerfully seeking an **associate pastor of children and youth**. We would prefer the candidate to have a master's degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school and at least 2 years of experience working with children and youth. Guided and supported by the children's council and youth council, this person would be responsible for the development and implementation of programs for children and youth, and would also provide pastoral care to children, youth and their families. The candidate should be energetic and enthusiastic with good communication skills. Salary would be based on experience and education. Submit résumé to: Harry Coble, Chairperson, Children and Youth Minister Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 201 N. Randolph St., Rockingham, NC 28379.

AN Advent DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

After longtime seminary professor and Christian ethicist Henlee Barnette's death, his friends — many of them writers, ministers and professors — began to gather each month for fellowship and theological discussion. This past year a member of The Barnette Buddies met Claudia Daniels from Edge Outreach and invited her to share with the group what this organization does in water ministry throughout the world.

"I presented to the group how we believe water is medicine. We can supply clean, safe drinking water to entire communities with a handful of salt and a car battery and do so in Latin America and India," Claudia reported. "Then, I discussed our water training program preparing 400-500 people a year to solve water problems throughout the world and about the children that now have hope for living a healthy life.

"We talked about how God is moving in these communities. We laughed and we cried and we decided to meet again so they could see firsthand our water training and hand pump repair facility. I had a great time, uninhibited by my ignorance that I was sitting amongst great theologians and educators."

Edge Outreach's relationship with The Barnette Buddies has grown to a warm friendship, and at one point a tearful Wayne Ward stated: "For years I have taught what you are actually going out and doing. Keep it up; keep it up!"

"Barnette Buddies" Wayne Ward, Norman Lytle and Glen Skaggs have joined with Edge Outreach founder Mark Hogg to provide these writings. As we wait upon the birth of the Christ child this Advent season, let us hear the cry of a child who dies every 15 seconds due to waterborne disease.

First Sunday of Advent

Water in the wilderness

By Wayne Ward

"Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the Lord says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.' " And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken. (2 Kings 2:20-22)

On that first Christmas, when Joseph took Mary and the Baby Jesus to Egypt, fleeing the sword of Herod, they were actually reliving the history of Israel and fulfilling the prophecy: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son!"

As they came to Hebron and the Oaks of Mamre, they must have recalled the heartache of Abraham as he reluctantly drove out the servant girl, Hagar, mother of his first son, Ishmael. Dying of thirst in the wilderness, Hagar was praying and holding her baby close



when she heard the sound of water running, a fountain of life in that barren desert.

By the way of the sea, near Gaza, they passed the Fountain of Philip, which would be immortalized by the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, when he asked Philip, "See, here is water; what hinders me from being baptized?"

Beside the life-giving Nile, which had saved the family of Jacob in the time of drought and famine, the boy Jesus walked the river's banks, as Mary and Joseph taught him about Moses being "drawn from the water" in a little basket by Pharaoh's daughter.

Surely they recalled the desperate escape of Moses and the Hebrew slaves through the divided sea, only to find themselves dying of thirst by the poison waters of Marah ("Bitter") in the desert of Paran. Felling the trees at God's command, the "bitter" water was made sweet by the purifying trees. Later, by the hand of Moses, God brought forth water from the rock to save his doubting people.

After about six or seven years in Egypt, God commanded Joseph to bring Mary and the boy back to Israel. He was to bypass Bethlehem and Jerusalem because a son of Herod, Archelaus, now ruled there. Going north to Nazareth in Galilee meant they had to take the desert road through Jericho, an oasis formed by the Fountain of Elisha near the banks of the Dead Sea.

The Bible tells us that Elisha had purified those volcanic waters by throwing salt into the gushing spring. Now we have come full circle. Edge Outreach uses salt to purify all kinds of water in thirsty countries all over the world.

When we drink the living water that Jesus the Water of Life gives us, we have a kind of Bethlehem in our own hearts, as Christ is born anew in us. ■

Second Sunday of Advent

Rivers of living water

By Norman Lytle

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he proclaimed, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

Thirst was an ever-present reality in the biblical world. The Old Testament describes the effects of the cycles of drought as causing famine and thirst throughout the land. The people, the livestock and even the land thirsted.

Because of famine in the land, Abraham led his clan to Egypt, as did Jacob two generations later. Famine drove Elimelech and Naomi to Moab with their sons.

God promised the Israelites fleeing Egypt that the Land of Promise was a "... good land ..., with flowing streams, with springs and



underground waters welling up in valleys and hills ... watered by rain from the sky, a land that the Lord your God looks after" (Deut. 8:7; 11:11b-12a).

As an agricultural and pastoral people, the Israelites were dependent upon the rains coming in their season. The major festival of the year, Succoth, or the Feast of Tabernacles, occurred in the fall of the year between mid-September and mid-October on our calendar.

Basically an agricultural festival, Succoth celebrated the end of the harvest season. Prayers of thanksgiving were given for the

abundance of the harvest and the faithfulness of the rains. Prayer for the beginning of the seasonal rains were acted out in the ritual ceremonies.

Each morning during the festival, a priest brought water to the temple from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher, as the worshippers recited from Isaiah, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The water was then poured out on the altar acknowledging this precious resource as a gift from God.

Against this visual celebratory background, Jesus proclaimed himself as the Source of Rivers of Living Water. Those who drink from the waters of salvation he provides will experience spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment from which they will not thirst, an assurance given also to the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (John 4:14).

In our present world of diminishing supplies of fresh, potable water and increasing spiritual thirst, Edge Outreach is active both in providing pure water and in sharing the Living Water of eternal life. ■

Third Sunday of Advent

The waters of salvation

By Glen Skaggs

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (Isaiah 12:3)

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance..." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:7-10, 15-16)

The subject of water is prominent in the creation account in Genesis. God parted the waters of the Red Sea to save the people of Israel and made water come from a rock as they wandered in the desert.

Water was a source of fear in the story of the great flood, but Noah and his family were saved. In certain religious ceremonies water was used to ritually cleanse persons after they touched dead bodies.

The Isaiah passage above is a song of praise related to the deliverance of Israel from the invading armies of Assyria. The word "salvation" is used here for the first time in Isaiah.

Page Kelley, in his commentary on Isaiah in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, writes that salvation "is derived from a verbal root meaning 'to be wide, spacious,' it connotes the idea of deliverance from all that would thwart or hinder one's peace and prosperity." He further comments that "to draw water from the wells of salvation means to continue to share in the good life that Yahweh has provided for his people."

Edge Outreach believes water is

medicine. Pure, safe drinking water is a part of the good life gifted to us by Yahweh.

The theme of water is continued in the Luke passage with baptism by John the Baptist. The crowds that came were trying to save themselves from future judgments without repenting. This is why John called them "vipers."

In *The Broadman Bible Commentary* on Luke, Malcolm Tolbert writes, "John did not ascribe magical powers to baptism. The rite does not have any value apart from a single individual response to God." A response is mentioned in verse 11. The individual should share with those in need, such as giving them an extra coat or food, as well as water.

The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means a coming, an approach, arrival. It could be used to describe events during the life of Jesus as well as before his birth. John rejected the questions of the crowd about him being the Messiah. He said one more powerful "is coming." Christ continues to come to those who will accept him and the requirements of discipleship. ■



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Anticipation

By Mark Hogg

For a child has been born — for us! The gift of a son — for us! Prince of Wholeness ... there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings. (From Isaiah 9, The Message)

Thousands of years ago, God inspired persons to set in motion “the anticipation” of a Savior. Years after the anticipation, others told how this Savior came.

Luke began his story with the kinfolk. Jesus’ momma’s cousin-in-law, Zach, was a Jewish priest. The Bible says that he and his wife, Elizabeth, “were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly.”

For a long time they’d been praying for a child, but they were old now. Then Zechariah got a visit by an angel and was told some mysterious things, like how an old man and an old woman were going to have a baby together. He didn’t really believe the angel when he was told their prayers were answered.

Here’s a rule of thumb from cousin Zach — don’t argue with an angel or you just might end up losing your voice! Herein lies the first step toward anticipation: Sh-h-h, be quiet and believe. Something’s going to happen.

Remember the Israelites, thirsty and wandering in the wilderness? Moses stepped up to an ordinary rock and hit it with his rod. Anticipation set in: Sh-h-h, be quiet and



believe. Something’s going to happen.

Water sprang up from the rock. According to rabbinic tradition, the Israelites carried it with them on their journey. Anyone who’s suffered from thirst wouldn’t think of leaving good water behind. “Tell Moses to go on ahead. I’ll get some guys and we’ll dig out the rock and bring it along, just in case.” Why not? Who’s to say it wouldn’t keep working?

Paul connects this picture in a way that reflects God’s water provision throughout time. All of them ate the same spiritual food, and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:3-4, New Living Translation).

Seems most of us are looking for something good, even divine, to move into our lives and stay awhile. Christmas is often held as the season for such feelings.

We look for it, wait for it, hope for it. If we find a good thing, we’ll drink it ’til we can’t drink anymore and then store it up as best we can. ■

Christmas Day

Announcing

By Mark Hogg

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)

Suddenly, near the little town of Bethlehem, during the quiet midnight rest of shepherds and sheep grouped together, the sky lit up like daylight.

Whoa! Something happened like no one had ever witnessed before. Angels showed up — a whole bunch of them! Singing like ... angels! They came to announce the birth of the Messiah.

Let’s think for a moment. It seems after a huge orchestrated event like this, the shepherds would want to tarry as long as possible. Isn’t it feasible that the angels would’ve stayed on and performed an impromptu mini-concert?

As for the shepherds listening, wouldn’t it have been incredibly moving? So much so they would have hollered, “Encore, Bravissimo, More, More.” Even in the depths of worship and awe and reverence, “Wait, don’t go just yet, sing something else!”

One can only ponder what an engaging experience this meeting of angels and shepherds was, but soon the sound trickled out all through the region. Scripture tells us the shepherds went back to their fields, singing after visiting the manger. They must’ve been singing the music of the Announcement — the music of joy.

Sometimes joy comes in the form of relief. In many developing countries people are waiting and anticipating a relief from waterborne illnesses. When solutions for clean, safe drinking water arrive you can hear the Bravissimos in the community’s chanting “Pure Water, Pure Water, Pure Water.”

Like shepherds hearing the news of a new life, they know the feeling of a new healthy body is worth a shout-out. Who would want a song like that to stop either?

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19) ■

MAY PEACE RAIN DOWN ON YOU AND YOUR FAMILY,

Your friends at Edge Outreach

Closing

Hope was and has been and is now spoken into the world. Hope is a fundamental perspective of scripture.

The Psalmist says: "I am confident that I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living." When the Christ Child grew up, he said to pray and don't give up. The angel said to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds: Do not be afraid. I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you.

Anticipating and waiting with wonder is one thing, but many people in the world are in waiting and anticipation for the arrival of a basic life-sustaining need — water. This kind of waiting can ebb its way into a churning fear deep in one's soul.

It's literally a wait for life or death standing in a queue for water when there is none or knowing the water you get will make your family sick.

These are the gifts of the Christ Child — those revealing him as Savior. Today in these times water is the most powerful, life-giving gift we could imagine. Edge Outreach partners with people to give that gift. And, thus our world can taste it.

This Christmas, you can give the gift of water to those around the world who suffer the physical harm of having to drink unsafe water. To make gifts ranging from \$25 to \$4500, go to edgeoutreach.com/watergifts. ■



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the lighter side

Windshield wiper wisdom

By Brett Younger

The rain started before we left home, and continued almost all the way. After four hours, I optimistically switched to “intermittent,” but we spent most of the day on the fast end of the wiper speed dial. I announced several times — to no one’s amusement — “The last time it rained like this Noah built himself a boat.”

One hundred miles from our destination, the wiper blade on the passenger’s side decided it had had enough and started unraveling. By the time we got to my parents’ house, the wiper was almost completely gone.

The next morning we drove through the rain to the Texaco in Mantachie, Miss. They only had one blade in stock (it was for a pick-up), but they helpfully pointed us to Jerry Pitts’ Auto Parts.

Lines in Mississippi are short, but

move slowly. The person in front of us talked to Betty Pitts about the weather (“Wet enough for you?”), somebody’s cousin (it was never clear whose), and a lively debate over who fries the best catfish (the consensus is “the place in Centerville, but it’s overpriced at \$6”). I don’t think the person in front of us bought any parts.

When it was our turn, Betty and my father discussed at length how good Amy, Betty’s daughter, was in the Tupelo Community Theater presentation of *Annie, Get Your Gun*. When we finally got to the reason for our visit, Betty suggested we replace just the wiper blade rather than the whole assembly, because “that will be cheaper.” I took the thin piece of plastic and a borrowed pair of pliers, and promptly broke the thingamajig that holds the wiper (I use non-technical terms so as not to confuse lay readers).

Betty then gave me a metal dilly that she assured us “will snap right on.” The rain was coming down hard. I held a borrowed umbrella as my father tried to get the assembly to “snap right on.” After a while, he held the umbrella and I tried. Finally, we sheepishly asked Betty for help. She knew far more than we did, but — and this made us feel better — she couldn’t get it on either.

Betty summoned an innocent bystander who had the misfortune to be in the area. I tried to keep the umbrella over as much of him as I could, but Douglas is big and it was pouring. By the time he announced, “I got it,” the stranger who replaced my wiper was soaked.

Betty said, “I’m real sorry that the assembly costs more than just the wiper.” She explained with concern that my bill would be \$5.44 rather than the original \$3.74.

I asked, “How much do I owe for installation?”

Betty smiled as she said, “I don’t know where you’re from young man, but you’re in Mantachie, Mississippi, now.”

Isn’t that a great line? Wouldn’t that be a wonderful line for us to use in our churches?

When a poor person says, “I was surprised that people made me feel so welcome,” we can reply, “I don’t know where you’re from, but you’re at church now.”

When a hurting person says, “I’m not used to people caring for me,” we can respond, “I don’t know where you’re from, but you’re at church now.”

When anyone says, “The people here seem to be having such fun,” we can smile when we say, “I don’t know where you’re from, but you’re at church now.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful? **BT**

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



Illustration by Scott Brooks

Warriors for Jesus

By Tony W. Cartledge
Posted Sept. 30, 2009
www.tonycartledge.com

I am trying to be more charitable than critical, but I'm struggling with American evangelicalism's penchant for military metaphors. Even as a child, I never liked singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," for example — the image of serving Jesus by "marching as to war" just didn't feel right.

Other images went over my head — I didn't know anything about the horrible atrocities of the medieval "Crusades" to recapture the Holy Land from "the infidel," so I watched Billy Graham's evangelistic "crusades" without a second thought.

Likewise, missionary terminology such as "winning the lost" seemed rather innocuous, since the focus seemed to be on rescuing people from sin rather than conquering their culture. In a world marked by religiously motivated wars, such language seems less innocent now.

The most extreme example of "jihad for Jesus" that I've run across lately was a

chapel service at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in September, when seminary president Paige Patterson announced a new campaign to evangelize everyone within a mile of the school's location on "Seminary Hill."

Introduced, no doubt, by dramatic lighting and music, Patterson "stormed onto the chapel stage," according to Baptist Press, driving a militarized dune buggy dubbed a "Fast Attack Vehicle."

Patterson, clad in a camouflage shirt, fired off a burst of blanks from a .50 caliber machine gun before emerging to announce a seminary-sponsored 50-day door-to-door evangelistic campaign called "Taking the Hill." A promotional video on Southwestern's website is filled with images of war and a description of "our assignment" and "our target."

To his credit, Patterson acknowledged the need for something beyond military might. Pointing to his vehicle's mounted guns, he said: "That weaponry brings sorrow and heartache. We need weaponry that brings joy and happiness. This

weaponry has the prospect of bringing things to an end. We need weaponry that opens eternity."

I appreciate his expressed concern. Even so, the whole idea of using "weaponry" in evangelistic engagement is troubling. It's precisely the sort of talk, I fear, that helps to fuel the sermons of extremists in the Muslim world who see little difference between Christian evangelism and American imperialism.

I don't doubt that Patterson and others who see confrontational evangelism as the heart of the gospel imperative have a real passion about it: belief in a hard doctrine of an eternal burning hell for non-Christians can be quite motivational for both the witness and his or her "target" audience.

I don't see that as the main concern of Jesus, however. The strategy behind a militaristic approach to evangelism is bound to result in added strife, not the peaceable kingdom to which Christ calls us. Those who follow Jesus should be good stewards of all that we have, including our vocabulary and the way we portray ourselves to the world.

It's compassion that our global neighbors need, not conquest. **BT**

You can take the boy out of Georgia . . .

By John Pierce
Posted Sept. 19, 2009
www.bteditor.blogspot.com

My short life as a Yankee began when Alamo "upgraded" me to a Pontiac Vibe at the Richmond airport. It went like this:

Rental car clerk: "You reserved an economy car. Is that still OK?"

Me: "Yes."

Rental car clerk (softly into phone with parking lot colleague): "What's the smallest thing you've got? (Pause) That's it?"

Rental car clerk to me: "Mr. Pierce, we are delighted to upgrade you today" (which were code words for: "This car is larger than what you're paying for, cheapskate, but at least you'll spend more on gas").

The silver Vibe was just fine — but the first things I noticed were the New York tags. Interestingly, others noticed as well in my running about the former capital of the Confederacy for a few days.

They were all nice comments like: "What part of New York are you from?" or "I see you're down from New York."

My reply, "It's a rental car; I'm from Georgia," should have been verified by my accent. Yet one store clerk said I didn't sound like someone from Georgia either.

I explained that mine was a Northwest Georgia-East Tennessee dialect altered by time in other places and the hard work of a couple of speech teachers who attempted to excise the hard "I" sound that "up-air" (that's northwest Georgia for "up there") makes life into "LIhf" and light into "LIht."

While driving around Richmond under the pretense of being a New Yorker, I never considered donning a Mets caps — not even for a moment. And apparently there were no lasting effects.

Following my last interview, I stopped by Cracker Barrel for a nice dinner of turnip greens, pinto beans, onion, chow-chow and cornbread.

Getting in my car to depart, I could only imagine what the older man in the rocking chair was saying to his grandson: "Now there's something you don't see everyday. A New Yorker coming in here for beans-n-greens." **BT**

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MEMBER

‘Appropriate balance’



Theologian and author Marva Dawn (seated) joined church musicians in Macon, Ga., for a time of worship and learning about worship.

Marva Dawn calls the church to worship

How Shall We Worship? “God wants us to be unified.”

God wants the church to sing old and new songs, Dawn told a gathering of church musicians meeting at Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., last month. And identifying worship as either “traditional” or “contemporary” is not helpful.

“If you worship according to your taste, that’s idolatry, heresy,” she said.

Most radio markets offer stations with 13 distinct musical styles, she said. It is unreasonable to think that a church can offer that many unique worship services.

Dawn calls for “the music of the whole church for the whole world — if we are going to reach out.”

She told church musicians: “I believe we can teach any song to any group as long as we do five things — educate, educate, educate, educate and educate.” Teaching one new song at a time — along with familiar ones — is the approach she suggested.

She reminded worship planners and leaders that the Psalmist calls for singing “to the Lord...” “Worship is for God,” she affirmed, not entertainment for the congregation nor a performance by worship leaders.

When someone complains that he or she did not like a certain song or style of music in worship, Dawn said, the proper reply is: “So! We weren’t worshipping you.”

Whatever the church does in worship at the current time is “contemporary,” she said, even if the music is old. She recommended attention to the Church Year as a way of experiencing the cycles of preparation, celebration and proclamation.

Of Christmas, she said: “We ought to fill our churches with hay and manure so we don’t romanticize Christmas ... (Jesus) suffered from the very beginning.” Churches, she said, need to consider “how much God humbled himself to become the child Jesus.”

Of Easter: “No one should come to Easter worship unless they’ve been to Lent worship and Holy Week worship.”

Dawn also urged worship leaders to make better use of silence.

“We don’t know how to do silence very well as God’s people,” she said. “We live in a noisy society.”

She called silence a “rare gift” and noted that God will often say things to us in silence that we haven’t wanted to hear amid the noise.

Good worship will result in good evangelism, Dawn told the church musicians, but the two should be considered separately.

“Worship is talking to God; evangelism is talking to other people about God,” she explained. “We ought not to confuse the two or it will be to the detriment of both.”

Using “contemporary” and “traditional” labels for worship is not the only

MACON, Ga. — Theologian and author Marva Dawn has a question for those who say, “We do contemporary worship; everything here is new.” It is: “So you invented God in the last year?”

Pointing to the 96th Psalm that begins with “Sing to the Lord a new song” and then quoting an old one, Dawn said God is musically eclectic and seeks unity rather than division over personal preferences.

“We should not divide our churches according to our tastes,” said the author of



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language change the trans-denominational Lutheran-raised theologian wants to affect.

“Get the church to stop saying, ‘I’m going to church’ — it’s heresy.”

She reminded listeners that church cannot be reduced to the one-hour gathering on Sunday. “You *be* the church!” the former English teacher said, acknowledging her words as bad grammar but good theology.

We can also “be” the church in the grocery store, she added.

Good worship occurs, she said, when we hold together the necessary tensions of faith — such as God as both holy and love.

“The reason a lot of people don’t worship is because they don’t fear God,” she said, noting that an overemphasis on God’s love at the expense of God’s holiness gives a license to ignore worship.

Worship should involve both the head and the heart, she said, noting another necessary tension. A person’s “will” comes out of what is known — the renewing of our minds. Being guided by feelings alone can be deceptive, she added.

“One of the crises of our age is building lives on feelings,” she said. Failed commitments get excused by simply saying, “I don’t feel like it...”

Worship, she said, should have both “freshness” and “continuity” — that recognizes 2,000 years of Christian history and 4,000 years of Hebrew history before that. The church needs both “new expressions” of worship and “familiarity” that connects the church of the present with the faithful of the past.

In other words, she said, worship always calls for an “appropriate balance” between the many dialectics we find in Scripture.

“It is really important that we teach worship so people don’t come for the wrong reason,” she pleaded. **BT**

“If your church uses ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ [to describe] worship, I hope I can talk you out of it.”

—Marva Dawn



Marva Dawn holds four masters degrees, and a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics and the Scriptures from the University of Notre Dame. She is a Teaching Fellow in Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver BC, Canada. More information on her ministry is available at www.marvadawn.org.

She is the author of numerous books on a variety of subjects including:

In the Beginning, GOD (InterVarsity Press, 2009)

Being Well When We’re Ill: Wholeness and Hope in Spite of Infirmary (Augsburg, 2008)

My Soul Waits: Solace for the Lonely from the Psalms, Rev. ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2007; 1st in 1983)

Joy in Divine Wisdom: Practices of Discernment from Other Cultures and Christian Traditions (Jossey-Bass, 2006)

The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World (Eerdmans, 2006)

Unfettered Hope: A Call to Faithful Living in an Affluent Society (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003)

Morning by Morning: Daily Meditations from the Writings of Marva J. Dawn, edited by Karen Dismar (Eerdmans, 2001)

The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call (co-written with Eugene Peterson) (Eerdmans, 1999)

A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World (Eerdmans, 1999)

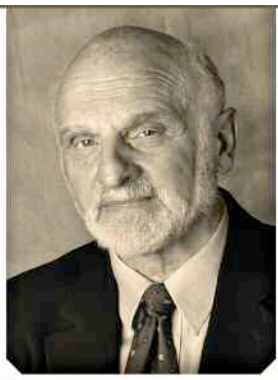
Is It a Lost Cause?: Having the Heart of God for the Church’s Children (Eerdmans, 1997)

Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for These Urgent Times (Eerdmans, 1995)

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting (Eerdmans, 1989).

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guest commentary

Hometown Christians could benefit from a change in perspective

Libby Grammer Garrett

Everywhere I have gone, from the doctor's office to Facebook, I find myself inextricably entangled in turbulent conversations about my high-school alma mater's cheerleaders, their inspirational football-game banners citing passages like, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me," and the unfortunate reactions of many Christians when the school system decided to ban the signs.

From the start, religious leaders (including, sadly, some Baptists) have led the rallying cry against what they perceive as the government's intrusion into the religious affairs of Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe High School. This has prompted students and parents alike to rally in droves to "fight the man."

What disturbs me most is not the Christian messages on the signs (they were there the two years I played for and led the marching band) but the anger that so many of our fellow Christians have demonstrated in their actions in response to what amounts to rather reasonable legal reckoning by the school board.

Their anger is directed at a system they think is seeking to destroy their faith, the person who called the superintendent to raise questions about the legality of the signs, and practitioners of other faiths (who they say get "special treatment" in schools, such as Muslim students who get special rooms to pray or Jewish students who get special excused days off).

Meanwhile, they say, Christians are "martyred" for being the majority.

But of what, exactly, does this martyrdom of Christianity consist? Has the faith died in the public sphere just because the government's schools are limited in their promotion of one faith over another?

I think not. From the start, the true

martyrs of the Baptist faith in particular have supported separating religion and government from each other's control. When the dissenters from Massachusetts Bay Colony, led by Roger Williams, escaped their persecution under the Puritans, they founded Rhode Island — a state dedicated not to mere religious tolerance, but to full religious freedom.

Colonial Baptists such as John Leland continued this rich heritage, influencing the nation's founding fathers to craft an amendment to protect the church and the state from each other.

So why have so many Baptists moved away from our heritage in situations like the one in Fort Oglethorpe, Ga.?

I believe the answer is fear. Fear motivates the Christian majority in my little hometown — fear of being overrun by those who think differently from Southern conservatives, fear of losing their traditions and heritage, and fear of losing their majority hold on society.

It is unfortunate to see so many of my well-meaning sisters and brothers in Christ fighting among themselves, and fighting nonbelievers, against a law that only protects us all from persecution and coercion in matters of conscience. This attitude encourages hatred and scorn for those who disagree, and teaches our students to continue a legacy of bickering — all for the sake of preserving a "tradition" whose vintage is actually rather recent.

Students, parents, church leaders and lay leaders need to refocus not on the one thing our students cannot do in their school — that is, proselytizing by official

school representatives at football games — but on what students can do to make an impact for the cause of Christ in their schools and communities.

Many organizations are available to students to share the gospel message. Students may join local chapters of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, "Y" clubs or other student-led Christian groups at local public schools. There, they can serve others while continuing to share Christ with their peers without any intervention by the school to dictate what they can or cannot say.

Focusing on improving relationships with other faiths will bear many fruits for the Kingdom. Mutual understanding is key to opening doors to share our faith in Christ with others, and freedom to do so without interference from government entities is mandatory to avoid reverting to Old World systems of religious control over our public institutions and public control over religious institutions.

Without a change in perspective, these arguments over cheerleading signs will continue to be indicative of the "signs of the times" — the era in which the Religious Right leads crusades against all others, demonizing well-meaning people (including other Christians) and making a mockery of the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. I hope and pray we can move past this anger-spawned rallying into well-meaning conversation with others about our faith that avoids the debasing rhetoric so apparent in the current dispute. **BT**

—Libby Grammer Garrett is a student at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta and a graduate of Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe High School in northwest Georgia.



guest commentary

Bruised by booze

By Tom Ehrich

RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

NEW YORK — At 10:30 p.m., after a drive upstate to look at colleges, I returned a borrowed car to Greenwich Village, threaded my way through reeling and raucous revelers, and boarded the subway for home.

A couple got on around 14th Street. She had dressed nicely for an evening out. He was wasted, talking to himself with jerky hand motions and nodding off. She looked resigned to another evening lost to drinks or drugs.

At 96th and Broadway, I found myself amid a sad display of people staggering this way and that. Night people, college students, young professionals, all lurching in the rain, like something out of a Federico Fellini film.

What a contrast to our serene two days visiting colleges in small towns and scenic valleys. And yet, not a contrast.

Alcohol and drugs were everywhere. In addition to describing academic opportunities — which sounded wonderful — tour guides stressed the presence of state police, city police and campus police, and described alcohol and drug policies in detail and the consequences for violating them.

Even so, both college towns brimmed with bars. In one, noisy weekend tippling was well under way when we arrived for a tour — at 11:00 a.m.

We stopped for the night in Corning and marveled at their success in preserving a

main drag from the glass-making center's post-war heyday. Then we noticed that every other storefront was a tavern. Steady streams of retirees and college students were pouring in.

You can't live anywhere in America and not be aware of the overwhelming impact that alcohol and drugs are having on our society. In one community after another, another generation is being decimated by binge drinking, marijuana laced with heroin, straight heroin, prescription drugs and crystal meth.

One pastor active in recovery sees a fundamental crippling of the American work force. The economic cost of addictions is nearing \$500 billion a year. Throughout America, weekend partying fills emergency rooms and morgues with drunk drivers, overdose victims, and rape victims. Close to 25 percent of all Medicare and Medicaid expenses stem from substance abuse.

If we want to see God at work in our communities, I think we need to examine these lives that are being lost to self-destruction.

It's fine for congregations to put on concerts, to continue nice traditions from earlier days, to undertake symbolic gestures toward equitable distribution of privileges, and to

gather in daylight for spirited arguments about sexuality.

But if we are to serve God's creation as it is today, we need to see and risk being disturbed by an epidemic of addiction. Some tipping point has been reached, and our cities and towns are spinning wildly into self-destruction.

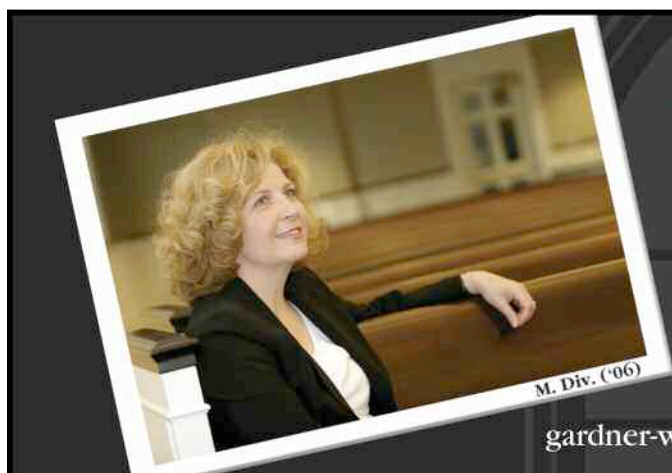
We must respond to it as faith communities. Faith isn't about digging a moat around one's own life.

I am helping some brave folks at a church on Manhattan's Upper East Side to launch a recovery ministry. I don't mean an annual Alcohol Awareness Sunday with a special sermon and singing "Just as I Am." I don't mean just allowing 12-Step groups to use basement rooms when no one else needs them.

I mean opening all aspects of church life to addicts who are seeking recovery, bridging the chasm of distrust between religion and recovery communities, walking together into sobriety and sanity.

Across the country, faith communities are risking a fundamental reorientation of religious life to make a difference, a one-day-at-a-time, one-life-at-a-time difference in a society caught in the death spiral of addiction. **BT**

—Tom Ehrich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York.



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Bonnie Adams keeps her promise

Each week Bonnie Adams works purposefully to keep a promise she made to herself more than 17 years ago: to strive to be an “involved church member” as she defined those qualities through nearly two decades of working for her church.

She and her husband, Clarence, a retired bank executive, have been members of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., for the past 35 years. For almost 20 of those years, Mrs. Adams was the administrative assistant to then pastor Dr. Henry Crouch.

“While I worked at Providence, I was totally focused on my job,” she said. “I was very active in the church, but everything I did was work related as a staff member, not really as a church member. Over the years I observed people in the church and saw the difference involved church members made in the life of the church — those who participated in activities and meetings, who were supportive and cooperative, who cared about the church’s goals and future. I promised myself after I retired I would try to be a really involved church member at Providence.”

When Dr. Crouch retired from Providence in 1992, Mrs. Adams left her position at the church to work another year with him in establishing the development office for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Returning to church life as a member instead of as an employee, Mrs. Adams began working to keep her personal promise.

Over the years she has faithfully attended services and activities, provided leadership on church committees, been active with the Woman’s Missionary Union and church bereavement ministry, and volunteered her time and talents to tutoring school children and assisting with mission projects.

Her involvement in Baptist life also began to extend beyond her church. She has been an active participant in state and national meetings of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and was enlisted to chair a committee for the national CBF meeting in Charlotte in 2010. At her alma mater, Mars Hill College, she is currently serving her second four-year term on the Board of Trustees.

Mrs. Adams believes staying current on Baptist life is an important part of being an involved church member. That is one of the reasons why she and her husband have been



loyal supporters and subscribers of *Baptists Today*.

“We like *Baptists Today* because it is such an unbiased publication, which isn’t true for all Baptist publications,” she said. “You feel like you are up-to-date on what is going on in Baptist life not only in North Carolina, but also other areas.”

One of the more important aspects of *Baptists Today*, according to Mrs. Adams, is the exposure the publication has given women in Baptist life. She feels the news journal’s articles have helped to promote the acceptance and appreciation of women’s expanded roles in churches.

“*Baptists Today* does a good job in covering the leadership of women and their contributions in churches,” she explained. “I am glad to be a member of a church that recognizes women and their leadership. At Providence we have some women in very

responsible leadership positions, including one serving as the deacon chair a few years ago. But that isn’t true at every church.”

Mrs. Adams realizes that for people who have a fixed opinion on women and their roles in the church, the publication would probably not change their minds. “But, for those who don’t have strong feelings one way or the other, I think reading these stories in *Baptists Today* could inspire them to want to recognize these women.”

The impact of these articles goes beyond conveying the news, explained Mrs. Adams. “These stories serve as a challenge to young women to be leaders in their churches and as an inspiration to women of what they can accomplish. Women have always been a vital part of the church, and now, thank goodness, they are being recognized for their leadership more so than ever.”

Mrs. Adams credits *Baptists Today* in helping her keep her promise of trying to be an involved church member.

“Knowing what is happening in Baptist life enables me to be a better church member,” she said. “I am better prepared to serve my church and its service to the congregation, the community and the world.”

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NOT AN EASY ROAD

Excellence was always the goal of trucking pioneer

RICHMOND, Va. — J. Harwood Cochrane remembers when the main road between Richmond and Washington was only two lanes with a curve so tight that truckers had to back up to make the turn.

“It was a deathtrap,” said Cochrane, a Baptist layman who founded Overnite Transportation in 1935 and built it into an impressive company that sold for \$1.2 billion in 1986.

As the interstate highway system grew, so did Cochrane’s trucking business known for its network of truck terminals that enabled cross-country delivery not previously experienced.

In the early days of trucking, Cochrane said, it took five transfers to get a delivery to California. “Now there are probably 30 trucks leaving Richmond for California every night.”

“It was rough as it could be,” he said of the trucker’s life before modern equipment, an elaborate interstate system and full-service truck stops. “But in those days you seldom ran more than 250 miles from home.”

Cochrane’s entry into the world of product delivery could not have been more humble. He was one of eight children raised on a “rural, very poor 70-acre farm” about 22 miles from Richmond.

“I was always trying to make some money one way or another,” he recalled. Setting rabbit traps or sending along goods — such as holly, mistletoe, lettuce and lighter wood — with his uncle who delivered produce to Richmond were his earliest efforts. “I just wanted to do something on my own.”

He found such creativity and self-sufficiency to be rewarding.

“I bought the first pair of shoes I ever had; I was only 9 years old,” Cochrane recalled. “We were as poor as Job’s turkey hen.”

His father died when Harwood was just 16, and his family moved to Richmond. After a few other jobs, he began delivering milk by horse and wagon.

“The week I turned 18 they gave me a new truck and a suburban route,” said Cochrane who found the niche that would fill his vocational life.

The road to trucking success was not easy, however.

“When I was 21, I bought a Chevrolet truck and a trailer. That year I bought three. The next year none of them was running. So I started all over — with one truck with a 12-foot body on it.”

He started in business with his brother, but they split the company and took different routes to avoid competing with each other. When the Interstate Commerce Commission came into existence, Cochrane gained the rights to 56 truck lines.

“I got as far as Houston, Chicago and Kansas City,” he said. “Then the government came along and deregulated the trucking industry (saying) ‘Go where you want to go...’”

Like many trucking companies, Cochrane said he nearly overextended in the 1950s. “I had eight years where every week I thought I might not make it. I promised the Lord if he helped me out of this spot I’d start tithing. At the end of three years I could easily live off the 10 percent; I didn’t need the 90.”

To this day, Cochrane and his wife Louise have kept their promise — and more. “I haven’t missed one week (of tithing) in 60 years,” said Cochrane, who instructed the person who handles his finances to always write the check to the church before her own.

His generosity has benefited many causes including Tabernacle Baptist Church in Richmond where he chairs the endowment committee. The small congregation includes students from the Baptist



J. Harwood Cochrane

Theological Seminary of Richmond whom Cochrane treats to bowling, pizza and the opera.

His gifts have supported numerous educational institutions and other non-profit organizations. Just to name a few: Cochrane has given \$36 million to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, more than \$6 million to Virginia Baptists and a million to the Red Cross.

“I’ve spread it around pretty good,” he said.

Cochrane said he had given more than \$6.5 million to the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board with his generosity resulting in the International Learning Center (formerly known as the Missionary Learning Center) in Rockville, Va.

“We got mixed up with the (Southern) Baptists but that didn’t work real well,” said Cochrane. “They went too fundamentalist for us.”

Gaining wealth was never a priority for Cochrane, he said. His mind was too occupied with thoughts of improvements — including his dream of nearly universal trailers that has been realized now.

“I never had a desire to be rich, but had a great desire to have better trucks, better people, better buildings.”

When asked to name his biggest business mistake he retorted: “Hiring kin people was one of them.” And when asked for some advice, he replied: “Don’t expect to succeed by cutting corners; it always backfires on you eventually.”

But he added: “I don’t want anyone to think I’m a good example ... but I always try to help people.”

Cochrane built a reputation for caring for his employees and others in need. He would quietly give company stock to those such as a police officer with several children and a family with a special needs child.

At 97, he still reads industry magazines and merges companies in his mind. “I’ve got aches and pains that keep me from doing a lot of things I’d like to do, but I stay busy.” **BT**



Campus groups tackle **domestic hunger** directly

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — As the new school year began at colleges and universities across the country, students at two historic Baptist schools were taking Jesus' command to feed the hungry and quench the thirsty quite literally.

Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Baylor University in Waco, Texas, are feeding their local communities through the Campus Kitchens Project. The initiative is an effort by students to keep extra food on their campuses from going to waste — and to challenge the very roots of malnutrition in their communities.

According to the group's website, there are 20 schools across the country that have started their own Campus Kitchens chapters. Students coordinate the redistribution of leftover food from dining halls to those in need.

The chapter at Wake Forest has been serving since 2006. According to Shelley Graves, the kitchen's coordinator, in that short time approximately 1,200 volunteers have worked to serve meals in the Winston-Salem community. Graves said student volunteers work in donated kitchen space and help serve 350 to 400 meals per week, Sunday through Thursday, to a number of local organizations that serve the disadvantaged.

"Students are really the ones that are running the program from day to day," Graves said. In fact, she noted, the program's volunteer spots are very popular among Wake students.

Andy Ronan is one of those student volunteers. A business major in his third year of volunteering with the project, he serves as a member of the chapter's executive board. He heard about the project through a friend, and then started volunteering on an individual basis before organizing a group from the Catholic campus ministry. They now serve meals regularly.

Ronan described the program as a "great link" between the university, its surrounding community and local charities.

He admitted that it is often easy to become "very sheltered" living on the campus of a school like Wake Forest — even for someone who, like he did, grew up in Winston-Salem. However, Ronan said, his experiences volunteering with Campus Kitchens have "helped me to see that right outside of our campus there are people that live such different lifestyles."

In helping their local community, Ronan said the student volunteers benefit as well. The project is "just as much a service to us as the people we deliver meals to ... [it] enriches your week," he said.

Graves, a Wake alumna, points to her own faith and background as influential in her motivation for serving through Campus Kitchens.

"A lot of my drive for service came from the fact that I grew up in a family [in which] service was not only a good thing to do, but a requirement," she said. Graves is now minis-

tering in her own way, following in the footsteps of her parents and her grandfather, all ministers.

Graves said the student volunteers come from a diversity of faith backgrounds. Although Campus Kitchens is not a faith-based organization, she said the Wake chapter tries to emphasize that serving others is a responsibility — and that the people they are serving are "not some abstract group ... they are real human beings."

The Campus Kitchen at Baylor is just beginning its first full year of service to the Waco community. It is one of the two major initiatives of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Poverty Initiative (BIPI).

According to Gaynor Yancey, a BIPI faculty coordinator and a dean at the Baylor School of Social Work, the project gets faculty, staff and students "all concentrated on the fact that poverty is one of the major issues in the world."

The Baylor kitchen was born from a project in Yancey's advance practice class in the social-work master's program.

"What would normally take a year to a year-and-a-half, my class did in three-and-a-half months," she said.

The process taught the students how to start an organization and included breaking the class into teams, with each team functioning as would a team in a real-world organization. The teams had a plate full of tasks ranging from working with the

university, administration, and local food service, to being trained as safe food handlers, writing grants and organizing volunteers.

Their work paid off when the kitchen officially started on Baylor's campus last Jan. 17 — the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. On that day alone, volunteers served 1,000 boxed lunches at nine different sites to people who were marking the day by serving their community.

Like the Wake Forest kitchen, the Baylor kitchen is student-driven. Last spring semester, Yancey said, the program had around 350 student volunteers.

One student volunteer is Anna Imose, a junior who serves as the student coordinator. Her responsibilities include all of the planning, scheduling and paperwork — including a monthly report to the national office of Campus Kitchen.

This year, Imose said, the Baylor chapter continues to prepare one full meal a week to be served at a local organization. They will also be taking food that can't be stored to the Salvation Army, which serves three meals every day of the week.

To Imose, her role as a student coordinator is about more than just serving food.

"You realize how important food is," she said. "I never realized how much of an influence it has.... [I] learned that in the simple thing of feeding people they are more willing to listen to you ... open up to you ... it opens a door that I never thought was possible."

Campus Kitchens' mission goes beyond simply feeding people, though, to include teaching them about healthy eating and living. Christine Hersh is Baylor's kitchen manager. A nutrition sciences major, she acts as the chapter's nutrition coordinator as well. Her job is to take the reclaimed food and decide how to



From left, Sheena Smith, Flor Avellaneda, Christine Hersh and Marianne Magjuka celebrated the grand opening of Baylor University Campus Kitchen earlier this year. Photo courtesy ABP/Baylor



Campus Kitchens of Wake Forest University encourages volunteers to use their creativity to put thoughtful touches on the food they prepare like this football cake. Photo courtesy ABP/Melissa Duquette

make nutritious meals out of it, along with running the kitchen and making sure food-safety standards are being followed.

This year, the Baylor kitchen is partnering with a local farm to incorporate locally grown produce into the meals. "[I am] very excited about bringing that nutrition into it," Hersh said.

The Wake Forest chapter will also be adding this element to their own kitchen through a campus garden.

Like Ronan at Wake Forest, Hersh said her experiences volunteering have helped her to see the need in the local community surrounding campus. "It has enabled me to see beyond the 'Baylor Bubble' ... it really opened my eyes to what the need is out there and how much food we waste — or would have wasted if we threw away this food from the dining halls."

In the case of Baylor and Waco, it's a community that could really use the help. According to Yancey, the small Central Texas city has a 27.5 percent poverty rate among adults. "Baylor is a part of the Waco community ... this is something that we can all get involved in," she said.

Outside of serving food and providing nutrition education, both Baylor and Wake Forest's kitchen projects encourage students to sit and eat meals with the people they are serving. Yancey described the program as "not just a thing of serving food, but building relationships ... sitting and talking with people over food, over a meal is one of the most effective ways to build relationships."

In her opinion, Yancey said, breaking bread and getting to know someone over a meal is "something pretty biblical." **BT**

—Melissa Limmer, a Baylor alumna, was a summer intern with Associated Baptist Press.



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Guidelines address spreading flu in churches

By Michelle Minkoff
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — The White House and federal health officials have released guidelines recommending that worshippers take precautions against spreading germs to reduce the risk of contracting swine flu.

Marilyn Meyers, a 67-year-old member of Washington National Cathedral, already had thought about the health risks involved in her church's services. On Oct. 4, as she has for the past several months, she rubbed sanitizer on her hands before getting in line for Holy Communion.

"You shake hands, you touch the prayer books we all share, you break off a piece of the same bread — who knows what might be on it?" she said.

At Sunday's service, parishioners continued to exchange the Sign of Peace, shaking hands with those around them. Most also waited in line to receive Communion, often sipping from a communal chalice.

"I'm not concerned about the wine yet," said Meyers. "But if I were, you're allowed to dunk the wafer in, so you aren't sipping from the same cup. I think I'm OK for now, though."

The guide, released by the White House

Office for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Department of Health and Human Services, advises religious groups to take precautions to help prevent the spread of swine flu.

The guide suggests that houses of worship encourage congregants to wash their hands often, use hand sanitizer, avoid crowded situations and interact

without physical contact when possible. It also urges religious leaders to keep in contact with local health organizations and closely adhere to their recommendations.

Joshua DuBois, the director of the faith-based office, said in a news release that faith leaders have significant power to help spread the word on how to stay healthy.

The National Association of Evangelicals, too, e-mailed its member congregations to suggest preparations for flu season by following the White House guide, which can be found online at www.flu.gov.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recommends that clergy remind parishioners not to drink from the Communion cup if they are feeling ill. The conference also said bishops are free to make decisions for their specific dioceses.

Already, Bishop John F. Kinney of St. Cloud, Minn., directed churches in his

diocese to stop offering a common Communion cup and to discourage hand contact during Mass.

In the Washington area, Catholic leaders said they were taking their cues from the Archdiocese of Washington and the bishops' conference.

The archdiocese is distributing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and reminding parishioners that they can nod rather than shake hands for the Sign of Peace, according to archdiocese spokeswoman Susan Gibbs.

The federal guidelines also are relevant to Islam. Some Muslims ritually cleanse themselves using the same bowl of water before they are called to prayer. And in the Jewish tradition, congregants close the service by shaking hands and wishing each other a good Sabbath, or "Shabbat shalom."

Samuel T. Lloyd III, dean of the Washington National Cathedral, said he was in close communication with local health authorities, and would take action as needed. But he thought it wasn't up to the Episcopal Church as a whole to dictate how to practice rituals.

"We are prepared to take action if there is a concern, but in the end, people should make their own decisions," he said.

Meyers agreed that precautions aren't up to the government, or the clergy.

"I think it's something that's up to the individual," she said, "No one can make the decision for you or tell you how to practice your faith." **BT**



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BAPTISTS
Today

Theologian-scientist ponders discipline connections

ATLANTA — There are paths between science and theology, and both can find value in interaction, noted author and professor of science and theology Robert Russell told an audience at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in September.

Russell, founder and director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences and a professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., delivered McAfee's second annual D. Perry and Betty Ginn Lecture on Christian Faith and Modern Science. He used his address to take on some common historical misconceptions about the roles of science, philosophy and religion.

"Philosophy mediates between theology and science," Russell said. "Science doesn't prove God, but it does show that life is very much at home in this universe. This is not a proof of God, but an invitation to take the universe and give it a sense of purpose and value in a way that the science I grew up with did not.

"It isn't as much of a leap to say that God created the universe as it is to say there are an infinite number of universes out there," he said. "It tends to be unanswerable because it's beyond the laws of science and observation."

Russell has spent his career studying these interactions. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he is a member of the Society of Ordained Scientists and has written or edited numerous books on science and theology.

He holds a Ph.D. in experimental physics from the University of California, Santa Cruz, a master of divinity and a master



Robert Russell lectures on theology and science at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta on Sept. 15. (Mercer University photo)

of arts in theology and science from the Pacific School of Religion and a master's degree in physics from the University of California at Los Angeles. As an undergraduate at Stanford University, he triple-majored in physics, religion and music.

One example of philosophy influencing science, he said, surrounds the "big-bang" theory about the creation of the universe. Russell said some theorized a single event beginning the universe, while physicists said this created the philosophical paradox: "How could the universe have a beginning?"

A competing theory, called the steady-state or ever-expanding-universe theory, was rejected by Albert Einstein in 1927 and called "an abomination." But in 1931, after reviewing the theory and considering his own position, Einstein changed his mind and called his original opinion his "greatest blunder."

"In my opinion," Russell said, "this shows that philosophy can play a creative role in science" because evidence can be proven false as part of the scientific process. The big-bang theory and the steady-state theory are still being debated today, Russell said, and philosophical and theological considerations influence theory choice.

Objections to the big-bang theory have also arisen on theological grounds. Some said the theory supports creation, while others disagreed, saying it would promote atheism.

Other scientists said if the theory is relevant to theology, it should be abandoned.

Russell said he thinks science is only indirectly relevant to theology.

"Science provides confirmation for theology, and science and theology are in consonance with each other," he said. "Science plays a secondary role in Christian faith, which primarily has its basis in Scripture, tradition, reason and experience."

Even though the theory of evolution is often vilified by Christians, Russell said for believers, theology can offer an explanation. "Evolution biology requires a specific set of circumstances to exist. There's a very subtle connection to God, because if any of the circumstances had been any other way, we wouldn't be here.

"The existence of life puts constraints on the type of physics you have," he said. "It ties physics and biology together. It's not a design argument; it's an argument against cosmic meaningless. Philosophy mediates between theology and science."

The endowed Ginn Lectures at McAfee were established to encourage a deeper understanding by clergy and students of science and how it relates to the biblical revelation. **BT**

—Bob Perkins Jr. is an Atlanta-based writer who has written for Mercer University and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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