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Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

We do not normally present our readers with discouraging information. We all need encouragement.

But now and then we need to face some hard facts. Yes, hard facts about mission work, the durability of the Gospel, both at home and abroad.

Digest This Sad, Sad Joke

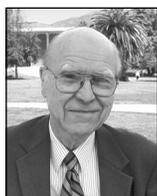
Two senators—one a Republican, the other a Democrat—were eating breakfast together. The Republican says to the Democrat, “You guys aren’t religious. You don’t know your Bible. I’ll bet you \$20 you can’t even say the Lord’s Prayer.” In reply the Democrat immediately launched out, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep”

Stunned, the Republican Senator blurted out, “I can’t believe you could do it. Here’s the \$20.”

Along this line I read recently that only a minority of college students today can name even one of the four Gospels.

Is Christianity Relapsing Globally?

Far worse, is the nightmare of a thought that our vast global, hard-won expansion of Christianity is falling to pieces before our eyes. We always used to think, “Even if things are not going too well in the USA, at least those millions of newly won believers overseas are flourishing in the faith.”



Ralph D. Winter is editor of *Mission Frontiers* and the General Director of the *Frontier Mission Fellowship*.

Okay, that is mainly true. They are flourishing. However, there are some disquieting facts that are hard to ignore.

Kenya, with over 400 denominations and almost as many Evangelicals as in all of Europe, has exploded before our eyes—into nasty and unprecedented intertribal warfare—despite being 80% Christian, just like the USA.

Nearby, the Central African Republic is considered by some to be one of the more dangerous and corrupt countries of the world. We might say, “Those people need Christianity.” Well, 70% of the country is “Christian” in 59 denominations, with a higher percentage of Evangelicals than any other country in Africa.

In Nagaland, almost 100% of the Nagas are Christian—it is the most Christian state of India. It also is considered the most corrupt. At least there is less head-hunting.

Does this mean we are planting a superficial kind of Christianity all around the world? Are people seeking or accepting our offered Gospel for reasons other than what we have expected?

A related question. Are emotional good feelings, however valid and beneficial, any match for the likely moment when logical and hard intellectual questions surface? That is, are emotions more valid, more credible, more durable, than our use of the mind? Or, are mind and heart both important? An Indian scholar addresses this on p. 15.

No Campus Crusader has ever been taught that getting people to “pray to receive Jesus” is more than a beginning. That’s a good beginning. But what follows? What are the next steps? Will Bible knowledge be all that is necessary? Note that the Bible itself does not tell us we must learn nothing elsewhere—for example, about nature and microbiology.

A Christianity that does not teach the Bible points the way nowhere but to New Age groping, ambiguity and relativism.

However, a Christianity that only teaches the Bible is blind to all the other knowledge God wants us to discover and value.

So why are Christians losing their faith?

I have never been more negatively impressed than by three very recent books.

An Irrelevant Bible?

In *The End of Biblical Studies*, by Hector Avalos, former Pentecostal and now Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Illinois, says that the Bible ought not to be studied because it is totally out of date. He is particularly offended by what he sees as the Bible’s “endorsement of violence” (p. 28). In describing this is the Bible teaching it?

When the Bible accurately and honestly reveals the fact that Jacob had concubines does that mean the Bible endorses concubines?

Again and again Avalos and other writers are giving up on the Bible for similar reasons. Avalos constantly points out how this and that passage of the Old Testament is “not at all applicable” to modern situations.

But the Bible is unlike any other religious book in the world. It doesn’t tell us of perfect people. It records horrendous evils and describes people who condone those evils. It even portrays the flaws of leaders.

But it doesn’t teach those flaws. It portrays both plural marriage and slavery. It does not teach those. It records the literal truth of a chosen nation both seeking and denying God’s will. Does it intend for us to take its every sentence, its every event, as a model to be followed?

Of course not. In one sense it mirrors for us how deep and dark our human past has been, how far we have come in better understanding God and His will for us. At the same time, for the same reason, it intends that we not slide back. Most important, we cannot logically criticize it for its honesty and accuracy!

But people are rejecting the Bible and losing their faith for no other reason than its honesty!

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Pagan Additions?

The second book, quite the opposite, is co-authored by George Barna and Frank Viola, *Pagan Christianity*. Barna has now apparently bought into the thesis that we must flee all the many new ways Christians have devised in living out the Gospel down through history. Were choirs, keyboards and guitars in the NT church? Out!

Such a book, with its meticulous historical hounding-out of things we do that are not in the Bible, is totally out of tune with the global church movement. There we see thousands of novelties created in the worship and living out of Biblical teaching. For missionaries, “contextualization” (employing the language and culture as far as possible) is the name of the game! And that’s Biblical.

Post-Biblical forms in the church are certainly to be evaluated, but not by their degree of correspondence to Biblical forms (principles, yes) for that is ecclesiolatry—and to a missionary it is the ultimate absurdity.

I am astounded. Barna is a respectable thinker. This time it seems he stumbled. He is promoting “the Organic Church.” But, what is the value of pointing out that Jesus did not pass out plastic cups at the Last Supper or talk about antibiotics (my own illustration of this thinking).

Just as Avalos’ book leads to a total abandonment of the faith, Barna’s book, despite some helpful insights, could easily lead to the total abandonment of the Church as we know it.

One book says the Bible has nothing to offer us. The other says that we must only go back to the Bible, to the precise form of the nascent Church.

Why Suffering?

An even worse misuse of the Bible, leading to massive confusion, comes from perhaps the most widely known Biblical scholar in the USA today, Bart Ehrman. His latest book is, *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer*.

A Moody and Wheaton graduate, and also a Princeton Seminary Ph.D., he is now a professor of religion at the Uni-

versity of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Not long ago he was quoted as saying,

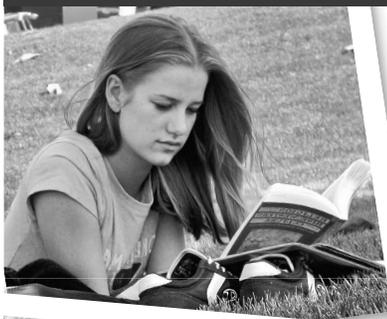
[I began to] think more deeply about my own understanding of why there is suffering in the world. Finally, because I became dissatisfied with all of the conventional answers I decided that I could not believe in [a] God who was in any way intervening in this world given the state of things. So that’s how I ended up losing my faith.

Now just out, his latest book unfolds this serious transition of faith. The book points out that the Bible gives various explanations for suffering and they could not all be right. Apparently he does not understand that the Bible very reliably portrays a nation of people who across the centuries gradually gain deeper insights, whose flawed words and deeds are not always what the Bible teaches, and that the story as it leads into the NT reveals an archangel adversary who is the most basic answer for the presence of suffering.

Okay, all articles in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* are focused on “Why do people lose their faith?” This is a very key issue for the mission of the Church today. 🌐

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A pastor and parent share about INSIGHT, a college-level worldview program of the U.S. Center for World Mission, available for 32 college credits at locations nationwide:



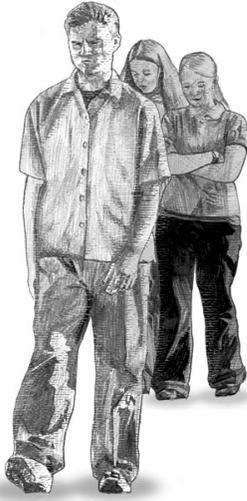
“...a God-entranced vision of reality that will make all other study, and all the rest of life, deeper, richer, and more in sync with God’s ultimate purposes for your life.”

*John Piper
Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church*

“The INSIGHT Program was a life changing experience for our daughter....My wife and I consider the money invested in the program to be one of the best investments we ever made with any of our children.”

*Doug Birdsall
Executive Chair, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization*

Contact INSIGHT for program locations: insight@uscwm.org



Why Are They Walking Away?

by Rick Wood

Have you ever felt like giving up on your Christian faith and walking away from God or the Church? Apparently, this is happening all over the world. In the deepest darkest moments of your life when your cries for help go unanswered, God feels distant, and there seems to be no sure answers for the pain that you are suffering, have you ever doubted God, His goodness or His power? Many have, and some have concluded that it is just not worth the effort to maintain their belief in a God of love and power in the face of circumstances that are horrific and impossible to understand as being directed or controlled by a loving Heavenly Father.

Let's be honest with ourselves and with each other. Living in this world of sin and pain is not easy and maintaining our trust and faith in the midst of it all can be a challenge. If we are to establish a witnessing Church in every unreached people and have it be a Church that not only withstands the onslaughts of Satan, but goes on to beat down the gates of Hell, we must understand why we are losing so many once "faithful believers" to doubt, unbelief and oftentimes outright defiance and anger towards the God and faith they once held dear. There is not one single answer to this problem but we must understand the causes that destroy faith and find solutions. That is what this issue of *Mission Frontiers* is all about.

This is no academic exercise. This is where the very real struggles of life intersect with faith in the God of the Bible—with life and death consequences for this world and the world to come. Matthew Murray, raised in a Christian home and considering missionary service, became so alienated and disaffected from the God of the Bible that he shot four young people recently who became martyrs for their faith here in Colorado where I now live.

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There are obviously many facets that make up the tragedy of Murray's life, but certainly his walking away from his faith in the God of the Bible was part of his downward spiral. Was the picture of God that was presented to him inadequate and sufficiently unbiblical to meet the challenges of his life? Fortunately, few go to the extremes that Murray did, but he is not alone in his abandonment of the Christian faith. Thousands, if not millions, have joined him in their disillusionment with God and the Christian faith and we need to have answers for them that make sense. The Christian faith is a rationally sound belief system and the Bible is a solid foundation for our faith. We have strong evidence for the faith we hold. So why is it that so many are walking away. George Barna and other researchers believe we may be losing a whole generation of young people. We cannot write it off as simply being rebellious people with hard hearts.

The key to the success of the World Christian Movement and the spread of God's Kingdom and His glory among all peoples lies in the God and the Gospel we proclaim and how we proclaim it.

If our Gospel is flawed, our view of God is disconnected from the Bible and poor (or no) discipleship is taking place, then it is not hard to see why people fall away when pain, suffering and disappointment comes crashing in upon their lives. They have no foundation for understanding the struggles of their lives in the context of their belief in a loving God and Savior of real power. They don't realize that they have been born into a world at war

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Yes, Satan is real and the battle between God and Satan is real. Many people think God directs terrible things to happen for some mysterious good reason. No wonder so many people are not terribly excited by following a God like this. Gregory Boyd in his article on page 19 goes into greater detail on this.

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Without a biblical understanding of the ongoing battle between God and Satan, the circumstances of life, not the Bible, will end up determining our theology and our view of the God we worship. For many who leave the Church or refuse to darken its doors, they have come to the conclusion that the God of power who allows or directs

the pain and suffering of this world is not worthy of worship or their obedience. They have wrongly blamed God for the pain and suffering that is the inevitable result of spiritual warfare and the free will of men and women. Spiritual warfare will always have physical consequences in our world. How well have we prepared people for the reality of the battles of this world? Have we, in the West, developed a theology of suffering and warfare against evil in all forms? Have we given people (false) expectations that do not line up with the Scripture? If our view of God is that of a loving Heavenly Father who will rescue us from all pain and suffering in this life and shower us with good things, then we are setting people up for disillusionment and failure.

If we are proclaiming a Gospel and a Christian worldview that does not make sense, is not biblical and does not work in the worst times of our lives, then we will continue to bleed out the best and the brightest from our midst.

This is not an academic exercise in my life either. The theme of this

issue strikes very close to home for me. Preparing this issue has been part of my own journey of understanding the trials of my life in the context of a God who loves me yet allows awful things to happen to me and the ones I love. I did not have a problem reconciling pain and suffering and a loving God until I started having lots of pain and suffering. I am still working through my understanding of the warfare between God and Satan and why things happen the way they do but here are a few things of which I am convinced:

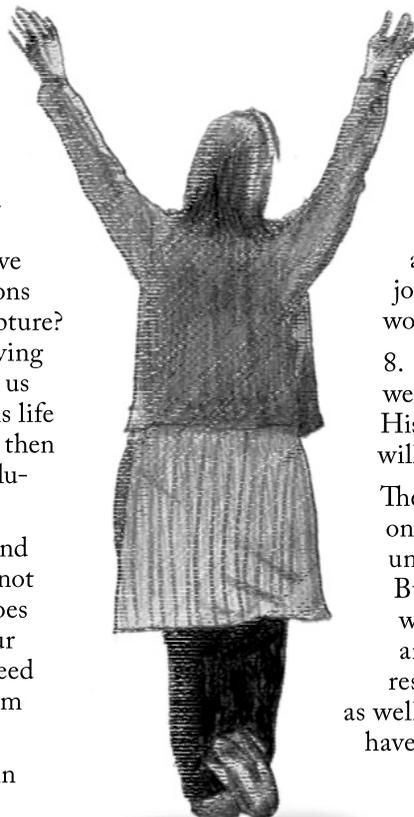
1. If we want to know what God is like, we need to look at Jesus not our circumstances or the pain of this world.
2. The Bible, properly interpreted, gives us an accurate view of a good, loving and powerful God.
3. God still loves me even when the circumstances of life are hard and I don't feel like it.
4. Much of the suffering in this world is the result of free human beings exercising their free will in war and corruption.
5. God's will is not always done on Earth, otherwise we would not need to pray, "Thy will be done on earth."

6. The more people know God and are obedient to Him, the less suffering there will be in this world and in our own personal lives.

7. We have an enemy in Satan who is constantly trying to get us to believe lies about God and His character both at home and abroad. God is asking us to join Him in the battle to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8).

8. One day all suffering will end and we will see Him face to face in all of His glory and the sufferings of this life will pale in comparison.

The issue of pain and suffering is one reason we are losing people to unbelief. There are many others. But we must confront all of them with sound, rational and biblical answers. It is the key to our progress among the unreached peoples as well as maintaining the progress we have already made. 🌐



Are We Proclaiming a Defective Gospel?

by Rick Wood

Is the Gospel message that hundreds of thousands of missionaries are proclaiming around the world defective? Have hundreds of millions of people bought into a Gospel message that is, at its heart, unbiblical? If true, this would be like Bill Gates sending out the latest Microsoft operating system which after installed for a year deletes all the files on the computer. To say the least, it would be a disaster, a catastrophe, and an apocalyptic nightmare all in one. But some are claiming that we are in fact proclaiming a defective, unbiblical Gospel.

Could this be one reason that so many are leaving their faith behind and the once vibrant Evangelical awakenings in Britain and America are but distant memories? The implications for world evangelization are immense. If the Gospel we proclaim will self destruct once installed on the hard drives of people's hearts, then much of our work among unreached peoples could be in danger of collapse as it has in much of Europe. Vishal Mangalwadi warns of this danger in his home country of India starting on page 15 of this issue.

Hundreds of millions of people have likely read the *Four Spiritual Laws*, the booklet written by Bill Bright and published by Campus Crusade for Christ. The first law in this little booklet says, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." This sounds great and it is just the kind of message that people want to



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hear. Many are eager to accept such a message and justifiably so. Who would not want this to be true in their lives. They say, "Wow, I would love to have a loving God on my side to make my life wonderful, to make my life complete." This message is proclaimed in books, songs and sermons across the world.

But what if this message is not true—at least not true in the way that most people want it and expect it to be true? Don't get me wrong, I have the greatest respect for Bill Bright and the ministry of Campus Crusade, but this focus of our Gospel presentation can be misunderstood by, and misleading to, a whole generation of people who want to add God to their lives to make their lives complete. In all fairness, the *Four Spiritual Laws* does go on to identify sin as the problem and to provide the proper solution.

But what kind of expectations are we providing to people when we say, "Come to Christ and God will reveal to you a wonderful plan for an abundant life?" Are we setting people up with false expectations of what God will do for them? Are we promising more than what God has promised to deliver? Are we trying to market the Gospel to a generation of self centered people who really don't understand their desperately lost state before a holy God and are therefore not really saved? Have millions of "believers" simply hired God to make their lives complete?

Ray Comfort in his book, *The Way of the Master* says, "[t]he enemy has very subtly diverted our attention away from our core message. Instead of proclaiming the Good News that sinners can be made righteous in Christ and escape the wrath to

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come, we have settled for a “gospel” that implies that God’s primary purpose in saving us is to unfold a “wonderful plan” for our lives to solve our problems, make us happy in Christ, and rescue us from the hassles of this life.” (p.19)

Is that the central purpose of the Gospel we preach, to give us an abundant, full and rewarding life? Many have sadly bought into this and are disillusioned when everything does not go according to plan.

One dedicated missionary family I know had their daughter brutally murdered. The very first house they ever owned after years of faithful overseas service burned to the ground just days after they moved in along with a lifetime of possessions. They did not even have a chance to unpack their boxes. Then the wife dies of cancer after a long battle.

The husband of another missionary couple I know developed Multiple Sclerosis and spent years bed-ridden and unable to speak until his death left his wife with four kids to raise by herself. Are these

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the exceptions to the wonderful, abundant Christian life that we have been promised? There seems to be a disconnect here between what the “wonderful plan” Gospel message promises and the reality of our life experiences in Christ.

This disconnect between the promise and

the reality has all sorts of ramifications for our spiritual lives. As Ray Comfort explains, “Those who come to faith through the door of seeking happiness in Christ will think that their happiness is evidence of God’s love. They may even think that God has forsaken them when trials come and their happiness leaves. But those who look to the Cross as a token of God’s love will never doubt His steadfast devotion to them. (p. 44)

Certainly many of those who have walked away from their faith have done so because the reality of their lives does not match up with the promised wonderful plan that their loving Heavenly Father has for them.

When the Church presents Jesus as the one who came to “solve our problems” and “make us happy” then we attract only those who have problems or are unhappy and those are the kinds of people who

will then fill our churches. If they do not repent of their sins then they are false converts and they are not new creatures in Christ. As unsaved people who claim to be Christians, they have simply brought their sins and problems into the church. This overworks the pastors, hobbles the outreach of the Church and its mission, and defames the name of Christ when supposed Christians continue in their sins. The irony is that these will also be the people who will be most likely to leave when Jesus does not solve all their problems or make them happy. They become disillusioned and bitter because they were not presented with the true Gospel in the first place (Comfort, p.36).

The Gospel is a promise of the righteousness of Christ for all who will repent of their sins and trust Christ as their Savior. To have a right relationship with God, people must come to the understanding that they are lost and doomed to suffer the wrath of God unless they repent of their sins and trust Christ for their salvation. This must be at the heart of our Gospel message. The Gospel is not a promise of a happy, problem-free life—just the opposite.

When someone comes to genuine faith in Christ and seeks to live a life of obedience, he becomes an active soldier in the ongoing battle between God and Satan. His faith in Christ essentially puts a target on his back and makes him an object of Satan’s wrath. That person becomes an active threat to Satan and his hold on power. Satan will then take every opportunity to take any genuine believer out of action.

But if people who come to Christ are not told of this spiritual reality then there will be tremendous confusion and disillusionment when the truth of this unknown spiritual reality breaks in upon their lives.

It is like a person who buys a vacation package to the French Riviera expecting a wonderful time of fun and relaxation only to discover upon his arrival that there is open warfare taking place with bombs going off, bullets flying and the wounded littering the sandy beaches. Such a person would naturally think: “What is going on here? This is not what I signed up for.”

Until we realize that we are in a war for our lives, we will be sitting ducks for Satan’s attacks and schemes. We will continue to lose those people who were never adequately prepared for battle. We must proclaim a true Gospel of grace and forgiveness of sin and stop trying to market the Gospel as the solution to all of our problems. It is already the greatest gift anyone can receive. 🌐

AN ANTI-INTELLECTUAL FAITH AND THE TRAGIC
CONSEQUENCES FOR

Britain's Evangelical Awakening

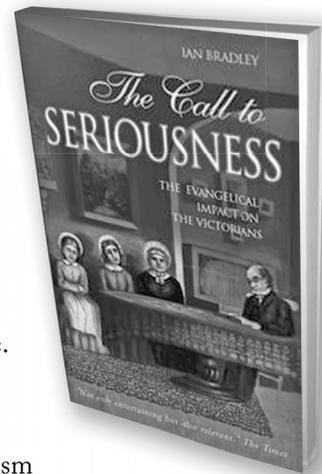
by Jonathan W. Rice

Recently, I began reading a book so interesting that I stayed up until 2:30 a.m. finishing it. If you ever want a detailed account of how the nineteenth-century English Evangelicals ended the British slave trade; abolished sati and infant sacrifice in India; banned child labor and other such abuses in England; started the world's first 'animal rights' group (The RSPCA, which banned the torture of animals for sport); rehabilitated prostitutes; reformed the Parliament; brought education and relief to the destitutes of England; brought about prison and lunatic asylum reforms, etc., then the book to read is *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians*, by Ian C. Bradley (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1976).

Bradley tries to take the stance of an impartial historian. However, it becomes clear after a few chapters that the subjects of his study are steadily gaining his admiration and empathy. In every chapter he critiques the excesses of the movement: their petty legalisms, repressive behavior codes ("The Cult of Conduct"), intellectual philistinism, and so forth. And yet, his approach is fair and he always balances the negatives with their many positive contributions. For the most part, the positives win out. A famous historian quoted in the book sums up the mixture: "Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical" (p. 106).

The book, however, ends on a tragic note. Many of the Evangelicals lost their children and grandchildren to agnosticism or atheism. All throughout its pages, we see glimpses of English Evangelicalism's serious weakness: anti-intellectualism. It comes out in the many accounts of their petty legalism and sometimes even pharisaic separatism; and how they terrorized their children with stories of juvenile Sabbath-breakers, who actually had a little fun on a Sunday and then died and went to Hell for it; and how they forbade their members to read "secular" novels and discouraged them from patronizing "secular" art and music (Mozart and Beethoven were flat out!). Their intellectual weakness becomes more pronounced in their view of "practical" religion.

True Christianity, they believed, did not entail entering the marketplace of ideas. They did not think it worthwhile to intelligently engage the skeptics, German Biblical critics, agnostics and atheistic philosophers of their day. Instead, they claimed, God had called them to a purely practical faith: to send forth missionaries, to help the poor and downtrodden, to better peoples' manners. These were the things pleasing to God; not intellectual debate or true apologetics. In fact, a popular belief of theirs was that one could only prove the existence of God by looking deep within one's own conscience (pi-



Jonathan Rice, a California native, has had extensive experience in India, going back to 1985. From 1995 to present, he has been involved in theological education across India. He has written several essays for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project (SCP) Journal. He is presently writing a novel that explores the New Age claims about Hinduism, pollution and ecology. In 2005, Jonathan expanded the above article into a lengthy essay for the SCP Journal under the title: The Descent into Unbelief: When Christendom Produces Cultists, Mockers and Atheists. Berkeley, CA: Spiritual Counterfeits Project Journal, Volume 29:2-29:3, November 2005.

etism at its worst!). When, by the mid-1800s, much of Evangelicalism became influenced by the rise of proto-fundamentalist groups, any fading hope of a 'life of the mind' was dashed to pieces.

Which brings us to the tragic last chapter of Bradley's book, the story of the new generation: the children and grandchildren of these

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nineteenth-century Evangelicals. While some of them kept the faith, "an alarmingly high number deserted the Evangelical fold" (p. 194). Some still remained Christians. For example, three of William Wilberforce's sons became Roman Catholics and the fourth became a non-Evangelical Anglican. Thomas Macauley also forsook Evangelicalism,

though he still considered himself Christian. The real tragedy is not in these cases, but in the many others who abandoned the Christian faith altogether. Bradley notes that, "Samuel Butler, George Eliot [pen-name of Mary Ann Evans], Leslie and James Fitzjames Stephen, and Francis Newman renounced Christianity altogether and became atheists" (p. 194). There are many others whom Bradley doesn't mention. For example, what about Margaret Noble several years later, the Wesleyan pastor's daughter, who as a child "loved Jesus very much" and wanted to be a missionary when she grew up? As an adult, she came under the spell of Swami Vivekananda, converted to Hinduism, changed her name to Sister Nivedita, and wrote praises to "Kali the Mother." The list could go on and on.

Many of those who fell away fit into a similar pattern. On one hand, they resented the repressive narrowness of their upbringings, but they also appreciated the many good aspects. The main issue was with the world of ideas: No longer were they protected, sheltered children, reading the propaganda of Hannah More. They were now thinking adults in the real world, reading the assaults of atheists, agnostics, and occultists. Their parents and their church had

not provided answers to such attacks on their faith. Nor had they trained their children in the critical examination of the Biblical worldview vs. other world views, which would have provided them with the tools to find answers for themselves. The result was a severe "conversion" crisis, but this time a conversion away from faith to atheism or agnosticism.

Many of them agonized deeply over their loss of faith. It was as though they had been robbed. They loved Jesus and wished with all their hearts that they could still believe in Him, but the evidence which confronted them tore their belief away. Many of them held onto as much of their godly past as possible. They tried to salvage the strong sense of morality, duty, hard work and self-control, but without the God who had given it to them in the first place. One of them summed it up this way in 1873: "Let us dream no dreams and tell no lies, but go our way, wherever it may lead, with our eyes open and our heads raised" (p. 200). There is bravery and integrity in this statement, together with a horrible sense of the tragic. It is the practical creed of a man who had once known and loved God, but had lost Him, and was facing his short life alone and abandoned in a now empty universe.

The story of the great author George Eliot (the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans) was very upsetting. I had grown up reading her stories but had never known the story of her life. She was raised an Evangelical and loved God with all her heart

(but, unfortunately, she had not been taught how to love Him with her mind). Her hero was William Wilberforce, and when she was 19 she wrote, "Oh that I might be made as useful in my lowly and obscure station as he [Wilberforce] was in the exalted one assigned to him" (p. 199). In another letter, she said that she would be happy if the only music she ever heard again in her life were worship music. However, all was not well. Bradley notes that "Three years later she rejected Christianity in a conversion which was almost as cataclysmic as those which had brought others to vital religion."

What was it that shattered Evan's faith? She read two books of Biblical criticism, Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, and Strauss' *Life of Jesus*. Utterly disillusioned, she abandoned her faith and spent the rest of her days alone in the universe, without God. She tried her utmost to live a moral and selfless life without di-



Mary Ann Evans

vine assistance, but failed miserably. In the 1850s, when she had become a successful author, she met George Lewes, a philosopher and scientist. Lewes was a married man, but they “fell in love.” Since he had no legal grounds for divorce, he simply abandoned his wife and moved in with Evans. They lived together as though married until Lewes’ death in 1878, trying to pretend that Lewes’ real wife didn’t really exist. What a wonderful beginning and yet such a horrible shipwreck for Mary Ann Evans’ life.

What sickened me the most was the fact that Evans lost her faith through reading the works of Hennell and Strauss! At this point in history, those men are no longer taken seriously. Their works have been completely refuted. No careful, thinking person today could ever lose faith by reading Strauss! In our time, some people lose their faith over the Jesus Seminar, but the western Church has come a long way in scholarship. Right off the top of my head I can think of at least three books, two by Protestants and one by a Catholic, which solidly refute the theories of the Jesus Seminar (and there are many more). Why didn’t the nineteenth-century English Evangelicals produce solid responses to Strauss and others? Why were they so lazy in this area when they were so diligent in every other aspect of life? Why did a whole generation have to be robbed of their faith in Christ? Why did a sweet young girl like Mary Ann Evans have to get deceived, fall away, and then live a life alienated from God as the mistress of another woman’s husband? True, Evans and all the others were adults, accountable to God for their actions and beliefs. But from a Biblical perspective, they were also sheep whose shepherds had failed to protect them from savage wolves.

The book’s conclusion left me with deep grief in my heart for a generation now long dead. And I thought of today’s English, the great-great grandchildren of the Evangelical generation. An England where the Royal Family has degenerated into tabloid trash, where Mick Jagger has become a knight, and where instead of Christian spirituality they follow everything from Hare Krishna to Harry Potter. And don’t forget those wonderful Brits who convert to Islam, like shoe-bomber Richard Reed. What a travesty!

When Vishal Mangalwadi joined me in the office the next morning, I told him about my reading experience and how badly it had bothered me. Vishal immediately said that the present-day Indian church is failing in the exact same manner. He mentioned as an example the attacks of

Hindu journalist/politician Arun Shourie against the gospels a few years ago. I was in Calcutta then and read them each week as they came out in *The Asian Age* newspaper. He had used his connections to write full paged, syndicated articles attacking the Bible for several Sundays in a row, culminating on Easter Sunday. (Apparently, someone forgot to tell him that Hindus are tolerant of all religions!) The amazing thing about it was he was using old, outworn, nineteenth-century arguments against Christianity. A few weeks later, one Christian leader gave a pathetic, insipid reply in the op-ed section of the *Asian Age*, but that was it. The rest of the Indian church was publicly quiet.

I mentioned the articles to some colleagues at the Bible college where I taught. Some were unaware of them and others seemed rather sheepish, as if the articles might be shaking their faith as well! One person said that maybe RZIM (Ravi Zacharias International Ministries) or some such group should write a response. But no one from any of the well-funded seminaries in India ever said or wrote a word. Nor did any of the well-paid church bishops, who in addition to their salaries get free housing and transportation. Several years later, they still remain silent! And not only that, there is more to the scandal. In 1989, Sita Ram Goel wrote his *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters* (Voice of India Publishing). Around the same time, Voice of India also published *Psychology of Prophetism*. Over twelve years later, the Indian church still has NOT responded to these attacks against Christianity. When Arun Shourie wrote *Missionaries in India*, (1994) only one person, Vishal Mangalwadi, responded with a book. No one has of yet answered his newest anti-Christian polemic, *Harvesting our Souls*.

Why does the Indian church allow such intellectual attacks to go unchallenged? Are the bishops and seminarians afraid that if they write well-researched answers that somebody might beat them

Why does the Indian church allow such intellectual attacks to go unchallenged? Are the bishops and seminarians afraid that if they write well-researched answers that somebody might beat them up or throw rocks at them? What really is the problem here? Perhaps the same anti-intellectual laziness which destroyed English Evangelicalism.

up or throw rocks at them? What really is the problem here? Perhaps the same anti-intellectual laziness which destroyed English Evangelicalism. Please do not underestimate the intelligence of our Indian young people. Many Christians all over India have read these attacks, especially the ones serialized in *The Asian Age*. How many of them have already lost their faith because no one in the church bothered to give them an answer? Maybe we should just tell them to "Trust and obey and go on your way." Is that what the church leaders think? They should not fool themselves. The young people will go on their way, out of the Church and into Hinduism or something else. The fault, however, does not lie with the Indian Church alone, but with the Western missions groups that pour untold millions of dollars into India. These groups seem not to have learned anything at all from the failures of both English and American Evangelicalism. For they will invest millions of dollars to send western tracts, dig wells, build hospitals, and

give free food to impoverished Muslims in India. But if someone requests a few thousand dollars to help Indian Christian thinkers do some serious research and writing, they are ignored.

Each generation of leaders in each nation will be accountable for the sheep in their care. They will answer for it at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Which reminds me...possibly no other group in church history was more aware of the Judgment Seat of Christ than the nineteenth-century English Evangelicals. They were, in fact, overly aware of it, almost to the point of neurosis. How devastatingly ironic it is that those same people will have to give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ for losing entire generations, starting with their own children, because they were too lazy to challenge the wolves at the door.

May the Indian church awake before it ends up in the same defeated place, guilty of the blood of its own sheep that it cared not to defend! 🌐

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THE PURSUIT OF
KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH:
**The Key to a
New Reformation**

by Vishal Mangalwadi

When the pioneers of Western Protestant missions arrived in India they established a college (1813), which grew into Serampore University. Their leader William Carey, a cobbler turned Bible translator, taught the Bible as well as languages, botany, horticulture, forestry and astronomy.¹

These Baptist missionaries had come to save souls: Why did they establish a university? Were they trying to soften the soil for converting Hindus and Muslims?

The missionaries were following the tradition set by the Protestant Reformers who were university professors and graduates. Martin Luther, the pioneer of the 16th Century Reformation, was a professor at the University of Wittenberg. He insisted that next to the reform of the Church, the second most important need was to reform the university. He became the father of universal education—a key ideal of the modern era.

Following Luther and Calvin, the Scottish Reformers put enormous money and effort into making Scotland Europe's first educated nation. Soon, the Church turned Europe into history's first educated continent. This achievement became possible also because of the educational mission of the Roman Catholic Church led by the Jesuits. Were the Roman Catholics merely competing with their Protestant rivals?

Not at all!

The Roman Catholic Church is the mother of Western education (Christian and secular). Before the Reformation practically all schools and universities were Roman Catholic.² They had no one to compete with and since Europe was already "Christian," there was no need to soften Europe's soil for conversions. The educators were simply pursuing their religious calling to seek and impart knowl-

edge. Most of them did not even know that they were laying the foundations of the modern world.

Why did the Western Church think that the pursuit of knowledge was a divine calling?

The idea came from the Bible via St. Augustine (AD 354-430). He taught that God was a rational being and the human mind (not just the human "soul") was made in God's image. Therefore, our rationality was qualitatively different from the brain in other animals. God gave us a mind like His own so that we might know Him and understand and govern his creation as his children. For Augustine this meant that, according to the Bible, to be godly required us to cultivate our minds—the instrument of knowing God and his creation.

This Augustinian theological assumption enabled the West to put confidence in human logic, language and rational knowledge (all the way from intuition and empirical observation to doctrines and creeds). Much before the birth of the modern age, the medieval (Augustinian) monasteries began doing something that became unique to Christianity. When a young man devoted his life to seek and to serve God, the monastery required him to spend years studying the Bible, languages, literature, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, music, theology, philosophy, and practical arts such as agriculture, animal husbandry, medicine, metallurgy or technology. Thus, the monastery—which was an institution for cultivating religious life—began producing a peculiarly rational person, capable of thinking, researching, developing technology, writing books, developing capitalism, science and complex, rational legal and political systems. In my country, the centers of Hindu and Buddhist

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learning were founded by great philosophers, but they believed neither in a rational God, nor in the validity of human reason. Therefore, they did not labor to produce such rational religious persons.³ The Bible (as we shall see below) became the ladder on which the West climbed the heights of its educational, technical, economic, political, and scientific excellence.⁴

Tragically, during the 18th and 19th centuries an intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment separated the West's confidence in reason from its biblical foundations. The result was tragic: the 20th century intellectuals awoke to a realization that the West no longer had any foundations for its peculiar confidence in human reason. Secular rationalism collapsed into skepticism, cynicism, mysticism and occult. Universities that were built to help students find truth and become servants of God and neighbors,

turned into factories producing workers for a technocratic age. Public education became incapable of training civilized citizens.

At the end of the modern era the university appeared like an electrician whose city had plunged into darkness. He climbed up a ladder to fix the high-voltage

cable that supplied power. Since everyone was looking to him as a savior, he became so confident that he kicked away the ladder, placing his feet firmly in midair. . . Such a scenario may be hard to imagine but that is how academia is dangling. It is imparting knowledge but it knows that it does not know the truth and will never know the truth.

The West progressed beyond other civilizations because it did with its mind what most of us did with our muscles. (I have never seen an American woman carry water on her head.) But sadly, now it has kicked away the very source of its confidence in the human mind—the biblical worldview that birthed and nurtured universities and made the West a uniquely thinking civilization.

This is not the place to discuss the reason for the collapse of faith in reason or how anti-intellectualism took over the Church and the culture.⁵ The fact is that the West is changing. Rational cynicism has become the hallmark of its universities. Therefore, the popular culture is defined either by unsatisfying crass materialism or a non-rational, non-moral, non-creedal spirituality of mysticism, UFOs, spirits and occult which includes myths and meditation,

drugs and divination, yoga and tantra, astrology and witchcraft, voodoo and gnosticism. This has happened because the West has exchanged its Bible-shaped worldview for a lie that the human mind is an accident of blind chance, no more valid than the animal brain.

When a culture concludes that the human mind cannot know the truth it does not merely have an intellectual problem. It is on its way to all round corruption and degeneration for it has declared that it is incapable of knowing right from wrong or even if right differed from wrong. (An animal is not equipped to make a distinction between eating and stealing.) It should not surprise the world that American middle schools are now confessing to their 11–14 year old students that their worldview makes them incapable of knowing if fornication is wrong. (Monkeys can't make moral distinctions between friendship, fornication, love, sex and adultery. Since they have no spirit they are driven only by chemistry—the flesh.) The best that some schools can do is to educate their 11-year olds how to use free contraceptives.

In India, a result of Christian anti-intellectualism was that William Carey's successors at Serampore University handed over the faculties of arts and sciences to secular government. Christians confined themselves to teaching theology. The Christian mind disappeared from our intellectual landscape. Most of our information regarding history, philosophy, sociology, literature, politics, economy, law, psychology, and science started coming from secular, leftist, Hindu, and Neo-Buddhist interpreters. These biases were accepted as the truth. Therefore, young people growing up in Christian homes began to think that Christianity is a childish, Sunday-School level faith.

This is tragic because these man-centered ideologies have completely corrupted our national life. Two professors—a Chemist and a Geologist—from an Indian university told me that they guide doctoral research, but they tend not to trust the conclusions of Indian scientists. Why? "Because the data is usually fudged: manufactured to suit a desired result: partly because much of the time, many of the instruments in our research labs do not function properly."

Corruption has so permeated India's national (secular/Hindu/Christian) life that many have turned cynical. Cynicism is growing in spite of the economic growth of the last decade that began after India was forced to turn from socialism to free-market principles. There is no doubt that as the West catches up with India's (non-rational, non-creedal, non-moral, mystical) spirituality it will also catch up with

There is no doubt that as the West catches up with India's (non-rational, non-creedal, non-moral, mystical) spirituality it will also catch up with our corruption and lose its freedoms.

our corruption and lose its freedoms. Corruption of morals flows from corrupted thoughts, and freedom requires inner self-government. People that cannot govern themselves have to be governed by others.

Be that as it may, India's economic up-turn is evidence that cynicism is wrong; decline is not inevitable. Like the partial healing of our economy, other facets of our national life can also be healed and regenerated. So can the West.

But what might trigger a new reformation?

The sixteenth century Reformation began when an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, understood a little phrase in the Bible, "*the just shall live by faith*" (Roman 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Habakkuk 2:4). Those words⁶ transformed Luther, enabling him to reject a religious culture that promoted corruption as the way of salvation (e.g., selling of indulgences). Luther's theological transformation began a social revolution that created the modern world. It snatched cultural power from the custodians of the older view, transferring it to a people who sought truth.

Today, a global reformation will begin if we understand a phrase in Isaiah 53:11:

"After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his *knowledge* my righteous servant will
justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities."

Given the fact that the Protestant anti-intellectualism predates secular anti-intellectualism by a century⁷, Isaiah 53:11 raises several questions.

What has knowledge got to do with our justification? Aren't we saved by faith alone?

To be saved means to know God. In John 17:3 the Lord Jesus said:

". . . this is eternal life: that they may *know* you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom
you have sent."

Who is Jesus Christ?

The apostle Paul explains in Colossians 2:3 that the Lord Jesus is the one

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of *wisdom and knowledge*."

How can man know God?

In Matthew 11:27 the Lord Jesus said, ". . . no one *knows* the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

In 1 John 5:20 the apostle John explained that the Lord Jesus did not come to this earth merely to die for our sins:

"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us *understanding*, so that we may *know* him who is true . . . his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

Why is knowledge so necessary that God would incarnate as a man?

Adam and Eve were created to govern this earth. The kingdom of Satan began when they chose to doubt God and believe Satan. Just as the kingdom of Satan begins in our mind, so also the kingdom of God begins in our minds, when we choose to turn from our false ideas and believe God's word. Isaiah 1:2-4, Isaiah 44:18-19, Isaiah 56:10-11, Jeremiah 4:22, Jeremiah 5:4-5, Jeremiah 10:14, Luke 11:52.

The Apostle Paul powerfully summarized the Old Testament perspective on the source of pagan degeneration. In Romans 1:18-32 he explains that:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who *suppress the truth* by their wickedness. . .

What are the consequences of the lack of knowledge?

In the preceding verses Paul asserts the Old Testament view that the lack of knowledge and understanding result in a nation's destruction (see Isaiah 5:13).

Why does God want his servants to be baptized with the Spirit of knowledge, wisdom and understanding?

The Bible explains that while God plans to bless all the nations (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18 etc.), Satan is out to "deceive the nations of the earth" (Revelation 20:3, 7). The Lord Jesus came to set us free by giving us the knowledge of the truth: John 8:31-32.

Anti-intellectualism spread in Evangelical churches partly because Reformation slogans such as "by faith alone" and "by Scripture alone" were misunderstood.

"By faith alone" the Reformers meant that salvation could not be earned by human religiosity. They did not mean that knowledge and understanding were not essential ingredients of faith.

Likewise, "by Scripture alone" they meant that when tradition conflicted with the Scriptures we were to abide by the Scriptures. The Reformer asserted the necessity of cultivating the mind and using reason in our search for truth. In his trial before the Diet of Worms (1522), Luther stated that he could not

recant unless he was convinced “by the Scriptures and plain reason.”

Salvation is not by faith alone. Jesus asked people to “Repent and believe” (Mark 1:15). Repentance involves turning from what is false (e.g., idols) to what is true (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus calls humanity to worship God in spirit as well as in *truth* (John 4:23-24). Paul asked Timothy to instruct his opponents gently “in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a *knowledge of the truth*” (2 Timothy 2:25).

Anti-intellectualism became acceptable because many Protestants forgot that Jesus did not come simply to take our souls to heaven but also to give us the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Timothy 4:3, 6).

The postmodern world is reaping the result of our error which focused on faith and other gifts of the Spirit and left the field of knowledge in the hands of the unbelievers. This happened partly because some Christians were deceived by the secular idea that the human mind was a part of “the flesh.” Therefore, they assumed that the mind had to be crucified. The apostle Paul claimed “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). He declared that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth.” The Letter to the Hebrews says, Christians are those who “have received the knowledge of the truth” (Hebrews 10:26). James commands us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). Peter says that knowledge is the source of grace, peace, godliness and effectiveness (2 Peter 1:2-8).

The Renaissance and the Reformation created the modern world of inquiry, discovery, and knowledge because the Word of God taught Medieval Christians (including the Reformers) that both our salvation and godliness required growing in knowledge (Ephesians 1:7-8, Colossians 1:9, Colossians 2:2, Philemon 1:6, Ephesians 4:11-13, Philippians 1:9, Colossians 1:9-10, Colossians 3:10).

So, what does this imply?

Isaiah 53:11 says that by his *knowledge* God’s righteous servant will justify many. For a hundred years now the Church has been growing in many nations (including America), yet the same nations are degenerating in many critical ways. This is because the Church has been offering justification without the knowledge of truth. We have turned “Salvation” into a shallow religious “experience” that “converts” but does not “make disciples” of all nations (Matthew 28:28).

The Lord Jesus, however, calls us to make people His apprentices, those who would learn from him and the Father (Matthew 11:29, John 6:45).

The Reformation transformed the West because it

made Europeans learners, the Bible their textbook, and Jesus their supreme teacher. The choice before our generation is to either seek the knowledge of God once again or to slide into an abyss of ignorance, corruption and slavery. The Word of God commands us in Proverbs 5:5-8 to: Get *wisdom*, get *understanding*

Recovery and pursuit of wisdom, understanding, and the knowledge of truth is the key to a new reformation because the postmodern intelligentsia knows that it does not know and cannot know the truth. Deception has to rely on force. It has to enslave, destroy. Intellectual and moral slavery is now called “Political Correctness”. This moral and semantic jugglery is similar to what Pagans always do. They try to make prostitution sacred by calling male and female prostitutes “gods” and “goddesses”. While deceptive words enslave, the truth liberates. It empowers people by giving them genuine reasons to live and act in ways that true, good and beautiful.⁸ 🌐

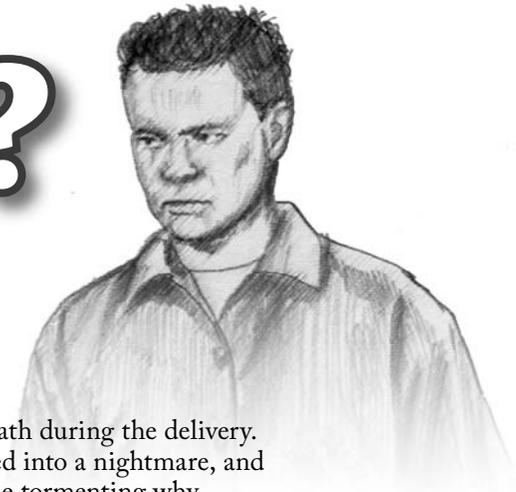
Endnotes

- 1 For information see *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for Transforming a Culture* by Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi (Crossway Books).
- 2 Back then there was no such thing as secular education. Luther was the first to urge the state and merchants to support church’s educational efforts.
- 3 Mahatma Gandhi, who studied law in England, became India’s first socio-spiritual leader to insist that his followers learn practical arts such as spinning. Prior to Gandhi, India did not have biblical models such as Moses, Joshua, Samuel and David who became political leaders because they were deeply spiritual men who received divine calling to pursue a political career.
- 4 This is elaborated in my forthcoming book, *Must the Sun Set on the West? An Indian Explores the Soul of Western Civilization*. Some of the content is available on CD. Visit www.vishalmangalwadi.com
- 5 A good introduction is Francis Schaeffer’s *Escape From Reason* (Crossway Books)
- 6 Postmodernism has lost confidence in words because the West has rejected its logo-centric worldview. Yet, the fact is that human beings create culture and history because we speak. Words are creative because they presuppose imagination and freedom. Freedom means that our words can be true or false, liberating or deceiving, constructive or destructive. Our words can capture the invisible laws that regulate cosmos because behind the cosmos are words—the Creator’s words. Words create and transform.
- 7 This article is intended for Christian readers. Therefore, it is addressing their concerns. In a lecture “From Da Vinci to Dan Brown: The Decline from Reason to Mysticism” I explain to a secular university how the Bible was the ladder which created intellectual giants such as Leonardo da Vinci and why myth makers such as Dan Brown (the author of *The Da Vinci Code*) are sinking into the perversion of sexual mysticism. For more info please See the 11-part lecture series, “Must the Sun Set on the West?” available from www.vishalmangalwadi.com.
- 8 This article is taken from a chapter in *Truth and Social Reform* due to be released in Transform World USA conference in Houston, TX in November 2008.

Is God to Blame?

by Gregory Boyd

Taken from the book *"Is God to Blame?"* by Gregory A. Boyd.



Why Did God Do This?

This is a book about the mystery of why tragic things happen the way they do. So it seems fitting to introduce this book with one of the toughest *why* questions a person can ever face: Why did a woman's precious baby die in childbirth?

Melanie's Story

Several years ago, after delivering a sermon on living with passion, I was approached by Melanie, a distraught middle-aged woman. "I have lost my passion for God and my joy in life," she said. "I used to be a fired-up Christian who poured herself into her faith, but now I feel nothing toward God and I'm always depressed. I used to run marathons, but now I'm a blimp. My husband and I used to be so close," Melanie informed me, "but now we're almost total strangers. Church used to seem so exciting, but now it bores me to death. I used to love to read the Bible and pray, but now I find both laborious and aggravating. I just feel dead!"

Melanie desired the passion I preached about that Sunday. She wanted to know how to come alive again.

After some conversation I learned that Melanie's downward spiral began about four years earlier when she lost a baby in childbirth. As long as she could remember, Melanie had wanted to mother children. She didn't marry till her mid-thirties, so to beat the biological clock she and her husband immediately began trying to have a baby. After three years with no success they discovered that because of a medical condition, it was unlikely they would ever be able to conceive a child. Melanie's extreme disappointment was short-lived, however, for quite remarkably Melanie conceived. "We thought it was a miracle," she told me.

Her pregnancy went forward without incident. But her delivery had tragic complications. The umbilical cord was wrapped around her baby's neck,

choking the child to death during the delivery. Their miracle had turned into a nightmare, and their life turned into one tormenting why question. Why would God miraculously give them a child, only to take the baby away while coming into the world? Why did this happen to them? Even more tormenting, why was God preventing them from conceiving again? Melanie's biological clock had all but wound down in the four years since the tragedy.

After about two years of struggling with doubt and depression, Melanie and her husband sought answers to their questions from a Bible teacher she knew and respected. The answer they received was consistent with the theology she had grown up with.

"God has a reason for everything," this teacher confidently told her. "There are no accidents in God's providence," he continued. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, and you just have to trust that God knows and always does what is best. The hand that smites is also the hand that heals. You just have to trust him."

When Melanie asked what good the Lord might have intended by taking her baby and now leaving her without a child, the teacher suggested there was a lesson she and her husband were to learn from this event. "When the timing is right—and God's timing is always right—and when you've learned what God wants to teach you, perhaps then God will bless you with another child," the teacher intoned. "Or perhaps it's simply not his will for you to have children."

Melanie accepted this instruction as gospel truth. She felt guilty because she had difficulty trusting "God's plan." The fact that her life, including her relationship with God and her husband, was slowly deteriorating intensified her guilt. Melanie had come to me with a question about passion, but at this point in our conversation her request changed. She wanted me to help figure out what lesson God might be trying to teach her. Maybe

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this would enable her to have a baby and get her life back on track.

A Different Perspective

My heart broke as Melanie told me her story. “Let me get this straight,” I said. “You’re supposed to believe that God gave you this strong desire to mother a child and then miraculously set you up to believe he was going to fulfill this desire, only to kill the baby he gave to you?” “Well, yes,” Melanie sheepishly replied. I asked, “Does that seem like something a loving God would do? Can you picture Jesus doing that to someone?” Melanie was completely stunned by my reply. She had been under the impression that the perspective of her upbringing and of the teacher she consulted was basically the perspective of all Christians.

“What are you saying?” she asked. I took Melanie’s hand and looked deeply into her eyes as I continued: “Melanie, do you really believe that God kills babies to teach parents a lesson? And do you really think that God is now refusing to give you any more children until you learn this lesson—though he won’t tell you what the lesson is?” “And the clock is running out, so I need to figure it out fast!” Melanie interjected with a desperate tone of voice.

I began to weep when Melanie said this. I felt such grief for the tormented state her theology had put her in. “Wouldn’t a good, wise and loving teacher at least tell you what you’re supposed to learn?” I could almost hear the wheels turning in Melanie’s brain as her eyes stared into mine for a long moment. Finally, as though confessing a deep sin, Melanie spoke up, this time with a tinge of anger in her voice. “To be honest, I know we’re not supposed to get mad at God. And I’ve been afraid to admit this before because it might further jeopardize God’s willingness to give me a baby. But this whole thing makes me mad. I just don’t get it!”

Then, like an erupting geyser, Melanie exploded with anger and frustration. She pulled her hands away from mine, threw them up in the air and with a loud voice protested, “God lets irresponsible teenage girls and women strung out on crack have babies, but *I* have a lesson to learn! I mean, we must *really* be terrible people to be disqualified from having kids when the bar is set so low!”

When Melanie was done venting, I said to her, “Given your picture of God, Melanie, I’m not at all surprised that you’re finding it hard to have a passionate, loving relationship with him. If I can be perfectly frank with you, what you were told to

believe sounds like a sick game. God takes your child and refuses you future children till you learn the lesson you’re supposed to learn—but he won’t tell you what the lesson is. This doesn’t sound like a wise and loving teacher, to say the least. How are you supposed to be passionately living for God when *this* is the picture of God you’re trying to live for?”

“Are you saying God didn’t do this to me?” Melanie asked.

“I have absolutely no reason to think this,” I replied. “The one thing I know for sure is that God is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. When we see him, we see the very heart of God. And everything I know about Jesus leads me to believe that God grieves over this situation even more profoundly than you do, if you can imagine that.”

Melanie was all ears as I continued. “When things went wrong in people’s lives, whether it was about their physical or spiritual condition or some tragedy that happened to them, I don’t recall Jesus ever looking for the hand of God in it. Instead, he had compassion on suffering people and treated them like casualties of war. He expressed God’s heart by bringing relief to people’s suffering. Melanie, I know the Lord is deeply in love with you, your husband and the child you lost. And now he wants to heal you and restore the abundant life he died to give you.”

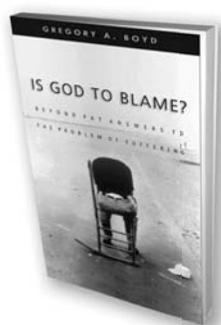
My words were striking a deep chord. Melanie’s rage turned to tears, which in a few moments turned to loud cries.

For several minutes she hugged me as she wailed. In between her cries she kept on repeating, “He didn’t do this to me? God didn’t do this to me?” The picture of God that had tormented Melanie for the last four years and had sucked the passion out of her life was beginning to change.

Of course Melanie and her husband would have many questions that would need to be addressed over time—questions that this book wrestles with. But the foundation for their transformation was being laid. In time, Melanie and her husband would learn to define who God is by looking at Jesus Christ. And though grief for their lost child would remain, they would in time learn to live with passion for Christ once again.

What is Your Picture of God?

Our attitude toward God is completely determined by our mental picture of God. Like Melanie, many people have trouble passionately loving and living for God because they have a mental picture of him that inspires anything but passion. Indeed, many



people who refuse to believe in God do so because they have a picture of God they find untenable. They assume that believing in God means accepting that he orchestrates the kind of misery Melanie was experiencing. If God exists, they reason, he would be responsible for all the evil in the world. Everything that happens would be the working out of his plan. And since these people can't with integrity accept that, they reject God.

This book offers a very different picture of God. Though it will be new to some, it really is not new at all, for it is rooted in the biblical depiction of Jesus Christ. When someone asked Jesus to show him God the Father, Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). In essence Jesus was saying, "I am your picture of God." Many people construct their picture of God from various philosophical premises or their own life experience. But while philosophical thinking can be helpful and life experiences cannot be ignored, Jesus tells us that our understanding of God should be centered on *him*. This is why the Bible calls him the "Word," the "image" and the "exact imprint" of God (Jn 1:1; 2 Cor 3:17-4:6; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).

The foundation for this book—and I believe for Christianity as a whole—is the claim that *God looks like Jesus*. As we will see, Jesus spent his ministry freeing people from evil and misery. *This is what God seeks to do*. Jesus wars against spiritual forces that oppress people and resist God's good purposes. *This is what God does*. Jesus loved people others rejected—even people who rejected him. *This is how God loves*. Jesus had nothing but compassion for people who were afflicted by sin, disease and tragedy. *This is how God feels*. And Jesus died on the cross of Calvary suffering in the place of sinful humanity, defeating sin and the devil, because he passionately loves people and wants to reconcile them to God. *This is how God saves*.

This Christ-centered picture of God is very different than the one Melanie was encouraged to believe. This God grieves with Melanie, seeks to free

her from her pain and endeavors to help her move beyond this tragedy by embracing a future full of passionate living. If we keep our focus on Jesus, we have no reason to assume God put Melanie and her husband through this tragic ordeal. Rather, we have every reason to assume God was and is at work to *deliver* Melanie and her husband from their ordeal.

People who become fully convinced that God looks like Jesus begin to love and are empowered to live for God with a passion they never dreamed possible before—regardless of their life experiences. And when they think this through consistently, they find that this revelation frees them to let go of *why* questions. These questions are almost always unanswerable. But they are not unanswerable because God is so mysterious—his character and purposes are unambiguously revealed in Jesus Christ—rather, they are unanswerable because creation is incomprehensibly complex.

My prayer is that you will (1) discover a passionate relationship with this beautiful God and (2) learn to live effectively in an ambiguous world where why questions can rarely if ever be adequately answered. 🌐



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Frontiers

Great Things from a Small Beginning: Celebrating 25 Years of Ministry to Muslims

by Greg Livingstone

We had no idea how to organize a new mission agency. What practices should we take from other agencies? What innovations were called for? In the early days, some critics exclaimed, "Frontiers! Isn't that the group that doesn't believe in training? Isn't that the irresponsible mission that will have 'bodies strewn across the Muslim world'? They send people out with one way tickets!" We were not highly esteemed in those days. At least our bureaucracy was minimal. We told new workers already on their way, "After you get to the field you can finish the paper work!"

In those early days at the US Center for World Mission, the entire Frontiers staff was myself, plus Bob Sjogren, his brother Jack, Debbie Greenawalt, Donna and Beth (two single ladies Bob picked up on his way to Pasadena) and Gary Taylor. Gary left his posh job in Washington, D.C., a sacrifice I'll never forget.

We rented two rooms on the US Center campus. Bob, back from Libya, slept in the shower room.

In May 1982, the North African Mission (Arab World Ministries) decided, "Greg, you must stop recruiting; we're full." Their system could only take so many applicants at a time. I thought, "Cut off my right arm, but don't tell me to stop recruiting." What was clear to me was that God was making His move to launch a harvest in the Muslim world.

So I walked the beach in Ventura for three weeks seeking God's green light to start a new mission agency. "There are already many good agencies; why another, Lord?" I realized that there was no agency committed to ALL Muslim peoples,

Greg Livingstone founded Frontiers at the US Center for World Mission in 1983. He recalls how it all began.



Greg Livingstone (center)

focused on church planting with ONLY Muslims. The need was focus.

I was 42—old enough to know it was not going to be fun. We didn't have any money. I alone had experience among the staff. Being new (and from California) was not helpful to get donors or prayer partners!

Returning to the USCWM, I was immediately approached by Steve Holloway who invited me to take over the newly formed MIO-Maldives Islands Outreach. But I was an Arab World guy. I didn't know much about the other Muslim regions.

In the meantime, Rick Love was looking for an agency for his vision. "Hey bro!" (he was from the beach community). "We're going to the Sundanese." I said "Great, I have a heart for Sudan." Rick frowned, "Not Sudan, the 30 million Sundanese in Indonesia." "Oh, right." Then John announced that he was going to China. "This is a mission to Muslims." I responded. "Yeah, we're going to the Muslims in China!"

Bob Blincoe is US Director of Frontiers. He and his team opened the work for Frontiers in northern Iraq in 1991.

The parade of young people at the Center was determined to go where the Church wasn't. They wanted to go to India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Sulawesi, Bahrain, Mauritania. Could they join Frontiers?

As self-appointed General Director all I did was see where the parade was going and run around in front of it.

Was there attrition? No more than any other agency. Most who stumbled, bounced back. As Dick Scoggins says, "Good people bounce back." Most all of us in Frontiers have gone through disappointments and difficulties; what would one expect in pioneer church planting in new territory of Muslim lands? Did we fail to "be there" for some colleagues when they needed us? Of course. But we were committed to upgrading, and we did. Still today, we keep asking, how can we do it better?

Too soon to celebrate; too soon to quit.

I'm thankful that the 1100 adult members of Frontiers today are just as dissatisfied as I have always been. We will be until we see our Lord honored by a great harvest of Muslims bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus. Our third International Director, Tim Lewis is himself a "son of the USCWM." He will push us "farther up, further in." Why? Because if we are honest, this is no time to be satisfied with 160 house churches established among Muslims from Mauritania to Mindanao.

The Remaining Task

by Bob Blincoe

We still ask the three questions that Greg Livingstone challenged us to answer on the first page of his book, *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities* (1993, Baker Academic):

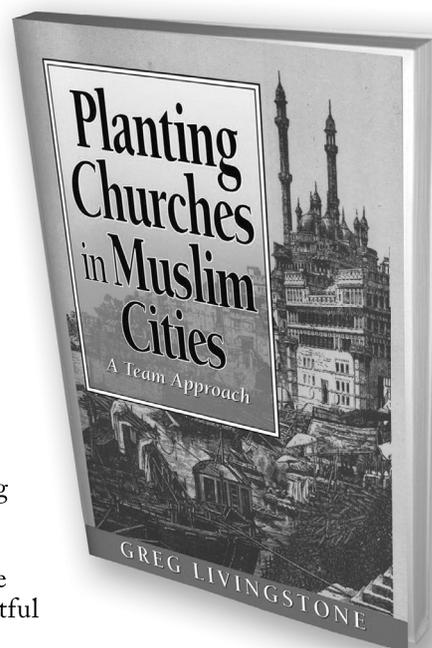
- Why are Muslims the exception to the success the church of Jesus Christ is experiencing worldwide?
- What is the God of the Bible intending to do about it?
- How is it possible to establish the first congregations of redeemed Muslims where today they do not exist?

Greg Livingstone's call to the "frontiers" in 1982 was to begin bringing the hope of Jesus Christ to Muslims. We coined a phrase: "Muslims, it's their

turn." Many fine agencies have since then caught the vision: Consider that 18 agencies with missionaries among Muslims met in Thailand in March of 2007. At this meeting a clearer understanding of the "most fruitful practices" in Muslim church planting began to emerge, and more agencies than ever before are adopting these fruitful practices.

Today Frontiers team leaders are being appointed from 18 different countries. With 800 field workers on 160 teams, Frontiers has begun work among more than 100 Muslim people groups. I was privileged to begin one of these works, among the Bahdini Kurdish people in Northern Iraq. But this brings us to the "dissatisfaction" that Greg Livingstone still feels: We are restless to begin new work where it is needed most, that is, among 247 utterly unengaged Muslim People Groups with populations greater than 100,000. This is the Task Still Unbegun. Every one of the "247" will need a special effort by a dedicated person or team. There are literally some American Christians who are not supposed to be in church next Sunday; God is calling them to move into neighborhoods where there is no church.

We still feel dissatisfied with the progress of the Great Commission in the Muslim world. We can see the 'frontiers' more clearly now. The 'frontiers' are in the hard places: Pakistan, Afghanistan, north India, Chad and Sudan, the island of Sumatra. We are stirred in our hearts by the work of the Gospel that remains unbegun. And we sense that we are not alone. Many will hear their hearts thump loudly when they read Paul's words, "It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand'" (Romans 15:20-21). 🌐



Raising LOCAL Resources

by Glenn Schwartz

Where does your help come from?

According to Psalm 121 (NIV) the answer to the question in my title is, “My help comes from the Lord” (verse 1). What a wonderful privilege for all of us to have as our provider the Maker of heaven and earth (verse 2).

For my purpose here, I would like to ask the question in a slightly different way. In terms of cross-cultural missionary work or community development I would like to ask: “From how far away does appropriate help come?”

For the past several days I have been participating in a conference of rural development specialists who work in some of the most needy parts of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. It has been inspiring to hear story after story about the success they are having in mobilizing local resources for the work they are doing. Even where they acknowledge that outside resources are needed, one after another spoke about the importance of keeping outside resources to a minimum in favor of discovering and mobilizing local resources.

This led me to reflect on the question: What is the best source of help to meet a need? On page 145 of my book entitled *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement*, I introduce what I call the principle of “geographical proximity.” By this I am advocating that the best resource is that which is nearest to the need. This is important for two reasons. First, the local source might be the most culturally appropriate and acceptable. One only has to consider the issue of importing western “yellow maize” into parts of Africa where “white maize” grown locally is much more acceptable.



Glenn Schwartz is Executive Director of World Mission Associates, based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The author welcomes interaction by e-mail at glennschwartz@msn.com.

A second advantage of mobilizing local resources is that the blessing of being the provider goes to the local giver, not to an unknown donor far away. Think about your own needs. If some unknown person far away would step in every time you have a need, then they—not those close to you—would get the blessing. It is worth reflecting on just who receives the blessing for giving.

In my writing about geographical proximity I recommend that if one part of a country needs assistance during a drought (for example), that the best source of help is another part of the same country that might have excess grain to share. If a whole country is in need, another nation nearby might be able to help. If one region of a continent needs help, other regions of the same continent should be the first to help. Unfortunately, sometimes the need is met from global resources because that is in the best interest of the farmers (or donors) far away who have excess grain at their disposal. When this happens, nearby resources are too often disregarded. I recognize that in times of extreme crisis, the resources that can be most quickly mobilized should be given priority. But even then, the global resources might take the longest to be delivered.

Several years ago part of East Africa was in crisis. Churches in both Zambia and South Africa provided assistance by sending planeloads of relief supplies to East Africa. Africa helping Africa has one important implication: the blessing goes to people in Africa! How often have needs been met from global resources when they could have been met from within the country, region or continent?

Those of us who speak about avoiding or overcoming unhealthy dependency have sometimes been accused of being selfish and stingy—only wanting to keep things for ourselves. What about turning the argument around? Those who insist on doing the giving from global resources may be depriving others of the blessing of giving that they would otherwise be theirs. Or is it that those with the global resources want to keep the blessing for themselves—at the expense of those who could help with local resources if they were given the opportunity to do so?

We must take care that sympathy for the far-away donor who needs to give does not drive the dependency syndrome. I suggest that true compassion cares for both the dignity of the recipient and those nearby who could help if they were given the opportunity. 🌐

I welcome interaction from those who wish to exchange ideas. My e-mail address is glennschwartz@msn.com.



Learning from the Global Family of God

Greg H. Parsons



We were all ready. We'd just finished seminary and had a sense of excitement about the future. One of my classmates was "Sam." Sam and I had both been to southeast Asia during a short term a few years before. He sensed God's call to return, so he was on his way to China as a professional and he has been there (or near there) pretty much since.

After years of language learning to become barely comfortable enough to try, Sam met with a believing family and sought to help them grow in their understanding of the Bible. He and the father, "Lee," didn't agree on certain areas of doctrine or practice, but they remained friends as Sam loved and accepted him. This impressed Lee, because at times, Chinese believers split over the smallest things. Lee had not seen this kind of commitment for the sake of the Gospel and their relationship. Both of them were learning lessons.

As is typical, Lee and his wife both had to work. In order to be with his children, Lee took a job working at night in a coal power plant. He would shovel coal to keep the plant running. In between shoveling, he would read his Bible.

All night long.

As Sam reflected on this with me recently, he noted that he was pretty sure that Lee knew a lot more about the Bible than he did. Yet Lee was gracious and thankful for Sam's faithfulness and friendship. Of course, Lee was faithful to his family and to the Lord. At one point, he was arrested and spent a few months in jail. Thankfully it was not longer.

As Sam and I talked further, we were considering the things we'd learned since those days in seminary. Sam's becoming fluent in Mandarin taught him a different perspective on, among other things, the Greek and Hebrew we had learned in seminary. Life has a way of providing wisdom and perspective over time, if we are willing to learn.

All too often, however, we get entrenched into our own perspective. We can't imagine how someone else might view something differently. We might,

for example, say to this family in China, "Why doesn't the wife stay at home? They must be doing something wrong, if she can't be with her children when they are young." We draw the line in the sand, or in stone. Moms who don't stay at home are automatically out of God's will, right? Now we are polarized.

Actually, Sam felt they loved and cared for their three daughters more than many "stay at home moms" in the states. All three are serving the Lord in various kinds of ministries now. Of course staying at home is not a clear, Biblical requirement of God's people. Certainly, Lee and his family are not living above their means like many here do. Lee's family was barely making it financially.

When we get polarized over issues in Christian circles, it terminates learning. We draw our line in the sand and cover our ears on issues that are simply clear to us. We value areas of practice over relationships—like "worship wars" in many churches. While we like it black and white, there seems to be many more areas that are gray than we would like to cope with.

I hold my foundational views firmly, but lightly. I don't push them on others. I work with those who don't push their views on me.

Relating to brothers and sisters from other cultures who do not hold to all of our perspectives helps us learn more about what God is doing around the globe. It has solidified my own perspective in the process, as well as expanded my thinking in new areas. By considering the perspective of faithful, God and Bible-pursuing people from different backgrounds, we are taught new lessons in the family of God. 🌐



Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He and his wife have been on staff at the USCWM since 1982.