

Whose Image Is on the Coin?

Unholy Alliance of Religion and Politics

What Others Are Saying...



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

The Jesus Way

Thanks for all the articles in the Spring *CWRm*. The entire "Jesus Way" issue adds up to an excellent presentation of the Christlike God, and it is already sparking wonderful conversations with my pastor and other friends.

Canada

I wanted to thank you for the great articles in the Spring *CWRm*. You have helped my family to see the Jesus way.

Texas

Out for Blood

Thanks for the articles in the Spring issue of *CWRm* challenging the idea that "the wrath of God needs to be assuaged." This was such an incredible issue, I actually re-read the articles by Brad Jersak ("Out for Blood" and "God Is Not the Witch") and Brian Zahnd ("Golgotha—Collision of Sin and Grace").

Could you send me a few extra copies of this issue? I would like to share them with the pastors of my local church. I agree with Brad Jersak's assessment that more and more people are rediscovering the grace of God. Thank you!

Tennessee

The Verdict Is In...

Great article by Rob Grayson "The Verdict Is In...and All His Judgments Are Mercy" in the Spring issue of *CWRm*. Thanks to Greg Albrecht and Brad Jersak for helping to shape the direction of the new PTM/*CWR*.

Arkansas

The Jewish Teacher

I enjoyed the Spring *CWRm* article by Richard Rohr "The Jewish Teacher." This article made so much sense to me and helped me understand that we should

follow Jesus' approach to discussing Scripture, which was about relationship rather than about enforcing strict dogma and shutting down discussion.

I had never heard of the Jewish practice of "midrash" before, and I appreciate this helpful information about the practice of "interpreting Scripture that fills in the gaps, questioning and imagining a multitude of possible interpretations."

North Carolina

God Is Not the Witch

"God is not the Witch" by Brad Jersak was an excellent article. It was good to see an exploration of the power of sacrificial love. Any belief in "the wrath of God being satisfied" on the cross was rejected. It was more like the power of God was being glorified.

England

Strange Land of Dread...

What courage it must have taken for Grant Corriveau to write the article "Strange Land of Dread and Denial" in the Spring *CWRm*. This article is moving, piercing and poignant. Grant poured out his heart and soul with complete honesty. We are all afraid to let go of life, precious life. But, like Big John said, "Being born causes death." Jesus lives in us and we in him, but faith can still be a struggle.

New York

Thanks for CWR/PTM

The articles in *CWRm* and *PT* are really helpful, encouraging and proof there is still sanity. Our prayers are being answered—the gospel is being preached and published.

Nevada

Thank you for the encouraging and inspiring articles in the *PT* and *CWRm*. I pray for you every morning and I am enclosing a small token of my gratitude.

California

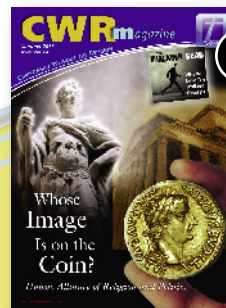
A More Christlike God

Wow! What a book. Several times I would read something, ponder it, have to put down the book for a minute and all I could think was "mind-blown!" This book challenges traditionally held beliefs/views about God. Brad Jersak has just given me a lot of reasons to continue to chew and ponder God as he really is and not as I was raised being told he is. And yes, there is a huge difference between what I've been told about God and who God actually is. I'm going to read the book again, probably right away, because when I started it I didn't realize the depth it was going to take me in thought, and so I want to read it again. I will also recommend it to pretty much everyone I know.

What Brad does in this book is completely turn upside down who God is—gives biblical support for it—and changes everything for people of faith and for people who scoff at faith in Christ. The whole section on "unwrathing" God was especially mind-blowing and revealing! I highly recommend this book—and that's an understatement.

Email

• See page 7 of this issue for details about how to order *A More Christlike God*.



Cover Story

Jesus did not endorse political parties or religious institutions. He never attempted to change the government. If you are a Christ-follower, then this election, and all elections, remind you of one and only one thing—Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord.

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WHOSE IMAGE IS ON THE ON THE COIN?

BY GREG ALBRECHT



UNHOLY ALLIANCE OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

The popularity and following of *the outsider* threatened all the establishment and its institutions held near and dear. They were losing control of the people—all the polls demonstrated that his market share of public support was growing. He came from some obscure and remote place far outside the Jerusalem beltway. He didn't have tradition and custom behind him like the power brokers in Jerusalem did, but it didn't seem to make any difference. The people loved this populist *outsider*.

It almost seemed like *the outsider* had come from another dimension—no one had mentored him and no big donors or influential cronies supported him. He didn't think like the movers and shakers

...IF THEY COULD TRAP JESUS IN A WAY THAT MADE HIM LOOK LIKE A RABBLE ROUSER, ROME WOULD WASTE NO TIME IN EXECUTING HIM. IT WAS POLITICS AND RELIGION AS USUAL.

did, he didn't act like they did, and he didn't talk like they did. But so far, all their efforts to discredit him had failed. They had thrown mud and muck, but it didn't stick.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. They decided to force his hand, so

that he would have to give one of two answers and either answer would spell the end of his popularity and better yet, probably the end of his life. The trap they devised was a perfect "catch 22" dilemma—

no matter how *the outsider* responded, one way or the other, he would be history.

As his political and religious opponents prepared for their ambush, they could already visualize headlines in the *Jerusalem Post* the next day. They would ask Jesus if the

"THIS ENGRAVING—WHO DOES IT LOOK LIKE? AND WHOSE NAME IS ON IT?" THEY SAID, "CAESAR."

"THEN GIVE CAESAR WHAT IS HIS, AND GIVE GOD WHAT IS HIS." THE PHARISEES WERE SPEECHLESS. THEY WENT OFF SHAKING THEIR HEADS.—*Matthew 22:15-22, The Message, translated by Eugene Peterson*

Jews should pay taxes to Rome. If he said "yes" then the headline above the story would be something like: "Turncoat Traitor Supports Paying Taxes to Rome." If that's how Jesus responded to their trap, then his answer would be the straw that broke his back. His popular support would evaporate and in no time they could find a way to get rid of him once and for all.

If Jesus said "no" then they imagined a headline something like: "Jewish Teacher Tells Rome to Take a Hike." If Jesus encouraged Jews not to pay taxes to Rome then Rome would quickly take action. The occupying military

powers of Rome would not put up with insurrection, so if the Pharisees could trap Jesus in a way that made him look like a rabble rouser, Rome would waste no time in executing him.

It was politics and religion as usual. But Jesus 1) avoided the trap, 2) exposed their dirty tricks and 3) called their bluff:

That's when the Pharisees plotted a way to trap him into saying something damaging. They sent their disciples, with a few of Herod's followers mixed in, to ask, "Teacher, we know you have integrity, teach the way of God accurately, are indifferent to popular opinion, and don't pander to your students. So tell us honestly. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Jesus knew they were up to no good. He said, "Why are you playing these games with me? Why are you trying to trap me? Do you have a coin? Let me see it." They handed him a silver piece.

"This engraving—who does it look like? And whose name is on it?"

They said, "Caesar."

"Then give Caesar what is his, and give God what is his."

The Pharisees were speechless. They went off shaking their heads (Matthew 22:15-22, The Message, translated by Eugene Peterson).

Strange Bedfellows: Religion and Politics

There's another presidential election just around the corner. The air waves are filled with acrimonious recriminations. Each party continues to do its best to expose the candidate of the

embarrassing behavior, and thus catapulting your candidate into the lead. The dirty business of politics can make for strange bedfellows.

Politics and institutionalized religion never change. They are filled with scams, abuse and corruption. They were in the time of Jesus. The Pharisees, an influential religious authority at that time, were disturbed about Jesus' popularity. Believing "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"—an adage that was old even then—the



POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION NEVER CHANGE. THEY ARE FILLED WITH SCAMS, ABUSE AND CORRUPTION. THEY WERE IN THE TIME OF JESUS. THE PHARISEES... WERE DISTURBED ABOUT JESUS' POPULARITY.

other party—to make them look weak and dishonest. In the best traditions of muck-raking, politicians from both sides are doing whatever it takes to make the other side look bad. It's all about finding weaknesses and, even better, uncovering some heretofore unknown

Pharisees and the Herodians, bitter enemies, snuggled up for a short term dalliance.

The Pharisees deeply resented the Roman taxes levied by Caesar on religious grounds, while the Herodians supported the Roman taxes on political grounds, because Herod owed

THE KINGDOM OF GOD PREACHED BY JESUS WOULD SPELL THE END OF BOTH RELIGION AND POLITICS—SO RELIGION AND POLITICS JUMPED INTO BED IN AN EFFORT TO ERADICATE JESUS AND HIS KINGDOM. IT'S STILL THE SAME TODAY.



TOTALITARIAN OCCUPYING ARMIES... BY PLACING THE LIKENESS OF THEIR RULER ON THE CURRENCY THE CONQUERED PEOPLE WOULD USE... A CONTINUAL REMINDER THAT THEY WERE SLAVES, NOT FREE.

his authority to Rome. But most of all, **the Herodians and the Pharisees hated Jesus.** Jesus was drawing great crowds, and he was against both the political power structure believed in by the Herodians and the religious power structure of the Pharisees. The kingdom of God preached by Jesus would spell the end of both religion and politics—so religion and politics jumped into bed in an effort to eradicate Jesus and his kingdom. It's still the same today.

So the televised debate started, as the Pharisees and the Herodians thought they might mislead and deceive Jesus as to their motivation by praising him with four truthful compliments. Even though these traits of Jesus were the mirror opposite of their own traits and tactics, they praised him, saying: *1) you have integrity, 2) you teach the way of God accurately, 3) you are indifferent to public opinion, and 4) you don't pander to your students, followers and/or supporters.*

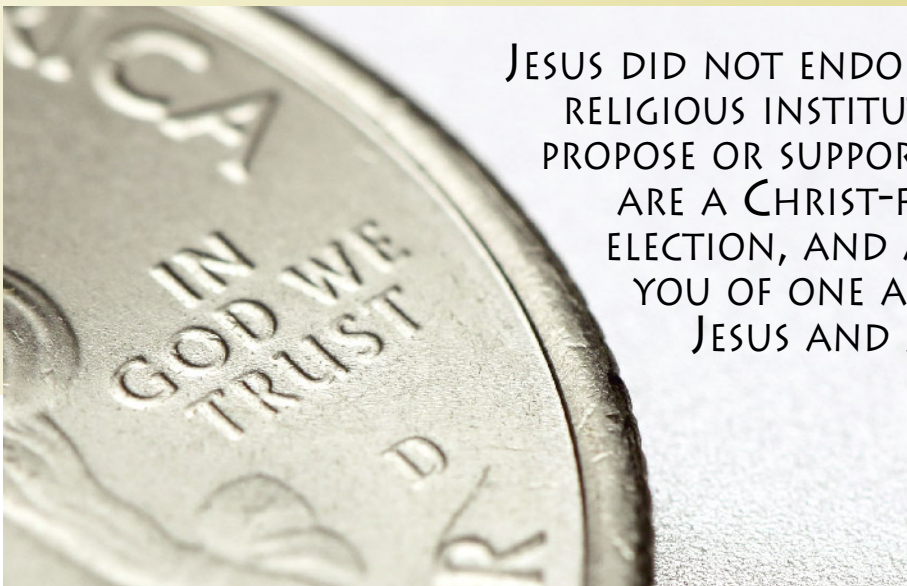
No doubt they thought these statements might help soften him up so they could catch him off guard with the ambush they had prepared, but as they always did, they seriously underestimated Jesus. Jesus had two responses to their trick question: *1) Give Caesar what is his, and 2) Give God what is his.*

Jesus' statement on politics: **Jesus didn't jump into bed with the government.** Jesus simply called attention to the fact that the currency they were using was the currency of the empire. The portrait on the currency was that of the Caesar. Totalitarian occupying armies further subjugated the people they had conquered by placing the likeness of their ruler on the currency the conquered people would use. The economy of the conqueror was imposed on the subjects as a continual reminder that they were slaves, not free.

Without lauding the political

or military machinery of Rome Jesus simply said that since the money was produced by Caesar, then he had a right to ask for some of it back. Jesus didn't urge his followers to vote for Caesar, to join a political action committee or canvas neighborhoods in support of Caesar. Jesus did not defer to the oppression, injustice and tyranny of government. Jesus did not say that he supported all of the ways in which Caesar used the money he minted and circulated and the economy he kept afloat. After all, Jesus had a kingdom of his own, which was and is "from another place" (John 18:36). Jesus simply said that the money belonged to Caesar in the first place and it was his right to ask for some of it back in the form of taxes.

Jesus' statement on religion: **Jesus didn't jump into bed with religion.** Nothing in Jesus' response to this trick question posed by his enemies (or any of his comments elsewhere in the Four Gospels) could be remotely interpreted as to giving his absolute support to the business of religion. He simply said "Give God what is his." In this exchange in Matthew 22 Jesus did not directly comment about the way in which religious authorities used money which people gave to them, thinking they were giving money to God. If you have any doubt whatsoever as to what Jesus felt about the big



JESUS DID NOT ENDORSE POLITICAL PARTIES OR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. JESUS DID NOT PROPOSE OR SUPPORT LEGISLATION... IF YOU ARE A CHRIST-FOLLOWER, THEN THIS ELECTION, AND ALL ELECTIONS, REMIND YOU OF ONE AND ONLY ONE THING— JESUS AND JESUS ALONE IS LORD.

business of authoritarian religion, read my book, *Rejecting Religion—Embracing Grace*, which is an exposition of the next chapter in Matthew (Matthew 23).

Fast Forward to November 2016...

If you are a citizen of these United States, and a registered voter, you have four choices this November: 1) Vote Republican, 2) Vote Democrat, 3) Vote for individuals and concerns you feel deeply about, regardless of party label, or 4) Don't vote at all.

Which one would Jesus favor? He did not nor does he

tell us...we have our own choices to make. Any one of the four options above might be better or worse, but no one option is holy and righteous.

Jesus did not endorse political parties or religious institutions. Jesus did not propose or support legislation. He never attempted to change the government.

When people expected Jesus to become politically aligned or to advance the cause of his kingdom in the ways they were accustomed, he retreated. He cared for people in need, but he did not make their predicament a political cause.

Regardless of where you live

and the color and size of your earthly passport, if you are a Christ-follower, then this election, and all elections, remind you of one and only one thing—Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord.

The really sad and pathetic thing is when Christ-followers unreservedly jump into bed with either the kingdom of a government or a particular political candidate, or with a particular denomination or spiritual leader, thinking that God is glorified in such alliances and allegiances.

Jesus alone is Lord. There is only one kingdom and that kingdom is given to us by the grace of God. The kingdom of God is "from another place." The kingdom of God is our spiritual country and our ultimate destination. All else is but rubbish. □

GOLD MEDAL WINNER!

Award-winning author and *CWR Magazine* Editor-in-Chief, Brad Jersak, will be speaking at two conferences this summer. Both of these conferences are an opportunity to hear and meet authors speak about the biblical declaration of God's relentless love and plan to reconcile all His creation—making all things new by the blood of Jesus Christ. A time to develop new friendships and galvanize the growing community of Christians embracing the forgotten gospel. **Order Brad's book at www.ptm.org/christlike**

"Light of the World"

Word of Grace Annual Conference—July 25-28, 2016

Location: The Father's House, 2649 E. Mulberry St., Fort Collins, CO

Speakers: Brad Jersak, C. Baxter Kruger, Caleb Miller, Mike Miller, Wm. Paul Young

"Forgotten Gospel Conference"

Aug. 5-7, 2016—Location: The Sanctuary, 3101 W. 31st Ave., Denver, CO

Speakers: Brad Jersak, Peter Hiatt, Robin Parry, Wm. Paul Young



Why We Love

THE WALKING



by Kevin Miller

Zombies. They're everywhere, which is precisely the problem with these undead ghouls. Once one of them shows up, more of them are bound to follow, lurching out of the rubble of the ruined landscape or, if you're really unlucky, running. Mindless, relentless, and insatiable—like a herd of shoppers on Black

Friday—no matter how hard you resist, it's only a matter of time before the zombies take over. And take over they have.

Zombies began haunting movie theaters in the 1930s, with *White Zombie* (1932) considered to be the first feature-length zombie film. George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) brought them into the nuclear age, adding both

the flesh-eating and the post-apocalyptic components, which have been the mainstay of zombie stories ever since. Zombies have gone on to infest comic books, television, video games, Jane Austen novels



DEAD

ZOMBIES IN GENERAL, AND THE WALKING DEAD IN PARTICULAR, CERTAINLY APPEAL TO THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR BY SERVING UP AMPLE PORTIONS OF BLOOD AND GORE...

THEY ALSO APPEAL TO OUR MORBID FASCINATION WITH DEATH, OUR ATTRACTION TO THE FORBIDDEN, AND PERHAPS EVEN A DESIRE TO WORK OUT OUR AGGRESSION IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT. BUT I BELIEVE OUR INTEREST IN ZOMBIES GOES MUCH DEEPER.

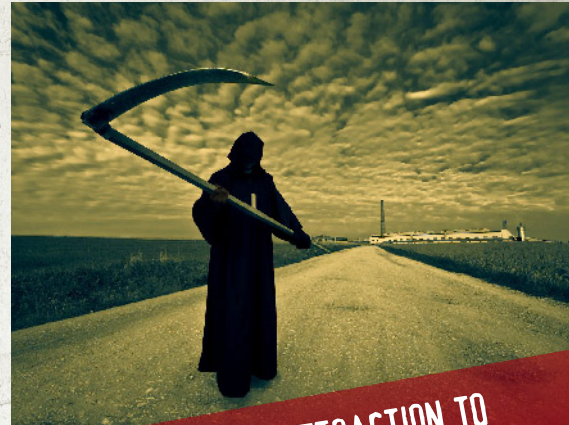
(turns out Glacier National Park is a safe bet).

Of all the zombific manifestations that have proliferated across our imaginations over the past few decades, one reigns supreme: *The Walking Dead*. What began as a comic book series has become a television ratings sensation. The show is so popular it's spawned a spin-off, *Fear the Walking Dead*, which is already breaking ratings records.

The question behind all of this is, why? Why has a creature

brought what was normally B-movie fare, e.g., science fiction, into the mainstream. This trend has continued with superheroes, vampires, witches, serial killers and aliens.

But I think that answer is too simple—and perhaps too cynical. Zombies in general,



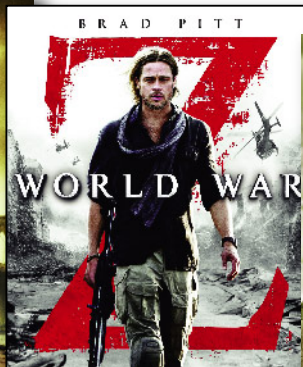
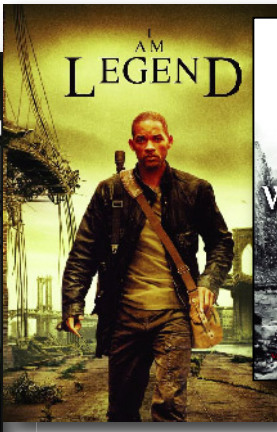
(*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*), and even science. A recent paper out of Cornell University used a zombie outbreak to simulate a real disease epidemic and determine the best place to hole up and wait out the apocalypse

that used to lurk only on double bills at the drive-in landed itself squarely in prime time? A simple answer is to say our fascination with zombies is just the latest example of a trend that began with George Lucas and Stephen Spielberg's movies in the late 1970s—*Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in particular. Together, these filmmakers

and *The Walking Dead* in particular, certainly appeal to the lowest common denominator by serving up ample portions of blood and gore.

In this regard, they do for us what horror stories have always done—facilitate a vicarious experience of a terrifying situation, followed by the rush of having “survived” the ordeal. They also appeal to our morbid fascination with death, our attraction to the forbidden, and perhaps even a desire to work out our aggression in a safe environment.

But I believe our interest in zombies goes much deeper. To get to the bottom of this appeal, I'd like to explore the





plays things straight down the middle, offering up a classic lumbering, undead, flesh-eating mob.

Apart from these characteristics, what makes zombies really frightening is what happens if one bites you. Then it's only a matter of time before you become one of them. This puts zombies in the same category as vampires, werewolves and other infectious monsters. Each archetype represents a primal fear of being infected or possessed by something that awakens an appetite for the forbidden and/or occludes the victim's personality, leading them to commit acts they wouldn't dare to otherwise. However, the fear of becoming a zombie runs even deeper than the fear of becoming a vampire or a werewolf, because in the latter cases, the victim still retains a vestige of his or her individuality.

Such a doomed existence can even have a romantic element to it, as demonstrated by the *Twilight* series and Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. With

WHILE SERIES HERO RICK GRIMES AND COMPANY ARE FORCED TO WORK THROUGH THESE ISSUES "FOR REAL," THE WALKING DEAD OFFERS VIEWERS A CHANCE TO EXPLORE THEM FROM THE SAFETY OF THEIR LIVING ROOM.

following three questions:

1) Why zombies? 2) Why the post-apocalyptic environment? And, most importantly, 3) Why now?

Why Zombies?

Although George A. Romero didn't even call his monsters zombies (his original title for the film was *Night of the Flesh Eaters*), *Night of the Living Dead* established a blueprint that subsequent zombie stories have followed ever since.

To go through the checklist:

1) zombies always show up en masse, 2) they're mindless, 3) they have an insatiable appetite for flesh, 4) they're typically reanimated corpses and 5) the only surefire way to stop them is to destroy their brain. A few zombie films have deviated from this formula, such as *Deadgirl* (2008), which features a single zombie discovered in a psychiatric hospital; 28 Days

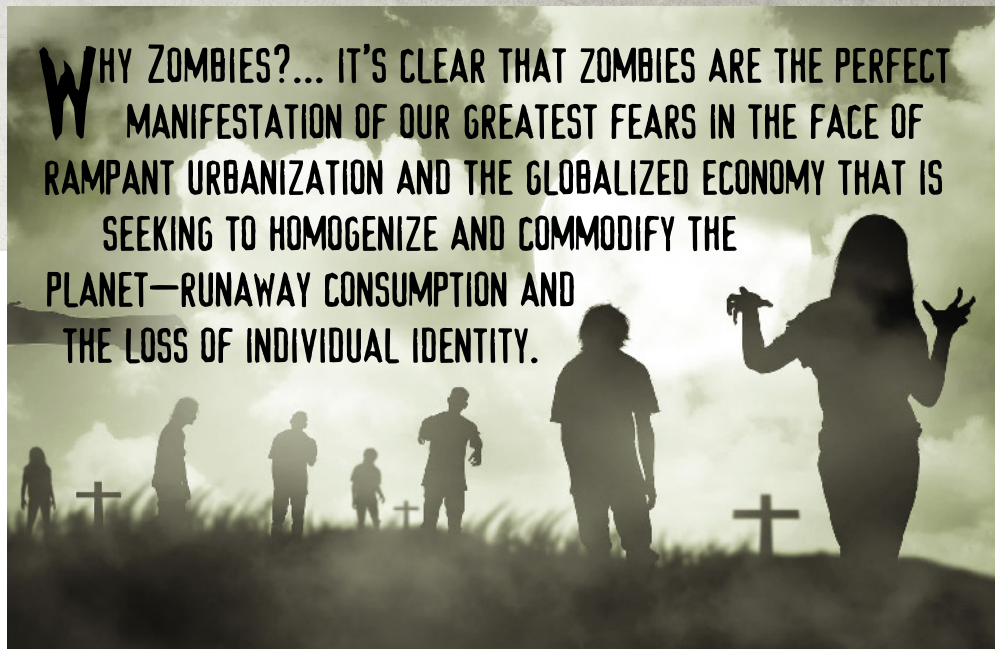
Later (2002) and *World War Z* (2013), in which the zombies aren't undead, merely infected by a disease; and *I Am Legend* (2007), in which the zombies exhibit signs of intelligence. But by and large, *The Walking Dead*



zombies, however, the victim becomes just another rotting, mumbling, disfigured face in the crowd. For people living in a society where differentiating oneself from the masses, thinking “outside the box,” and being a non-conformist are how we shape our identity, nothing could be more terrifying.

This is why zombies arriving in hordes is no accident. In the pre-industrial age, every economy was a local economy, so people living on the frontier had no one to rely on but each other. Therefore, what people feared most was the lone stranger who prowled just beyond their borders or, worse, the deviant lurking in their midst who could imperil the community’s existence by sabotaging it from within. Hence, people’s fears tended to manifest in the form of individual fiends—vampires, werewolves, demons and witches—rather than packs of infernal monsters.

All that changed with the rapid urbanization that began during the Industrial Revolution and has accelerated ever since. Now we find ourselves pressed in on all sides by nameless, faceless hordes. The lone killer who uses the anonymity of the city to prey on his fellow citizens is still frightening, but that’s nothing compared to the mob. While physical lynchings are relatively rare these days—at least within North America—virtual lynchings are at an all-time high. Our greatest fear is being swallowed up by the masses, who will either destroy us if we refuse to conform or render our existence inconsequential if we do. Hence, we tend to hunker down in isolated special



interest groups and online forums in an effort to avoid being consumed by or absorbed into the masses.

Taken together, it’s clear that zombies are the perfect manifestation of our greatest fears in the face of rampant urbanization and the globalized economy that is seeking to homogenize and commodify the planet—runaway consumption and the loss of individual identity.

Why the Post-apocalyptic Environment?

Apart from the zombies themselves, the most frightening element of a zombie outbreak is the societal collapse that follows. With governments, militaries and NGOs (Non-government organizations) down for the count, the survivors have no one to rely on but themselves. Before long, life for the survivors reverts back to a pre-industrial existence, with small communities struggling to subsist on the new zombified frontier. Although the zombie threat is significant, it’s manageable—as long as everyone in the community plays by the rules. That never happens though,

so the community’s focus shifts inevitably from the threat “out there” to the threat within. The only thing that saves these communities from imploding is either an escalation of the zombie threat or a hostile encounter with another human community that is also competing for the scarce resources left over from the pre-zombie age. That’s when the true horror begins.

While most zombie stories take place in the immediate aftermath of a zombie outbreak, *The Walking Dead* is distinctive in that it sticks with its characters throughout the months and years that follow. As they wander across the wilderness that was America, we witness their multiple attempts to resurrect some vestige of the civilization they lost or merge themselves with someone else’s social experiment, inevitably with disastrous results. In the midst of it all, both the characters and the viewers get to explore fundamental questions about the nature of humankind. Strip away the veneer of civilization, and what’s left? Where does



... WE SENSE WE ARE CLOSER THAN EVER TO THE TOTAL SOCIETAL COLLAPSE WE WITNESS ON *THE WALKING DEAD*. FEW PEOPLE FEAR A LITERAL ZOMBIE OUTBREAK, BUT EVER SINCE THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION IN 1991, WE HAVE LIVED IN A WORLD WITHOUT CLEAR-CUT BATTLE LINES.

true evil lie, in the hearts of people or in the societal structures that surround us?

At first, *The Walking Dead* appears to come down unequivocally on the former, hence the characters' incessant search for an ideal external structure that will mitigate their worst instincts. But as each structure fails, they are tempted to abandon the quest altogether and embrace a simple philosophy of "kill or be killed," survival of the in-group at all costs. However, recent episodes have hinted that an alternative paradigm is beginning to emerge. Oddly enough, it couldn't be more "Jesus-shaped" in its eschewal of violence and its insistence that until we recognize the value of every human life, our own lives will constantly be in peril.

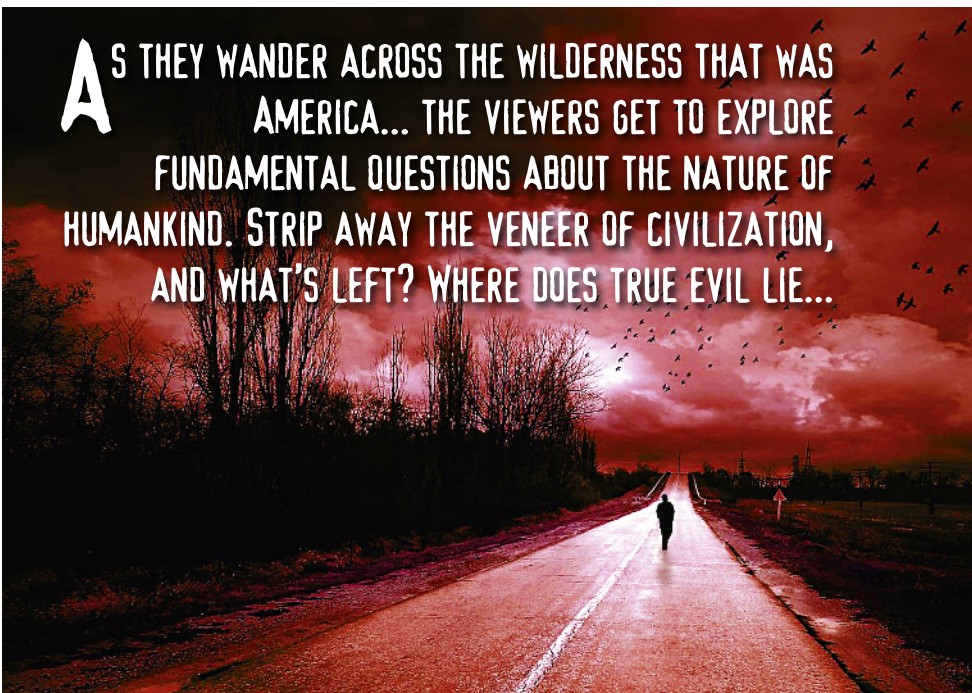
While series hero Rick Grimes and company are forced to work through these issues "for real," *The Walking Dead* offers viewers a chance to explore them from the safety of their living room. The series also offers urban viewers a wish fulfillment fantasy of sorts. Sequestered in the "evil" of the city, we tend to romanticize the pre-industrial age. In this

sense, our fascination with post-apocalyptic stories belongs in the same category as the movement toward small homes, organic food, environmentalism, and craft beer. As Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young put it, we all have the sense that, "we got to get ourselves back to the garden." However, *The Walking Dead* reminds us that in the heart of the Garden we find deception, betrayal, exile and murder.

On another level, we live in an increasingly complex world

where every attempt to provide for our security is fraught with ambiguity. In the past, when fighting the Nazis or communism, for example, the world seemed relatively simple, the battle lines clearly drawn. We may have had to do some terrible things to ensure our survival, but at least we did them for the right reasons—or so we told ourselves. Now we're not so sure. That's where *The Walking Dead* brings us a measure of relief.

When dealing with the



AS THEY WANDER ACROSS THE WILDERNESS THAT WAS AMERICA... THE VIEWERS GET TO EXPLORE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF HUMANKIND. STRIP AWAY THE VENEER OF CIVILIZATION, AND WHAT'S LEFT? WHERE DOES TRUE EVIL LIE...

zombies at least, *The Walking Dead* strips away all ambiguity, offering us the vicarious satisfaction of “killing” our enemies without reservation, survival without the guilty hangover. However, when the focus returns to navigating the world of other human

communities, we are plunged right back into moral ambiguity. At what point do the things we are forced to do to protect our community eclipse the value of the community we are trying save?

While *The Walking Dead* certainly allows us to indulge some of our darkest fantasies, it does not allow us to get away with easy answers. Episode after episode, this question is front and center, with the series insisting that the only way to overcome the evil out there is to deal with “the devil inside.” This is the genius of post-apocalyptic fantasies, which strip away all the accoutrements of the modern world and bring such issues into stark relief.

Why Now?

While flesh-eating zombies are a relatively new phenomenon, post-apocalyptic stories are as old as humanity. Virtually all ancient creation narratives begin with some sort of cataclysmic event, with gods being torn asunder and the universe created from their remains. Even the book of Genesis opens with the Spirit of God hovering over primeval chaos. Then there’s the flood narrative, which suggests we have been living in a post-apocalyptic world since the days of Noah.

While such stories have always existed in the background, I believe they are moving into the

WHILE FLESH-EATING ZOMBIES ARE A RELATIVELY NEW PHENOMENON, POST-APOCALYPTIC STORIES ARE AS OLD AS HUMANITY... SUCH STORIES HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED IN THE BACKGROUND, I BELIEVE THEY ARE MOVING INTO THE FOREGROUND NOW, BECAUSE WE SENSE WE ARE CLOSER THAN EVER TO THE TOTAL SOCIETAL COLLAPSE...

foreground now, because we sense we are closer than ever to the total societal collapse we witness on *The Walking Dead*. Few people fear a literal zombie outbreak, but ever since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, we have lived in a world without clear-cut battle lines.

We went straight from the Cold War to the War on Terror, where anyone could be an enemy. Add in world-rocking events like the 9/11 attacks, the 2008 financial crisis, growing concerns about climate change and the resurging threat of nuclear war with Russia, and many people fear the world is on the brink

of Armageddon. Therefore, it’s only natural to turn to shows like *The Walking Dead*, not only to escape for an hour each week but also to enter a world that has already endured its end.

Who knows? If Rick Grimes and company can figure out a way to survive the apocalypse without sacrificing their souls, perhaps we can, too. □

Kevin Miller is an author, editor, film critic, screenwriter and director of dramas and documentaries. Kevin produced the movie Hellbound? which was inspired by his editing of Her Gates Will Never Be Shut by Brad Jersak.

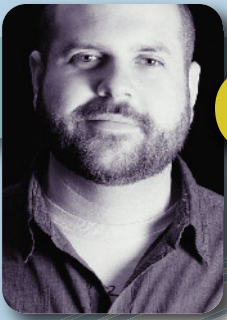


Coming soon...

THE REMNANT

By award-winning author,
Monte Wolverton

In a totalitarian, post-apocalyptic future where religion is forbidden, a band of concentration-camp escapees treks through a lawless wilderness on a quest for authentic Christianity, only to come face-to-face with an unthinkable dilemma.

CWR_m

ZACK HUNT

Sometimes I Wish the Bible Had Never Been Written

I don't mean I wish God had never spoken or that the gospel was never proclaimed. I just wish there was some way the words could have remained what they originally were—an oral tradition, stories passed down from generation to generation that carried as much weight as they do today (if not more) because they had to actually be learned and understood, or else they would be lost. Stories are better heard than read.

And they're even better lived out. When stories get written down lines are drawn, walls are erected, boundaries laid down. Sometimes that's a good thing, but a lot of times what happens is a vibrant, life-giving story is transformed into a stale, lifeless idol to hold over the heads of others. *The words that were meant to give life instead become an instrument of death in the hands of those who are more concerned with having all the answers than they are extending grace and incarnating love.*

When the gospel gets codified into little more than a new set of doctrines to believe and behaviors to avoid, Christ is often transformed into a dictator eager to destroy dissidents and turn his followers into a self-appointed secret police force myopically focused on ensuring that everyone conforms to their particular interpretation of what it means to be a Christian.

When the revelation of God is reduced to words on a page, chopped up into chapters and verses ripe for the picking, words that were meant to give life too often and too easily become nothing more than ammunition for condemning the behavior and opinions of others, particularly those in the minority, who don't look or talk exactly like us, who don't think about God or the Christian faith exactly the way we do.

I know there's no going back. But we can and we must do better. If the written story of our faith is going to be the source of Life and Liberation we claim it is, then we must do a better job not just of telling that story, but a much better job of actually living that story out.

Of course, how that story is supposed to be

lived out comes back to how we read the written words—which is profoundly dependent upon our particular context and tradition. And it's that context and tradition (the cultural bubbles we all live in) that leads to so much division and strife in the Church.

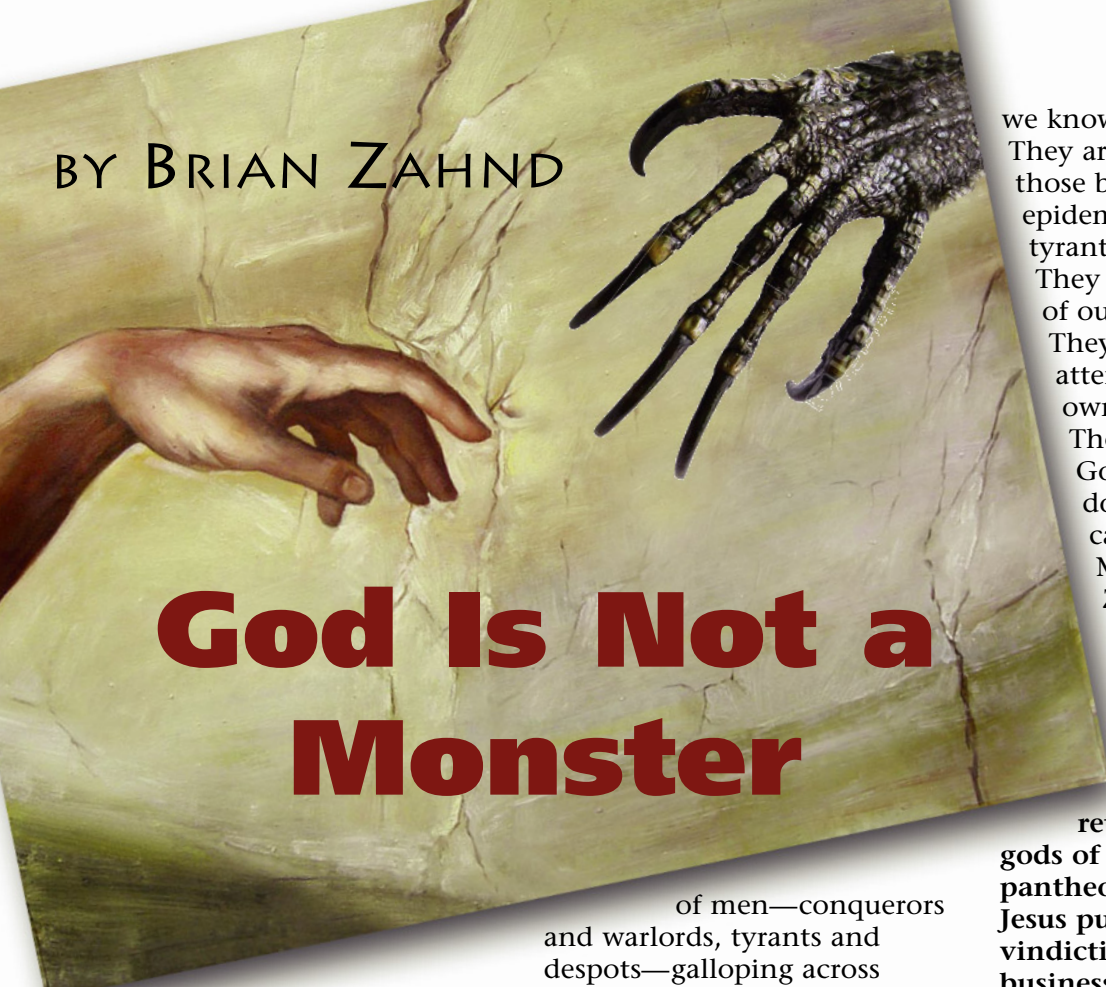
Convinced our reading of Scripture is the one true reading of Scripture, we refuse to listen to other readings and consider the possibility that we might be wrong, that the truth might not actually be as plainly obvious as we thought it was. And *we retrench into our theological camps and cling fast to our proof-texts, convinced that our right beliefs will save us.*

Of course, this theological travesty can't be entirely blamed on the fact that our story of faith has been bound by the written word. After all, there are centuries' worth of Christian history in which the people of God were guided by Scripture, not slaves to it.

But *since at least the late 19th century the Church has been plagued by fundamentalism and the biblical idolatry it espouses.* We are inheritors of generations' worth of a catechism that has taught countless Christians that the Bible is the end, not the beginning, of faith.

I don't know how to completely reverse our enslavement to the written word or how to liberate the Spirit from the cultural vise we have her in, but I do think St. Augustine has some wisdom for reading Scripture that, if heeded, might put us on the path towards a healthier, more life-giving reading of the Bible.

In his book, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Teaching)* St. Augustine lays out how he thinks the Bible should be interpreted. For Augustine, *the Greatest Commandment is the beginning and end of all scriptural interpretation. So no matter what lens you read the Bible through, if your ultimate conclusion doesn't lead you towards loving God and your neighbor, then it's wrong.* The Greatest Commandment (love towards God and love towards neighbor) has to be an incarnated way of life, not another doctrine to agree with. It has to be something we actually live out. □



BY BRIAN ZAHND

God Is Not a Monster

There are monsters in this world, but the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not one of them.

Yes, Virginia, there are monsters. We have an imagination for monsters because we know of their existence. Venomous and vicious beasts were a daily peril for our earliest ancestors. Volcanoes and tsunamis can swallow whole cities. Hurricanes and tornadoes roar from the heavens, leaving hell in their wake. Epidemics of disease are lethal predators taking their pitiless toll. Worst of all, there are monstrosities

of men—conquerors and warlords, tyrants and despots—galloping across history like ringwraiths bringing conquest, war, famine and death. We can imagine monsters because we have met them.

But the living God is not one of them. Not the God who Jesus called *Abba*.

Oh, the gods are monstrous, of course they are. They are

YOU MAY THINK SUCH LANGUAGE IS RECKLESS. IT IS NOT... AFTER YEARS OF PRAYING, MEDITATING ON THE GOSPELS, AND SITTING WITH JESUS IN CONTEMPLATION, I AM SIMPLY NO LONGER AFRAID OF GOD. MATURING LOVE IS DRIVING OUT FEAR.

mercurial and merciless, petty and vengeful. They have to be mollified by a virgin flung into a volcano or a victim sacrificed on a stone altar. They always demand a violent and bloody appeasement...or else! But we know about these gods now,

we know what they really are. They are personifications of those beasts and disasters and epidemics and wars and tyrants that frighten us so. They are deified projections of our own rage and fear. They are the desperate attempt to deal with our own sin and shame. The good news is that the God revealed in Christ does not belong to the category of Mars and Moloch, of Ares and Zeus. These are the false gods of our frightened and shame-laden imaginations. **The Creator God, the One True God, is not vengeful and retributive like those**

gods of the primitive pantheon. In his triumph Jesus put these petty and vindictive gods out of business. It's only their fading ghosts that haunt us today.

In the dread of night we may be tempted to think that the true God shares the fearsome attributes of the vanquished monster gods. In our horror we imagine how Scripture confirms our nightmares. In our terror we may use the Bible as a pallet to paint a macabre

and monstrous image of God. But then the day dawns and we hear Jesus say, "It is I. Be not afraid" (John 6:20). With the dayspring of Christ the terrors of night fade away. *Jesus is perfect theology.* And Jesus saves us from our primeval

nightmares about the divine. The hands of God are not hurling thunderbolts. The hands of God have scars—they were nailed to a tree as he forgave monstrous evil.

“I no longer fear God, but I love him. For love casts out fear.”—Saint Anthony the Great (251–356)

I agree with Saint Anthony. I am also well aware that some will vehemently protest Saint Anthony’s words and my agreement with them.

Nevertheless, I agree with the great saint because this has been my experience as well. For many of us, a dread fear of God may be the only place we can begin our journey. It’s how we first take God seriously. But it’s only the starting point and we must not stay there. So, yes, I understand the Bible commends the fear of God, and I do too—but only as a preliminary beginning. God desires us to grow beyond the rudimentary beginning of fear.

“God is love. And all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.... Such love has no fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.”—The Apostle John (1 John 4:16–18).

What I fear is not God, but the suffering my sin can inflict on myself and those around me. The malevolent



Thetis begs Jupiter to intervene in the fate of her son Achilles, painting by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, 1811

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE GOD REVEALED IN CHRIST DOES NOT BELONG TO THE CATEGORY OF MARS AND MOLOCH, OF ARES AND ZEUS. THESE ARE THE FALSE GODS OF OUR FRIGHTENED AND SHAME-LADEN IMAGINATIONS.

consequences of sin are very real. But I’m not afraid of God. I used to be, but I am no longer. I am no longer afraid of God because I have come to know God as he is revealed in Christ. I have come to know that God’s single disposition toward me is one of unconditional, unwavering love. The knowledge of God’s love has made it impossible for me to be afraid of God.

You may think such language is reckless. It is not. *The peace of no longer being afraid of God* has been hard won. It has come from relentlessly seeking to know God as he is revealed in Christ. *It is not the result of a liberal, sloppy, pick-and-choose theology.* Rather, it is the result of pushing through the dark outer courts of the fear of God into the holy of holies where the love of God shines

eternally and dispels all darkness. After years of praying, meditating on the Gospels, and sitting with Jesus in contemplation, I am simply no longer afraid of God. Maturing love is driving out fear.

God is not a monster. *There are monster god theologies, but they are mistaken.* Accusation and scapegoating, the ravages of war and the wages of sin, these are monsters. The cruel vagaries of chance—until they are tamed by Christ in the age to come—may

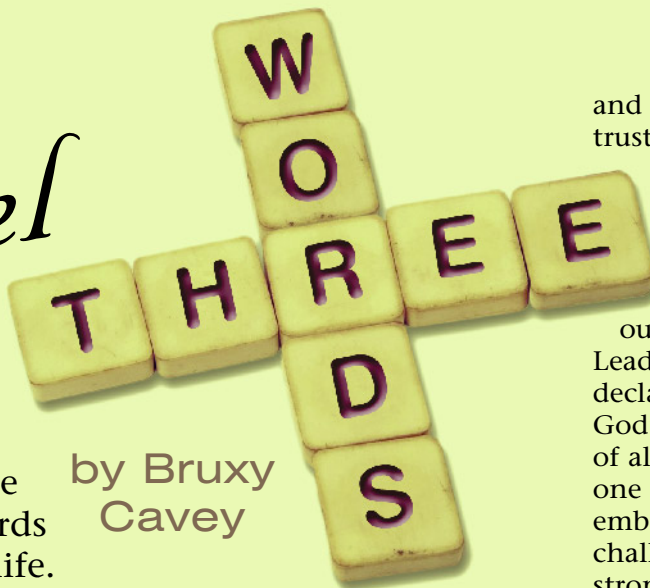
fall upon us as monsters.

But God is not a monster. God is love. Jesus reveals this to us. If we move against the grain of love we will suffer the shards of self-inflicted suffering—and we can call this the wrath of God if we like—but the deeper truth remains: **God is love.**

So don’t sit in the dark with the tormenting idea that God somehow harbors malice and ill-will toward you. It’s all a cruel fiction. Turn on the light of Christ and realize that the monster you imagined does not exist. Who exists is Jesus. And he is the one who says to you, “It is I, be not afraid.” □

Brian Zahnd is a pastor and author of several books, including Radical Forgiveness, Beauty Will Save the World and A Farewell to Mars.

The Gospel in



by Bruxy Cavey

There are three beautiful words that lead to life.

Three beautiful words that, if declared from a believing heart, will usher us into salvation. Three beautiful words that are not conjured by sheer will, but are the fruit of the Spirit at work in our lives.

The Apostle Paul says, *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9).

Jesus is Lord. The Gospel in three beautiful words. This is what the Holy Spirit always whispers to our hearts (1 Corinthians 12:3).

At our church (The Meeting House), we don't so much invite people to embrace Jesus as their own personal Savior as we invite them to follow Jesus as Lord. And the bonus is, when you embrace Jesus as Lord you get him as Savior as part of the package.

But when people start by asking Jesus to be their savior, they may spend the rest of their lives trying to figure out if they also want him as Lord.

Yes, salvation is a free gift, we tell people. But it is a free gift that will cost you your life. Still, the declaration of Jesus as Lord is not just a

commitment to the authority of Christ in our lives. It is also a rallying cry of joy, that the Lord of the universe can be seen and known and experienced through Jesus. Every word of this Good News spills over with celebration.

JESUS is Lord. Our faith is rooted in a real person, in history, in the belief that God has entered our time and space in person. Our Bibles are not Lord (see John 5:39-40), but

when we open our Bibles we have the opportunity to enjoy a supernatural rendezvous with the one who is at the center of the story of everything.

Jesus IS Lord. We don't merely honor a man who WAS Lord, whose 2,000-year-old story is accessible to us through Scripture. We follow the one who IS Lord.

This declaration assumes the resurrection, ascension and his ongoing presence in our lives. Jesus is alive and leading us now, by his Spirit, speaking through Scripture, the Church

and our hearts. We choose to trust and find encouragement in his final words recorded in Matthew's gospel—"I am with you always."

Jesus is **LORD**. Jesus is our Master, our Mentor, our Leader, our Lord. This is a declaration of who is King of God's Kingdom and the Judge of all the earth—and that is the one who walked among us, embraced the outcasts, challenged religious strongholds, washed his followers' feet, suffered and died loving those who hated him, and rose again on our behalf. The Lord of all is Jesus.

So, to say "**Jesus is Lord**" is not just a declaration of submission to the one who holds all authority; it is a declaration of revelation—*God looks like Jesus!* The Lord of all is seen in Christ.

And so, when we come to believe that "**Jesus is Lord**," we are led to embrace three other

...to say "**Jesus is Lord**" is not just a declaration of submission to the one who holds all authority; it is a declaration of revelation—*God looks like Jesus!* The Lord of all is seen in Christ.

beautiful words: words that express what is for us more than wishful thinking, but the most beautiful reality imaginable, rooted in the evidence Christ provides—because "**Jesus is Lord**" we can believe "**God is love.**" □

Bruxy Cavey, author of the best-selling book End of Religion, is Teaching Pastor of The Meeting House. Their tagline is: "A Church for People who Aren't into Church"—and that's what they try to be to those who have given up on religion.

...Because He First Loved Us

by Lauren
R.E. Larkin

Perusing some of the links in my favorite online parenting journal, I ran across an interesting little story of a mother and daughter, told from the daughter's perspective primarily.¹

The background goes as follows: the mother is apparently in the hospital, hooked up to tubes and unresponsive. The daughter is at her mother's bedside begging for her to respond. "Please? Mom? C'mon...you have to wake up. This whole thing is freaking me out! You're just staring." Throughout the story, the daughter repeats: "Mom, blink if you can hear me."

But the daughter's story is less about getting her mother to hear her and more about what she had always *heard* from her mother. The daughter recounts her own descent into an angry young woman. She unloaded her anger on her mother directly through verbal attacks, or indirectly by insulting herself—a double whammy attack plan, i.e. *If my insults to you don't hurt, I'll criticize the thing you love!* Later, she writes,

It was stupid, really. Typical teen stuff. Rebellion. Drinking. Smoking. Piercings. If I spoke to her at all it was to say how awful she was. And how ugly I was, since she gave birth to me. I knew, somehow,

It was stupid, really. Typical teen stuff. Rebellion. Drinking. Smoking. Piercings. If I spoke to her at all it was to say how awful she was... But, she constantly reassured me that I was the most incredible thing.

that by insulting myself, I'd cut right to her core. But, she constantly reassured me that I was the most incredible thing. And even though I didn't acknowledge it, I think I said those things just so I could hear her tell me I was beautiful. *I knew she hated what I had become. At least on the outside. But she never said it. Not once. She only said she loved me. Over and over and over.*

When our children are babies, it's easy to say repeatedly, "I love you"; they're squishy loaves of pink flesh, innocent, sweet, and precious. The *I-love-yous* pour from our mouths in sickening sweet tones to on-hearers. And just because these *I-love-yous* are easy does not mean that they aren't heartfelt; they are. Our hearts are captured by our babies. They're even captured by our toddlers. Whether terrific or terrible, these little guys smell of sweetness and innocence, embodying the deep-down root of what it means to be silly, and we love them. And we tell them so, over and over.

But as the young child grows into an older one, the *I-love-yous* become harder to muster. The "Oh, sweet little girl, you just plucked every ornament off of the Christmas tree like they were ripe apples" is replaced with "For the love of

He loves us with a no-strings-attached, just-because, one-way love; not only when we are good, sweet or innocent, but when we are downright horrible, cursing His name, rejecting everything about Him.

God, child, would you just clean your damn room?!" The crayon they once wielded, scratching out precious drawings of you two holding hands with the erratically sized letters spelling out: "I love you, Mommy" is replaced with a well-honed verbal sword that cuts you to the bone. And in those moments, rather than say, "I love you," we send them away. When they come home embracing everything we taught them (nay, *implored* them) to reject, our words are often filled more with judgment and condemnation than love.

...we know what rebellious and unpleasant and messy children we are, yet God loves us. He loved us so much that He sent his only son to save us. In the midst of our mess, muck and mire, God's love hit us right where we are like a locomotive.

And it's not because we don't love them; we *do* love them. A lot. Hurt, rejection and even disappointment are big emotions for a parent to feel, emotions that are easier to communicate with angry language rather than loving language. When my child's mess hits my front door like a locomotive, my knee-jerk response is anger; rarely is it, "I love you."

But, it's precisely when our children's messes hit our front doors like locomotives that the *I-love-you* penetrates the hardest of hearts, plants a seed, grows its roots and (eventually) bears its own fruit.

How do I know this? How do I have faith this is true?

Because we know what rebellious and unpleasant and messy children we are, yet God loves us. He loved us so much that He sent his only son to save us. In the midst of our mess, muck and mire, God's love hit us right where we are like a locomotive. Jesus came to us, and He loves us with a no-strings-attached, just-because, one-way love; not only when we are good, sweet or innocent, but when we are downright horrible, cursing His name, rejecting everything about Him.

He loves us no more when we're great and no less when

we're rotten. And He *never-ever* stops saying it. His *I love you* echoes through the halls of time, forever penetrating our ears through the word of the gospel. And it's here, right here, as we hear that God loved us first, where we see our children in the midst of their mess, grab them by the arms, and say, "I love you...even now, I love you. Always, I love you. No matter how hard you push, I love you...you'll never outgrow my love."

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.... We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:7-11, 19 NKJV). □

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1. Full article can be found at www.brainchildmag.com/2015/11/blink-if-you-can-hear-me.

Lauren R. E. Larkin is a graduate of Trinity School for Ministry where she earned an MDiv and STM focusing on Systematic Theology and Ethics. She has contributed essays to various publications, including The Gospel According to Pixar and regularly contributes to theological blogs: Mockingbird, Dropping Keys and Liberate.



CWRm

CINDY BRANDT

Raising Children *Un-fundamentalist*

I don't feel remotely like an authoritative voice in the parenting arena. But as they say, *write what you would like to read*, and I am in desperate need of a robust discussion regarding how the hell to talk to my kids about hell. In other, less eternally-damning words, how do we who grew up *evangelical* and suffer some damaging effects of fundamentalist theology do the delicate parenting dance of communicating God's love to our children without transferring harmful teachings we have internalized?

Before we get into *what*—the content of the faith that we transfer to our kids—it is necessary (though rare) to discuss *how*. Specifically, we need to be aware of the significant power imbalance between adults and children, and how that influences the way we speak to kids about faith.

Many churches have their Sunday School kids perform for the congregation. I can't ever sit through one of these children-led worship songs without crying. It is heart-warming to watch little kids happily blast at the top of their lungs how much Jesus loves them. Christian parents proudly display these moments as witness to how God stirs the sensitive spirits of children. In other words, "look how easily children are evangelized."

But I live in a country that is predominantly Buddhist. Here, children are taught to hold incense and bow at ancestor tablets or to a variety of gods. How cute is a little kid who prays with pure devotion to a Buddhist god? *Just as cute* as the blonde-headed little girl singing happily *Jesus Loves Me!*

A child's faith is not a testimony of God's power to evangelize them; it demonstrates how malleable children are to faith values passed down to them at a young age. Children must trust whole-heartedly in order to survive; their dependence on adults undergirds their entire worldview.

As parents we are entrusted with this enormous responsibility to build structures of faith that our children will inevitably live

fully into, especially when they're little.

Because of this drastic inequality of power between adults and our dependent children, we must take tender care to wield our tremendous spiritual influence on them in a way that is respectful of their autonomy, that listens to their concerns, that empowers them to grow into wholeness, and to ultimately make their own faith choices. We must always be aware of the power differential even as we act as the portal through which they come to know God.

In every step of their development, we are seeking to add more freedom to their own expression of faith, giving away our power as parents and inviting them into equal partners as they grow up.

The term *fundamentalism* is a little fuzzy, and Christian parents run a theological spectrum from left to right. I define fundamentalists as those who control children under the guise of religion: through rigid discipline, uncompromising rules and heavy gate-keeping so that participation in a certain community is conditional upon conduct.

Fundamentalists lord power over children, invoking spiritual terms like biblical authority, godly discipline and instilling a fear of the Lord. In reality, they are instilling fear, period. Whether you use the fear of hell or demons or the "righteous" anger of God, these tactics unjustly take advantage of the vulnerability of highly imaginative children, and is an abuse of power against them.

With every fiber of my being, I do *not* want to do this to my kids. But how, when the insidiousness of fundamentalism was infused into my own spiritual upbringing, and when parenting is largely instinctual and reflective of the ways we were brought up?

I don't know how to raise my kids the way I wasn't raised. The task for a new generation of Christian parents is to create new ways and forge new paths. I have more questions than answers. The best way I know to do this is together with you. For the sake of the kids. □

When non-Americans or expats who have spent an extended period of time outside of America encounter the culture shock of being in the United States, one of the first reactions is to the dizzying array of choice. It's not uncommon for those of us unaccustomed to American society to enter a state of indecision paralysis in the center of the cereal aisle at Walmart.

Every product is divided into sections, subsections, catering to each gender, every life stage, depending on your preference. The marketing machine is well-oiled to target with sharp precision those who belong in each niche demographic.

Bible Marketing

This phenomenon of accommodating the hyper-individualistic American culture has not escaped the Study Bible industry. In order to meet the consumer demands of individual preferences, Bibles have been packaged in every color, shape and size,

The marketing machine is well-oiled to target with sharp precision those who belong in each niche demographic...the hyper-individualistic American culture has not escaped the Study Bible industry.

accompanied by thematic study aids from the *Teen Girl's True Images* to *The Patriot's Bible*. There truly is a Bible for every person.

However, the high value placed on individualism is something that would have

You Don't Need Another Study Bible



by Cindy Brandt

been foreign in ancient near eastern culture. The biblical writers wrote as members of a community to address those belonging as a People of God. To read Scripture as a text

directed at individuals outside of the context of their participation in community is to fall short in doing faithful hermeneutics.

Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones wrote a fantastic book on the intersection of Scripture

and Ethics in Christian Life. In *Reading in Communion*, they say,

"People do not come to decisions or to texts in a vacuum or as isolated individuals; they come as people with particular histories and commitments and specific habits, dispositions and convictions" (page 13).

In other words, the Teen Girl doesn't come to the biblical text as just a teen girl, she brings with her the dynamic history of her family, the diverse environment in which she moves through life, and the varying ideas she engages with through schools and clubs and churches. The forces that

We have made the student of Scripture a consumer product, instead of a beloved child of God belonging to her larger community.

have shaped her impact the way she reads the Bible. To package a Study Bible as the Teen Girl's Bible assumes those complexities don't matter, that they don't affect her reading, and prevent her from offering more than she has to offer.

In the effort to honor the individuality of each person, we have instead, stripped our personhood down to a categorized niche. We have made the student of Scripture a consumer product, instead of a beloved child of God belonging to her larger community.

Not Merely an Academic Exercise

Study aides and thoughtful discussion questions are of course vital to the conscientious reader. But perhaps when we stop producing yet another category of study Bible, and fitting ourselves into whichever splintered group we identify with, we'll actually approach Bible Study the way Scripture was meant to be read, as the People of God. Perhaps we would stop asking the questions, "What does Scripture have to say to **me**," and instead ask, "What does Scripture have to say to **us**?" This is not to undermine our personal relationship with God, but to say that a communal reading of Scripture is more aligned to how it was always meant to be read.

More importantly, we must remember as Christians the primary purpose in Bible Study is not mere academic exercise, but through which we become the People of God. Fowl and Jones argue that Scripture and Christian ethics are intertwined, and that because

we develop morals and virtues through our participation in community, we must also study the Bible via community.

Take, for example, the biblical command to forgive our enemies. Different Christian traditions throughout history have interpreted the application of this command differently according to the situations they find themselves in their particular time and context. **When some Christians realized that applying the command to forgive enemies conflicted with the interests of the government, theologians developed the Just War theory, an extra-biblical framework to determine the morality of war.** On the contrary, some Christians insist on pacifism, a complete rejection of violence under any circumstances.

Willing to Be Changed?

The way Christians responded to the ethics of peacemaking depended upon the way they interpreted Scripture, which emerged from whichever tradition they were from. Reading the Bible influences the way we act in community, and the way we act as a community consequently impacts the way we read the Bible.

What does it mean, then, to read Scripture in community? Theologian Karl Barth famously said, "Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both." It is a short quip to remind us to be thoughtful about the rich context in which both Scripture and our humanity is embedded.

This cannot happen if we

merely read the Bible for a ten-minute devotional each morning, or even in a one-hour discussion at a weekly Bible Study. It is to become a lifelong student of the history and traditions of both ourselves and of the Bible. It is to posture ourselves to listen to the voices of our elders and our young, to the neighbors in our community, to the political leaders of our day, to those marginalized and silenced by the dominant powers, to both those inside and outside the doors of our churches.

It is to listen, not with an agenda to change others, but with a willingness to be changed ourselves. It is to submit ourselves to the process of character formation, to allow the beautiful and brutal realities of life to throw us wholeheartedly into the arms of our community—to be held together by the love of many, and to emerge with greater clarity about how this dynamic Word of God makes us better people of God.

Sisters and brothers, we do not need another glamorous new edition of a Study Bible. The printed text itself has no power. The beauty of Scripture shines through our collective ability to live out the truths of God—to display the Spirit of Christ. The task remains as daunting as it was when Jesus called his disciples to take up his cross. Love, forgiveness, justice and mercy require our collaboration and energies.

We can't afford to spend our time tailoring our Study Bible. We need to get busy living it out. □

Cindy Brandt is a different kind of missionary, based in Taiwan, the author of Outside In. Cindy blogs at <http://cindywords.com>.

Putting the World

Back Into Christianity

by Jeff K. Clarke

...for far too long we've painted a picture of faith that is largely disconnected from life in the here and now. For many people, Christianity has become an *other-worldly faith*...

primary expression in the life to come, that same faith will have a limited ability to interact with and impact life today. *For many, Christianity has become little more than a means of escape from this world.* And for this reason, among others, some people have decided to walk away from Christianity.

Finding a More Balanced Approach

What we need is a more balanced approach—one that does justice to the world that is and the world to come. First, let me say that the world as we know it is indeed broken and in need of repair. While God's beauty and love can be seen

One of the reasons people decide to leave Christianity is that for far too long we've painted a picture of faith that is largely disconnected from life in the here and now. For many people, Christianity has become an *other-worldly faith*; a faith that anchors its existence almost entirely in another world, making the world we live in increasingly irrelevant.

These people view earth as a temporary residence and a

For many, Christianity has become little more than a means of escape from this world. And for this reason, among others, some people have decided to walk away from Christianity.

place destined for complete destruction.

In essence, Christians are waiting to one day be evacuated from the earth. And, Jesus' return is believed by many to be the event that will signal this removal.

In this scheme of things, faith and matter are seen to be in opposition. Matter is viewed with suspicion because it is seen as a hindrance to faith, rather than the location where faith can be developed, experienced and expressed.

As a result, if faith finds its

everywhere, we are also keenly aware that things are not as they should be. "Creation itself is groaning" for the promised redemption of all things (Romans 8:22).

Secondly, it is also true that God has promised to renew and restore all things. And, Jesus announced and enacted this cosmic renewal, referred to in the New Testament as the kingdom of God, throughout the entirety of his public ministry.

Throughout Jesus' public ministry he demonstrated the

reality of this *in-breaking kingdom* in everything he said and did. Every healing, exorcism and miraculous provision, combined with his teachings, pointed to the reality of the world to come

...rather than choosing to view this world as a place to escape from and defining faith along the lines of detachment and separation, maybe we need to start seeing the world through the life of Jesus... a work defined by renewal and reconciliation.

finding expression in the world that is. In Jesus, God's redemptive project for global restoration entered into its final stage—often referred to as *the last days*.

In God's renewed world, sickness, disease and death will be no more. Equality and justice will reign supreme and Jesus will be all in all.

However, we can and should expect to see *signs* of the kingdom come within the kingdom now; glimpses and echoes of the promised world *expanding* into the world that is.

Yet, for so many Christians, past and present, the world that is has little or no connection with the world to come.

In fact, these worlds are diametrically opposed to one another. In their minds, this world is destined not for renewal, but destruction.

As a result, it is little wonder why these same people have created a faith that is largely detached from the world.

The Church as the Outpost of the Kingdom of God

The world as we know it will never be everything it should be. However, the church can and should become outposts of the kingdom, showcasing to the world that is what it one day can become.

As N.T. Wright once said, *The community (the church) is*



supposed to live in reality how all humanity is supposed to live in theory.

Therefore, rather than choosing to view this world as a place to escape from and defining faith along the lines of detachment and separation, maybe we need to start seeing the world through the life of Jesus and choose to continue to live out the work *he* began—a work defined by *renewal and reconciliation*. The world that is not completely at odds with the world to come. There is certainly a disconnect

between the two, but they are not completely *disconnected*.

Christians are called to be emissaries of Jesus' kingdom. We are to be embassies of God's redemptive work in the world and are called to invite others to join the restoration project. We "are to be in reality how all humanity is supposed to live in theory." We are called to demonstrate what the world can look like when God is in charge.

When we make this transition, in both what we believe and how we live, only then will we have a faith that is no longer defined by separation from the world, but a **faith that seeks to bridge the gap between the now world and the then world.**

Faith will no longer be about escape, but reconciliation and renewal. Church life will center on living out the kingdom ideals of Jesus the King and looking for ways to see "God's kingdom come and God's will being done upon the earth as it is in heaven."

And, when we do, the other-worldly emphasis the church has carried for far too long will give way to a theology and life that will do justice to the work Jesus began.

A work of bringing the life of the world to come into the life of the world that is.

Even so Lord Jesus, come. □

Jeff K. Clarke is the Senior Editor of ChristianWeek, a public speaker, blogger and an award-winning writer of articles and book reviews in a variety of faith-based publications. Additional work can be viewed at jeffclarke.com.

BURNING EMBER

the Steve Bell Adventure



“Steve’s *people* can load in his gear through the stage door.”

The young pastor has his back to the church lobby so he can’t see Steve Bell and his manager, sound engineer, business partner and friend Dave Zeglinski already lugging heavy speakers, guitars, cables and tubs of CDs out of their rented SUV to begin the setup for tonight’s concert. This pastor, like many of us, presumes that recording artists are all about big business and bus tours and dozens of *roadies*. The reality is much more humble. If Steve Bell has *people* they are regular fans like me who have followed the admonition on a CD cover to “Call and see how you can host a Steve Bell concert.”

Intimate church concerts are the backbone of Bell’s ministry. Last night he played in Cornwall, Ontario before commuting to Montreal and tomorrow he’ll be off to Ottawa. Monday morning Steve and Dave will be catching a flight back to Winnipeg completing yet another mini-tour. “This allows us to take our music on the road,” explains Steve, “while avoiding long absences from our families.” Next weekend they will be touring again, perhaps in California or Texas or British Columbia.

So who is Steve Bell? Why did renowned music journalist Larry LeBlanc, Canadian bureau chief of *Billboard* magazine (1991-2007) once declare that: “Steve Bell is a Canadian national treasure.”¹ Why are Bell’s fans so enthralled with his music even though he has never *broken out*—as the lingo goes? Why, despite Bell’s long promising and award-winning career is he still playing small venues with audiences of dozens or hundreds instead of arenas seating thousands? These questions form the focus of a recent award-winning documentary entitled *Burning Ember* by Refuge 31 Films,² covering Bell’s 25-year career in music and Christian ministry. Over that time he has independently released 18 solo CDs with combined sales of over 300,000 units; won two JUNOs (Americans, think GRAMMYS); won two Western Canadian Music awards, and numerous Covenant Gospel Music and Prairie Music awards.

Bell has performed over 1500 concerts to over a half million people in fifteen countries. His show

...because of the way he carries his faith. He can be trusted to present his music and beliefs in a way that is genuine and does not demand that everyone else must also believe the same things he does.

usually comprises just him and his guitar but he has also performed symphony concerts to sold-out and capacity crowds in many Canadian cities like Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary, as well as Nashville, Tennessee in the USA. Bell is especially fond of his appearance with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra at Massey Hall (Americans, think Carnegie Hall). His advocacy work has raised support for organizations like World Vision and others.

In 2012 Steve received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, awarded to Canadians who have “made a significant contribution to their fellow countrymen, their community, or to Canada.” In 2013 he received the Winnipeg Symphony’s Golden Baton Award.³

That’s an impressive record for a Canadian indie artist working in a “niche within a niche” as Dave Zeglinski describes Bell’s place in the musical landscape. Not bad for someone who has never *broken out* despite earlier predictions that he had the right stuff to become a mega-star.

Tonight, after the hurried but practiced *liturgy* of setting up the hall, getting the sound just right, getting the CD sales tables organized and briefing the handful of volunteers about the intricacies of sales receipts, and ticket sales, we have a few quiet moments to hang out with Steve and Dave

as they munch from a platter of veggies.

How did this all start? That’s a long story and one you’ll want to hear Steve tell rather than me. An intriguing detail describes how some of Canada’s most unwanted men—prisoners in the medium security penitentiary where his father worked as Chaplain—helped Steve learn guitar. His joy-filled finger-picking guitar instrumental *Drumheller Circle* pays homage to these men and the kindness they extended him as a lad by inviting him to join their Saturday morning music sessions.

Not a “Christian” Musician

Interestingly, Bell doesn’t care for the title “Christian Musician.” He’d rather be known as a songwriter and musician whose lyrics and stories convey the essence of his life experience just as it does for all artists. Steve Bell is Christian and so it is only natural that his art reflects this.

Tim “TK” Krupa, co-founder of the Center for Missional Entrepreneurship in Seattle aptly describes Steve as: “... poet, sage, theologian,... relevant to people who are looking for something deeper...willing to wrestle with things and ponder...”⁴

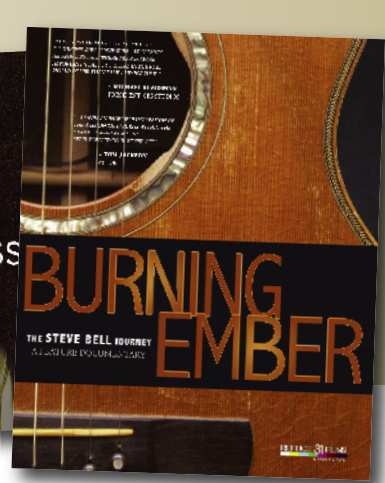
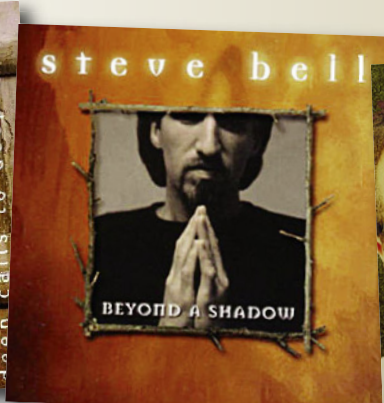
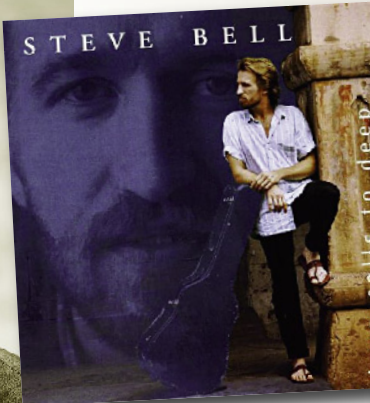
Steve’s touring takes him into every recess and corner of Christianity. Part of his gift seems to be an ability to translate one part of the church for the others as he draws people towards the overarching grace of God. He often teases gently as well as educates. “I grew up in a Baptist church. Are there any other ‘truly saved’ people in the audience?” He might play



for an Orthodox congregation “...complete with bells and smells,” one night, then move on to a Southern Baptist congregation the next night. “...never underestimate Southern Belles—they know how to organize!” The next day might find him at a Catholic or Pentecostal church delving into ancient prayers and symbols and reminding his listeners that such things are like icons on a computer screen. They are only useful as long as they connect us with the original application they were created for.

God’s Grace in Jesus

When not touring, Steve might be found in a non-church setting performing with a Symphony Orchestra. “The church used to know the power of art...”⁵ **It is the universality of the message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ that opens doors to Steve Bell**



both in church and beyond. A friend once confided to me that: *If church looked more like Steve Bell, I might still be interested.* Other concert organizers have commented that Steve is welcomed into these regular settings because of the way he carries his faith. *He can be trusted to present his music and beliefs in a way that is genuine and does not demand that everyone else must also believe the same things he does.*⁶

All too soon the last notes of our concert fade out, the lights come up and the evening is drawing to a close. Both men are exhausted from their long day of driving and performing yet Dave patiently answers fans' questions about which album has *that special song I liked so much*, while overseeing the sales then organizing the take-down and repacking. Steve chats energetically with the line of fans who want to meet him. He has inspired and re-energized them in the challenges of their daily lives and they want to thank him.

Bell's own history involves struggles with anxiety and depression and this may be part of why his art ministers so tenderly to the hurts and needs we all share. "There's a place for rah-rah marching music to get the troops going," Bell once said, "but I'd be honored if God would let me write sustaining music for when we are half-dead, laying in a

trench somewhere."⁷ And this has been his mission for two-and-a-half decades. Yet, after all these albums and awards his ministry continues weaving its way through these intimate concerts in local churches. What a gift from God! If Bell had *made it* and was playing exclusively in huge sites, there could be no line ups, no personal words and heart-felt hugs. Tonight people were literally and spiritually touched by this world-class musician.

Small scale events are also a blessing for individuals like me and the congregations who host this work. For at least one evening we get to be full-fledged partners in *The Steve Bell Music and Ministry Adventure!* I've witnessed the healing and encouragement and I've read the many grateful comments expressed on Steve's blog pages. Knowing that I played a small part in it all is an awesome feeling.

Finally Dave and Steve head off into the night, stopping at a local hotel for food and rest. They'll continue bright and early tomorrow. A fellow musician once called Bell "Canada's hardest working musician." Steve's view: "I am deeply privileged to be doing this."

Defining Steve Bell's Success

So, has success passed Steve Bell by? The best answer comes

from the *Burning Ember* documentary as expressed by his longtime friend and music mentor, Heather Bishop: "Success has to be measured carefully. What is it you want to be successful

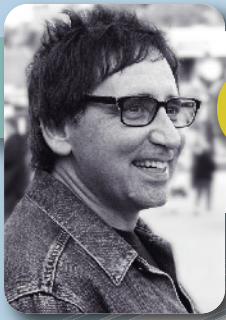
Bell's own history involves struggles with anxiety and depression and this may be part of why his art ministers so tenderly to the hurts and needs we all share.

at? If Steve's goal was to get out there and touch the hearts and minds of people and open them up he's enormously successful. If Steve's goal was to channel light into this world Steve's a giant. And in that sense I think he has surpassed his goal and he's a brilliant example of absolutely living your truth."⁸ □

1. <http://stevebell.com/about/biography/#sthash.bEhbRoNn.dpuf>
2. *Burning Ember—The Steve Bell Journey*, Written & Directed by Andrew Wall Refuge 31 Films. Released September, 2014.
3. <http://stevebell.com/about/biography/#quickfacts>
4. *Burning Ember*, Ibid.
5. *Steve Bell—In Concert, At Home And With Friends* DVD, currently unavailable
6. Ibid.
7. *Steve Bell In Concert With the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra*; Crown Entertainment DVD
8. *Burning Ember*, Ibid.

Note: Quotes and comments are taken from Steve's various DVDs and albums as well as from personal conversations. Any errors in transcription or memory are my own.

Grant Corriveau has been a Steve Bell fan since 1994, attending as many concerts as come within driving distance. He even organized a few himself with help from local congregations.



Father Forgive Us

Brian Zahnd recalls the church massacre in South Carolina, June 17, 2015:

Lord Jesus, help me to be a voice of peace, drawing your church in America away from its idolatrous allegiance to nationalism, militarism, consumerism, racism, violence, guns, and war. Amen.

I pray this everyday. I've done so for years. Praying this prayer has formed me in a certain way. (The purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we think God ought to do, but to be properly formed.) This prayer has influenced me to write books about forgiveness, beauty, and peace. My target audience is the evangelical church in America. My people. I also pray the Confession of Sin from the Book of Common Prayer. I always pray it in the plural...*Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you...*

I pray in the plural because I know I am complicit in sins I have not personally committed. I know I benefit from an economy originally founded on stolen land and slave labor.

I didn't "do" these things but still, people like me benefit from them. I know this. So the very least I can do is pray, *"Father, forgive us our sins."*

I prayed these prayers today. Like I do every day. But today is different. I'm reading Pope Francis' encyclical and grieving a massacre.

First, the encyclical...Pope Francis writes, "The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life."

I've held a position of Christian environmentalism since I was a teenager. Those of us who call the Father of Jesus the Creator of the heavens and the earth should treat the gift of creation with sacred reverence. To pollute and pillage the planet for the sake of rapacious greed is a form of violence directed not only against creation, but the Creator.

Then I heard about the horrible massacre at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. A twenty-one year old white supremacist entered the church during a prayer time and Bible study. He sat beside the pastor, Reverend Clementa Pinckney. After about an hour he announced, "I'm here to shoot black people. I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. You have to go." The gunman then killed the pastor and eight other worshipers. This massacre occurred in a church once burned to the ground because its members had worked to end slavery. Now their suffering continues. The saints of Emanuel A.M.E. have entered fully into the sufferings of Christ.

In response to the massacre, President Obama said, "I've had to make statements like this too many times. At some point, we as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this kind of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries."

He is right. This kind of (now common!) mass violence does not happen in Canada or the United Kingdom or Australia or Germany or most other developed Western nations.

But America is different. America is violent. America was founded upon violence, it is addicted to violence, it sanctifies the capacity for violence. The twin original sins of America—indigenous genocide and African slavery—have still not been fully owned and confessed. (The government sponsored eradication of Native Americans is virtually never mentioned). We keep hoping that someday we can just forget about this sordid past. But we cannot because it is still with us.

We are a violent people. Violent in our history, violent in our rhetoric, violent toward our planet. Me included. I too am complicit. I too am a sinner. *"Father, forgive us our sins."*

Lord Jesus, help me to be a voice of peace, drawing your church in America away from its idolatrous allegiance to nationalism, militarism, consumerism, racism, violence, guns, and war. Amen. □

WALKING THROUGH MINEFIELDS TOGETHER

by Darlene Enns-Dyck

A manifesto is a declaration of intention and motives.

What would it be like to have a manifesto for walking together through minefields that threaten to divide and destroy us? And what if we internalized that manifesto so that it would become ingrained in us? Every time something rises in us,

...what if we internalized that manifesto so that it would become ingrained in us? Every time something rises in us, screaming for us to draw lines, screaming for us to point fingers and call names...

screaming for us to draw lines, screaming for us to point fingers and call names, what if we could reach deep inside for a manifesto—an alternative—a passionate response to what we don't always feel (maybe not even often), but still desire to live into? A manifesto—a vision—a hope of a beautiful place, a beautiful plan, a beautiful world.

Let's play with an idea for an incomplete manifesto:

1. Every journey begins

where we are. As much as I sometimes wish to be someone and somewhere different, an authentic journey begins nowhere else than where you are right now. If I'm angry, I'm angry. If I'm scared, I'm scared. If I'm judgmental, I'm judgmental. We have to start with where we are. And where I am is complex. Much of it has been formed from a deep history, of people and places and experiences, of books and

...what if we could reach deep inside for a manifesto—a vision—a hope of a beautiful place, a beautiful plan, a beautiful world.

songs and voices, of colors and buildings and plans. Some of it lives focused and strong in me, some of it lives completely unconsciously. But it's me.

2. Willingness to grow and move from we are.

I want to move from who I am today, to the new me I could be tomorrow. I don't put a great

deal of weight in my strength, my ability, my courage, my body. I am willing, but fickle. I am desperate, but weak. I am courageous, but sometimes cowardly. I am willing to move, but at times paralyzed by my own faults. And so, in recognition of my "inability," I concede, I surrender, I submit, that in order to truly grow, I will give in...to Another. Not just any "other," but to the Greatest "Other."

My strength to grow, to move, is directly related to releasing my life to another. To the One who created me. To the One who formed me in LOVE and who is the essence of LOVE.

3. LOVE is the ground on which we stand.

Love is to be the air that I breathe, the water





I will seek to not fear the power of LOVE...to break down barriers and cross oceans...To believe that God's love will transform...a meal, a conversation, a conflict, a life.

drive me to pursue its cracks and crevices, to plumb its depths and rise to its heights. *Love must* trust that the deepest parts of me were created in LOVE, not from my parents only, but from the ONE. And to trust that the power of love is stronger than any other power that surges through my body and spirit.

I will seek to not fear the power of LOVE...to break down barriers and cross oceans. To believe that it will never dumb something down, but only lift something up! To believe that instead of watering it down it will be the water of eternal life! To believe in love. In its practicalities and in its mystery. To believe that God's love will transform...a meal, a conversation, a conflict, a life.

Remember that Jesus, the complete embodiment of God's love, said that all the laws hang on two commands: to love God, and to love others. Let me strain and sit with that verse my whole life, with laughter and tears, to grasp the extent of this call on my life. May I never move outside of an arm's reach of that command, as a parent to a child in water.

4. People matter more than positions. My desire to figure it out, my desire to know, and my compulsion to be right must give way to a person. First, to a PERSON—the person of Jesus. My compulsion to be right (on a bad day), my desire for truth (on a good day)—must give way to a PERSON. And to people.

...my compulsion to be right must give way to a person. First, to a PERSON—the person of Jesus.

My compulsion to be right (on a bad day), my desire for truth (on a good day)—must give way to a PERSON. And to people.

People, because people have faces—faces I need to look into, to see. People, because people have names—names I need to know. People, because people have stories—stories that need to be heard. Positions can keep me at a distance, but people, faces, names and stories nudge me, and sometimes force me, to really see, to really listen, to really look. I want people to matter more than positions.

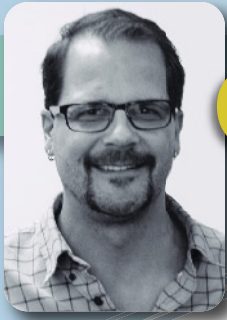
5. Discern a path, without being a bully on it. I want to desire truth, search for it like a treasure! I want to ask

questions and dig deeper. I want to plant seeds of curiosity and harvest ideas! I want to till the ground with love and attention and not be afraid to fail. To give in to something and then be okay with it not growing; to trust the process of planting and nurturing and harvesting more than the outcome. I want to lean in to the Spirit, hovering and howling, abandoning myself to the movement, trusting in the "Other"... the One in whom everything lives and moves and has its being. I want to cultivate a precise ear to the things of God, to the things of Love, to the things of eternity!

6. I want to live in Ephesians 3:16-21 (Message Bible): *"I ask God, that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb*

the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us! Glory to God in the church! Glory to God in the Messiah, Jesus! Glory down all the generations! Glory through all the millennia! Oh yes!" □

Darlene Enns-Dyck is the Senior Pastor of Seeds Church in Altona, Manitoba.



CWR_m

BRAD JERSAK

Missing What Mark?

I periodically hear sin defined as “missing the mark,” as if this grand discovery will repair our misunderstandings about sin, the gospel or God himself. The imagery of a bulls-eye is recycled with each telling. Nearly everyone accepts this definition—from such divergent theologies as the “hyper-grace” camp to hellfire fundamentalists.

Some crucial clarifications are in order if “missing the *mark*” is to serve a Christ-centered perspective on sin. The first question can’t be, “What is sin?” but rather, “What is the *mark*?” Christians generally identify “the mark” as God’s holy standard, purity or perfection. In that view, sinners are those who miss the bull’s eye of perfect law-keeping. Since we all miss the mark, we are all sinners. Defined this way, sin is law-breaking behavior, a guilty verdict for failing to measure up to God’s righteous standard of flawless perfection. For this, we are condemned as guilty and in need of justification (usually imagined as a courtroom scenario). These assumptions often imply the need to behave better, or even if grace covers us, sin is still essentially misbehavior. Thus, repentance is seen as asking for forgiveness for our bad behavior and strength to behave in more godly ways. This may ring true, since the Bible sometimes does describe sin as “lawless deeds.” But it’s dreadfully inadequate. How so?

First, “the mark” is *not* perfect behavior. That’s a dangerous setup for bad religion, an invitation to repeat our original mistake: consuming the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rather, “the mark” is the tree of life—namely, intimate fellowship with God himself, the kind of communion our proto-parents enjoyed in Eden before they turned away. That means “sin” is not primarily misdeeds; it is actually turning away from God’s life-giving love towards *self-will, independence and alienation*. Perfection is not the “mark”; *union with God through trust in his goodness is the mark!*

“Missing the mark” is not merely the hedonistic party scene the prodigal son fell into.

Rather, his “sin” was leaving the Father’s house in the first place. Indeed, the elder brother missed the mark just as badly, slaving in the fields until his self-righteousness and resentment matched his brother’s alienation. In that parable, repentance is not self-loathing or sobriety—it’s going home to the Father and reconnecting with his love. This invitation lies at the heart of the beautiful gospel: it’s not about behaving our way back into the Father’s good graces, but yielding to the Father’s grace, surrendering to his care.

Second, the New Testament treats sin as a problem profoundly *worse* than law-breaking misbehavior. It’s a malady with much *deeper* roots than misdeeds (though these are its ugly symptoms). “Sin” is a fatal disease that cannot be healed by striving to overcome it, or attempting to punish it out of our nature. That would be like a parent whose baby is dying of meningitis urging the child to *will his fever away*, or trying to *spank the virus out of her*.

Even perfectly managing the symptoms does not remove the disease. That’s why self-righteousness is not just ineffectual; it too misses the mark by continuing to turn from God to rely on self-will. No, we need a Great Physician whose medicine is mercy. If the sickness of sin is to go, it requires a Savior (in Greek, literally, *healer*) who can apply the cure—divine grace and radical forgiveness right down to our DNA. This is why Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). He compared himself to Moses’ serpent on the pole, who healed all the snake-bitten as they humbled themselves to just turn and receive life (John 3:14-15).

As long as our use of the term “sin” is based in the wrong “mark” and we confuse the sickness with the symptoms, that word actually sabotages our beautiful gospel. If so, perhaps it needs a “time out.” Instead of beat downs, the beautiful gospel welcomes the alienated home and the sick back to health in the Father’s embrace. □

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The Heart and Soul of Our Father Many misinterpret God because of our tendency to assume God will treat us the way others have. Father's Day is a time to come closer to the God who loves us beyond our imaginations. Week of June 19

Prayer—There's More Than One Crayon in Your Box Organized, lockstep, predictable prayers (like “coloring within the lines”) are not the only way to pray—our prayers may also include “coloring outside the lines.” Week of June 26

Above All Other Flags Are Christ-followers expected to be un-questionably devoted to and blindly obey human authorities even when they seem to be far from Christ-like? Week of July 3

“Make it Go Away” Doctors are often asked by their patients, and lawyers by their clients, a similar request many ask God —“just make it go away.” But God doesn't always do that, does he? Week of July 10

“So—Who Are You?” Does information and data such as our birth date, social security number, profession, passport and citizenship tell the whole story of who we really are? Week of July 17

The Blame Game If God has known all along how we will eventually respond to him, does that mean we have no responsibility for our lives? Can we blame God if he doesn't allow us to choose in the first place? Week of July 24

“I Fought the Law...” The law accuses us and identifies us of our flaws, but obedience to any law does not make one righteous—there is only One Way to know and relate to God. Week of July 31

Playing Religious Games Bad news religion entices people into playing religious games, but no one wins those games. In fact, religious games are dangerous and toxic, leading to many un-Christ-like products. Week of August 7

Serving in Jesus' Name Serving anyone is a messy business, and though serving others in the name of Jesus means we become vulnerable to pain and rejection, it is the most meaningful calling in life. Week of August 14

The Missing Shovel Join us for a compelling story of self sacrifice and the transforming consequences such sacrifice produces. Week of August 21

How Deep Is His Love! Much has been written and taught of how humans might prove their love to God—but the real issue is not how much love we have for God, but how deep his love is for us. Week of August 28