

Christian Odyssey

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Exploring Life and Faith

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Illustration by Ken Tunell

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Michael Morrison

EDITOR: Tom Hanson

SENIOR EDITORS

Paul Kroll
Randal Dick
Terry Akers

DOCTRINAL ADVISOR: John E. McKenna

ART DIRECTOR: Ronald Grove

Published by the Worldwide Church of God
President: Joseph Tkach
Church Relations: Ronald Kelly

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Letters to the Editor

New gold vein

A quick note of thanks for promoting the article from Thomas Torrance on Justification in the April edition of *Christian Odyssey*.

I've read it once, and wow, it is like a rider's reins on a fiery stallion, for it calls me to rethink everything about my thinking.

Perhaps it is like discovering the edge of a new gold vein, and in so doing it may give a whole new

direction of my future digging for gold.

So much for my words. I'm trying to express my gratitude to you all for sharing such a gem of an article. Keep that sort of thing coming.

Now I'm off to feast on it again, and again, and again in order to comprehend what it is saying to me.

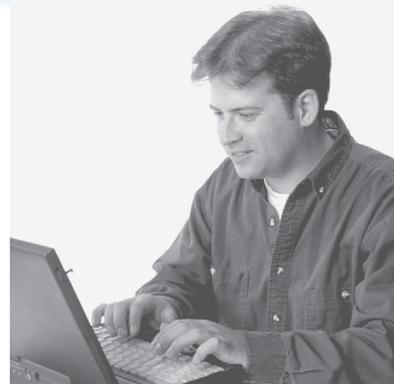
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‘Let nothing be wasted’

By Joseph Tkach

Jesus saw a large crowd coming toward him, and he asked Philip, “Where will we buy enough bread for all these people?”

Jesus already knew what he was going to do, but he asked the question because he wanted Philip to think about it and learn something from it (John 6:5-6, my paraphrase).

John included this story so that we could think about it and learn something from it, too.

Spiritual significance

Let’s fast-forward into the story so we can see what Jesus already knew would happen. He miraculously fed the large crowd, and they later asked Jesus to prove that he was the Messiah (v. 30). Jesus told them, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven—bread that gives life to the world.”

“Well then,” they said, “give us some of this bread” (v. 34). Their response was like the Samaritan woman at the well: When Jesus said that he had water that would give eternal life, she said, “Give me some” (John 4:15), and eventually Jesus said that he was talking about himself.

And in John 6, Jesus also reveals that he is talking about himself: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35). Jesus is the bread who came down from heaven to give life to the world. Just as bread is nourishment for our physical lives, Jesus is the source of spiritual life and energy.



The miracle of feeding the large crowd pointed toward a spiritual truth, and that is why Jesus did it, and that is why he wanted Philip to think about it, and that is why John tells us the story.

Jesus did many miracles that John did not include in his book, but John includes certain ones to help us have faith in Jesus (20:30-31)—not just believe that Jesus did certain things in the past, but that we would trust him with our eternal future. The miracles are signs pointing us toward Jesus’ spiritual significance.

Let’s look at the story again.



When Jesus said that he had water that would give eternal life, the Samaritan woman said, “Give me some” (John 4:15), and eventually Jesus said that he was talking about himself.

It was almost Passover, John tells us (v. 3). Bread was an important feature of the Passover season, but Jesus is revealing that salvation does not come from physical bread, but from Jesus himself.

Jesus asked Philip, “Where are we going to buy bread for these people?” And Philip answered, “It would take (roughly) five thousand dollars to buy enough bread for this crowd!”

Andrew did not speculate about the price, but he must have been good with kids. He had already befriended a boy and learned that he was carrying a little extra food. “This boy has five small loaves and two dried fish, but that’s not near enough, is it?” Perhaps he was hoping that the crowd included a few more boys who had the foresight to bring lunch.

“That’s good enough,” Jesus said. “Have everybody sit down.” So everybody did. Jesus thanked God for the food, and gave everyone as much food as they wanted (v. 11). It was quite a crowd—larger than many towns are today—and the people began to talk among themselves, “Surely this is the Prophet” (v. 14).

They thought that Jesus was the leader Moses had predicted (Deut. 18:15-19)—and yet, ironically, they were not willing to listen to him. They wanted to make him a king by force—forcing him into their idea of what a Messiah should be—rather than letting Jesus do what God sent him to do.

When everyone had enough to eat, Jesus told the disciples: “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted” (John 6:12).

Doesn’t this strike you as a little odd? Why would Jesus want to gather all the leftovers? Why not let the people keep the extra? Or let it be a bonanza for the birds and chipmunks?

The disciples picked up 12 baskets full of leftovers, John tells us. **See Nothing Wasted, page 4**

Nothing Wasted

Continued from page 3

us—but then he says nothing about what they did with all those half-eaten loaves. I think there’s something going on behind the scenes. What is there in the spiritual realm that Jesus does not want to go to waste? I think that John gives us a clue later in the chapter.

Walking on water

The disciples took a boat back home—but they left Jesus stranded there, without any other boat to pick him up (vs. 17, 22). John does not indicate that anything was out of the ordinary with this, so I conclude that the disciples often left Jesus alone, presumably because Jesus wanted to be left alone sometimes. He needed some time on his own for prayer, no doubt. (As an aside, I might point out that this is also true for pastors today—they need some time to themselves, even though there will always be people who want more of their time.)

As far as I know, Jesus was not in a hurry. He could have walked back to town on the roads that went around the lake. Or he could have waited for a boat, like the other people did (v. 23). But he walked on the water, apparently to make a spiritual point.

In Matthew, the spiritual point is faith, but John says nothing about Peter walking on water or sinking and being saved by Jesus. What John tells us is that when the disciples took Jesus into the boat, “immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading” (v. 21). This is the feature of the story that John wants us to take note of.

If Jesus could do teleporting, why did he need to walk on water? Why not just zap to wherever you want to go? What’s the point?

You might have a better idea, but here’s mine: The story tells us that Jesus is not limited by physical circumstances, and as soon as we accept Jesus, we are spiritually at our destination. It may not look like it, but Jesus is not limited by physical appearances. Spiritually, the reality is set; it has been done.

The bread of life

The people searched Jesus out again, looking for another free lunch, and Jesus encouraged them to look for spiritual food instead: “Do not look for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life” (vs. 24-27).

“The Son of Man will give you this food,” Jesus said, but instead of asking for this gift, they asked what they should do (v. 28). They were asking for works instead of grace.

“What does God want us to do?” they asked, wanting to meet the requirements of the messianic age. Jesus told them: “God wants you to believe in the person he sent” (v. 29). The messianic age has already begun, so don’t try to work your way into the kingdom—just trust Jesus, and you’ll be in. Just take that one step, and you’ll be there!

Could it really be that easy, the people wondered. They asked for evidence—as if feeding 5,000 people had not been enough! “What miraculous sign will you do that we might believe you?” As an example of a miracle they might be willing to believe, and in keeping with the Passover season, they

mentioned a miracle of bread associated with the Exodus—Moses gave them manna (bread from heaven) to eat. Some Jews thought that God would provide manna in the messianic age, too.

But Jesus said that the real bread from heaven doesn’t just feed the Israelites—it gives life to the world! (v. 33). “Give it to us,” they said, probably wanting to examine it to see if it met their qualifications.

Jesus replied that he was the bread from heaven, the source of eternal life for the world.

The people had seen Jesus perform signs, and they still did not believe in him (vs. 33-36), because he did not meet their qualifications for a messiah.

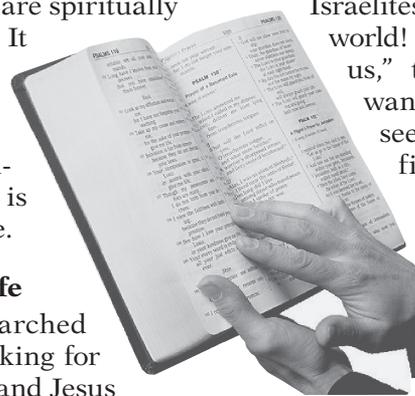
Why did some believe, and others did not? Jesus explained it as the work of the Father: “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me.” He repeats this idea in verses 44 and 65: “No one can come to me unless the Father draws him ... unless the Father has enabled him.”

Once the Father does that, what does Jesus do? He tells us his role when he says, “I will never drive them away” (v. 37). Perhaps they can leave on their own, but Jesus will never push them away. Jesus wants to do the will of the Father, and the Father’s will is that Jesus will lose none of the people the Father has given him (v. 39). He does not let anyone go to waste.

Since Jesus does not lose anyone, he promises to raise them up at the last day (v. 39). This is repeated in verses 40, 44 and 54. Jesus stresses that the person who believes in him has eternal life (vs. 40, 47).

Eating his flesh?

Jesus also says that people who



Jesus said that the real bread from heaven doesn't just feed the Israelites—it gives life to the world!

eat his flesh and drink his blood have eternal life (vs. 51, 53-56). Just as he was not referring to the stuff made from wheat when he called himself the true bread, he was not referring to muscle tissue when he spoke of eating his flesh.

Some of the Jews wondered, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52), but in the Gospel of John, it is often a mistake to take Jesus’ words in a literal sense. For example, Nicodemus asked, How can people enter their mothers’ wombs and be born again? (3:4). Similarly, the Samaritan woman said, Give me some of this living water so I won’t have to come back to this well (4:15).

They pushed the literal meaning, but the story shows that Jesus meant something spiritual. Here in chapter 6, Jesus said, “The flesh counts for nothing; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (v. 63). Jesus is not making a point about his muscle tissue—he is talking about his teachings.

And his disciples seem to get the point. When Jesus asks them if they want to go away, Peter an-

swers: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). Peter was not worried about having access to the flesh of Jesus—he focused on the words of Jesus. The consistent message of the New Testament is that salvation is experienced through faith, not special food and drink.

From heaven

Jesus repeats one more point several times in this chapter: that he is from heaven (vs. 33, 38, 41, 42, 46, 50, 51, 58, 62). The reason that people should believe in Jesus is because he has come down from heaven. He is absolutely trustworthy, because he does not just have a message from heaven, but he himself is from heaven.

The Jewish leaders did not like this teaching (v. 41), and some of Jesus’ disciples could not accept it, either (v. 66)—even after Jesus made it clear that he was not talking about his literal flesh, but rather his words themselves were

the source of eternal life. They were troubled that Jesus claimed to be from heaven—and therefore more than human.

But Peter knew that he had nowhere else to go, for only Jesus had the words of eternal life (v. 68).

Why did he know that only Jesus had these words? Because only Jesus is “the Holy One of God” (v. 69).

That is the reason his words are trustworthy; that is the reason his words are spirit and life. We believe in Jesus not just because of what he says, but because of who he is.

We do not accept him because of his words—we accept his words because of who he is.

Since Jesus is the Holy One of God, we can trust him to do what he says he will do: He will not lose anyone, but will raise us all at the last day (v. 39). Even the crumbs will be gathered, so that nothing goes to waste. That’s the Father’s will, and that’s something worth thinking about. 

‘The flesh counts for nothing; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.’

Put people at the heart of ministry

By James R. Henderson

People were at the heart of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He touched the lives of others and let their lives touch him.

Ministry to others flowed from him because that was who he was—a ministering servant, someone who lived a life of caring involvement. The condition of people affected him emotionally. Matthew 9:36 records that Jesus was “moved with compassion” for the harassed, weary multitudes.

Our motivation for ministry must, through Christ, be transformed from being duty-driven to being compassion-driven, from results-focused, duty-driven tasks toward relationship-focused, compassion-driven desire.

Jesus put people first. How they felt mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually mattered to

him. He entered into their joy and shared in their suffering.

God sees people as important and precious, which is why he seeks to save us and to use us for his great work. How do we view people? Is winning them for Christ just a means to the end of our pleasing God? Or do we view them as God views them—precious people whom we want to serve with compassion? Precious people with whom we want to share the joy of Jesus’ love.

Ministry and mission are about relationships, not about tasks. Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us into Christ-centered relationships.

In Jesus’ love, may we put people at the heart of our ministry. 

James R. Henderson is WCG mission developer for Africa.

Hope Floats

By Brenda Plonis

Mercy Ships first captured my attention at an exhibition in the United Kingdom.

A picture of a white ship loomed over before and after surgery photos of a baby born with a cleft lip. I thought of my own cleft palate, sewn together in a Western hospital two decades before.

I was fortunate. In a world where cleft lips and palates are the second most common birth defect, my mother gave birth to me in a society where my problem was repairable; hospitals affordable. Many are not. These are the ones Mercy Ships seeks to help—the poorest in lands where health care is but a dream, and poverty is an everyday burden.

Eventually, I boarded the *Anastasis* to participate in a five-month Discipleship Training School (DTS) program, working in the Communications Department.

My team included writers, photographers, videographers, graphic designers and media liaisons. My department tells the public about

Mercy Ships, by taking photos, writing stories, hosting media and providing tools such as books and multimedia CDs for crew and staff to use to raise their own support. All crew members onboard pay their own way, from captain to cook, doctors



Doctor performs surgery on cleft lip.

to deckhands, ensuring that donations directed toward the ministry are used for the people we serve.

Sailing with Mercy Ships offered me the chance to visit some of the richest countries in the world, including Norway, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom. I also visited some of the poorest—Benin, Togo, Gambia, Senegal and Sierra Leone—the lat-

ter of which is ranked as the poorest country in the world, after a decade-long civil war ravaged the land and destroyed the infrastructure.

Those countries rich in material wealth were often just as poor spiritually as the ones we visited



for our outreach locations.

During my stint as media liaison and writer, I hosted numerous international journalists, radio stations, television crews and photographers from Germany, Holland, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States, including *Reader's Digest*, *Dateline NBC* and a host of others.

I learned that while we considered Africa our official outreach location, Europe needed to know the good news of the gospel as much as anyone. Every time I hosted a journalist and took one for a tour of the ship, I shared why I chose to use the gifts God gave me to serve the poor.

Several weeks after Sept. 11, 2001, a journalist named Rita arrived at the gangway in Rotterdam, Holland. She wanted to know more about Mercy Ships, but as I took her for the usual tour, she explained that she wasn't sure what her angle was going to be for her story—she just knew that she needed to visit the ship that afternoon.

For the next two hours, we
See Hope Floats, page 16



Mercy Ships International: Caribbean Mercy

Principles of effective children's ministry

BRING the children

By Ted Johnston

I am privileged to serve with Dr. Jeb Egbert as national co-director of Generations ministry.

In this ministry we share with leaders and members of Worldwide Church of God congregations this admonition: May we all be active in advancing the church's ministry to and through children.

Proactive

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14).

We see this admonition lived out proactively in the early church. Children were such an integral part of the church in Ephesus that Paul, writing to that congregation, addresses the children directly (Ephesians 6:1-3).

That Paul would do so is exceptional, particularly in a culture that viewed children more as property than as valued persons.

In Ephesians Paul wrote: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (6:4). Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their children. For that reason, children's ministry should involve, wherever possible, ministry to and through parents.

Sadly, however, many children are missing one or both parents.



A March 4 article in *USA Today* ("Poor Choices Create 'Baby Mamas' ") notes that in the United States, "nearly 24 million children (34 percent) live apart from their biological father." To

make matters worse, many parents who are physically present are either unwilling or unable to nurture their children in the Lord.

Effective children's ministry

In such a setting, what can an individual Christian do to minister effectively to children? What can a congregation do?

Research by the Barna Research Group indicates that 75 to 85 percent of adult Christians in North America made their initial faith commitment before age 15. Children are particularly open to Jesus and his love. It is an opportunity that the church must not miss.

While there are no magic formulas or programs, some key principles can be derived from Scripture and ministry experience, summarized in the acronym B.R.I.N.G. Together, we can B.R.I.N.G. children

into a relationships with their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Bless them with Jesus' love

Christian ministry is Jesus' love in action. Christ's love is the motive, the method and the hoped-for result. Children's ministry seeks to show

Jesus' love to children, so they can know him and come to love him too.

Relate to them at their level

God has created children to develop in a particular way intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and physically.

For us to be effective in ministering to children, we need to reach out to them in ways that are appropriate to their stages of development.

Involve them and Nurture them

Children's ministry is not merely programs (such as Sunday School classes and nurseries, as helpful and essential as such programs are).

Children's ministry is about positive, supportive and encouraging relationships in the love of Christ.

Inside the church, we can share the life of the congregation with them, involving them fully in the church's worship, fellowship and outreach. Outside the church we can involve them in our recreation, our jobs and our hobbies—we let them see us living life as Christ's followers. In this way, they learn from us as an apprentice learns from a master craftsman.

This is Christian discipling.

It involves modeling and instruction—and it takes lots of time and focused attention.

Grant them increasing ministry opportunity

Children's ministry is ministry both to and through children. **E-See, BRING the children, page 9**



Can you do that in school?

Separation of Church and State

By Karen C. Seddon

It has been said that we all have two things in common: death and taxes. Believe it or not, we share a third commonality—the public schools.

Whether or not you have attended public schools or your children have attended, you have paid the taxes to fund them, which makes all of us stakeholders in the public school of America.

The Christian Educators Association, International (CEAI) of which I am Central Florida area director, exists to demonstrate God's love and truth to the educational community. We equip, empower and encourage educators to reach their God-given potential.

For those students, parents and teachers who are in the public schools, we would like to offer encouragement to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Being a Christian in a public school is difficult at times, but this article is designed to help Christians realize that much of what we have come to think is unlawful in the public school is not.

For instance, the most frequent concern comes in the form of separation of church and state. Did you know that the term "separation of church and state" does not exist in our Constitution or Bill of Rights?

The first amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Two words must be understood: *establish* and *prohibit*. We would like to use the synonyms *encourage* and *discourage*. When edu-

cators are in the public schools, they are wearing their government hats. They cannot establish or encourage religion in the classroom.

Constitutionally protected prayer

On Feb. 7, 2003, then Secretary of Education Rod Paige sent the following letter to U.S. school officials to explain the facts about Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools. For more information visit the U.S. Department of Education web site at <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml> and type "prayer" in the Search ED.gov box.

Dear Colleague:

As part of the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), I am issuing guidance today on constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of this guidance is to provide State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs) and the public with information on this important topic. The guidance also sets forth and explains the responsibilities of SEAs and LEAs with respect to this aspect of the NCLB Act. Most significantly, as a condition of receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), an LEA must certify in writing to its SEA that it has no policy that prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public schools as set forth in this guidance.

The guidance clarifies the rights of students to pray in public schools. As stated in the guidance, ". . . the First Amendment forbids religious activity that is sponsored by the government but protects religious activity that is initiated by private individuals" such as students. Therefore, "[a]mong other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other noninstructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities." Public schools should not be hostile to the religious rights of their students and their families.

At the same time, school officials may not "compel students to participate in prayer or other religious activities." Nor may teachers, school administrators and other school employees, when acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, encourage or discourage prayer, or participate in such activities with students.

In these challenging times, it is more important than ever to recognize the freedoms we have. I hope that this guidance can contribute to a common understanding of the meaning of the First Amendment in the public school setting. I encourage you to distribute this guidance widely in your community and to discuss its contents and importance with school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Sincerely,
Rod Paige
Secretary of Education

What most public school administrators and leaders have forgotten is the second clause: or prohibit the free exercise thereof.

In 1962, the Supreme Court disallowed state-sponsored prayer. This Supreme Court decision has been misunderstood over the last four decades. Some have come to believe that the very mention of God's name is disallowed.

The second word in the First Amendment that needs to be taught is *prohibit*. Teachers and administrators cannot prohibit or discourage free speech in the public schools. As long as students do not interrupt the instructional time, they do not shed their First Amendment rights at the school house door.

Students are allowed to read their Bibles during silent reading periods in class or pray in the halls or over their meals in the cafeteria. They may gather for group prayers such



Teens pray at school [Photo by Tom Hanson]

as See You at the Pole or to bless their teachers and administrators.

The school can neither encourage nor discourage the private prayers of individuals. Christians

do not have to be ashamed to be Christians in the public schools or lead secretive lives. They must however, be wise and humble as they spread Jesus' love across their campuses.

Shine your light and display your fruits as we prayerfully turn our public school system over to the true Reformer. 🦋

School Prayer and the Law— It's Probably Not What You Think

By Mike Feazell

You may have seen the bumper sticker that reads, "Get Prayer Back Into the Public Schools."

A bumper sticker like that might cause someone to think either that there is no prayer in public schools, or that prayer is not allowed in public schools. Indeed, a good many people seem to think that prayer in public schools is illegal.

But it isn't, and it never was.

The law allows you to pray all you want, but it also prevents you from imposing your prayers on others who don't want to hear them. And that's a good thing. People need freedom of religion, but they also need freedom *from* religion, that is, freedom from somebody else's religion having the power to impose itself on you.

It was to obtain freedom from religious oppression that many came to America, where they could practice religion as they wished without a state church oppressing them. Thank God for America!

Here are some suggested revisions of the school prayer bumper sticker:

- A. "Form a private prayer group at your school. It's legal."
- B. "God hears silent prayers too. Tell your kids."
- C. "It's Legal to Pray at School. But It's Not Legal to Compel Others to Listen. Thank God."

BRING the children

Continued from page 7

fective children's ministries equip children to minister to others—to peers and even to those who are older. By involving children actively in the ministries of the congregation, children develop a sense of ownership, a sense of responsibility to the congregation and to its disciplinmaking mission.

Many tools are available to help us in children's ministry. But no tool is more important than prayer. May we all pray that God will impress upon our hearts the high calling to BRING children to Christ. It's for God's glory and for the children's everlasting benefit. 🦋

Exclusive interview with

Robert Farrar Capon, author of *Genesis: the Movie*

Pastor Tim Brassell interviews Robert F. Capon, Christian author and scholar.

All of Grace

Part Five

Tim Brassell: What would you say is the most important key to interpreting the parables of Jesus?

Robert Capon: Getting the Christ character right. Who is the Christ figure in the Prodigal? The father. Who is the Christ figure in the Good Samaritan? The Samaritan. The Christ figure in the Lost Sheep is the shepherd.

And the point is that it's not the lostness of the sheep that drives the parable—it's the goodness of the shepherd. The shepherd loses the sheep and acts out of his own goodness to alleviate his own loss. The finding, the saving, are all in his hands—the sheep do nothing but get lost. It's all grace.

TB: You like to cook; you've even taught classes and written books on cooking. Let's say God has a favorite recipe—what would it be?

RC: It's the recipe of creation and redemption. That is the recipe that runs through the whole Bible. The idea of coupling the New Testament with the Old and taking both seriously is to say you really don't want to stop the recipe in the middle.

The Son of God is both the Cre-

ator and the Redeemer of his creation from the very beginning of the recipe. The perfect creation he fashions through the Spirit by the will of the Father and then hands back over to the Father is what the Bible is all about, Old and New Testaments, beginning to end.

One complete and perfect recipe for a new creation, a redeemed creation, from the very start.

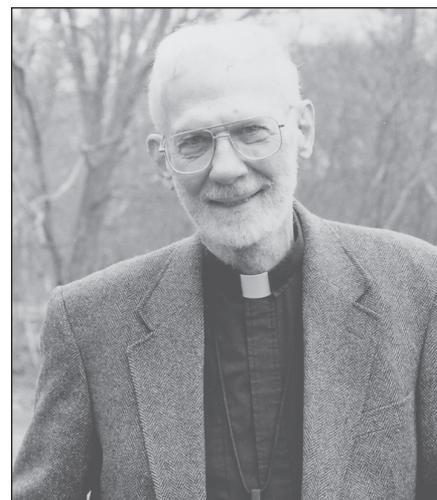
TB: What advice would you give American Christians today?

RC: Well, to go back to the analogy of the Bible as a movie, I would say just watch—listen and watch the film. Try to get rid of all the things that you've been told it's about and just watch it unfold as it tells its own story. And never think you have to get it all nailed down and figured out. Just watch and let it tell its story to you.

For example, Augustine was careful when he said the first chapter of Genesis is creation in the mind of God, and the second chapter is creation in time and space.

He went on to say that you can take it the other way around if you want. That's important. Remember that you can always take it the other way. In other words, I don't have to be right about it. The film itself is genius, and we must stay in our seats and sit at its feet.

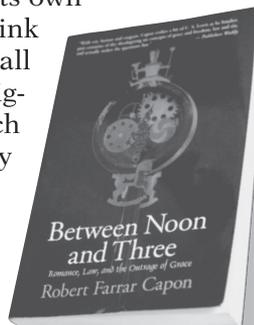
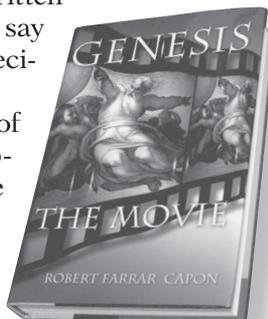
TB: What do you think the min-



Robert F. Capon



Tim Brassell



istry focus of the American church should be today?

RC: Get people to watch the film. That's it. And help them watch it. Help them get rid of bad watching habits. The brilliance of orthodoxy is that it does see Scripture, every bit of it, as the Word of God, the Word of God incarnate as a matter of fact. And every bit of scripture is part of the same great story, the same great recipe of creation and redemption. 🦋

Robert Capon Books

Autographed copies of Robert Farrar Capon's books are available from the author by clicking on the Amazon.com "used and new" button and going to seller "quietchina" for your purchase.

Jesus Christ of ‘one substance with the Father’

— Council of Nicea, May-August, 325

May 20, 325 was a watershed date in the history of the Christian church. The first international Christian council was convoked at Nicea, a city in what is today northwestern Turkey.

The council dealt with a number of issues, such as the controversy concerning the timing of celebrating Easter. However, the most important reason was to discuss the nature of Jesus Christ.

Apostolic writers had not systematically described Jesus Christ's relationship to the Father in a theological or formal way.

The subject might not even have arisen were it not for the influence of Greek philosophy in the Roman Empire, and even on some Christian thought. To the Greeks, the perfect God was unchangeable and could have nothing to do with a flawed humanity or our world of matter, which is changing and corruptible. Some Christians began to think of God in the same vein as the philosophers, that is, that God was immutable, impassible and fixed in his being.

In the early 300s, a man named Arius was a popular presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt. He taught that the Logos or Word, who became incarnate as Jesus Christ, was a uniquely brought forth and highly exalted being.

Arius' teaching began what was at first a local quarrel in the church at Alexandria between himself and his bishop, Alexander. But bishops outside Egypt soon began to side with Arius against Alexander. In the years 318 to 320 the contest between the two views broke out into the open.

While Arius included the Word in the created order, Alexander placed all of creation on one side and the Father and the eternal Word on the other. While the motto of the Arians regarding the Logos was “there was when he was not,” Alexander taught that the Word existed eternally with the Father.

Emperor Constantine appealed for agreement, but the controversy continued to rage. The emperor sent letters to Christian bishops throughout the empire, urging that they come to Nicea to settle the issue.

Among the most prominent at the council were Alex-

ander of Alexandria, the main opponent of Arius' teachings, and Eusebius of Nicomedia, the chief spokesman for the Arian position. Among the attendees was a young deacon, Athanasius of Alexandria. While he was unable to participate, not being a bishop, the council formed the prelude to his central role in later articulating the Trinitarian confession of the church.

Most of the bishops were repelled by the idea that Jesus Christ could be thought of as what to them amounted to a created being. When they worshiped Christ, they did not worship a creature—they worshiped God. They were saved not by a created being, but by God. The bishops proceeded to craft a creedal statement of faith concerning what they believed about the Son of God. They wanted the statement to absolutely exclude the claims of Arius that the Logos was a product of the will of God rather than of the very essence of God.

The bishops wrote in their statements that Jesus Christ was “God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.” A key phrase was “of one substance,” which translates the Greek *homoousios*. This means that what God is in his essence, Jesus Christ the Son of God is also. Eventually all the bishops except for two signed the creedal statement, believing that it contained

the ancient faith of the apostolic church and that it was an accurate reflection of the truth of God's nature to which the New Testament points.

The deity of the Holy Spirit did not come up for discussion at Nicea. The two bishops who opposed the statement were deposed and exiled. Arius and his writings were also anathematized and he was exiled to Illyria. The controversy continued, however, until the council of Constantinople in 381, when the Nicene creed was ratified once and for all.

The creedal statement at Nicea regarding Christ's divinity and co-eternal existence with the Father formed the basis of the Nicene Creed, which after 381 became the most universally accepted statement of the church's confession about the being and nature of God. 🦋



Council of Nicea, A.D. 325

A Lesson About Storms

Mark 4:35-41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." . . . A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

By Mike Feazell

The crises of life have often been compared to stormy seas. They come upon us whether we like it or not. They terrify us. They knock us around and threaten to destroy all our stability and security. We don't know whether we can survive them. And we don't know how long they will last.



At least, that's how a storm at sea would be for most of us. For Jesus, it was just a chance to grab 40 winks.

As Mark tells the story, the disciples were terrified that the boat was going to break up and everyone would die. But Jesus was asleep (on a cushion no less, Mark notes, adding to the contrast between Jesus' tranquility and the disciples' panic), apparently oblivious to their pending doom. They rouse him and cry, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (v. 38).

Of course, Jesus quiets the storm with a word, but then he chides the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v. 40).

Some of the lessons in the story are obvious. Jesus has power over the storms of life, experiences them alongside us, loves us, saves us from them and wants us to trust him more than we do.

Let's look at a lesson that might not be so obvious. Storms don't worry Jesus. He's right there with us during them, but he's perfectly calm about them. He isn't terrified; he isn't impatient; he isn't worried. In fact, he's so calm, he's asleep. To us, he seems to be asleep at the switch. We wonder why on earth he doesn't get up and do something. We start to wonder whether he



Illustration by Ken Tunell

even knows the trouble we're in. Whether he cares. Whether he even can do anything about it. Whether he's really all he's cracked up to be.

Like the disciples, we believe he's there. In the disciples' case, they could actually see him lying there asleep. We don't have that luxury. We believe he's there, but most of the time he seems just as asleep as he was during the storm that day on the Sea of Galilee. The psalmist had the same lament in Psalm 44:23-24: "Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

Maybe that's why Mark included this story. The not-so-obvious lesson is that Jesus was just as much in control, and the disciples were just as safe in his hands, while he was asleep as while he was awake.

Most of the time, life seems like a relentless voyage from one storm to the next. At least it does for me, and I expect it's the same for you. One thing I've learned about myself is that during storms I'm usually a scared rabbit just like Jesus' disciples were.

But I'm also learning that I can take heart in knowing that Jesus isn't scared, and he isn't depressed. He might be asleep, or he might not be, but either way, like the song says, "He's got the whole world in his hands." Even if he doesn't wake up and quiet the storm, I'm safe with him. And if he does wake up and quiet the storm,

See About Storms, page 13

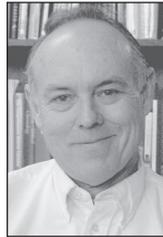
The Great Divorce— C.S. Lewis

By Terry Akers

The subject of hell has intrigued the Christian church throughout its nearly 2,000-year history.

This doctrine has long been a source of scholarly debate, resulting in widely varying conclusions, depending on the guiding church tradition or interpretative method used.

The evangelical church's consensus on hell is that it exists, and that it represents alienation from God. Details as to the exact nature and duration of hell, however, are open to speculation, limited only to one's imagination and religious preconceptions. The Worldwide Church of God publishes a concise overview



of the doctrine of hell titled, *The Battle Over Hell*. It is available free of charge at www.wcg.org/lit.

C.S. Lewis' stylized treatment of heaven and hell in his book, *The Great Divorce*, is a masterful work of fiction.

Lewis writes in the preface: "I beg the readers to remember that this is a fantasy ... the transmortal conditions are solely an imaginative supposal: they are not even a guess or a speculation at what may actually await us. The last thing I wish is to arouse factual curiosity about the details of the after-world." As this book demonstrates, however, fantasy can be an effective tool for proclaiming the gospel.

Lewis' theological perception (*Mere Christianity*) and vivid imagination (*The Chronicles of Narnia*) come together here in an astonishing vision of heaven and hell. *The Great Divorce* upholds the scriptural teaching that those who end up in hell put themselves there by ultimately refusing to receive the redemptive grace God makes available to them in Christ.

This is in contrast to teachings that, in the minds of many, present God as a vindictive monster rather than as the loving Creator-Redeemer revealed in the Bible.

In Lewis' "imaginative supposal," even in hell, lost souls remain free to accept God's grace.

The story chronicles the responses of a busload of hell's inhabitants to an imaginary tour of heaven. It offers a window into the fallen human psyche, with its pettiness, vanity and capac-

ity for self-deception, where some humans keep finding creative ways to say no to God's yes for them in Christ, through pride and selfishness—maybe forever.

The Great Divorce is entertaining and full of wisdom. Most of all, it makes one think. The vignettes from the text, with their penetration into the human condition, make excellent topics for small group discussion. Lewis weaves imagery with dialogue as he illuminates Christian concepts of heaven and hell with clarity and beauty.

This 1946 classic has stimulated an interest for many in seeking greater theological understanding regarding creation, reconciliation and redemption. Lewis' book has inspired deeper reflection beyond the narrow confines of literalism and the equally treacherous ditch of pure symbolism. 🦋

About Storms

Continued from page 12

he's probably going to say: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

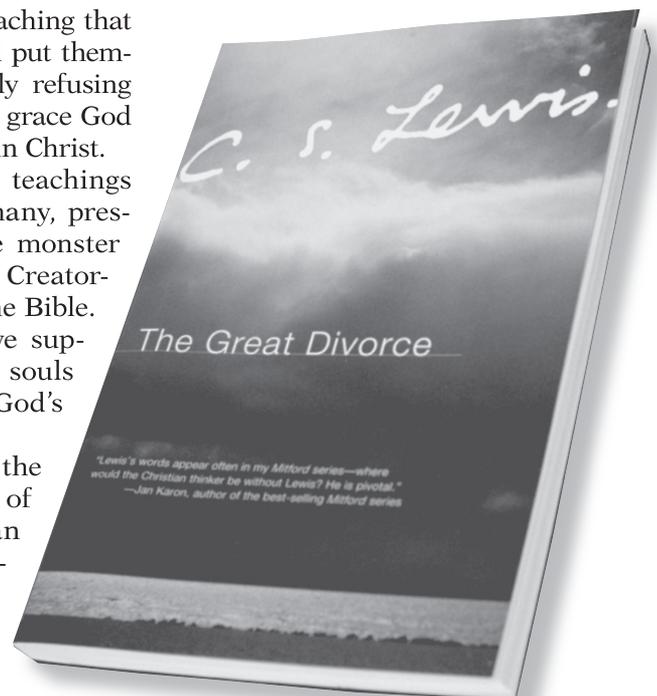
And I can live with that. 🦋

Reflection

1. Does it sometimes seem that God is ignoring you when you need him most?
2. Has a trial you've gone through made you stronger spiritually?
3. Do you feel that Jesus should keep you from going through trials?
4. When was your faith most tested?
5. Why does God let us suffer trials if he loves us?

Further reading

Where Is God When It Hurts? by Philip Yancey



Setting a good example

a study of 1 Peter 3

By Michael Morrison

In chapter 2, Peter advised readers to have such good behavior that unbelievers will have nothing bad to say about the gospel. To set a good example, Christians should submit to civil authorities, and slaves submit to their masters. In both cases, Peter uses terms that are appropriate to the first century, such as emperor and slaves. He now continues this theme by addressing wives and husbands.



Exhortation for wives

“Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

When Peter says “in the same way,” he means that women are to submit just as men should, each to the appropriate authorities. Citizens submit to government offices, slaves to their masters and wives to their husbands. However, this does not always mean obedience. If a husband told a wife to sin, she should not obey. Peter is speaking generally, not making an absolute rule.

The point is that women should set a good example. When husbands see that Christianity causes wives to be cooperative rather than rebellious, they will be more willing to listen to the gospel, and eventually follow their wives into the faith.

Peter’s next advice is also found in non-Christian writings: **“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit”** (vv. 3-4). Peter does not require women to wear ugly clothes and have

unkempt hair, nor to avoid jewelry. Rather, he is saying that women should not see external things as their source of beauty. Real beauty is in a person’s attitude, for it is **“of great worth in God’s sight.”**

Peter supports this point with biblical examples: **“For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves”** (v. 5). They had inner beauty whether or not they had external beauty and jewelry, as some no doubt did.

“They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master” (v. 6; see Gen. 18:12). Abraham sometimes obeyed Sarah (Gen. 16:2; 21:12), but Peter is here focusing on Sarah as an example for women.

Peter tells the women, **“You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear”** (1 Pet. 3:6). If husbands demand that wives worship Zeus, wives should do what is right, and not submit to fear.



Peter does not require women to wear ugly clothes and have unkempt hair, nor to avoid jewelry. Rather, he is saying that women should not see external things as their source of beauty. Real beauty is in a person’s attitude, for it is of great worth in God’s sight.

Advice for husbands

Peter gives less space to the responsibility of husbands, but what he says was unusual advice in that culture: **“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives”** (v. 7). In the same way as what? In context, it is submission.

Peter encourages husbands to treat their wives **“with respect as the weaker partner.”** In that society, women were almost always weaker. Men were often 15 years older than their wives, more educated and more experienced. Women often married in their early teens, dropped out of school and stayed at home.

Although men in that Greco-Roman culture rarely treated women with respect, Peter tells husbands to respect their wives, not be condescending. Why? Because they are equal when it comes to salvation—they are **“heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.”** Their value to God should make a difference in the attitude that husbands have toward them.

Peter adds another reason that husbands should respect their wives: **“so that nothing will hinder**

your prayers” (v. 7). The way we treat others affects our prayers.

Responding to evil

In verse 8, Peter gives a general appeal to all the believers: **“All of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing”** (vv. 8-9).

If someone treats us wrong, we are to respond by doing good, not by getting revenge. God set the example for us by doing good to us even though we had done evil to him. Peter supports this advice by quoting Ps. 34:12-16: **“Whoever among you would love life and see good days must keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”** (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

Peter has already pointed out that Jesus did not retaliate with threats against his persecutors (2:22-23); here he repeats the need for us to keep our words and our actions in control.

Peter asks, **“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”** (3:13). Unfortunately, some people persecute those who do good, so Peter adds, **“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed”** (v. 14). Persecution itself is not a blessing, but God rewards those who suffer unjustly.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (v. 15). This verse—often quoted in evangelism training—is in a context of how we respond to persecution. When we are persecuted, we should not be ashamed of our faith, but be ready to explain it. The Greek word for “answer” is *apologia*, the word used for a defense in a court of law.

Though we may be treated roughly, we are to reply without anger: **“But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander”** (vv. 15-16). Peter does not want Christians to give the enemy any excuse for their hatred. A gentle answer may reduce their anger by showing them that the gospel is not dangerous.

Peter summarizes by saying, **“It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil”** (v. 17). If God brings us to a point of suffering for following Christ, then it is better to suffer unjustly than to give the persecutors evidence against us.

The example of Jesus

Peter again turns to Jesus as the supreme example of suffering without retaliation. This leads to a digression.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit” (v. 18). We should be willing to suffer for doing good, because Christ suffered for us. Peter notes that although people killed Jesus’ body, they could not kill the Spirit (cf. Matt. 10:28).¹

Peter comments about Noah’s ark: **“In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also”** (v. 20-21). People were saved by the ark, not the water. The water of baptism symbolizes death—we symbolically go into death and rise out of it.

Baptism saves us not by **“the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God”** (v. 21). Baptism symbolizes cleansing, but only spiritual cleansing saves us, for salvation requires that our sins be forgiven.

As a third picture, Peter says that baptism saves us **“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** Christ’s resurrection is the power of life after death (see 1 Pet. 1:3, 21). We are saved through a spiritual union with Christ, and baptism symbolizes that we have joined him in his crucifixion and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:3-4).

The resurrection did not merely restore Jesus to human life—it gave him great glory. He **“has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him”** (1 Pet. 3:22). For aliens and strangers in Asia Minor who were being harassed for their faith in Christ, it is good news to know that he has been exalted into glory, for those who follow him into suffering will also follow him into glory! 🦋

1. I have omitted the oft-debated verses 19 and 20. Peter does not give enough information to be sure what he means, and we do not have the space to detail the extensive scholarly debate.

Questions for discussion

- Will non-Christian husbands be impressed by “purity and reverence”? (v. 1)
- Should wives obey if their husbands want them to wear gold jewelry and fine clothes? (v. 3)
- In what way does poor behavior hinder our prayers? (v. 7)
- Am I prepared to suffer for my faith? (v. 14)
- Am I prepared to give an answer for my faith? (v. 15)
- Are there any exceptions to the saying, “It is better to suffer than to cause suffering”? (v. 17)

Hope Floats

Continued from page 6

walked past the displays of photos, we toured the bridge, walked along the promenade deck and discussed religion. She was searching for something in her heart and wanted to know why I believed what I did.

It was one of the first times in my life that someone asked me so directly why I believed what I did. I said that in the midst of the chaos surrounding the world and my life—I know my God is a rock I can cling to. I explained to her when nothing else in the world made sense, Jesus made sense to me.

Rita reminded me why God called me to Mercy Ships in the first place—to bring hope to those who need it most. And she re-

minded me that no matter where we are in the world, we are all on a mission for Jesus.

I often told people onboard I felt my heart was more in Europe than in Africa. While I knew that God called me to the ship, I didn't necessarily feel called to Africa. But returning to Europe every summer for our public relations and procurement phase made me realize why I accepted this job.

My heart ached for the teens I saw on the metro (subway) in the United Kingdom, for the workers cycling the streets in Holland, for the partygoers strolling through the streets of Spain—for all of those who did not have a hope to cling to.

I often think of Rita, for to me, she represents the nameless, faceless thousands of people around the world who look like they have it all together on the outside, but internally they have a war with their

souls as they search for the truth.

I hope by now she's found what she's been looking for. I felt Christ near on that day she came to visit—and I pray she knows Christ now.

Since the author's first stint on the Anastasis, she has also served Mercy



Before (left) and after surgery.

Ships on land, in Washington, D.C., as a grant writer, and also at their head office in East Texas.

Several months ago, she returned to the Anastasis to train an all-new communications team, and most recently, transferred to the smallest vessel in the fleet, the Caribbean Mercy, to head up the communications team onboard.

For more information on donating your time, resources or skills to Mercy Ships, check out their web site at www.mercyships.org. Average crew fees are roughly \$300 a month. You can contact Brenda by e-mail at brenda.plonis@mercyships.org. 🦋

Lectionary Readings for May 2005

Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) is May 5, but Jesus' ascension into heaven is often celebrated on the following Sunday. Pentecost comes after that, 50 days after Easter.

May 1

Psalm 66:8-20
John 14:15-21
Acts 17:22-31
1 Peter 3:13-22

Psalm 104:24-35
John 20:19-23
Acts 2:1-21

May 8

(Ascension Sunday)
Psalm 47
Luke 24:44-53
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:15-23

May 22

(Trinity Sunday)
Genesis 1:2-2:4
Psalm 8
Matthew 28:16-20
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

May 15

(Pentecost)
Numbers 11:24-30

May 29

Deuteronomy 11:18-28
Psalm 31
Matthew 7:21-29
Romans 1:16-17; 3:22-28

Is God to Blame?

"The ultimate goal of creation ... is for people to receive, replicate and offer back to God the perfect love that God eternally is." *Is God to Blame?* by Gregory A. Boyd, InterVarsity Press, 2003 (p. 37). 🦋