



BAPTISTS Today

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differentlly

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BAPTISTS Today

An autonomous national Baptist news journal



Photo by John Pierce.
Long-time missionaries to Japan, Calvin and Harriett Parker, live in Mars Hill, N.C., where Calvin continues to write insightful books.
Story on page 4

Heaven's Rain
A story of pain and forgiveness
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The Japanese challenged Calvin Parker's assumptions

MARS HILL, N.C. — Calvin Parker's latest book, *The Good Book Is Better Than It Used To Be: Eighty Years with the Bible*, is fairly small but not a lightweight. It is an honest rendering of one bright Baptist's mind and heart about Holy Scripture and the most challenging issues facing Christians today.

The scholarly missionary to Japan (1951-1989) said his extensive experience in East Asia significantly changed the way he views the Bible.

"They challenged a lot of my assumptions," Parker said of his 38 years of living, worshipping and learning among the Japanese people. "They helped me realize that my Western way of thinking unduly influenced my reading of the Bible."

Parker said he arrived in Japan with an Aristotelian logic that assumed "if A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C." That was not the Japanese way of thinking, he learned quickly.

Although he had studied Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Parker said his "breakthrough" came when he began to think and dream in Japanese.

"The language affects how you do logic," said Parker. "The Japanese can't possibly interpret the Bible as we do."

Parker said his early experiences in Japan turned his mind from a rational approach to logic based on Greek philosophy to a relational model based on biblical thought. That, in turn, impacted his approach to Scripture.

Reading the Bible *differently*



Friends in Japan ship a favorite treat to long-time missionaries, Calvin and Harriett Parker, who have lived in the mountains of North Carolina since 1989.

Arguments such as the one Baptists often engage in over the "inerrancy" of the Bible hold little interest for Parker, he said. The so-called "domino theory" — that if one minor point in the biblical text is inaccurate then the whole gospel truth might fall — is tied to an old way of thinking for him.

"Inerrancy once made sense to me," said Parker, who was ordained to ministry by the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., in 1947, "[but] it no longer makes sense to me."

But Parker said he avoids the discussion since "there's not much room for compromise." "If that's the kind of mind you've got, then that's the kind you've got."

The soft-spoken missionary who, along

with his wife of 62 years, Harriett, has called the mountain setting of Mars Hill, N.C., home since 1989, said he has never been aggressive in trying to change the minds of others.

"My calling to is to be a Christian witness," said Parker. "I'm not an activist like some of my friends."

However, Parker does have strong opinions about how some people use — or, in his opinion, misuse — the Bible to justify particular causes such as the invasion of Iraq and the subjugation of women.

"It is a Good Book if used in a good way," said Parker. "I want to put in a good word for it."

LEARNING ABROAD

While some people may think of missions in terms of exporting truth, and often Western culture, Parker said he learned a great deal about faith and ministry from those with whom he worked in Japan — in addition to a different approach to interpreting the Bible.

“They taught me to be more tolerant of other people’s views,” he said.

He credits Japan Baptist Convention leader Shuichi Matsumura with teaching him to “put people to work in the church and then win them to Christ.” An American approach to logical persuasion is ineffective, he said. The first step in reaching a person is to create a family for them.

“You cannot talk these people into being Christians,” he said. “You have to expose them to it over a long period of time.”

Parker said he also discovered Christian values and behaviors in those who did not profess to be Christians. For example, he said the Japanese judicial system is based on showing mercy and redeeming someone. As a result, a smaller percentage goes to prison.

Japanese Baptists also gave Parker a new perspective on the role of women in church leadership that he had not experienced back home.

“In the first service we attended in Tokyo in 1951, the offering was taken up by four women and the prayer was offered by one of them,” Parker recalled. “I’d not seen that before.”

He was also surprised to discover that this Baptist church had women serving as deacons and that the male-dominated church leadership he had experienced at home was not worldwide.

“In seminary [in Japan], I taught many women who became outstanding pastors,” he said.

So one can imagine the alarm Japanese Baptists and the longtime Southern Baptist missionaries there felt, he said, when James Merritt, president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000-2002, visited Japan and told women pastors that God could not call them without “contradicting his Word.”

Also, Parker said he and other Baptists in Japan discovered great benefits in working with Christians of other denominations.

“It has been a great, great experience,” he said of their long missionary service in Japan.

TELLING STORIES

For those who cannot experience Japanese life firsthand, Parker has several varied and insightful books that are available at www.amazon.com. (Search for “F. Calvin Parker.”)

For example, his book, *Christ in a Kimono: Christian Beliefs in Japanese Dress* (2003), gives insight into how the Christian gospel is understood and takes hold in Japan.

“I was so infatuated with Japanese culture,” said Parker of his interest in writing this book and of finding ways to connect the gospel story to the daily lives of the Japanese people.

“In my preaching, I tried to use Japanese illustrations and Japanese commentaries,” said Parker. “Using these sources helped me see that I could cast a light on the gospel by showing how it fit into their world.”

He has also written a groundbreaking biography of Jonathan Goble, the first American Baptist missionary to Japan whose influence was wide including being credited with inventing the rickshaw. Parker first learned of Goble in a missions class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“If I’m going to be a missionary to Japan,” Parker recalled thinking as a seminarian, “then I should know more about the first Baptist missionary to Japan.”

That quest became a long and deep one. He discovered that little had been written about Goble — and used his first three furloughs from the mission field to do research including time spent at Harvard and the University of Tennessee as well as in New York State where Goble had been raised.

Parker picked up the work of an unfinished biography and eventually gave his first lecture on the controversial mission pioneer. “That established me as an authority on Goble,” he said with a smile.

His book, *Jonathan Goble of Japan: Marine, Missionary, Maverick*, was published in 1989 and is aimed more toward American readers, he said. In Japan, Goble is famous for his part as a Marine in the 1853 Perry Expedition. Goble’s journal was not confiscated by Perry — and his recordings made front-page news in Japan.

Parker gives an honest appraisal of Goble who was converted to Christianity and affirmed a call to missions while in

prison for threatening a grocer. Yet he was fired by the American Baptist Missionary Union after just one year.

“He never was able to overcome his temper,” said Parker. “He really hurt the missionary cause in one sense.”

However, Goble did translate the Gospel of Matthew into Japanese — the first Bible translation. And he, unlike some early missionaries, adapted Japanese architecture to churches rather than using Western styles.

Parker, who studied Goble’s life and influence for 14 years, said, “He had a lot of insights but his character was always in question.”

Parker has also written a book about the first Japanese Baptist convert — known as “Sam Patch” — who was brought to New York by Goble and baptized.

Parker has also written and published a biography of his wife: *Hallelujah Hale: The Story of Harriett Hale Parker, Missionary to Japan* (2009).

A NEW HOME

Floridian Calvin Parker and his Tennessean wife settled into the small, college town of Mars Hill, outside Asheville, N.C., after retiring as missionaries 21 years ago. He had never been there before.

They are active members of Mars Hill Baptist Church — “which has some outstanding women ministers,” he noted.

The mountain setting is similar to where they lived in Japan, and thanks to modern technology they keep up with many Japanese friends. Some even ship their favorite snacks to them.

After a 12-year battle with cancer, Parker has given up preaching but still teaches Sunday school. He thought his book on the Good Book would be his last, due to health concerns, but is not sure now if something else might come to print.

Whether or not more writings follow, Parker has provided a wide-ranging collection of books about the Bible, the gospel it contains, and those who have sought to share it in different times and cultures.

And he remains a strong advocate for the Bible, which he said is best understood as a life jacket rather than a straight jacket.

“We need not abandon it any more than we need to abandon God,” he writes in the closing chapter of his book. “We only need to read it with spiritual discernment, to distinguish the gold from the dross.” **BT**

Quotation

“ remarks ”

“It’s a little like giving Lindsay Lohan the Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s ‘Woman of the Year Award.’”

—Communications Director Joe Conn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State on the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission presenting its John Leland Award to Alan Sears who directs the Alliance Defense Fund (*The Wall of Separation blog*)

“Idlewild has always maintained the highest safety standards in all our church activities.”

—Brian McDougall, executive associate pastor of Tampa’s Idlewild Baptist Church, to the Tampa Tribune, after a Florida jury ordered the church to pay \$4.75 million to a young man injured as a teen on a 2003 youth ski trip (*ABP*)

“Part of the cost of doing ministry in a dangerous world is preventing, minimizing and preparing for these threats — that is, risk management.”

—Baptist minister Phill Martin of the inter-denominational National Association of Church Business Administration on helping ministry leaders to foresee potential for liability, injury, abuse and theft that places congregations at risk (*ABP*)

“Background checks do not predict the future or expose harmful behaviors from individuals who have never been caught. But checks can help organizations learn of volunteers or employees who have documented criminal pasts.”

—Jennie Taylor of LifeWay Christian Resources, which has found more than 600 felony offenses since the Southern Baptist publishing arm began offering discounted criminal-background checks to churches and other organizations in 2008 (*ABP*)

“I don’t want to write a book, and I don’t want to start a movement after my name. I just want to get this done.”

—Kevin Ezell who left a Louisville pastorate to become president of the troubled Southern Baptist North American Mission Board (*The Christian Index*)

“We have done a perverse twist on the old saying, ‘What is good for General Motors is good for America’ and tend to act as if ‘What’s good for America is good for God.’”

—Davis Byrd, architect and theologian, in *Living by the Word of God* (2010, *Parson’s Porch Books*)

“We believe that people have the freedom to worship and to express their faith and to have houses of worship in the places where they live.”

—Southern Baptist ethics leader Richard Land speaking in support of “victimized” Muslims seeking to build a new mosque in Murfreesboro, Tenn. (*ABP*)

“Local officials may also need to be reminded that the fact that some have committed terrorist acts in the name of a faith is not a justification for denying others who claim that faith their free exercise rights.”

—Melissa Rogers, director of Wake Forest Divinity School’s Center for Religion and Public Affairs (Report from the Capital)

“It’s incredibly sad that so many Christians place such a huge focus on the physical and the external, as though whether you’re up on your feet is the definitive evidence of whether or not your faith is strong.”

—Disability advocate and artist Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic who is being treated for breast cancer, on those who connect physical challenges to some hidden sin or lack of faith (*RNS*)

“When a breakdown of trust and empathy has occurred in science, religion, or some other realm, a new and unwelcome character often appears on the scene in the form of the fanatic.”

—Martin E. Marty, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, in *Building Cultures of Trust* (2010, *Eerdmans Publishing*)

“The movement for religious liberty would succeed in America because evangelicals, rationalists, and deists fought for it together.”

—Thomas S. Kidd, associate professor of history and senior fellow at the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University, in *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (2010, *Basic Books*)

“If the average Southern Baptist knew that only about 19 cents of every dollar winds up on the international mission field, I believe they too would feel a need for a radical reprioritizing of missions giving.”

—Southern Baptist Convention President Bryant Wright of Marietta, Ga., whose church directly funds international missions, on the allocation of Cooperative Program funding (*Baptist Press*)

editorial

Common challenges face church leadership

By John Pierce

A highly respected and long-tenured pastor called to talk about some of the issues he was facing in leading his good and healthy congregation. He said pastoral ministry had never been more challenging — with issues on the table that were not imagined earlier in his career.

This effective pastoral leader wanted to know if the challenges being encountered by his congregation were unique to their setting.

He mentioned financial issues — especially as they related to budgeting for congregational needs and determining the best course for supporting missions beyond the church. Then he wondered aloud about addressing staff concerns: how many and what kind of ministries need professional leadership over volunteers?

Worship planning, facilities maintenance and use, changing demographics, and competing factors in the community and other subjects were added to the informal list as our phone conversation unfolded. And after a sigh, he mentioned that a new, high-tech, high-energy community church on the edge of town was pulling members from every congregation around regardless of denominational affiliation.

This seasoned and gifted Christian leader did not sound defeated, just perplexed by the multitude of “stuff” piling up on the pastor’s desk. Then he asked: “Do you know if other churches are dealing with these issues?”

“Yes,” I responded quickly and with a soft, hopefully reassuring laugh. “Just about every church I’m aware of is dealing with those same issues.”

Whether or not that acknowledgement created any comfort, I don’t know. Perhaps ministry loves company.

With no doubt or hesitation, one can affirm that church leadership is very challenging today. Expectations are higher, and competition — though we don’t often name it as such — is stronger.

Another experienced pastor commented to me about how some of the new challenges

to pastoral ministry are revealed in the ordination and interview processes. Completely different questions are being asked of ministers and potential ministers than in the past, he said.

He recalled his own experience with an ordination council some 30 years ago when he was asked about his views on Christian theology and the church’s ordinances. Now, he said, prospective ministers — for ordination or a new church calling — are quizzed about more divisive issues such as abortion, homosexuality and worship style preferences. In such cases, there is rarely an answer that suffices.



So, along with many other challenges of church leadership today, ministers are being pushed onto an obstacle course of controversial and highly emotional issues to be navigated. It is easy to get tripped up by those expecting only answers that align with their own politics and theology.

In many church settings, it is not enough to provide pastoral care, administer the church business effectively and offer biblically based, relevant messages on Sunday morning. Pastoral leaders are often expected to carry the water for those whose personal “cause” dominates all else in their lives.

Indeed, church leadership today comes with many challenges. Yet few are unique to any one congregation.

Lay leaders do well when they acknowledge — in the ministers’ hearing — that their work is not easy in these changing times and assure them that they are not being held to an unfair standard based on a time when people and money flowed more freely.

Yet, despite the many new challenges, all church leadership — clergy and laity alike — needs to be reminded that the work being done is unique in purpose and highly needed. These new challenges to congregational ministry can be faced with faith and optimism.

Duplication of the past is neither possible nor probably desired.

Never underestimate the creativity within a congregation to shape new challenges into effective ministry opportunities. And, despite the many cultural shifts and hot-button issues, ultimately, most church members still want to know that God and God’s people are there for them in their greatest times of need.

And in the fast-moving, often-uncaring culture that swirls outside the church walls there exists a greater need for Christian compassion and community than at any point in most of our lifetimes. Therefore, the church’s unique mission to nurture faith and fellowship — despite all odds — deserves our best attention. **BT**

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BAPTISTS
Today



Editor's note: This is the 11th in a yearlong series of articles on "Healthy ministers for healthy churches," produced in partnership with the Center for Congregational Health and supported by a gift from Henry V. Langford.

Realizing grace and truth

By Stephen N. Johnson

It may appear a truism — not to mention arrogant — to say that both ministers and congregations need to understand the gospel of the grace of God. Perhaps it's not as axiomatic as it seems.

Aldous Huxley wrote in *The Perennial Philosophy* that familiarity with Scripture can lead to "a reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words."

The sacred word "grace" has fallen victim to "a reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning." We sing about grace, use it in sermons, even hear it in secular conversation.

Do we, however, understand how radical, how outlandish, how amazing grace truly is?

Nothing will bring health to both ministers and congregations like a clear understanding of the nature of New Testament grace revealed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The church is "the body of Christ" — Paul's favorite metaphor for the church. Just as Jesus is God incarnate in this world, so the church is Christ incarnate in this world. As such, the church is to embody Christ in the world. It has no other reason to exist.

In a world fractured by wars, crime, violence, social upheaval, political acrimony, economic recession and ecological disasters, does the church have anything worthwhile to offer? It does: God's grace.

John concludes the prologue to his gospel with these words: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has

seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him" (John 1:17-18).

For John, Jesus "explained" God to us, and what he "explained" is that — above all else — God is a God of "grace and truth."

This is the good news the church is to embody in the world. But is the grace and truth of Jesus the message of the church today?

Not according to the latest research.

The Barna Group's president, David Kinnaman, in his groundbreaking book *unChristian*, reveals

"that Christians are best known for what they are against. They are perceived as being judgmental, anti-homosexual, and too political."

The same year *unChristian* was published (2007) the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina voted to expel a church from its membership because that church welcomed gay and lesbian persons. The same thing occurred a few years earlier in my home state of Georgia.

There can be no question for those who know the Jesus of the four Gospels that he would have welcomed and dined with them, but not the Baptist conventions of North Carolina and Georgia. These are not isolated instances of the church rejecting those whom Jesus would accept.

What message does the church of Jesus Christ send to the world — or for that matter to those in the pew — when it rejects the very persons Jesus welcomed and for whom he died?

We may sing with fervor "Amazing Grace," but we let many persons know that we expect them to clean up their act before we clasp them to our bosom. They needn't

think they can barge into our church just as they are and fraternize with the good people. No WWJD bracelet for "them"!

This is why "... young people are quick to point out they believe that Christianity is no longer as Jesus intended. It is un-Christian," according to Kinnaman's research.

In 1517 the church had forsaken the simple truth of the gospel of God's amazing grace, and Martin Luther called the church to reformation. Have we done so again, and is it time for a new Reformation?

The church must again embody the truth and grace of Jesus Christ, the message of God's unconditional love, forgiveness of all sin and acceptance for all humanity.

How can the church today effectively communicate the truth and grace of Jesus?

First, grace means that the love of God is unconditional. God does not love us if or when or but or however. God loves us period.

There is nothing we can do to cause God to love us more; there is nothing we can do to cause God to love us less. Love is God's character, not a response to our performance.

After a lifetime of contemplating the life and ministry of Jesus, John wrote the most profound statement in the Bible: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

The greatest ministry the church can have is to embody the grace of God — God's unconditional love to everyone. To tighten the screws even more, this must include radical Islamic terrorists (Remember Jesus saying something about loving our enemies?) and any others with whom we radically disagree. There can be no exceptions.

Second, the church is commissioned to proclaim the gospel of grace, not to enforce the public morality. The public, the politicians and often the church don't get



this. They expect the church to regularly threaten the population with sanctions temporal and eternal; it helps keep people in line.

When the church, however, sees as its primary task the proclamation and enforcement of laws, the gospel is always lost in the process. The message of the church becomes “thou shalt not” rather than “your sins have been forgiven.”

As Kinnaman documents in his book, *unChristian*, the church today is known for what it is against, not for the gospel. Both pulpit and pew need a renaissance of the Good News.

Third, take sin seriously, but take grace more seriously. How serious is sin? Look at the cross.

Then look again; because, according to the Apostle Paul, Jesus has “forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out (“erased, obliterated”) the ... debt ... and has taken it out of the way (“born clear away;” perfect tense: results are abiding), having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14).

God resolved all issues with us and our sin in Christ on the cross. We are forever forgiven. Jesus didn’t come to make us non-sinners (if so, he failed); he came to tell us that we are forgiven sinners.

This is outrageous, of course, but this is the “truth and grace” of the gospel.

When the church does not grasp the radical nature of God’s grace, it has nothing to offer the world that cannot be offered as well or better by others. Its salt has become tasteless and is good for nothing but to be cast out, which, according to Kinnaman, is pretty much what the majority of young people and young adults (ages 16-29) are doing with the church.

The church must once again grasp and embody pure grace, unalloyed with cultural expectations and ecclesiastical traditions. When it again takes possession of the outlandish truths of God’s grace, it has a pearl without price: the power of God that can transform human hearts.

The church — and no other entity in the world — has been called to embody, proclaim and dispense the transforming grace of God. The church has no other reason to exist. **BT**

—Steve Johnson is a veteran pastor who currently serves as president of Reformation Ministries, Inc., based in Macon, Ga. He can be reached at stevermi@cox.net.

Your favorite book?

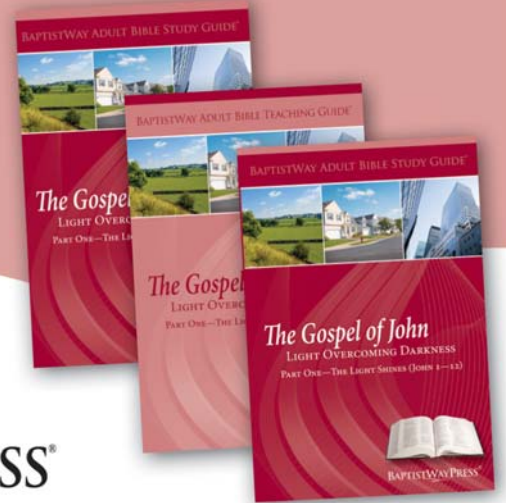
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Constructing confessions

‘Noisy’ Baptists continue centuries-old debate over identity

“Very noisy.” That’s the way the 18th-century Virginia Baptist pastor John Leland described the activities of the revivalistic Separate Baptists of his day.

He was right. Indeed, “very noisy” may be an appropriate designation for much of Baptists’ 400-year history.

Given the current loss of denominational identity and the increasing disengagement of many persons from religious communities, we might even celebrate the fact that many Baptists remain passionate about ideas and issues that both unite and divide. Recent divisions over confessional statements for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina illustrate the passions that are evoked in continuing conversations. (See related story on page 13.)

Differences over Baptist identity were there from the beginning. While the earliest Baptists quickly developed a shared set of distinguishing marks, they often disagreed over the boundaries of their broad spectrum of beliefs.

The Baptist movement began in 1609 amid the religious upheavals that included Puritans, Separatists, Independents, Anabaptists, Levellers, Ranters and other sectarians. They were second-generation Protestants, born almost a century after Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

From their passionate commitment to a believers’ church — the belief that all who claimed membership in the body of Christ should attest to an experience of grace — early Baptists created a spectrum of ideas that at best were balanced by congregations and individuals, and at worst fostered continuing debate, even schism.

The continuum of Baptist identity includes the following:

- **Biblical authority and liberty of conscience.** Perhaps the genius of the Baptists is the idea that the people can be trusted to interpret Scripture aright in the context of community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- **Priesthood of all believers within a community of faith.** Baptists affirmed Martin Luther’s idea that “we have no priest save Christ himself,” that each person may come directly to Christ for salvation. Such faith was confirmed in the community of believers, the church. Early on, new converts were required to testify to their experience of grace, which was then voted on by the congregation.

- **Congregational autonomy and associational cooperation.** Baptists insisted that the authority of Christ was mediated through the believing community. Each congregation is responsible for the direction of its ministry and the extension of its Christian identity.

Yet congregational autonomy did not mean independence. Early Baptists soon formed associations of churches for spiritual fellowship, doctrinal mediation and interchurch cooperation.

- **Theological diversity and contradiction.** Baptists share many common doctrines and practices: Believers’ church, baptismal immersion, congregational polity, associational cooperation and religious liberty. Yet their theological diversity is extensive.

Historically, General and Free Will Baptists stress Christ’s death for all persons (a general atonement) and the “cooperation” of saving grace and individual free will in the process of salvation. Particular and Primitive Baptists emphasize election and predestination, insisting that Christ’s death applies only to the elect, chosen by God before the foundation of the world.



From the beginning, Baptists have maintained contradictory theologies inside a set of common beliefs and practices.

- **Religious liberty and loyalty to the state.** A believers’ church is the foundation of the Baptist affirmation of freedom of conscience and religious liberty. Faith must remain uncoerced by state or state-privileged religion. God alone is judge of conscience.

Baptists long affirmed their citizenship, but reserved the right to dissent should the state require an obedience that contradicted faith and conscience. The separation of church and state is centered on the necessity of religious freedom for orthodox believer, heretic and atheist alike.

- **Inevitably confessional and selectively creedal.** Many 17th-century Baptist groups wrote confessions of faith to describe their views on Christian doctrine and Baptist principles. Other groups have drafted similar documents across the years, often differing on how to apply such confessions.

Some use them to set boundaries of faith and practice; others see them as guides for shaping Baptist identity. Some hesitate to use them at all lest they convey an authority beyond Scripture or substitute doctrinal assent for a personal experience of grace.

Others suggest that Baptist tradition is “confessional, not creedal,” meaning that confessions are guides to beliefs while creeds are imposed — a clear interference with freedom of conscience. Most Baptist groups find ways to articulate basic beliefs, sometimes pressing certain doctrines in ways that seem decisively creedal.

CONTINUING SIGNS OF DIVERSITY

Even the briefest survey of contemporary Baptist confessions of faith reveals the continuing diversity of such documents in content and interpretation. I am currently completing work on a new edition of William L. Lumpkin’s classic work, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, the last edition of which was published in 1969.

The publisher, Judson Press, asked me to add an additional chapter that includes more recent documents. For example:

• **The Confession of the Nigerian Baptist Convention** details basic Christian doctrine with extensive emphasis on the “Spirit-filled Life,” Satan, Demons and “Deliverance” — issues that are significant in Nigerian culture.

• **The Baptist Union of Southern Africa** uses a 1924 confession with 11 statements on classic Christian doctrine. A sentence added in 2000 reads: “That God has ordained marriage as a heterosexual relationship between a natural man and a natural woman.”

In 1987 the Union added a “Statement of Baptist Principles,” including priesthood of all believers, lordship of Christ, congregational autonomy, believer’s baptism and religious liberty.

• **In 2001 the Japan Baptist Union** approved a brief statement of basic doctrine on God, Church, salvation and Scripture that concludes with these “additional remarks”: “The Japan Baptist Union is a body which respects the independence of each local church. Therefore, this Declaration of Faith does not intend to limit the autonomy of local churches. We pray that the local churches, by sharing this Declaration, will confirm for each other what JBU stands for and where it is going, and that the fellowship among churches will be deepened.”

• **The Preamble to the Statement of Faith of the Hong Kong Baptist Seminary** describes the use of confessions of faith, noting that, “Historically Baptists have opposed creeds, but have through the years issued a number of confessions of faith. The basic purpose of a confession of faith is to express what one group of Baptists believes at a given time... Individual freedom and congregational church government lie at the heart of this refusal to impose an external authority.”

• **The Baptist Bible Fellowship International**, a group connected with Independent Baptist churches, has a lengthy confession of faith that contains this statement on the nature of Scripture: “By ‘The Holy Bible’ we mean that collection of sixty-six books, from Genesis to Revelation, which, as originally written does not only contain and convey the Word of God, but IS the very Word of God.”

“Perhaps the genius of the Baptists is the idea that the people can be trusted to interpret Scripture aright in the context of community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

• **The Evangelic Baptist Church Partage** (Sharing) in Perpignan, France, a member of the Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches in France, begins its confessional statement by noting that historically, Baptists “link themselves in the tradition that goes back to the Apostles and that in the course of time has stressed the primitive faith as it is expressed in the Scriptures, in terms of the renewal of the Spirit (Middle Ages), of the Reformation (XVI and XVII centuries) and the missionary effort (XVIII and XIX centuries).”

The church’s confession ends with the Apostles’ Creed, the only confession I have found that uses a historic creed in its official document.

• **The Baptist World Alliance** has used the Apostles’ Creed in worship services, but not in its confession of faith. That document — approved at the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham, England, in 2005 — surveys traditional dogmas related to Christian and Baptist ideals.

It concludes: “Now, at this centenary gathering these things we declare, affirm and covenant to the Lord Jesus Christ and to each other, believing the truth found in Him and revealed in the Scriptures. We, recognising that this is a partial and incomplete confession of faith, boldly declare that we believe the truth is found in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Because we have faith and trust in Him so we resolve to proclaim and demonstrate that faith to all the world.”

Contemporary confessions clearly demonstrate similarities and differences among 21st-century Baptist groups. As Baptists write and utilize confessions, questions abound:

• What types of confessional statements are needed to clarify Baptist identity in a post-modern era?

- How will confessional documents be used by Baptist groups, churches and individuals?
- What kind of dissent would be possible for those who disagree with certain elements of any confession?
- Who would adjudicate differences of opinion?
- What options might be available for remaining in cooperation amid sincere differences between confessional identity and personal conscience?
- What is the relationship between conscience and civility of discourse? Can differing approaches to common identity be pursued without the language of suspicion or accusation?

Like their “noisy” forebears, 21st-century Baptists face the challenge of saying what they believe and then living out those beliefs individually and communally. When confessions won’t hold, Baptists may even follow their ancestors in another well-known Baptist tradition: multiplying by dividing. **BT**

—Bill J. Leonard teaches church history at Wake Forest Divinity School where

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Who are **the Baptists?**

Nagaland: the most Baptist place on earth

Two hundred years ago, the Naga tribes living in the northeast corner of what later would become India would not have seemed likely candidates for the gospel: they had a reputation as fierce headhunters who expected young men to prove their courage by venturing out and returning with the decapitated head of an enemy for display in the village skull house.

When American missionaries came to Nagaland, however, they won the trust of the Nagas and found them surprisingly receptive to the gospel message. Although Baptist converts were baptized as early as 1847, significant efforts did not begin until 1868, with the arrival of Edwin Clark and his wife. The Clarks' focus on learning the Naga language and culture enabled them to make significant inroads in evangelism, a task the Nagas quickly took upon themselves.

Although the number of foreign missionaries remained small, indigenous preachers spread the gospel throughout the tribes and villages.

The groundswell of faith resulted in a majority of the population coming to faith in Christ. By 2001, according to census figures published by the Indian government, 90 percent of Nagaland's 1.98 million residents were Christian, and about 75 percent of them were Baptists, giving Nagaland a higher concentration of Baptists than any state in the world, including those in the southern U.S.

Baptists became so predominant that some town councils adopted ordinances declaring that only Baptist churches could be built. That policy came to light in July 2010 when Naga Baptists were accused of anti-Catholic bigotry after construction of a Catholic church in the village of Anangre



A choir from Nagaland sings during the 2010 Baptist World Congress in Honolulu this summer.

was halted and the building dismantled. An official with the Nagaland Baptist Church Council said responsibility lay with the Anangre Village Council rather than with Baptists.

Baptists have long sought to promote peace among armed political factions in

Nagaland that have caused considerable bloodshed. BWA representatives and other U.S. Baptists recently participated in helping to broker a peace accord signed by leaders of three rival factions on Sept. 18.

The Nagaland Baptist Church Council is an active member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), reporting 484,174 members in 1,400 churches. A men's choir from Nagaland was among the featured performers during the 2010 Baptist World Congress in Honolulu, Hawaii. **BT**

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of articles introducing readers to member groups of the global Baptist family.

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For an extra \$25, receive a free copy of Bruce Gourley's book, *A Capsule History of Baptists*.

‘Recurring themes’

Baptist historians group affirms ‘individual conscience’

ATLANTA — A group of Baptist historians that meets annually to read and discuss early Baptist writings endorsed a statement Sept. 27 affirming the role of individual conscience in Baptist life.

Fourteen members of the “Baptist Classics Seminar” group cited “broad and recurring themes” found in original Baptist sources written between 1610 and today.

Those affirmations include, according to a document released by the group: “believer’s baptism, personal ‘heart’ experience of God, the priesthood of all believers, personal and communal devotion to God, a commitment to the church as the body of Christ, the autonomy of each local church, congregational polity, the regular practice of ordinances (baptism/Lord’s Supper), voluntary cooperation among churches, and strong voices for religious liberty and the separation of church and state.”

“We believe these themes are still relevant and should continue to inform our Baptist heritage and witness,” the statement said.

Bruce Gourley, executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society, said in a background statement compiled in consultation with three other members that the group frequently shares its findings with the larger Baptist community through classrooms, preaching and teaching in local churches, publications and other venues.

This year, a controversy over proposed changes to foundational documents of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina “made us realize just how important our studies are to the larger Baptist community,” Gourley said.

The North Carolina CBF is currently holding listening sessions about a proposed statement that replaces references to Baptist concepts like the priesthood of believers and



Bruce Gourley, executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society

religious freedom with language from the Apostles’ Creed, an early statement of Christian beliefs used for liturgical and teaching purposes in a number of Christian denominations.

Members of the task force proposing the new North Carolina document say the intent is not to abandon principles of individual freedom, which are articulated in values shared by the national and state CBF, but rather to identify Baptists not only by what separates them from other Christians but also by what they hold in common with the larger church.

Critics of the proposed changes say the North Carolina statement tilts toward a “Bapto-Catholic” school of thought drawn from the writings of a few early English Baptists. Scholars articulated the view in a “Baptist Manifesto” in 1997 that affirmed Bible study in “reading communities” rather than relying on private interpretation and following Jesus “as a call to shared discipleship rather than invoking a theory of soul competency.”

While “not a direct rebuttal” of the “Baptist Manifesto” movement, Gourley said his group’s statement is “a reminder to the Baptist world that we as Baptists of the 21st

century share a distinct identity that arises from common and still relevant historical themes in our four centuries of existence.”

The statement said this year’s study of selections from 17th-century English Baptist writings particularly affirmed “the role of individual conscience, especially when voluntary faith was threatened with coercion or compulsion.”

The foundation for all the Baptist principles they enumerated, the scholars said, was “the belief that the Bible alone, neither creeds nor tradition, is the authority for religious faith and practice.”

“In our tradition we find both the personal and communal elements of biblical faith; we find a believer’s church that preserves a place for unfettered individual conscience,” the scholars said.

The historians renewed their commitment to “the vibrant Baptist witness of freedom that is responsive to the authoritative Scriptures and under the Lordship of Christ” and to “the relevance of Baptist identity for the 21st century.”

Endorsing the statement were Sheri Adams of Gardner-Webb University’s School of Divinity, Loyd Allen of Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology, Rosalie Beck of Baylor University, Jimmy Byrd of Vanderbilt University, Pam Durso of Baptist Women in Ministry, Jerry Faught of Oklahoma Baptist University, Gourley, Carol Holcomb of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Glenn Jonas of Campbell University, Sandy Martin of the University of Georgia, Rob Nash of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Brent Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, Doug Weaver of Baylor and Mark Wilson of Auburn University.

Later signatories to the document include Baptist historians Walter B. Shurden, Bill Leonard, Glenn Hinson and Leon McBeth. The full statement can be found at <http://www.baptisthistory.org/bhhs/affirmationbaptisttheme.html>. **BT**

The historians renewed their commitment to “the vibrant Baptist witness of freedom that is responsive to the authoritative Scriptures and under the Lordship of Christ.”

Young Christians seek intentional community among poor persons

GRESHAM, Ore. — In the two years since David Knepprath and Josh Guisinger moved into the rough-and-tumble Barberry Village complex, roughly a dozen young Christian men and women have made Barberry Village their home.

Their goal: Create a sense of community in a chaotic neighborhood overrun with drugs, prostitution and gangs.

Their work mirrors, in some ways, the “new monasticism” movement, in which Christians move into urban or rural areas to work with the poor.

It’s not an easy way to live. Some neighbors have been suspicious. Safety is an ongoing concern. And some of these urban missionaries have burned out on a project that can be a 24-hour-a-day burden.

Yet they’ve been so successful that other complex owners have asked them to replicate their efforts. Congregations have volunteered their services. A woman from Virginia is moving to the Portland area so she can do similar work in another neighborhood.

Now, at least once a month, churches cook meals for the residents at Barberry Village. In early August, children were invited to a three-day Bible camp.

Guisinger and Knepprath and their friends have also helped people move. They’ve thrown birthday parties for neighbors. And they cleaned up one woman’s flooded apartment.

Police officers are still dispatched to Barberry Village on a regular basis, sometimes more than once a day. But many neighbors say the complex is safer, friendlier and better for children. A former manager called the young men and women a “godsend.”

“I hope they continue to do this,” said Eugenia Swartout, who lives at the complex with her family. “It gives us some safety and security knowing there are kind people out here and not just bad guys.”

In the beginning, it was just a group of guys sitting around and talking about their faith. Knepprath and Guisinger were buddies in their early 20s, looking to create a ministry that went beyond church walls.

They didn’t want to dabble, though.

They wanted to dive in, 24/7.

With guidance from a nonprofit called Compassion Connect, they moved with friends into an apartment, putting two sets of bunk beds in one room and using the other two bedrooms as an office and a closet.

Still, they remained outsiders who could live in almost any neighborhood they chose. They had to strike a delicate balance; they didn’t want to come on too strong and alienate their neighbors.

So while they were open about their Christianity, they didn’t plunge into conversations about their faith. Nor did they move in acting as if they could solve the social ills at Barberry Village.

“We were very conscious of that,” said Knepprath, who has since moved out but remains active in the ministry. “Our perspective from the start was that we’re not here with all the solutions, or even thinking we know all the problems.”

So they walked door to door, handing out chocolate-chip cookies. A letter explained their purpose and faith. They invited residents to the first community meal.

A few people shut the door in their faces. One guy answered with a Taser gun. But others accepted the cookies in the spirit they were offered, and the first seeds of friendship were sown.

It’s not unusual for Christians to move into impoverished areas to work with the poor. But movements like new monasticism have gained momentum in recent years.

Dan Brunner, who teaches Christian history at George Fox University, is part of a new monastic community in Portland. Members tend to be young and left-leaning, Brunner said. Some don’t work with churches at all.

“Most of the ones I know are pretty active in their communities,” Brunner said. “They want to cooperate with local churches.”

Dan Johnson moved into Barberry Village with his wife, Jenn, and their infant son in early 2000. They needed an inexpensive apartment because Dan works for himself, and were intrigued by the work that Knepprath and Guisinger had started.

The couple now has two children. But

Barberry Village is not an easy place to raise a family. There’s no playground equipment, and Jenn doesn’t always feel safe.

“Sometimes,” Dan said, “my wife doesn’t want to walk by the main entrance when there’s a dozen scruffy-looking guys out there.”

Guisinger hasn’t been bothered by the crime. He previously worked in street ministry and, when he was a kid, his parents invited in strangers who needed help. Living among the poor, however, was something he’d never experienced.

“I wondered if I would be able to relate,” he said. “I grew up in a wealthy family; I never lacked a meal or insurance or anything like that.”

Knepprath lived at the complex after he got married but moved recently to be closer to his job. Guisinger and his friend Jared Simons now have two new roommates. Even after nearly two years, Guisinger has no plans to move.

Instead of staying holed up in their apartments, neighbors now go outside and get to know one another. They invite each other over for dinner. It’s more like a neighborhood than an anonymous apartment complex.

Jesse Danner, a former heroin and cocaine addict who’s been clean for three years, arrived in April 2009 with his wife and their children.

He was worried about moving into the complex, given its reputation. But he met Knepprath and Guisinger when they invited his family for a community meal. Later, Danner’s wife started going to church and was baptized on a camping trip. Now Danner goes to church, too.

One day last October, Knepprath came over and asked Danner for some help with a computer. They walked across the parking lot to a friend’s place. But Knepprath didn’t really need help.

“They actually threw a birthday party for me,” Danner said. “It’s the only one I’ve ever had.” **BT**

—Steve Beaven writes for *The Oregonian in Portland, Ore.*

Unbelievers know the most about belief

WASHINGTON — Who can best answer questions about religion in America? Based on a new survey released Sept. 28 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, it's your atheist or agnostic neighbor, followed by the Jew or Mormon down the street.

A significant percentage — four in 10 — of Roman Catholics did not know that their church teaches that the bread and wine used at Communion become the body and blood of Jesus during Mass.

The survey also found that graduates of private schools did better than students in public schools, but religious school graduates didn't fare any better in their ability to answer questions about the Bible, world religions or the role of religion in public life.

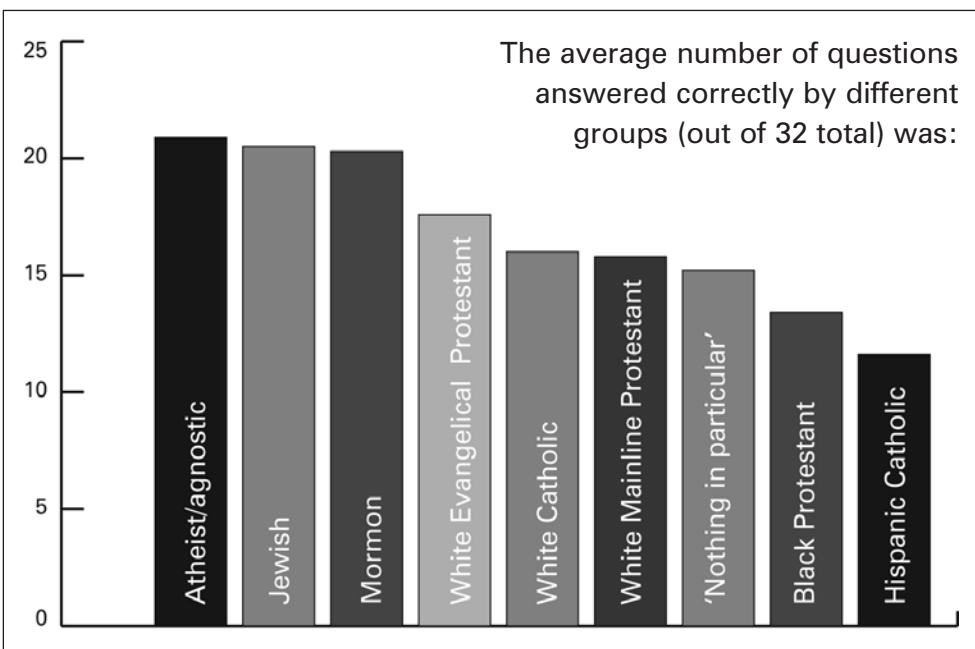
“Our survey certainly shows that there are lots of things that Americans do know about religion — most Americans have a certain familiarity with the Bible for instance,” said Greg Smith, a senior researcher at the Pew Forum. “But, at the same time, there are important things that people don't know as well.”

Overall, agnostics and atheists, Jews and Mormons scored the best on a quiz of 32 questions — from citing the first book of the Bible (Genesis) to naming a preacher from the First Great Awakening (Jonathan Edwards).

David Silverman, president of the group American Atheists, said he wasn't surprised that atheists answered more questions correctly than others, and hopes the findings will help people realize that atheists understand the religious beliefs that they reject.

“It certainly underscores the fact that atheists are not atheists due to ignorance,” he said.

In fact, Smith said, eight in 10 of the atheists and agnostics polled in the survey



were raised in a faith, including three-quarters who were reared as Christians.

Mormons' high levels of religious knowledge can be credited to four years of early-morning classes in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and Mormon church history during high school, said Terry Givens, a professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond.

Likewise, Jews have a strong emphasis on education, he said.

“I think probably as with Mormons, Jews have learned that in order to operate ... effectively within a larger dominant culture, one has to be bilingual ... in their own and the host culture,” said Givens, author of several books about Mormons.

Most Americans are somewhat familiar with the Bible, Smith said, but responses to the poll's nonbiblical questions reveal a lack of knowledge on certain traditional beliefs. For example, just 16 percent correctly said that Protestants — not Catholics — have taught that salvation comes through faith alone.

The poll results were based on telephone interviews with 3,412 adults nationwide between May 19 and June 6, with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

That total includes an oversample of Mormons, Jews and nonbelievers. Smith said the high number of correct responses from those groups was not due to the oversample. Those additional interviews helped ensure a reliable analysis of groups that account for a small share of the overall population.

Stephen Prothero, author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — And Doesn't*, said the findings reflect Americans' tenuous grasp on the world's religions, preventing them from having significant interfaith conversations.

“Yes, there is a kind of ‘Jeopardy’ quality to this,” said Prothero, a religion professor at Boston University who consulted on the survey. “But I think these kinds of simple questions indicate the deficit that we have as a country in understanding the religions of the world and our own religions.”

Although the average respondent answered just half of the answers correctly, researchers opted not to give anyone an “F” or an “A.”

“It's not as if the American public has taken a semester-long religion course and are now being tested on topics with which they should be familiar,” Smith said. “That's why we don't assign grades.” **BT**

Mormons' high levels of religious knowledge can be credited to four years of early-morning classes in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and Mormon church history during high school.

guest commentary

The 'other' was us

By David T. Ngong

Seidou Ibrahim, Mohammad Ibrahim, Adamu Ibrahim. These are the names of my cousins, or more appropriately, my brothers.

My mother's younger sister, Mero, who I call mother, not aunt, married a man from our village who converted to Islam. So I grew up living together with siblings who were Muslims.

We ate together and slept in the same beds when we were growing up. While I read the Bible and prayed to God through Christ, Adamu and Seidu, with whom I spent much time, read the Quran and prayed five times a day to Allah.

I do not remember that the table was a particularly important place around which we did community. In fact, we did not regularly eat at tables.



Sometimes we sat on the floor in a circle with the food in the middle for all to share; sometimes we sat on short stools beside each other as we ate.

There was one table at home, and that was our father's table. Children were not allowed to eat on Father's table. As the head of the house, Father had the table to himself. To eat at Father's table was presumptuous — declaring oneself to be heir when Father was still alive.

So my reflection is not so much about table fellowship as it is about fellowship with the "other." To put the matter bluntly, I did

"Growing up, my understanding of what it meant to be ecumenical was not limited to dialogue with other Christians who we thought were wrong about what they believed; it included living in harmony with the African traditionalists, Muslims, and those of other faiths and ideological commitments."

not grow up in a home where we feared the "other." I grew up in a home where we ate, slept and played with the "other."

Perhaps this was because the "other" was us. My father was an African traditionalist who never became a Christian. My mother was, and still is, a Baptist Christian.

My cousins such as Adamu and Seidou were Muslims. Perhaps it is easier to believe that the "other" is you when you are so close to the "other."

My interaction with the "other" at home was reinforced by what was going on in our society in general. Many Cameroonians lived with relatives who belonged to different ideological and religious persuasions.

The first president of Cameroon, Amadou Ahidjo, was a Muslim. The prime minister, who is the current president, Paul Biya, was a Roman Catholic. The end of Ramadan, just like Christmas, is celebrated as a public holiday in Cameroon.

Growing up, my understanding of what it meant to be ecumenical was not limited to dialogue with other Christians who we thought were wrong about what they believed; it included living in harmony with the African traditionalists, Muslims, and those of other faiths and ideological commitments.

In my experience, difference has been emphasized by politicians or those in power for their own benefit. It has been used to garner support from one group of people against other groups for purposes of power.

So Paul Biya, President of Cameroon, pits his Beti people against other people in the country. Osama Bin Ladin pits some Muslims against other Muslims and a homogenous West. Tutsis are pitted against Hutus and vice versa in Rwanda. Some Christian preachers pit the West against Islam and vice versa. Men are pitted against women and vice versa. Baptists are pitted against Catholics, and so on and so forth.

I do not want to give the impression that I grew up in a paradise where difference made no difference. Rather, I want to say that I grew up where we knew that in order to live with ourselves we needed to live with the "other." In fact, the "other" was us. **BT**

—David Ngong, from Cameroon, teaches African Studies and Religion at Baylor University. He shared this message at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, during "Table Talk," a time in the worship service when a member shares about the value of table fellowship.

Baptist News, Baptist Views

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guest commentary

When atheists and Baptists agree

By Rachel Held Evans

I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that the Earth is roughly 4.5 billion years old. This position routinely puts me at odds with two groups of people — atheists and Baptists.

In fact, over the past few months I've been criticized by both Ken Ham (the Baptist behind the Creation Museum) and Hemant Mehta (the atheist behind the Friendly Atheist blog) for urging the evangelical community to adopt a more nuanced approach to the evolution/creation debate. Both wanted me to give something up — Ham, my belief in evolution; Mehta, my belief in God.

That's because when it comes to science, atheists and Baptists have remarkably similar worldviews: Both have arrived at the conclusion that accepting the science behind evolutionary theory will inevitably render Christianity extinct. As a result, one group has essentially made a religion out of naturalism, while the other has avoided serious consideration of the scientific data.

While not all Baptists are young-Earth creationists, one of their most esteemed leaders recently took a strong stand on the issue. Responding to criticisms that he misrepresented Charles Darwin in a June 19 speech at the Ligonier Ministries conference, Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, declared on his blog that "the theory of evolution is incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ even as it is in direct conflict with any faithful reading of the Scriptures."

Mohler's words were all too familiar to me. Growing up in the apologetics-driven evangelical subculture of the '80s and '90s, I spent most of my life convinced that the theory of evolution had been concocted by godless scientists intent on undermining the authority of Scripture.

We were locked in a battle with these "enemies of the faith," I learned. Only one side could win, and if it wasn't ours, the Christian faith would be lost.

This idea was reinforced at my Christian college, where one of the science professors

When it comes to science, atheists and Baptists have remarkably similar worldviews: Both have arrived at the conclusion that accepting the science behind evolutionary theory will inevitably render Christianity extinct.

liked to tell the story of how, as a sophomore in high school, he had dreams of becoming a scientist but could not reconcile the theory of evolution with the creation account found in Genesis. So one night, he took a pair of scissors and a newly purchased Bible and began cutting out every verse he believed would have to be removed to believe in evolution.

By the time he was finished, he said he couldn't even lift the Bible without it falling apart. That was when he decided, "Either Scripture was true and evolution was wrong, or evolution was true and I must toss out the Bible."

That story had such a profound effect on me that when I left the evangelical bubble and began studying evolution on my own, I nearly lost my faith. From the fossil record and DNA sequences, to ice rings and biodiversity, I found the evidence in support of evolutionary theory compelling and reasonable — which, according to both the atheists and the Baptists, meant I could no longer follow Jesus.

What leaders like Mohler fail to realize is that they are setting young Christians up for failure. They are inadvertently orchestrating the very exodus that they fear. In presenting faith and science as a choice, the Baptists have essentially conceded that the atheists are right after all — and, as a result, they are losing some of the brightest young minds in Christendom to a false dichotomy.



Mohler would be wise to consider the words of St. Augustine, who, (centuries before anyone had heard of common descent), said this of his interpretation of Genesis: "In matters that are so obscure and far beyond our vision, we find in Holy Scripture passages which can be interpreted in very different ways without prejudice to the faith we have received. In such cases, we should not rush in headlong and so firmly take our stand on one side that, if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines this position, we too fall with it."

By the grace of God, I found this quote before my faith completely fell apart. However, many of my peers did not. They believed the Baptists and the atheists and made the choice that their intellectual integrity demanded. They left the faith.

If Mohler wants to see a new generation of evangelicals survive to carry on the tradition, he's got to stop presenting evolution as incompatible with Christianity. He's got to make room in his theology for both an old earth and a loving God.

He's got to stop agreeing with the atheists. **BT**

—Rachel Held Evans is the author of *Evolving in Monkey Town*, a memoir about growing up in Dayton, Tenn., home of the Scopes Monkey Trial. This commentary from *Associated Baptist Press* is adapted from one that first appeared at *On Faith*, a website jointly sponsored by The Washington Post and Newsweek.

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2010 ChurchWorks!

Good ideas for effective ministry

Brought to you
this month
by Jeremy Colliver



Questions for transforming teens into leaders

I sit behind our youth on Sunday mornings and every time we sing the hymn “We Are Called to be God’s People,” I feel an extra tug as to how I am to represent Christ to the youth with whom I minister. As I look at them, I am reminded that they too are continuously being called to be God’s people and not the people the viral videos on YouTube or the me-centered commercialism are calling them to be.

I constantly struggle with the best way to minister to the youth. I’m attuned to what other people are doing in their ministries to weave the elements that will effectively work with the youth I am currently called to serve. Through all this weaving there has been one core thread — and that is our model for leadership.

Leadership has become one of the buzzwords added to book titles, speakers’ tag lines and blogs to grab people’s attention. But of all the different aspects of leadership I have read about, there seems to be something different about cultivating leadership in people of the church.

This difference comes to mind when reading Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and when singing the first line of the hymn mentioned above. The difference is that we *all* are called to be leaders in the body of Christ. We are not called to be “the one” who will lead all others to being followers of our way or what we espouse. Our head has already been established in Christ, and we are called to lead others in continuing the creation of the Kingdom of God. The way we lead and where we lead may be completely different, but each of us can lead through the different gifts and talents with which we have been blessed.

To help our youth learn to think of leadership, and in the end to think about their identity in Christ and their call, each year we pose six key questions to them. (These questions can be asked as part of a series or used as the basis for a retreat.) We invite our freshmen and sophomores to focus on these over the course of the school year.

We meet once a month as a large group and then follow up with the youth individually as needed. Each month one of the questions is posed as a tension, and the group wrestles with that tension until their desired product is created. The sophomores help facilitate this process, honing some of the leadership skills they developed in the past year.

Here are the six questions and challenges we present to the youth:

1) “How do I experience God?”

The way in which we view God becomes the filter for living. But it is not only what we believe about God to be true, but also the way in which we experience the truth. We challenge the youth individually to formulate “I believe” statements and then collectively to determine what they believe as a group. With the composite list they create a representation of those beliefs that may turn into a statement of declaration or a work of art.

2) “How am I equipped?”

Sometimes the hardest thing is to determine what our own gifts are because they come naturally and do not seem “special.” Therefore, we present an activity that challenges each person to determine how his/her gifts will be used to help facilitate the larger group’s activity.

3) “How do I know who I am?”

Establishing a sense of self while part of a group is always difficult, especially as a youth already struggling with self-identity. Thus, we challenge the group to create a yearbook to show how each person is connected through his/her uniqueness.

4) “Why do I need others?”

We all are connected, but sometimes we need to know why we are connected and what that means for our group. The challenge for this question is to create a group covenant that reflects the importance of these connections.

5) “Where do I come from?”

Examining the foundations that have been set, the question becomes: “Can I build from here or do I need to tear down some stuff first?” To help members of the group learn about themselves, we challenge them to create or enhance an alumni youth group.

6) “When do I act?”

We are called to be. Being is not only existence, but also activity. The challenge for this question is to create a ministry event in which the group will invest time over the next year. This becomes the basis for what the youth do in their sophomore year.

The leadership model that emerges is based on relationships and sometimes seems to be more of an art than a science. It is about empowerment and evoking the person God has created the youth to be. Our hope through this model is that each person will discover how he or she leads. **BT**

ChurchWorks! 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 Jeremy Colliver, minister with youth at Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown, Ky. More ministry resources are available at www.thefellowship.info/News/subscribe and www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page.

2010 Bible Studies

These lessons follow the adult Formations studies from Smyth & Helwys Publishing www.helwys.com

Nov. 28, 2010

Heirs according to the promise

Galatians 3:23-28

In February 2001, Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore began making plans for a monument to the Ten Commandments, reasoning that the Alabama Supreme Court building required something grander than a wooden plaque. His final design involved a 5,280-pound granite block, 3 feet wide by 3 feet deep by 4 feet tall, covered with quotes from the Declaration of Independence, the National Anthem, and various founding fathers. The crowning element would be two large carved tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. High-grade granite from Vermont was ordered and shipped, and Judge Moore found benefactors and a sculptor to complete the job.

On the evening of July 31, 2001, despite some initial installation difficulties and concerns regarding structural support for the monument's weight, Moore had the completed monument transported to the state judicial building and installed in the central rotunda.

The next morning, Moore held a press conference in the central rotunda to unveil the monument. In a speech following the unveiling, Moore declared, "Today a cry has gone out across our land for the acknowledgment of that God upon whom this nation and our laws were founded. ... May this day mark the restoration of the moral foundation of law to our people and the return to the knowledge of God in our land."

Several years later Stephen Colbert, host of "The Colbert Report" on Comedy Central, interviewed Congressman Lynn Westmoreland from Georgia's 8th District. Westmoreland co-sponsored a bill that would require the Ten Commandments to be dis-

played in both the Senate chambers and the House of Representatives. At the end of the interview Colbert asked Westmoreland to "name the Ten Commandments." After pausing for a few seconds the Congressman began to recite some of the different commandments. Ultimately, he could only recall three of the Ten Commandments.

Throughout the history of America, Christians have used the Ten Commandments as both a moral guide and as a wedge issue in politics. While they are one important piece of our Christian heritage that provide a strong moral foundation, they and the other laws found in the Hebrew scriptures are inferior to the justification offered through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Reflect: What role do the Ten Commandments play in your daily life?

In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul addressed a controversy that surrounded the expansion of the Christian movement into the Gentile community. The question arose among the Jewish-Christians as to whether or not the Gentile converts had to undergo circumcision in order to be considered true followers of Christ. Paul provided a clear answer:

"We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law" (Gal. 2:15-17).

Paul's opponents were concerned with who was and who was not a part of the family. For them, circumcision was the distinguishing mark of one's membership in God's family. Paul countered: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all

**LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, Nov. 28–Dec. 26, 2010**

Written by Jason Loscuito, chaplain and director of religious life at Converse College in Spartanburg, S.C.



children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:25-27).

Baptism, not circumcision, marks one's membership in God's family. It is through baptism that we are clothed with Christ.

At age 13, I was baptized at the First Baptist Church of Middleburg, Fla. It was a special event to me because my father was also baptized at the same time. I remember standing in the changing room, putting on the white robe and trying to quell my anxiety. As I walked up the slippery stairs toward the pool, I saw my pastor reach out to take my hand. Standing in the pool, I could feel the eyes of each person in the congregation looking at us just as I could feel the pastor's hand on my back. He asked me if I had decided to accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior and Lord of my life. I responded that I had. He lowered me down into the cool water and brought me back up, washed anew. After the church service, my father and I drove to the movie theater. As we got out of the car and began walking across the parking lot, he turned to me and asked, "Do you feel any different?" It is a question that has challenged me since that day.

Reflect: Do you remember your baptism? Where did it take place? Who was present? What did the minister say? What did your family and friends tell you afterward? Did you feel any different?

As we begin the Advent season and anticipate the arrival of the Christ child, let us all remember our baptism and decide that we will no longer be enslaved by those who call us to follow the laws that are chiseled into the hard, lifeless granite, but rather let us seek to follow the living and life-giving Emmanuel, God with us, who set us free and makes us "heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides these Bible study resources to church leaders through this supplement to *Baptists Today*. For more information on how CBF is "serving Christians and churches as they discover their God-given mission," visit www.thefellowship.info or call 1-800-352-8741



Dec. 5, 2010

In the fullness of time

Galatians 4:1-7; Matthew 1:1-17

As I gaze at the black-and-white photograph, he looks back at me with a slight grin on his face, displaying the immense pride he felt. He is surrounded by his loved ones. His wife, son and daughter pose with him in front of the truck he drove around the city collecting people's discards in hopes of finding a treasure. It was a long way from that small village in Sicily.

His story is not that unusual. The town he grew up in didn't offer him much of a future. His older brother had already left for the "Promised Land" — America — to find work, so that he could send money back to his family. Now it was his turn. Barely old enough to shave, he made his way down to the docks and found a ship heading to New York City. The letter from his brother was his map to a new life. It included instructions for him and names of people to look up once he made it through customs. I wonder what went through his mind as he peered over the railing and saw the lady standing in the harbor, beckoning people to her shore?

The customs official couldn't speak Italian, so he anglicized the last name to Lemon and stamped his papers. He had a new name to go along with his new country. He met up with his brother in the Dakotas and worked with him and the other immigrants laying railroad track for the empire spreading west. I don't know how long he stayed there, but he eventually made his way to Mississippi. It was there that he fell in love with a woman who spoke no Italian, but they got married anyway, and were able to make their marriage work for more than 50 years.

He died when I was a boy. I have only a few memories of him ... the wooden barrels that contained his homemade wine he made from grapes bought in Michigan and the smell of cigars that hung on his clothes. Questions arise in my mind when I think about the courage he had to have to board that ship so long ago. What if he had turned back and gone home, content to live out his life in that small village? Would I have existed? I am grateful that he did not turn back, but decided to board the ship and leave behind his family so that he could eventually

start a family of his own. I have to believe that God moved and worked behind the scenes in his life, just as God did in the life of Jesus, to bring about the circumstances until the time was right for Jesus' birth.

Reflect: Have you ever examined your family genealogy? What surprised you about the people you discovered? Is there anyone that you are proud of or ashamed of in your family tree?

The writer of Matthew's gospel was addressing a Jewish-Christian audience, so he understood the importance of beginning his book with Jesus' genealogy. For first-century Jews, a genealogy was the way of remaining connected with their ancestors and ensuring the purity of their race, heritage and membership in the nation of Israel. By including Jesus' genealogy, Matthew shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's purposes and hopes; that God's purposes are inclusive, extending to men and women of all nations; that the genealogy begins with Abraham and includes women and Gentiles, those considered outside the covenant; and that Jesus is the royal Messiah. He describes Jesus as "the son of David," which makes him the royal heir to the Davidic throne.

He shows God as the hidden actor. God is active in the entire story from Abraham to Jesus, from the initial promise to the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. God works through the ordinary lives of ordinary people to bring into being the people of Israel represented by the descendants of Abraham.

The author of Matthew wants his readers to understand that God originates and guides the events of Jesus' life within the context of Israel's history. Jesus is God's chosen agent who will manifest God's saving presence in a sinful, imperial world. The genealogy emphasizes God's purposes rather than Jesus' biological connections by highlighting the covenant relationship with Israel and putting the birth of Jesus within the context of that covenant.

The apostle Paul also reminds us that the birth of Jesus opened the way for those outside of the covenant to "receive adoption as children" of God (Gal. 4:6). Our adoption also makes it possible for the spirit of Christ to enter into hearts to cry, "Abba! Father!" reminding us that we are no longer slaves under the law. Now we have a familial connection to God through our brother, Jesus the Christ.

Dec. 12, 2010

He named him Jesus

Matthew 1:18-25

I have a recurring dream that infiltrates my sleep every now and then. There are times when some of the details are different, but the theme always remains the same. The dream usually goes like this:

I am back at my high school in small-town Florida but am my current age. Either I am at a football practice trying out for the team or standing on the sidelines during a game waiting for the coach to call my name for a field goal attempt or a punt on fourth down. The call never comes. I stand and watch, feeling foolish as the other players run through practice drills or make plays in the game, wondering why I am waiting to play a high school football game as a 36-year-old. When I wake up, I replay portions of the dream, trying to decipher a deeper meaning I can apply to my current stage of life. I have even shared this dream with colleagues and friends who claim to have experience in dream interpretation, but have yet to hear a satisfactory explanation for this recurring dream.

Eighteen years ago, I was finishing my senior year in high school and had aspirations of playing football at the college level. I was recognized as one of the top players in our conference and received some letters of interest from some Division III schools located in remote parts of the country. I also decided that God was calling me to prepare for vocational ministry, so I met with my pastor and mentor about the next steps I needed to take in my life. My pastor encouraged me to visit his alma mater, Samford University, where I could take classes that would prepare me for vocational ministry and would also provide me with an opportunity to play football as a walk-on. I scheduled a visit and sent a highlight film to the recruiting director. During my visit, he encouraged me to walk-on and to participate in two-a-day football practice.

I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the team. My teammates were my community. We practiced together, ate together and worked out together. It all came to a screeching halt for me after our season was over, however. Our head coach called a team meeting to tell us he was taking another coaching job at a Division I school. Soon after the announcement was



made, a new coaching staff arrived and we began spring practice. I thought I had done a good job during the spring practice, but the new special teams coach informed me I was no longer needed on the team. I was shocked and angry. I was convinced that it had been God's plan for me to attend this specific university, but now I was unsure if I even wanted to come back in the fall.

During the summer I worked a job and practiced football in the late summer afternoons. One day, as I was preparing for bed, I had an overwhelming sense that I needed to focus on my classes and to prepare for vocational ministry. I decided to stop pursuing my football dream and to listen to what I felt was God's call on my life. It wasn't an easy decision, and there are still times when I wonder what would have happened had I decided to join my teammates back on the practice field in mid-August. I am grateful, though, that God is gracious and works with me as I attempt to make decisions that coincide with God's plan for my life.

Reflect: Do you have a recurring dream that infiltrates your sleep on occasion? What is your dream about? Do you think God is trying to communicate something through the dream? If so what?

Joseph had a tough decision to make. Should he go through with his commitment to marry Mary, or should he divorce her quietly so that she would not face the consequence of death (Deut. 22:23-27)? He was wrestling with a conflict of kingdoms. Joseph was a "righteous man," which means he did his best to follow the Mosaic Law. He could have easily gone to the priests and told them what had happened and they would have dragged Mary to the town gate and stoned her to death. This was what the Law prescribed, but Joseph did not obey the letter of the Law.

While Joseph was fitfully sleeping, unsure of his decision, God sent a messenger into Joseph's dream, who said, "Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). Those comforting words, "Do not be afraid," are the words we need to hear when we are forced to make hard decisions in our own lives. They have the power to help us move forward, even when we are unsure of the next step, because we know that God is with us each step of the way.

The messenger instructed Joseph "to name him Jesus." This was a common name

in that region of the world during that time. Jesus' common name united him with humans of this world. He is the eschatological deliverer of the people of God who relinquished his position of authority, humbled himself, took the form of a slave, and was born into human likeness, so that all humanity could be redeemed back to God (see Phil. 2:5-7). He is Emmanuel, the God who is with us.

Reflect: What step(s) is God calling you to take? What barriers are holding you back? How do you respond when you hear that God is with you?

Dec. 19, 2010

Where is the child?

Matthew 2:1-12

Fred Craddock relates the following experience in a collection titled *Craddock Stories* (Graves and Ward, ed., Chalice Press, pp. 129-130):

Years ago, near here in Los Angeles, the Society of Biblical Literature, scholars from all over the world, gathered and read papers to each other. I was present at the meeting. There were over 3,000 scholars from many countries of the world. Between papers — and you can imagine the level of the papers, very detailed and working on little words and phrases and all of that; it took a lot of energy to listen to the papers — I went for a coffee break. I went down to the lobby of the hotel where we were meeting, and a woman, a plain-dressed woman, I would guess her to be 40, came up to me and said, "Are you attending the meeting here of Bible people?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "Can anyone come?"

I said, "Well, to some of the sessions, yes."

"Well, I want to come."

I said, "Why?"

"I have walked the streets of Los Angeles since I was 16 years old, selling myself. The other night I caught my daughter, a teenager, beginning the same life. I would like to be a Christian." She had a Bible, an old Bible with a zipper.

I couldn't think of a session for her to attend. I said, "Sit down," and we sat down and drank coffee, and I unzipped her Bible — it had not been unzipped I think — and read her some of it, and talked with her. We had a word of prayer. Then I went to a phone and

called a church, and a minister came from that church, and they went away together.

There are people who would say, "See all the foolishness of those scholarly meetings? Anybody there probably couldn't even answer the woman's question, 'What must I do to be saved?' All that stuff is nothing. What they need is just somebody to answer the question."

My response to that it is 'phooey.' That scholarly work is extremely important; otherwise the good ship Zion would be so covered with barnacles of prejudice and sentimentality it'd sink! But somebody's got to answer that woman's questions. In the church, you see, both the critical community and the confessing, evangelizing community are extremely important.

There are times when the church, like the Society of Biblical Literature meeting, can serve more as a barrier than as a conduit to those who are seeking Christ. Like the Magi, people are searching for and asking, "Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?"

Reflect: What was it like the last time you were a visitor at a church? Does your church adequately welcome those who are seeking Christ? What physical or cultural barriers has your church erected that insulate you from those who are different from you? What role does the "critical community" and the "evangelizing community" play in your congregation?

The Magi, or astrologers, traveled a great distance to Jerusalem so that they could worship the "King of the Jews." Their arrival and announcement about worshipping this new king put Herod and all the residents of Jerusalem on edge because in Herod's mind there was now a viable threat to his kingdom. Like the Magi, those among us who seek Christ may come from places and backgrounds that put us on edge because they are different from us. The church must be aware of the ways it sustains a certain cultural and socio-economic status that keeps people who do not fit at arm's length and be intentional about welcoming those who are seeking Christ.

Caryll Houselander, an English laywoman mystic who lived through the ravages of World War II, writes in *A Child in Winter* (Sheed and Ward, p. 128):

"God changes everything. God sends us to where God wants us to be; among those whom God wishes to be among; to do that

which God wishes to do in our lives.

“God brings to the Bethlehem of our lives those people to whom God wishes to show the Infant Christ in us; those who are to give us something for him, just as God brought whom he would to Bethlehem: animals, angels, shepherds and kings. Unlikely people, proving that, though there are distinctions between different kinds of people in the world, when they come into Christ’s presence there is to be no distinction, no selection; the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned, the laborer and the king, must kneel together to the Infant Christ.

“With all the ingenuity and all the sincerity in the world we cannot arrange our lives as God can to ensure that we give the Infant Jesus his necessity in us, not our goods or our thoughts of him, but ourselves.

“Our humanity is to clothe him. Our love to be the four walls that shelter him. Our life to sustain him.”

Reflect: Where is God calling you to go? Who does God wish you to be among? What does God wish to do in your life?

Dec. 26, 2010

A voice was heard in Ramah

Matthew 2:13-23

In his book, *Night* (Bantan, pp 61-62), Elie Wiesel recalls a horrible memory from the time he spent as a prisoner at the Buna concentration camp:

“One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. SS all

around us, machine guns trained: the traditional ceremony. Three victims in chains — and one of them, the little servant, the sad-eyed angel.

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him.

This time the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS replaced him.

The three victims mounted together onto the chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

‘Long live liberty!’ cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

‘Where is God? Where is he?’ someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting.

‘Bare your heads!’ yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

‘Cover your heads!’

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive ...

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking: ‘Where is God now?’

And I heard a voice within me answer him: ‘Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on the gallows ...

That night the soup tasted of corpses.”

The previous story and our text are not the traditional stories we tell during the Christmas season, but they both serve as poignant reminders that we are not immune to tragedy and injustice. Ultimately, for Wiesel, his experience in the concentration camp caused him to stop believing in God. For him, a loving God would not allow the chosen people to be murdered at the hands of the Nazis. God died on the gallows along with

the small child.

I imagine that the parents of the children who were slaughtered in and around Bethlehem also questioned God: “How could you have let this happen?” “Why did the angel only warn Joseph and not other families?” “Why didn’t Mary and Joseph wake their neighbors and urge them to come with them to Egypt?”

People ask difficult questions during times of tragedy and unfortunately they are often given glib, “biblical” explanations for why the tragedy befell them. Because many tragedies are beyond human understanding, it is unwise to try and offer an explanation. It is better to patiently wait for a resolution even if we don’t receive an answer during our lifetime.

In the foreword (pp x-xi) to *Night* Francois Mauriac, describes his meeting with Wiesel and the difficulty he had in how to respond to his story:

“And I, who believe that God is love, what answer could I give my young questioner, whose dark eyes still held the reflection of that angelic sadness which had appeared one day upon the face of the hanged child. What did I say to him? Did I speak of that other Jew, his brother, who may have resembled him — the Crucified, whose Cross had conquered the world? ... Zion, however, has risen up again from the crematories and the charnel houses. The Jewish nation has been resurrected from among its thousands of dead. It is through them that it lives again. We do not know the worth of one single drop of blood, one single tear. All is grace. If the Eternal is the Eternal, the last word for each one of us belongs to Him. This is what I should have told this Jewish child. But I could only embrace him, weeping.”

We are not called to explain evil. Rather, we are called to enter with empathy into the lives of those who have been harmed. By entering into another’s pain, we become the presence of Christ to them, even if we don’t offer any words of comfort. Those who have suffered deeply often do not need explanations as much as they need compassion.

Reflect: Recall a time when you experienced a tragedy in your life. Who offered you compassion? What did that person or persons say or do for you that brought you comfort? Are you aware of someone who is living through a tragic event right now? How can you minister to them during this dark time? BT

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in the know

Keeping up with people, places, & events

Bill Ireland is pastor of First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga., coming from the pastorate of Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Gerald Keown was named to the Bob D. Shepherd Chair of Biblical Studies at Gardner-Webb University's School of Divinity. He has served as Old Testament professor since 1996 and as associate dean since 2006.

Eric Spivey is pastor of First Baptist Church of Cornelia, Ga. He previously served as associate pastor and minister of Christian formation and missions at The Baptist Church of Beaufort, S.C.

Lucius Walker Jr., an American Baptist pastor and activist, died on Sept. 7. Walker was perhaps best known for his opposition to the U.S. trade embargo with Cuba.

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Executive Director/Minister: The District of Columbia Baptist Convention is seeking an executive director/minister to serve as the principal executive officer of the Convention administering all funds, programs, and ministries under the direction of the executive board and the executive committee. Applicants must be an ordained minister with a degree from an accredited seminary, able to be an effective pastor to pastors with listening and coaching skills, and able to work with all Convention affiliations and partners. For a comprehensive list of the position qualifications and responsibilities, see www.dcbaptist.org/ministry.php. Please send inquiries, letters of application and résumés by Nov. 30 to: Dr. Ella Redfield, Chair, Search Committee, DC Baptist Convention, 1628 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20009, fax to (202) 667-8258, or email to search_committee@dcbaptist.org. Indicate "Executive Director/Minister Applicant" in the subject line.

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Baptists Today adds new directors

By John Pierce

MACON, Ga. — Five new members of the Board of Directors for *Baptists Today, Inc.* began three-year terms in September. The autonomous, national news journal is guided by a self-perpetuating board that is committed to freedom of the press and historic Baptist principles.

Toni Clevenger, a lay leader in the First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla., returned to the board. She is author of the church's history and is active in various Baptist organizations including the Baptist History & Heritage Society.

Jack Causey, retired pastor of the First Baptist Church of Statesville, N.C., joined the board. Currently, he works with ministerial placement through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and in mentoring younger ministers through the Center for Congregation Health at North Carolina Baptist Hospital.

Ben Gross was also elected to the board for the first time. He is retired from the

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga where he was a long-time chemistry professor and department chairman. He is active in Chattanooga's First Baptist Church.

Lee Royal, another active Baptist layman, was elected as a new director. He lives in Greensboro, N.C., and is a lifetime honorary trustee at Mars Hill College. He built an expansive Manpower temporary employment service franchise in the Carolinas before retirement in 1986.

Also joining the board is David Turner, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. He was a member of the inaugural class of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology and currently serves on the national coordinating council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Three directors completed six years of service each on the *Baptists Today* board and were recognized: Ann Beane of Richmond, Va., William Neal of Stone Mountain, Ga., and Ella Prichard of Corpus Christi, Texas. The board, which meets twice annually, currently has 33 members. **BT**

Keithen Tucker completing service with *Baptists Today*

MACON, Ga. — Keithen Tucker is leaving his position with the autonomous news journal *Baptists Today* at yearend. He has served as director of development and marketing since April 1, 2002.

A native of Albany, Ga., Tucker served as pastor of North Carolina churches for 22 years and then as church-relations director for Wingate University before joining the staff of *Baptists Today*.

“Keithen has the ability to strike up good relationships by simply calling our supporters and thanking them for their gifts to *Baptists Today*,” said Executive Editor John Pierce. “He has also encouraged those who send a single gift to make a three-year pledge that sustains the ongoing work of this news journal.”

Under Tucker’s leadership, two successful campaigns have been launched, an endowment fund has been established and several faithful supporters have included *Baptists Today* in their estate planning to



secure the news journal’s future.

“For many friends of *Baptists Today*, Keithen’s voice and face have become quite familiar,” said Pierce. “His effusive personality will be missed both in our office and throughout the places he has traveled to

promote the work of this unique publication.”

Tucker, 59, described his work with *Baptists Today* as an “adventure in faith” in which he discovered great appreciation for honest reporting, editorial freedom and a forum for exploring issues of importance to many Baptists.

“I have had the privilege and honor to visit either in person or by phone so many of the *Baptists Today* family,” said Tucker. “You have been a blessing, and I appreciate the support you have given to me and our organization.”

Tucker was honored at a meeting of the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors on Sept. 24 in Macon, Ga., where the news journal is based.

“I will miss the relationships I have built and friends I have made as a representative of *Baptists Today*,” he said. “Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your lives over these many years.” **BT**

Long-time professor and civil-rights advocate Mac Bryan remembered

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — A long-time Wake Forest University religion professor active in the Civil Rights Movement died Sept. 29. McLeod Bryan, 90, is being remembered not only for his own work for peace and justice, but also for influencing countless others through the years.

“I’m always running into people who told me, ‘Your dad changed my life in class,’” Bryan’s son, George, told the *Winston-Salem Journal*.

The North Carolina native received a B.A. (1941) and M.A. (1944) from the school — then known as Wake Forest College — and a B.D. (1947) and Ph.D. (1951) from Yale University.

Bryan was pastor of Olivet Baptist Church in New Haven, Conn., from 1945 until 1948. He taught at Mars Hill College and Mercer University before joining the religion department at Wake Forest in 1956.

Bryan stayed at Wake Forest for 37 years, championing racial justice and human rights while teaching his students about

religion and ethics. Often controversial and an agent of change, Bryan and others mounted a campaign to integrate Wake Forest in 1963.

He also taught in South Africa — where he was an early opponent of the country’s segregationist apartheid regime — and at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

Like other outspoken whites active in the Civil Rights Movement, Bryan was often vilified. His son said job opportunities were withheld, and crosses were burned on his father’s lawn.

In a preface to Bryan’s 1999 book, *Voices in the Wilderness*, author and fellow white Baptist civil-rights advocate Will Campbell said Bryan “fits unquestionably within the line of prophets.” Despite his academic achievements, Campbell said, Bryan always preferred to be called “Mac.”

Published by Mercer University Press,

Voices in the Wilderness — subtitled *Twentieth Century Prophets Speak to the New Millennium* — included Bryan’s autobiographical reflections of his experiences with five influential people he knew, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Clarence Jordan.

He wrote a total of 13 books, including *These Few Also Paid a Price*, a compilation of testimonies of 30 Southern whites who participated in the Civil Rights Movement juxtaposed with the white majority’s intense opposition to any change in the racial status quo.

Bryan is survived by his wife of 65 years, Edna, four children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

A graveside service was held Oct. 1 at Bryan’s boyhood church, New Bethel Baptist Church in Garner, N.C. A memorial service was held Oct. 3 at Wake Forest Baptist Church, where he was a member, in Wait Chapel on the Wake Forest campus.

Memorials may be made to the G. McLeod Bryan Caring Award at Mars Hill College or Wake Forest University Public Engagement for Religion. **BT**



Mac Bryan

My evil plan to overthrow church-membership practices

By Amy Butler

In the tradition of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, I would like here to officially announce the unveiling of my plan to overthrow current church-membership practices.

You heard me right.

It's not that this thinking is new to me; it actually started long before that church council meeting several years ago where the council heatedly discussed whether or not people should be erased from church membership if they are dead.

But every time I teach a new-member class, fill in a form asking for church-membership numbers, or approach the long-anticipated season of stewardship each year, I think about this again ... and again and again and again.

And I officially declare that I am done thinking about it. It's time to take some radical action.

Here's the thing: I have given this speech innumerable times, to the point that our deacon chair once asked me to tone it down, as I could be scaring people.

I have written about this in the church newsletter so much, the editor is starting to suggest new material.

I have even preached about this, as preaching is often good for addressing a captive audience.

Here's what I say: In short, being a church member means you show up regularly, in person at little events like, say, worship; you offer your voice to the ongoing conversation of how we're following Jesus around here; you give your money (seriously, I think everybody should tithe and I am not kidding); you commit yourself to a personal discipline of faith, which means tending to your own spiritual health and praying for the health of this community; and you actively help newer members and visitors find their place here.

As I always say, anybody can be a part of our life together. Really, everyone is welcome to participate. But I feel a conviction that being a church member is a different thing altogether.

And after years of worrying about being too demanding of people, I am scared no longer. Church membership is a big deal, because the health of our community, not to mention the work of following Jesus, is a big deal, too.

So here's what I propose: Let's clear the

rolls every year. Yup. January 1, the church membership number goes down to 0. You heard me.

Then, as an act of worship, let's all publicly commit ourselves to church membership for the year ahead — with full awareness that we are committing to the life of this community in the ways I mentioned. And then, let's agree to hold each other accountable while we pray as hard as we can for God's help.

I am not so naïve that I don't know this



sort of membership policy may present some problems. For one thing, the number of delegates that we can send to associational meetings is based on our membership numbers. No matter that we can never find

enough people to go anyway, but I guess I could see how a reduction in our allowed representation might be ... sad?

And then, of course, if we publish accurate membership numbers every year, all the people out there who were under the impression that Calvary was a megachurch will know the truth.

Honestly, the only real objection I can think of is that a membership policy like this might prove unpopular with people who move away but want to maintain their ties to this specific church. I can see how this could be hard; it's always hard to live through transition and change. But if we define church membership as being present and invested, then we will have taught our people well if they move away and find a new community of faith in which to plant their lives.

Frankly, I would much rather be sending out prophetic, committed Christians to other faith communities than have a super-inflated membership number that is not reflected in the actual life of our community.

So, that's it: my secret plan to overthrow current church-membership policies. I think it's high time we shake things up a bit around here. Who's in? **BT**

—Amy Butler, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., blogs at talkwiththepreacher.wordpress.com. This column is distributed by Associated Baptist Press.

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guest commentary

The ‘myth’ of a Christian nation

By James A. Rudin

RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

The late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan is credited with saying that “everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts.”

Some leaders of the religious right would have us believe that America was founded as a “Christian nation.” The facts, however, say otherwise.

While the Founding Fathers, with their diverse Christian backgrounds, had every opportunity to make the fledgling United States into a “Christian nation,” the factual record reveals they consciously refused to do so.

And it was not, as some opine, a mistake or an oversight.

Their reasons were a combination of history, demography and the Founders’ shared belief that they were creating something unique in the world.

They remembered the Church of England’s persecution of religious minorities, including the Pilgrims and Quakers. The Founders were also haunted by the ghosts of Europe’s Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) when huge numbers of Protestants and Catholics killed each other in the name of God.

The text of the Declaration of Independence contains just four theological references: “nature’s God,” “Creator,” “Supreme Judge of the world,” and “Divine Providence.” There is not a single specific mention of either Jesus or Christianity. The Declaration, reflecting the signatories’ collective thinking, was carefully written and edited; words were included, or not, for a reason.

The U.S. Constitution, written in 1787, has only this religious wording: “in the year of our Lord,” a common phrase still used on

some legal documents and diplomas.

There is not, however, any constitutional authorization for the establishment of any religion in the U.S. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. Article Six rejects a “religious test” for public office, and the First Amendment prohibits the establishment of religion while at the same time providing for its free exercise.

There were demographic factors at work, as well. By 1776, the U.S. was already religiously diverse, with several Protestant groups, minority Catholic and Jewish populations, and a large number of African-American slaves, some of them Muslim.

James Madison, a Presbyterian attorney from Virginia and a future president, predicted a “multiplicity of sects” in the U.S., similar to diverse political parties. We see now that Madison was, and remains, correct.

Even so, the question of whether the U.S. would officially become a “Christian nation” was in doubt until a titanic struggle was waged in Virginia between Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry in 1785.

Henry, the state’s governor and an Anglican (today he’d be known as an Episcopalian), wanted residents to pay a church tax to support religious institutions. Because of Virginia’s population at the time, most taxes would have gone to the Anglican Church. Supporting the tax was John Marshall, another Anglican and a future Chief Justice.

Jefferson, who was also raised in the Anglican tradition, strongly opposed the proposal, and he enlisted Madison and Baptist minister John Leland as allies in the bitter campaign to defeat the bill in the Virginia



Legislature.

Thanks to the efforts of Jefferson and his allies, Henry’s tax legislation failed, and the following year, 1786, the Legislature adopted Jefferson’s Statute of Religious Freedom by a vote of 74 to 20.

The Statute has had an extraordinary influence upon American history for 225 years. It provided that:

“No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever ... nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

Those are facts. And now my opinion:

Had Henry’s church tax become law, it is likely that other states would have followed Virginia’s lead and adopted similar measures. Had that happened, it would have been a far different America for every citizen, whether religiously identified or not.

A Henry victory in 1785 would have made it much more difficult to write the Constitution two years later without including specific religious language and/or a provision to approve a church tax and an established state religion.

Thanks to Jefferson’s victory in the Virginia Legislature, that did not happen. It’s a historical fact — not an opinion — worth remembering. **BT**

—Rabbi Rudin, the American Jewish Committee’s senior interreligious adviser, is the author of the forthcoming *Christians & Jews, Faith to Faith: Tragic History, Promising Present, Fragile Future*.

The U.S. Constitution, written in 1787, has only this religious wording: “in the year of our Lord,” a common phrase still used on some legal documents and diplomas.

guest commentary

Embracing the radiant center

By Leroy Seat

Are you a fundamentalist or a liberal? Since either/or thinking is so common (most people seem to like simplicity), many seem to think that Christians are either fundamentalists (or at least narrow conservatives) or liberals. But this is clearly a false dichotomy, so I advocate a position that is neither fundamentalist nor liberal.

My dislike for Christian fundamentalism is fairly strong. In fact, I wrote a whole book under the title *Fed Up with Fundamentalism*. So, naturally, many people have assumed that I am a liberal. Recently, one of my Facebook “friends” referred to me as a “proud liberal.”

But does opposing fundamentalism make one a liberal? I think not.

My recently published book is titled *The Limits of Liberalism*. In it I give examples of several leading liberal theologians whose position, in my opinion, is an over-reaction to various problems within fundamentalism. Sometimes the opposite of fundamentalism *is* liberalism.

Opposition to fundamentalism, however, doesn't necessarily lead to liberalism. There should be — and can be — a suitable stance in between. But that middle position is not easy to find or to maintain.

As is commonly known, in ancient Greek mythology Scylla and Charybdis were two sea monsters situated on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and Italy. Those fearful monsters were located close enough to each other that they posed an inescapable threat to sailors who sought to pass between them: avoiding Scylla usually meant passing too closely to Charybdis and vice versa.

I certainly agree with those who seek to escape the “monster” called fundamentalism. Still, I also see the danger of fleeing the threat on the right only to be gobbled up by liberalism, the “monster” on the left.

Those who seek to navigate the narrow channel between the two may well argue that the monster on one side is not as dreadful or as destructive as the monster on the other. And some may see the monsters as being so unequal that they are willing to risk being captured by the lesser monster so as to not be devoured by the other.

But shouldn't we ardently try to escape both the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis of liberalism?

While working on *The Limits of Liberalism*, I came across a delightful book by a dynamic, (relatively) young Methodist pastor. Adam Hamilton titled his book *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*.

While I largely agree with the centrist position Hamilton takes on most issues, I decided I did not like to talk about that position as being *gray*. Generally, gray is not a very appealing color.

Perhaps, instead, we can seek a position between the extremes of black and white that is composed of brilliant blues, gorgeous greens and rousing reds. “Maybe the future of Christianity does not have to be just some shade of gray, but a rainbow of colors with many hues blending together to produce a form of the faith that is more appealing than one that is black or white — or gray.”

So even though I like Hamilton's position, and even though I found his reference to the “radical center” appealing, I decided to call the desired middle position the *radiant center*. That center “glows with the

heat (passion and compassion) and light of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the gospel about Jesus.” It radiates out “to warm and enlighten everyone within its scope.”

Proposing such an attractive center position doesn't mean that all other Christians will necessarily affirm such a stance or flock to it — although I hope more and more will. Those on the right, the rigid fundamentalists, will see the radiant center as being too “liberal” and will criticize it for abandoning some basic doctrines and/or emphases of their understanding of Christianity.

Those on the left will see that center as being too conservative and will continue to advocate a position that is more in harmony with the ethos of secular humanism than with the historic Christian faith. Being in the middle always opens one to attacks from both the right and the left.

But the radiant center is not a small or limiting position. It is large enough to include Christians with various emphases and understandings of the Christian faith. The radiant center doesn't seek uniformity or unanimity. It realizes the vitality of having different interpretations and the dynamism of constant dialogue.

The radiant center is the place where those who reject fundamentalism as well as those who recognize the limits of liberalism meet. Among the many who congregate there are those who realize that one doesn't have to be a fundamentalist to be a good Christian as well as those who understand that one doesn't have to be a liberal to reject fundamentalism.

—Leroy Seat of Liberty, Mo., is a retired missionary to Japan. He is the author of *Fed Up with Fundamentalism: A Historical, Theological, and Personal Appraisal of Christian Fundamentalism* (2007) and *The Limits of Liberalism: A Historical, Theological, and Personal Appraisal of Christian Liberalism* (2010).



the lighter side

The flag that doesn't fly over Milton's head

By Brett Younger

On the Sunday before Veterans Day, Milton was thinking about the flag while his pastor was preaching about following Christ or commitment to God alone or something like that. Why couldn't they put some bunting on the pulpit? Wouldn't it be great to sing "I'm Proud to Be an American" instead of the "Doxology"? What would be the harm in saying the Pledge of Allegiance together?

Milton thinks of himself as a war hero. He spent the last three months of the Korean War at Fort Benning, Ga., cooking breakfast — powdered eggs, grits, toast, sausage and, on Saturdays, pancakes. He lives in fear that people will forget the sacrifices he made.

Milton didn't usually get in line to shake the preacher's hand, but he decided to hang around today. He listened as people offered the usual comments: "I enjoyed the service," "You really stepped on their toes today," "Nice weather we're having," "Better luck next time."

Most people tried to say something related to the sermon, but Milton had something important to get off his chest: "Pastor, we need a flag in our sanctuary. We need it now. I'm ready to pay for it. We need a flag to tell everyone who comes to our church that we're Americans and proud of it."

The pastor's mind races to possible responses. He could try to explain again that Baptists were founded on the ideal of the separation of church and state. For 400 years Baptists have refused to allow loyalty to any country to be on equal footing with loyalty to Christ. Milton had been around for a pretty significant portion of Baptist history. He should know this by now.

The pastor could talk about the symbols at the front of their sanctuary — a communion table, a baptistery, a Bible and a cross. Did any country's flag — even their favorite country's — belong with the emblems of a faith that knows no borders? Milton loves NASCAR. Would he want a picture of Dale Earnhardt in the baptistery? Christians love Jesus' mother. How would Milton feel about a

statue of Mary on the communion table?

The pastor could mention Reina, the Japanese exchange student living with the Petersons for a year. Reina's parents are Buddhist. What message will she get if there's an American flag in the only Christian place of worship she's ever visited? If Baptists believe in the priesthood of every believer, doesn't that include the believer who isn't American? What does it mean if a flag in a church represents only a portion of believers? Milton is a proud graduate of the University of Georgia. Would he also like a UGA pennant in the sanctuary? What if the chair of deacons pushed for an NC State banner?

The pastor could have raised any of these serious questions, but then the oddest thought popped into the pastor's head and out of his mouth before he could stop it: "Milton, do you and Lucille have an American flag over your bed?"

"What?"

"Is there an American flag pinned to the ceiling over your bed?"

Milton was confused, "No."

"Is it because you don't love our country?"

"No, that's ridiculous."

"So you're telling me that the absence of a flag over your bed isn't an indication of your lack of patriotism?"

"No, of course not."

"Why do your refuse to put a flag over your bed?"

Milton's face was red, white and blue. "I don't refuse to put a flag over my bed. It just doesn't belong there."

"Milton, I'm disappointed that you're not more patriotic. A flag in your bedroom will tell everyone that you're an American and proud of it."

"Wait a second, pastor. You're missing the point."

"When you are in bed, the flag will remind you and Lucille that you're not just committed to each other, but also to the United States of America. I'm ready to pay for it."

"Just forget it. We'll talk again on Memorial Day." **BT**

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



Of time and bus stops

By Tony W. Cartledge
Posted Sept. 8, 2010
www.tonycartledge.com

It's well before full daylight when Samuel walks down to the bus stop each morning about 6:20 a.m. When I follow a little later, giving the dog a morning romp, Samuel and his compatriots are quite a sight.

Three boys wait at the same bus stop, all high school freshmen, but they rarely say a word. Rather, each one stands or sits apart, earbuds in place, with faces glowing in the light of their respective iPods as they play games or search for favorite tunes.

During the first eight days of school, they had three different bus drivers who arrived on different buses, before the school system finally found a driver who is capable of following the route correctly and arriving at somewhere near the expected time.

Samuel is fortunate: this is only his third school, as he was able to go the distance at both his elementary and middle schools. This is his first year riding the bus.

Times have changed. Back in the day and the place where I grew up, we went to the same school for all 12 grades (no kindergarten then) and had



the same bus driver (Mr. Jinks Goldman) for the entire stretch.

In my first-grade year (1956), the bus looked like something out of a cartoon. It was short and rounded, with big black fenders surrounding the narrow nose. It was No. 6. A few years later, we got a new bus (No. 21), and shortly before I graduated, yet another one (No. 26).

We didn't have to meet the bus until 8:00 a.m., as school for all 12 grades started at 8:25 a.m. and let out at 3:15 p.m. If we were late getting out of the house in the morning, we could count on Mr. Jinks blowing the horn as he came down the hill well before reaching our driveway.

I started out alone at the stop, with my younger brothers joining me three and five years later. We tended to banter while waiting, usually in good-natured fashion.

In cold weather, we admired the ice crystals growing from the red clay, then stepped on them. Small transistor radios had come out before I finished high school, but it would never have occurred to me to plug in the earphone and take it to school.

Samuel and his friends carry giant backpacks, but for some reason the notion of a backpack or book bag was unknown in our county. We stacked up our books and carried them under one arm, if they would fit, or in both hands. I remember using a green rubber strap to keep mine together (it fit right in with my nerdy glasses and pocket protector).

When homework time comes, Samuel pulls out a slick TI-83 Plus calculator that has more computing power than the entire University of Georgia had when I started there in 1969. I considered myself technologically advanced because I got a slick yellow Pickett slide rule my senior year.

Times change — but fortunately the basic rules of algebra and the classic authors remain the same, so I'm not yet useless when it comes to homework. Give me a challenging word problem, and the smell of chalk and purple spirit masters come rushing back.

If only the equations came as easily ... **BT**



Priests tire of all-about-me weddings

By John Pierce
Posted Sept. 21, 2010
www.johndpierce.com

Giles Fraser, a priest at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, told a BBC radio audience recently, according to Religion News Service, that some weddings can feel like "an overblown vanity project."

Many clergy, he said, prefer conducting funerals that "still have a beauty, a quiet dignity and a moral seriousness that is quite absent from many of the weddings."

The Rev. Fraser and others who endure such weekend extravaganzas have heard enough about "my special day." According to the RNS report, the Anglican priest said "the problem with the modern wedding is that it's too often a glitzy stage-set, overly concerned with the shoes, the flowers, the napkin rings and performing to the cameras."

As a top priest at St. Paul's, Fraser doesn't have to look far to see where some families might have gotten the idea of turning weddings into high-dollar, attention-getting events. Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana were married there in the grandest of styles in 1981, drawing a TV audience of some 750 million.

So while brides are saying yes to the dress, it seems some clergy are saying no to the excess.

I'll take a bet on who's going to win this one: mother of the bride. **BT**

Muslims ask: When will blame game end?

When will the blame game end? That's the question many Muslim Americans are asking, as controversies simmer over the role of Muslims in American public life, such as where they can pray, and how Islam is depicted in textbooks.

Many U.S. Muslims say the battles are not just about the right to practice their religion, but also about a lingering sense that they are, and will always be, held responsible for terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam.

Whether fellow Americans see them as distinct from Islamic terrorists will no doubt shape the future of generations of American Muslims.

Thus, for many Muslims, life in the U.S. requires maintaining a delicate balance between asserting their constitutional rights, getting along with fellow citizens, and distancing themselves from acts of terrorism — without seeming to accept blame for them.

For instance, agreeing to move Park51, the proposed Islamic community center near Ground Zero, is not just a matter of ceding religious rights, but also about accepting guilt for the actions of the 9/11 hijackers and other terrorists.

To be sure, not all Muslims feel that way.

Moving Park51, “does not mean we must accept the false premise that Islam is responsible for 9/11, and it does not mean sacrificing one’s rights to the populist, neoconservative and religious fundamentalist voices that seek to transform the issue into a new clash of civilizations,” wrote Tariq Ramadan, a controversial Swiss-Muslim scholar.

The differences are often generational.

“The people who seem to feel most uncomfortable with the idea of Park51 and feel some collective guilt for a lot of the violence that’s happening tend to be the first generation immigrants,” said Ameena Meer, who lives near Ground Zero and was two blocks from the first tower when it fell. She believes the proposed Islamic center should not be moved, and has started a Facebook in support of the project. Her mother disagrees.

“In my mom’s mind, it would be like stopping all the drama. But in my mind, moving it would be, one, an admission of guilt, and two, it wouldn’t solve anything,” said Meer.

This concern has been prevalent on Muslim blogs and Internet chat rooms, and in newspaper articles and interviews.

Mongi Dhaouadi, president of the



Swiss scholar Tariq Ramadan says fellow Muslims should not appear to take blame for terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam by making concessions to their religious freedom, such as moving a planned Islamic community center proposed near Ground Zero. (RNS photo.)

Connecticut chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations, said he fought a decision by the president of the Hartford City Council to uninvite two imams from praying before council meetings after citizens protested.

“You’re caving in to people who say all Muslims are complicit in 9/11, and you’re giving legitimacy to that view,” said Dhaouadi. “We can’t accept this.”

Council president rJo Winch said she had no intention of assigning collective guilt to Muslims, but was respecting opposition views, even if some were intolerant.

Other Muslims believe they can reject collective responsibility but feel guilt individually.

“Allah makes it real clear that we’re stuck with each other, like family,” said S.E. Jihad Levine, a blogger and journalist who was raised Jewish but converted to Islam in 1998. “You may not like your brother or your sister or your uncle, but they’re blood. And when you’re Muslim, how could you not help but feel any guilt, with what some of these Muslims do?”

Observers say collective guilt of Muslims has been amplified by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as terrorism threats coming from other Muslim countries, from trouble spots like Somalia and Yemen, to more stable but authoritarian countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya and Egypt.

“The stereotypes must be recognized and deconstructed through education and enforcement of civil rights,” said Sahar Aziz, a civil rights lawyer in Austin, Texas. “The bias held by portions of the public is fueled and justified when they see their government mistreating Muslim Americans.”

Collective guilt is a question that has challenged different countries for centuries, from Germans and Japanese after World War II to Serbs and Hutus more recently. Some foreign policy experts have noted that one of Americans’ biggest enemies — Osama Bin Laden — ascribes guilt to all Americans for the perceived crimes of America against Muslims.

Despite the current difficulties, Meer said she does not fear for her daughters’ future in the U.S. “I believe that it’s temporary, and also because I believe, when push comes to shove, most Americans are pretty tolerant.”

Levine, who said she has experienced harassment as a Jew and as a Muslim, isn’t so sure. “It causes a little fear in me. I definitely have my passport current,” she said. “When something else happens here, it’s not going to be pretty.”

The only way for Muslims to fight collective guilt, Levine said, is to get out in their communities so people know them as individuals. **BT**

Top religion reporting, Gus Niebuhr honored

By Kevin Eckstrom
Religion News Service

DENVER — Religion reporters from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* won top honors Sept. 25 at the 2010 Religion Newswriters Association's annual awards competition.

The RNA also honored former *New York Times* religion reporter Gustav Niebuhr with its William A. Reed Lifetime Achievement Award. Niebuhr, who left the beat in 2001, now teaches at Syracuse University.

William Wan of *The Washington Post* won first-place in the Supple Religion Writer of the Year award, followed by Michael Paulson of the *Boston Globe* and Eric Gorski of The Associated Press.

Veteran religion reporter Laurie Goodstein won the reporting award for *The New York Times*, followed by the AP's Gorski,

Peter Smith of *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Ky., and Rachel Zoll of the AP (honorable mention).

In the Cassels Religion Reporter of the Year contest for small newspapers, first place went to Melissa Burke of the *York (Pa.) Daily Record*, followed by Ron Cassie of *The Frederick (Md.) News-Post* and Amy Umble of *The Free Lance-Star* in Fredericksburg, Va.

The Cornell Religion Reporter of the Year award for mid-sized newspapers went to Jenny Green of the *Ottawa Citizen*, followed by Peggy Fletcher Stack of *The Salt Lake Tribune* and Bob Smietana of *The Tennessean* in Nashville.

Awards of excellence in radio religion



Gus Niebuhr

reporting went to Interfaith Voices, followed by freelancer Genevieve Oger, Capital Public Radio and Arun Venugopal of WNYC Radio (honorable mention).

The PBS program *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* swept all three television awards for work done by Kate Seelye, Kim Lawton and Deborah Potter.

The Schachern Award for Multimedia Reporting went to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, followed by Manya Brachear of *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, and honorable mentions to Jenny Green of *The Ottawa Citizen* and *The Wichita Eagle*.

The Chandler Student Religion Reporter of the Year went to Evan Pondel of the University of Southern California, followed by Jeremy Blaney of Michigan State University, Tiffany Stanley of Harvard University, and Kate Shellnutt of Northwestern University (honorable mention). **BT**

Mormon president says church needs more missionaries

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
The Salt Lake Tribune

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) — Despite an impressive number of men and women preaching the Mormon gospel across the globe, the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints needs even more missionaries, LDS President Thomas S. Monson said.

A two-year mission is a universal expectation for every “worthy, able young man,” Monson said Oct. 2, speaking to more than 20,000 Mormons in the LDS Conference Center and millions more watching the church's 180th General Conference via satellite.

Young women don't have the same obligation to serve full-time, but can make “a valuable contribution as missionaries,” Monson said. “We welcome your service.”

And to retired couples, the LDS leader said, “we need many, many more senior couples.”

Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles repeated Monson's message, saying, “We need more missionaries.”

Nelson mentioned that his large

“The primary reason for changes in missionary numbers is the fluctuating population of available missionary-age members.”

Mormon Temple in Nauvoo, Illinois. Photo by Peter Merholz.



Mormon family had so far produced 49 such missionaries and encouraged every member to share the faith with his neighbors, friends and Internet connections.

The push for more missionaries may reflect an awareness of the church's shrinking proselytizing force, which is down to about 52,000 from a high of 62,000 in the

mid-1990s. The decline is due in part to the LDS Church “raising the bar” on missionary qualifications in 2002, LDS spokesman Scott Trotter said last February.

But, Trotter said, “the primary reason for changes in missionary numbers is the fluctuating population of available missionary-age members.” **BT**

Empty pews at Sunday evening services

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — Doug De Vries describes Sunday evening worship as “a lot less formal” than the morning service at Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church.

It’s also a lot less crowded.

Plymouth Heights is in step with a larger trend of declining evening attendance in evangelical denominations that long have cherished a heritage of worshiping twice on Sunday. Some evening services are more intimate; others have been cancelled or replaced by an alternative.

“It’s a business question that has been asked,” said De Vries, the church’s minister of music. “People are spending time with their family (on Sunday nights) or using that time to get together in small groups. We were concerned that we were squandering resources to put the evening service together.”

Plymouth Heights’ 5 p.m. worship service continues, with about 25 percent of the people who attend the weekly Sunday morning service.

That mirrors data from across the CRC, based on survey results presented this summer to the church’s annual Synod. The survey found evening worship attendance is “plummeting,” down from 56 percent of members in 1992 to 24 percent in 2007.

Researchers wrote that the data “seems to suggest evening service attendance has become optional.”

It’s not just the CRC. Officials at the Assemblies of God reported a 6 percent drop in Sunday evening attendance, to 416,751, in 2009 even as the overall size of the denomination grew by 1.2 percent, to 2.86 million.

There are different ways to interpret the trend: Some see it as harmless, while others see worrisome deviation away from doctrine. For others, the decline is a natural outcome of the historically Dutch church’s aspirations to evangelize a broader demographic.

“Many churches are substituting evening worship and putting their energies into other things,” said Jeff Meyer, pastor of Crosswinds Community Church, a 4-year-old CRC congregation in Holland, Mich., that, like many new churches, does not conduct evening worship.

“The people who are exploring



Christianity are not typically accustomed even to weekly worship a single time. So to put forward some kind of a community-based expectation that you do this twice a Sunday would be extraordinary.”

At Roosevelt Park Community Church in Grand Rapids, attendance at Sunday evening services fell from as many as 175 people in the mid-1990s to about 40 when the service was discontinued five years ago, said pastor Reginald Smith.

Ending the service has enabled the church to put more energy into the morning service, children’s programs and ministry during the week. The result has been a bigger focus on evangelism and relational ministries, Smith said.

“We just saw incremental diminishing returns (in attendance),” Smith said. “Younger families were much busier with all the humming and bumbing of life and they found other ways to refresh themselves.

“The evening service was a wonderful thing back in its heyday, but it cannot continue to function in the same form that it has historically. For a lot of churches, that’s really a harsh reality.”

The harsh reality, in David Engelsma’s view, is that churches that drop evening

worship are ignoring their spiritual inheritance. The retired seminary professor calls the trend “plain evidence of the great apostasy that Christ has predicted.”

Engelsma said evening worship in the Dutch Reformed tradition dates to the 16th century, when ministers taught from the Heidelberg Catechism. Engelsma’s Protestant Reformed Church, which split from the CRC in 1925, still turns out en masse for Sunday night services, he said.

“Basically, it’s the same today with us as it was back in The Netherlands in the 1500s,” said Engelsma. “When a parishioner sits year after year under the regular instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism, he is going to be knowledgeable of and grounded in the truths, the doctrines and the teachings of the Christian faith.”

Others, including Ron Rienstra, a professor at the Reformed Church in America-affiliated Western Theological Seminary, are concerned that Christians may be chipping away on the one day a week that God commanded to be set aside and kept holy.

“The two services is a way to frame the whole day as belonging to the Lord,” Rienstra said. “The decline of Sunday evening worship is a marker alongside many that our culture is becoming more popularly secular. We’ve lost a sense of sacred time that is being offered back to God.”

Some churches have dropped the evening worship but offered an alternative. Grand Rapids’ Eastern Avenue CRC now meets every other Sunday night for a half-hour of worship, a half-hour of eating and an hour of small-sized “covenant groups.”

More than 200 people took part in the groups last year, a significant increase from evening attendance that “literally became a bit embarrassing,” said Fred Sterenberg, church administrator.

“The decision (to end the service) almost made itself because very few people were coming,” he said. “If we’re talking tradeoff, (the covenant group alternative) is a pretty good tradeoff.” **BT**

—*Matt Vande Bunte writes for The Grand Rapids Press in Grand Rapids, Mich. Whitney Jones contributed to this report.*

“Younger families were much busier with ... life and they found other ways to refresh themselves.”

Spirituality, consumerism come together at Joyce Meyer's conference for women

ST. LOUIS — The scene near the concession stands resembled something closer to a strip mall on Black Friday than the hour preceding a worship service.

Hundreds of women lined up outside a temporary “boutique” with displays of \$25 T-shirts and \$40 hoodies emblazoned with messages like “Love Revolution” and “Think Happy Thoughts.”

A staff member controlling the flow of shoppers wondered aloud whether a bull-horn would help.

Nearby, a crush of women lined up three deep to pick up copies of DVDs and books, most bearing the smiling face of Joyce Meyer, the woman they'd all paid an average of \$55 to see and hear.

It's likely all of them had seen Meyer on television, or heard her on the radio, before. And a good percentage had probably also seen her live at one of the many conferences that Joyce Meyer Ministries puts on across the country each year.

Many were veterans of the women's conference that Meyer has convened annually in St. Louis for 28 years. The forum grew from 65 women to a peak of 25,000 and back down to 17,000 this year. They'd come from all 50 states and 21 countries to hear Meyers' no-nonsense, populist version of the gospel.

“In some way, shape or form we all have something in our lives we're dealing with,” said Michelle Madl, 45, from Rhinelander, Wis., who was attending her second women's conference. “But we come together here, as women, to meet new friends and to help each of us see we're not in this alone.”

For many of the women, seeing and hearing Meyer was worth the journey and money they spent on airfare, gas, hotel rooms, tickets and food.

“I watch Joyce on TV, and I've read lots of her books,” said Linda Donald, 46, of Jackson, Miss.

Her friend, Gwendolyn Sample, 42 of Pickens, Miss., added that she was ready for a “fresh word” from the tart-tongued evangelist.

The atmosphere is a mixture of humor,

inspiration, pampering and all-out consumerism. If women came for Meyer's preaching, they were also here for the stuff.

That included many of Meyer's 80 books, or her \$20 DVDs. Pamphlets offered “partnerships” — monthly donations to the ministry bolstered by scriptural justification for giving (“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” — Acts 20:35).

But in the face of such peddling, women like Jennifer Lake, 41, of Festus, Mo., were anything but bothered. Lake was carrying a bag full of new Joyce Meyer purchases and saw no conflict between the collective spiritual sisterhood on display and the equally evident commercialism.

“There are plenty of women who can't be here this weekend, and we can support them financially in this way,” she said.

Madl said, “I know where the proceeds are going and the impact they have with the wonderful things this ministry does.”

Ensuring women feel appreciated, relaxed and comfortable is a big part of Meyer's annual conference. Women won everything from free massages and makeovers to \$250 Wal-Mart gift certificates to a home addition.

“Part of our goal is to make everyone feel loved and special,” Ginger Stache, the ministry's chief media officer, told the crowd.

Meyer is known as a champion of the so-called prosperity gospel, which ties financial generosity and wealth to physical and spiritual well-being.

Shayne Lee, a sociology professor at Tulane University and author of *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*, compared Meyer to George Whitefield, the 18th-century British evangelist who toured the colonies preaching the gospel and becoming “the first American celebrity.”

“What (Meyer) is doing is carving out space in market share and converting

Christianity into a commodity,” Lee said. “She proves that Christianity can compete in the marketplace.”

Roby Walker, the ministry's chief operations officer, said the conference costs “millions” to stage, and that total receipts add up to “about \$2 million to \$3 million.”

The ministry says sales of the clothing in the conference “boutique” go to help needy children. “Our goal is to cover the expenses of the conference and break even,” Walker said.

There's a local benefit, too, officials said. Walker noted that attendees booked 4,000 hotel rooms and spent money on local restaurants and shops between Meyer's teaching sessions.

As she spoke about the parable of the Prodigal Son, Meyer paced the stage in black pants and a black leather jacket. A big diamond ring sparkled from her left hand and long earrings dangled from her ears.

While much has been made of Meyer and money — the Senate Finance Committee asked for copies of her financial records back in 2007 — the women attending her conference looked beyond the sparkly jewelry toward the message at the heart of Meyer's preaching.

God, Meyer said to hoots and cheers Thursday, loves a party. The evidence is that Jesus' first miracle was to turn water to wine at the wedding in Cana. “Jesus made the party better,” she said, smiling.

Meyer looks and sounds like the women in her mammoth, middle-class congregation. She is their husky-voiced, sassy neighbor who speaks wisdom directly to the broken lives many of them lead. They recognize her vocabulary, her sense of humor, her demeanor of world weariness.

“We pray for all we left at home,” she said to loud applause as she welcomed her flock to St. Louis. “We pray for the husbands, the kids, the baby sitters and all the dishes left in the sink. We pray for it all.” **BT**

—Tim Townsend writes for The St. Louis Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Mo.
This article is distributed by Religion News Service.



Joyce Meyer

Heaven's Rain

A story of pain and forgiveness

OKLAHOMA CITY — A son of Southern Baptist missionaries who survived the home-invasion murder of his parents in 1979 and later went on to advocate for victims' rights as Oklahoma's youngest-ever state senator brings his story to the big screen in a newly released independent film titled *Heaven's Rain*.

The movie, which premiered Sept. 9 in Hollywood, tells the true story of Brooks Douglass, who produced, co-wrote and appears as an actor in his first film.

Heaven's Rain centers around one of Oklahoma's most heinous crimes. On the evening of Oct. 15, 1979, two drifters burst into the home of Richard Holmes, who was then pastor of the 3,000-member Putnam City Baptist Church in Oklahoma City.

They bound the pastor and his wife, Marilyn, along with 16-year-old Brooks, and forced the family to listen helplessly while they took turns raping the couple's 12-year-old daughter, Leslie. After tying the girl, the two ate the family's dinner while leisurely discussing what to do next.

Brooks Douglass plays his father as a foreign missionary in Brazil sharing wise counsel with young Brooks played by Nicholas Braico.

Finally, 24-year-old Glenn Burton Ake told his accomplice, Steven Keith Hatch, 26, to go start the car. Ake then shot all four of the family members, leaving them for dead as the duo made off with a little more than \$40. Richard, 43, and Marilyn, 36, died at the scene, but Brooks and Leslie managed to untie each other and drive the family car for medical help.

After his election to the Oklahoma State Senate in 1990, Brooks Douglass got landmark legislation passed allowing family members of a murder victim to witness the execution of the killer. He and his sister became the first crime victims to exercise the right when they watched Hatch's execution by lethal injection on Aug. 9, 1996.

Except for the murder of his parents, however, Douglass says the most dramatic moment of his life was his 1994 meeting with Ake at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary,



Brooks Douglass plays his father as a foreign missionary in Brazil sharing wise counsel with young Brooks played by Nicholas Braico.

where he forgave the triggerman who forever altered his life.

"I have to admit that on some level I thought of myself as a happy person," Douglass said in an interview. "I didn't realize until I was sitting in that room how angry I was and how much I was carrying around."

Douglass said he and director/co-writer Paul Brown didn't set out to make a "message" film. "We kind of let it tell itself, based on what events did I feel like were pivotal in getting me where I am today," Douglass said.

On the other hand, "I certainly felt like the message of forgiveness was one that couldn't help but come through," he added.

As the father of children ages 5 and 3, Douglass said for him the film is also about the importance of parenting. Several of the scenes were filmed in Brazil, where Brooks portrays his father as a Foreign Mission Board missionary. The family was stationed there before being furloughed to the United States.

"The older I get, the smarter he gets," Douglass said.

Douglass said Christians talk about forgiveness, but he doesn't think most people really understand what it means.

"You hear it in church a lot, but when you really get down to the nitty-gritty, I don't think we see that much of it in practice," he

said. "Although we talk about it, I think forgiveness seems hard, painful. It's something that we don't want to do. I think it's contrary to most of our nature. I think it's certainly contrary to mine."

The title *Heaven's Rain* alludes to Matthew 5:45, where Jesus says that God causes rain to fall on both the just and the unjust.

Douglass said people approached him in the past about making his story into a book or movie, but he turned them down because they wanted to tell it as a crime story. He said he never dreamed that he would do it himself, but after 12 years in politics he decided he wanted to become a screenwriter.

Six years ago he moved to California and enrolled in a class taught by Brown, a screenwriter with past credits including the television shows *The X Files* and *Quantum Leap*. After reading a couple of Douglass' scripts, Brown asked him if he once worked for a senator. As Douglass told him the story over coffee, Brown's jaw dropped and he said, "That's what you need to write."

Douglass answered that he didn't think he could do it because it would be too painful, and Brown replied, "Where I come from, that is exactly why you should write this, and probably no one else should."

As the writing began to wrap up, Douglass balked at the idea of shopping the script around to studios and production companies, because if they bought it they would have the right to rewrite it.

"I wasn't particularly fond of the idea of having gone through all this, writing all this, and having somebody come in and take their own approach and own values and rewrite it the way they want it," he said.

The only other option was for Douglass to produce it himself. That meant hiring peo-

ple and raising a budget. Douglass started spending his own money and raised some funds from people around the Oklahoma area who knew his story and wanted to help him make the film.

Thanks to local support in Oklahoma, the crew was able to use the State Capitol, governor's mansion and the state prison free of charge. Panavision donated the use of four expensive movie cameras, and Fuji gave them a price break on film.

Most of the actors worked for the minimum scale. Several of the scenes are filmed inside the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City.

"People have been extraordinarily giving and supportive, and that is how we were able to get it done," Douglass said.

The movie stars Mike Vogel, who currently stars in the CBS primetime show *Miami Medical*, playing the young Brooks Douglass. Taryn Manning, who co-starred in the 2005 movie *Hustle and Flow*, plays Leslie Douglass.

A small budget also ruled out a huge marketing campaign. Instead Douglass is renting theaters a week at a time — beginning in Oklahoma and Texas and with a goal of getting into every major market by the end of the year.

"We want as many people to see it as we can," he said.

While not an intentionally "Christian" movie, the settings of a mission field in Brazil and a pastor's home and church mean that faith messages play a central role. Douglass said some churches might want to sponsor a showing, and he is willing to do that depending on how close it is to other screenings scheduled around the same time.

Douglass said everyone was "astonished" when the film received an R rating — mainly because some of the dialogue includes a character describing memories of being raped as a 12-year-old girl — but he doesn't believe that will hinder Christians from seeing it.

Douglass said "99 percent" of the dialogue was written from conversations that he actually had, but he could have written much more. His scene with Glenn Ake, for example, was lifted from an hour-and-a-half conversation but lasts a little over eight minutes on film. **BT**

Bible study asks, 'What Would Andy Do?'

By Kay Campbell
Religion News Service

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. — Say a group of immigrants want to build a mosque in Mayberry, right next to All Saints Church.

WWAD: What Would Andy Do?

The question, of course, never surfaced in the beloved *Andy Griffith Show* that chronicled life in the bucolic town of Mayberry, untouched by the battles of civil rights and war that festered in the 1960s.

Tucked somewhere into the cool green hills of North Carolina, Sheriff Andy Taylor mediated minor feuds in the largely homogeneous hamlet, guided his son, reined in the excitable Deputy Barney Fife, and set an example for common sense leadership that still inspires today.

Joey Fann, a software engineer from Huntsville, Ala., who has written *The Way Back to Mayberry*, a popular study guide for small groups in churches, wonders what the calm lawman of Mayberry would make of America's current collective agitation.

"What impressed me first about the series is the friendships between the characters and the compassion Andy has for everyone," Fann said. "There are a lot of values in that, even 50 years later."

Fann, at 44, is too young to have seen the show until it went into re-runs. The show lived on long past its run from 1960 to 1968, and Fann thinks the gentle unfolding of those basic values — which Fann also finds in his Christian faith — are why.

"Andy Griffith insisted that each show have a moral," Fann said. "And religion is portrayed the way it fits into the life of people of faith: Just as part of everyday affairs and conversation. It's a secular show, but you know these are church-going, God-fearing people."

Fann began to analyze Barney's antics and Andy's tender shepherding of Mayberry while he was a student at Churches of Christ-affiliated David Lipscomb University in Nashville. It's also when he fell in love with Mayberry.

Those conversations grew into a mid-



week small group class he taught and still leads from time to time at Twickenham Church of Christ in Huntsville, Ala.

The class received national attention and spawned his website, <http://BarneyFife.com>, where he and others share lessons and conversations about the show.

In 1999, an editor from B&H Publishing in Nashville contacted Fann to see if he'd consider writing a book, and he felt as dumbfounded as Gomer would have before a date. "I'm a software engineer, not a writer," Fann told the editor.

But he picked out 30 of the episodes that had stuck with him and wrote essays on each, much as he would start a discussion for one of his group meetings at church. Each short essay begins with a Bible verse that he sees illustrated by the episode.

The show is reaching a new generation in his home. Fann's 4-year-old daughter, Josey, loves to watch the episodes with her father. Fann encourages other families to discover — or rediscover — the show to learn from the time-tested example of a town where everything was, in a loving kind of way, black and white.

"Any time you are talking about *The Andy Griffith Show*, you are going to have a good time," Fann said. "Being a friend, being compassionate to people not like you, taking responsibility, being a good dad — I think we all need a little Mayberry in our hearts." **BT**

the media shelf

By Cecile B. Holmes, Religion News Service

Books challenge consumer-driven church model

Two new books challenge Christians to restore their faith to its true mission and forsake a consumerist mentality that some churches adapt in a bid to meet members' needs.

“Churches can better shape the faithful by recovering a sense that the life of faith is supposed to be a challenging experience,” said veteran journalist G. Jeffrey MacDonald. “I think that this may start with a new consumer ethic for this new religious marketplace.”

MacDonald, an ordained clergyman and a correspondent for Religion News Service, takes on the consumerist gospel in his recent book, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul*. He criticizes the easy gospel doled out by some



congregations, arguing that faith loses its flavor when watered down.

MacDonald says churches should remember the words and lives of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King Jr., two 20th century martyrs who died when their public Christian activism challenged the status quo.

“American history would have been completely different if Martin Luther King had stayed inside his comfort zone,” he said. “He put himself at ultimate risk and paid the ultimate price.”

University of Texas journalism professor Stephen D. Reese approaches the challenge from a more personal perspective, but reaches similar conclusions in his new book, *Hope for the Thinking Christian*.

Reese, who's active in Austin's Oak Hill United Methodist Church and is the author of several academic books, pushes readers to explore what's required for modern believers to discover an active, grounded faith.



“I wanted to emphasize the everyday-life aspects in the book,” Reese said. “I wanted to get beyond the notion that you have to have a serious personal life crash in order to have a testimony... I think we have all faced the spiritual drama of everyday life. What it means to be a father, a husband, a teacher, a friend — multiple situations.”

The rapid pace of modern life, combined with people's constant connection to technology, limits essential time to withdraw and be still, Reese says.

“The difference between work and home is no longer there,” he said. “We're so distracted in our world with demands on our time. There are difficulties in pulling away from work to have some kind of Sabbath moment. That's probably more challenging than ever before.”

Since the book's publication, Reese often finds himself speaking and reflecting on the “traditional division between the intellect and the life of the heart.” He sees a lingering uneasiness within academia over such a conversation, despite “more acceptance now of faith in the public square.”

Both Reese and MacDonald highlight the world's need for hope, and lay the responsibility for developing an intentional spirituality — ingrained in both Christian and congregation — at the feet of the faithful.

MacDonald worries that churches, pressed to please a fickle clientele, are failing their principle mission to edify, noting that the nation's greatest social movements — from 19th century abolitionists to 20th century women's liberationists — achieved their goals with roots in the church.

“What we're talking about here is whether churches in America will be capable of producing a prophetic voice in the present or in the future,” he said. “The muscles that the church has at its disposal to shape people who know the heart of God and can bear witness in a prophetic way, those muscles are being eviscerated by consumerism.” **BT**

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Dedicated following keeps shape-note singing alive

By Greg Garrison
Religion News Service

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The archaic sounds that fill the historic former church sanctuary echo, hauntingly, like a whispering ghost from the past.

Inside the 1902 building that once housed the Second Presbyterian Church, the elaborate archways bounce back the sound of sacred harp singing.

It's a style of music that once dominated rural evangelical religion, in the days before the Civil War and church organs, when a capella singing was the norm. It's never entirely died out, in part because of people like Tim Cook.

"It was once common throughout the South," said Cook, a shape-note singing aficionado who brought his lessons to the former church that's now part of the University of Alabama at Birmingham campus.

Cook's group of more than a dozen interested singers sat facing Cook as the song leader, holding wide-page hymnbooks filled with notes in the shapes of open and solid squares, diamonds, triangles and ovals.

Throughout the 1800s, the mournful harmonious sounds of a capella shape-note singing reverberated in churches throughout the South. It's now experiencing a renaissance of sorts in Sacred Harp songbooks and conventions. But while Sacred Harp singing has surged, the slightly more complicated seven-shape-note Alabama Christian Harmony singing still struggles to stay alive.



"We certainly don't want it to die out," said Emily Creel of Burleson, Ala., who carries on her family's generations-long love affair with the music. "We do it to promote the heritage and tradition of the music."

The Internet has helped create a revival for shape-note singing, bringing singers together for events across the country.

Cook says having the notes in different shapes makes it easier to read and sing the music in four-part harmony.

Participants sing the actual note sounds first: "fa" for triangle shape notes, "sol" for oval, "la" for square and "mi" for diamond-shape notes, instead of the lyrics. That's just a tradition. Then they sing it with the lyrics.

The combination of archaic harmonies and old-style lyrics can be jolting to outsiders. To others, it's addictive. Many of the shape-note songs were written by English composers such as Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, set to

old English dance tunes and carried from churches in rural England by colonial settlers.

The tradition was carried to the South, where many churches continued the shape-note a capella singing of the hymns with complex harmonies. The songs may have archaic, cryptic names such as "Old Hundred," better known in many hymnbooks as the doxology; "Amazing Grace" appears in shape-note books as "New Britain."

When pianos and organs became common in churches, a capella singing began to disappear, along with the complicated harmonies in the old hymnbooks.

Cook took up shape-note singing after moving from Michigan to Atlanta in 1995, and now teaches it and leads singings.

"I've always liked to sing a capella, four-part harmony," Cook said. "When I heard this the first time, I said, 'That is the voice of heaven.'" **BT**

What are you giving
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A conversation with Leonard Sweet

BUIES CREEK, N.C. — For more than 20 years, Leonard Sweet has been a leading voice among those seeking to help Christians relate effectively to a changing world. An ordained United Methodist clergyman, he currently serves as the E. Stanley Jones professor of Evangelism at Drew Theological School in Madison, N.J., and as a visiting professor at George Fox University in Portland, Oregon.

Sweet has published more than 20 books, scores of articles, and upwards of 600 sermons in both print and digital formats, currently through *wikiletics.com* and *sermons.com*. Two of his more recent books are *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* and *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There*.

Baptists Today contributing editor Tony Cartledge caught up with Sweet while he was at Campbell University Divinity School to present the Reavis Ministry Lectures on Sept. 28.

BT: Back in the 1990s, you were one of the first to begin talking about the emerging postmodern era and how it's challenging the church ...

LS: Yes, but I don't use that term (post-modern) anymore.

BT: Why not? And what term do you use?

LS: Certain words can become greasy over time when so many people use them, and use them in different ways. It's the same reason I don't use the word "emerging" any more.

I talk now about a "Gutenberg culture" versus a "Google or TGIF (Twitter, Google, iPhone, Facebook) culture," depending on

whether one is born before or after 1973 (when the cell phone was invented). That makes it really clear.

There is a technological component to the divide, but part of the difference is that in Gutenberg culture, technology is a separate category. In a Google world, technology is in everything. I use it to say there's a significant shift going on in the ways people are moving and thinking.

The modern (Gutenberg) world has been shaped by books, print and paper. The Google world is a digital culture. Print and digital media stimulate different parts of the brain, and actually cause it to be rewired.

When I was a pastor and tried to deliver a fervent sermon in the same manner as Charles Wesley, I realized that it didn't work in my day as it did in his day. I use this to describe a paradigm shift in how you lead your church. We are called to make disciples of all cultures, including Google culture.

The major cultural currency in a Gutenberg world is the word, which makes up verses. We memorized and exegeted words and verses.

In the Google world there's a new currency: image and story. In a Google/TGIF culture, people don't think in words or verses. To connect with this culture, you have to give them stories.

The church is the last one to get this. It's still trying to communicate through words and verses rather than images and stories.

BT: How does one lead effectively in a congregation that includes both cultures?

LS: I start by getting Gutenbergs to realize that they're immigrants in a Google world.

The natives today are Googlers who have the cues and clues to what's going on.

What do immigrants to a new country do? They tend to create little ethnic enclaves and try to preserve the old country with its songs and traditions for as long as they can. Many of our churches have become little Gutenberg ghettos. It's time we got a mission for the world we actually have rather than the one we wish we had.

In *So Beautiful*, I introduced the idea of churches having an interface and an operating system. The interface is morally neutral — the devil can use EPIC (Sweet's earlier suggestion that church programming should focus on Experience, Participation, Images and being Connected). The interface needs an operating system to run it.

Christianity has a divine design for human life, and we need to get back to the original system God planned for church. I refer to it as MRI: Missional, Relational and Incarnational.

Much of the fighting going on now, such as the "worship wars," has nothing to do with preserving authentic Christianity, but is really about preserving Gutenberg culture. We have a bad default system I refer to as APC (Attractional, Propositional, Colonial), and we need to move on to the MRI system so we can make disciples of all cultures.

BT: Using your acronyms, how do you see MRI and EPIC working together in the church setting?

LS: EPIC is the interface that connects us with culture. The operating system (MRI) can run many different interfaces. It's the operating system that can be attacked by viruses.

Sometimes it gets slow and sluggish, and needs to be defragged. God has been defragging the church for the past 20 years: we have needed a huge upgrade.

The church can work better, but it needs to reboot. I believe God is rebooting the church to its original operating system.

BT: In your acronym MRI, you use the term “missional,” which has become one of those “greasy” words that can mean different things to different people. How do you define it?

LS: Being missional is not about church growth. For me, it’s joining in God’s mission in the world. It’s not the church’s mission; it’s God’s mission.

BT: I’ve heard you, Alan Roxburgh, Henry Blackaby and others talk about finding where God is working and getting on board. How does one determine where God is working?

LS: The first half of my book, *Nudge*, introduces semiotics, which is basically a Greek word that means the study of signs. Jesus knew how to read the signs.

Today most people are interested only in the signs of the end time, not the signs of what Jesus is up to. The key is, “How do I read the signs of what he’s up to?”

Jesus is the ultimate sign. We should be looking for signs of Christ’s presence. In everybody you meet, Jesus has already been trying to call that person to himself. So, how do you read the signs and encourage that?

It’s not “show and tell” evangelism, but “shut up and listen” evangelism. You have no right to speak until you have discerned what the spirit is doing in the other person’s life.

Get them to tell their story, and as they’re telling their story, you begin pointing out how God is working in their life — get them to see what God is up to and realize that’s Jesus at work in their life. It may not lead to an altar moment, but I’m here today because a lot of people nudged me.

So then, you’re not connecting them to your story (what Jesus has done for me), but to the gospel story. Being able to do this presupposes that we know the stories of the Bible, but we don’t. That’s why I believe every Sunday school should be reinvented as Bible U. — to learn the Bible in a fresh way, not as word and verse, but as image and story.

BT: Do you have hopes that this book will make a serious impression on those

who continue to promote aggressive propositional evangelism?

LS: The major criticism of the book is that nudging doesn’t include an element of judgment. Some people have written me, saying that witnesses need to make non-believers realize that they’re the “spawn of Satan” and need to repent or face judgment. They’re about judgment; I’m about nudgment.

BT: In an article on “Twitter Theology,” one of the five reasons you gave for loving Twitter is that it’s admittedly a surface medium. You said one of the best compliments you could receive is “Sweet, you do shallow well.” What do you mean by that?

LS: (Concerning Twitter), it’s sound bytes that bite. I don’t talk about what I’m doing — whether I’ve finished eating or brushing my teeth — I try to lift up what I see that Christ is up to.

I live a lot of my life in academic circles, where people spend a lot of time in the depths and some people seldom surface. You surface for relationships, to connect with people. If you’re not surfacing, you’re not connecting.

It was said of Jesus that “the common people heard him gladly.” I don’t want to get so sophisticated that the people can’t hear me. Still, this reflects my immigrant status.

My kids are tweeting and texting all the time — they’re always hanging out with friends, even when they’re alone. I have to will myself to do it, to think “It’s time to text” or “It’s time to tweet.” For a native Googler, it’s like breathing. They don’t will themselves to do it.

The trick is staying connected. The book is the most antisocial thing ever invented on the planet. That’s why the modern world created individualism. We didn’t have that concept as we know it until the printing press.

Print enabled the “I” to become separate from the world, to make individual decisions apart from the community. That’s what enabled Martin Luther to say, “Here I stand.”

Now, however, it’s gone so far that everyone lives in a “you-niverse.” The Google world is a reaction against that. People are never without their friends, even when alone, because they are connected digitally. That’s why it’s called social networking.

That doesn’t mean it’s without dangers. I’m concerned that in Google culture we’re losing something, getting a hive mind, with no independent thought apart from the hive.

BT: I understand that you’re involved with a Doctor of Ministry program called “Semiotics and Future Studies.” How would a well-trained “Jesus semiotician” function differently as leader of a congregation?

LS: Part of it is a belief in the present tense of Jesus. That’s a huge statement. I believe “We serve a risen savior, he’s in the world today.”

Part of what it means to be his disciple or follower is to read the signs of his appearing. God’s finger is still writing on the wall; Christ is still present. The ultimate in spiritual illiteracy is the inability to read the handwriting on the wall.

A semiotician helps people to read the signs of the spirit, and the ultimate sign is Christ. Then we can join Jesus in what God is up to.

BT: What would be different about a pastor who does this?

LS: You’re never at a loss for what to preach. Every week you see signs of what Jesus is up to.

You can be confident to move forward into the future because you know where the Spirit is leading, so you can stand before the people and say, “Follow me as I follow him because this is where he is leading.”

This kind of pastor also turns the people into semioticians so they can read the writing on the wall and no longer live in a state of denial ... Christianity no longer has the home court advantage. We’ve got to deal with it, get over it, and get help.

BT: You use the word “interstitial” a lot. What do you mean by that, and how does being “interstitial” relate to semiotics?

LS: The Gutenberg world said, “Go in.” The Google world tells you to “Go out.” It’s all about being social; tries to connect.

I’m saying it’s between. God is amidst where two or three are gathered. The real discovery of God takes place in those spaces between. That’s where real magic happens, where miracles happen.

God is a “midst” God. To experience God, we’ve got to get into the midst. It’s never clean, comfortable or predictable. You have to risk some things to get there. We’re like lobsters, [which] can’t grow unless they shed their shell and become vulnerable while a new shell is forming. We have to take risks and go through vulnerable stages if we want to grow. **BT**

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