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Illustration by Kreg Barr

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Downsizing
Maybe Christians haven't been thinking small enough

I have suggested before in this space that we American Christians ought to learn to think smaller. I hope I am wise enough to reflect on my own advice. Even since the Tower of Babel, sinful people have preferred to think big. We have, to use the Psalmist’s terminology, “exercised ourselves in matters too great for us.” We may not literally have shaken our fist in God’s face, and we would have been shocked if someone had referred to our ambitions as “rebellion.” Yet if we were to examine our aspirations with brutal honesty, we’d be embarrassed how much of the Babel-like “Let us make a name for ourselves” pervades what we do.

Big, of course, isn’t necessarily bad. In fact, it’s probably a God-given trait in humans to want to set new records in bigness. Whether it’s a Big Mac or a big SUV, whether the pyramids in Egypt or the Sears Tower in Chicago, whether the annual earnings of Microsoft or the number of sources that can be scanned by Google in just a single nanosecond—God made us to enjoy having our minds stretched with numbers and dimensions we can barely comprehend.

But big all too easily becomes bad—and it can happen in at least two very opposite ways. Big is bad when it makes us forget what is even bigger. And big is bad when it makes us forget what is very small.

Babel prompted its big dreamers to forget about an even bigger God. Such is so easily the case for us as well. It is one of the reasons we at WORLD are skeptical about the United Nations and the whole idea of a one-world government. It’s why we are cautious even about an overweening federal government, where largesse and control become too closely linked. When we have a government that pretends it can give us everything we need, it makes it just that much harder to sing with conviction, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

But big government is hardly the only giant out there threatening to divert our attention from an even bigger God. Big corporations, big entertainment conglomerates, big universities—even good things like big families and big churches—all these can deflect and reroute our trust from God Himself as the source of everything we need. When that God commands us, “Don’t have any other gods before Me,” a good place to start checking is with those influences that have become the biggest in our lives. God wants to be bigger than any of them—and one definition of the secularizing of a culture is the extent to which that culture’s people forget how big God is.

But big is bad also when it makes us forget what is very small. We forget that nations and communities and companies and churches and even families are all built one person at a time. So it’s easier to march to Washington with a quarter million like-minded people than it is to sit down for an evening with a neighbor who disagrees with the issue that was central to our march. It’s more dramatic to get caught up in mass evangelism than it is to speak personally about Jesus to someone in our neighborhood we’ve known for 15 years. It’s easier to sign a national petition against homosexual marriage than it is to learn to love a spouse more genuinely.

We’ve all bought too easily into the lie that “big” automatically means “effective.” In fact, “big” very often becomes just another word for “anonymous”—an anonymity that itself often leads to ineffectiveness. Getting swallowed up in a megachurch, for example, makes it all too easy to blend into the crowd where no one can hold you accountable for doing your part.

A recurring theme in the Bible is that it is the task of God’s servants to be faithful in small things—and then to trust a wise Father to assemble all those little matters into the accomplishment of His global purpose.

In 1992, three presidential elections ago, I suggested here that we Christians try to live the 1990s “telling the truth, living chastely, paying our bills on time, living within our incomes, caring for the needy who are closest to us, worshipping faithfully. Little things, all of them. But if we really did them, instead of getting regularly sidetracked with impossible global visions, who knows what might happen? We might even take over the world!”

Well, we didn’t—at least not during the ’90s. Maybe we just weren’t thinking small enough.
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**TORTURE** The Bush Administration on June 22 released a stack of classified documents detailing a secret, two-year debate over the proper handling of captured al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters. President Bush insisted he had never authorized torture, but the 100-plus pages of memos revealed that top advisers had argued for a broad range of interrogation techniques that they admitted might be construed as "cruel, inhuman, or degrading."

The White House hoped the documents would quell the torture controversy, but that seemed unlikely to happen. While one set of guidelines—adopted after more than a year of debate—permitted only relatively mild interrogation techniques, the rules applied only to prisoners held at the U.S. military base in Cuba.

As critics demanded past and current guidelines at other prisons such as Abu Ghraib, former detainees stepped forward with horror stories of their own. A Saudi national just released after 10 months in Abu Ghraib told reporters he'd watched a fellow inmate suffer "immense torture. The Americans stripped him of his clothes in winter time, sprayed him with water, then threw him to the ground and took turns at beating him until he was unconscious."

There was no corroborative evidence of that account, but Democrats on Capitol Hill vowed further investigations of the widening scandal (story, p. 18).

**RELIGION** The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) shifted briefly into damage-control mode last week after a series of news reports misrepresented a political-action manifesto on which the group had been working for three years. The document, "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civil Action," is designed both to encourage NAE's members toward public engagement, and to guide them in their efforts. But a pair of June 20 news items by the Associated Press and CBS News reported just the opposite: that NAE was calling on Christians to "step back from politics" (story, p. 22).

**SOCIAL ISSUES** With Senate debate on the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) finally set for July 12, the public debate over the issue is showing signs of wear. A Barna poll released in June showed Americans evenly split on whether to amend the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. More than a third of those polled said they'd never even heard of the FMA. That may explain, in part, why the issue isn't causing as much citizen furor on Capitol Hill as conservatives had expected in the wake of the gay-marriage controversies that roiled in Massachusetts, San Francisco, and copycat cities in recent months. Meanwhile, Senate conservatives pushing the FMA would need an estimated 15 more "yes" votes to pass the measure before the end of the legislative session, now just six weeks away (story, p. 23).

**CULTURE** Racy television and radio programming may soon become a lot more expensive—at least for those airing it. The Senate last week voted 99-1 to fine broadcasters up to $3 million per day for airing indecent material. The legislation increases the current maximum penalty for a single incident, from $27,500 to $275,000, with fines increasing with each incident until the $3 million limit is reached. A similar House measure sets fines at $500,000. A conference committee will hammer out the differences between the two bills. "We're going to have to take action because the broadcasters won't police themselves," said Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), the bill's sponsor.

**POLITICS** Although Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland, under threat of impeachment, announced his resignation on June 21, he's not out of the woods yet. The once-popular Republican still faces a federal corruption probe involving millions of dollars in state funds. His resignation choked off a political career that spanned three decades (story, p. 24).

**SPACE** SpaceShipOne rose only 400 feet above the earth's atmosphere and its flight...
lasted just 90 minutes, but its voyage last week could usher in a revolution in space travel. The mission’s backers hope that, as the first privately funded space flight, SpaceShipOne’s successful trip will lead to civilian space tourism. The three-seat craft has enough room to carry paying customers, and it will likely return to space within two weeks in order to prove reusability and reliability. Governments now no longer have a monopoly on space travel, said George Whitesides, executive director of the National Space Society: “The door to space is finally open to the rest of us.”

**AIDS** President Bush announced that Vietnam will be the 15th country to receive aid under his $15 billion Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The original plan targeted 14 countries—12 in Africa and two in the Caribbean—but Congress mandated another in January. For months rumors swirled that India would take the 15th slot, but administration officials said they chose Vietnam because it’s on the cusp of an epidemic. Cases are predicted to rise from 130,000 today to 1 million by 2010.

**NORTH KOREA** U.S. negotiators at six-party talks in Beijing in late June prepared to offer North Korea new incentives for dismantling its nuclear weapons programs. The seven-page proposal would give Kim Jong Il a “preparatory” three months first to seal and close his nuclear facilities. South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia would then start shipping heavy fuel to the North for energy purposes, and the United States would make a provisional offer not to invade or topple Mr. Kim. Talks about lifting U.S. economic sanctions in place for decades, and normalizing relations, would follow. In return, the North would have to allow nuclear inspectors full access to its plutonium enrichment sites to keep talks and fuel shipments going.

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**How about real diversity?**

**FOLLOWING THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER’S LATEST SURVEY, which shows the public’s continued distrust of the American media, one might think the press giants would be more careful about their public associations and agendas. One would be wrong. At the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association Convention in New York (June 24-27), the list of big media supporters is impressive and also disturbing. CBS News anchor Dan Rather is among the headliners. Other media supporters include The New York Times, CNN, Time Inc., National Public Radio, Bloomberg, The Washington Post/Newsweek, ESPN, Comcast, Hearst Newspapers, Newsday, NBC/NBC, ABC News, several individual newspapers, and Fox News (where I am a contributor and show host).**

Calls to several of these media organs seeking information about their support of the convention were mostly not returned. A CNN spokeswoman, Christina Robinson, told me she didn’t know how much money CNN had contributed to the event, but she assured me that CNN is committed to “diversity.” She said CNN has a “recruiting booth” at the venue. A New York Times spokesman acknowledged that paper’s sponsorship of the event at the “editorial level” but did not know how much money the Times is contributing, though he said the paper regularly offers panelists and speakers to journalistic gatherings.

If one reads the press release about the convention, it is clear (to me at least) that this function is more about advocacy than journalism; more about shaping the image of “sexual minorities,” as they like to call themselves, than about accurate reporting. The National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association claims that it has more than 1,200 members and 23 chapters in the United States, with affiliates in Canada and Germany. It is a front for placing gay activists in newsrooms to shape the way their issues are covered. Anyone who protests such advocacy risks being labeled a “bogot,” the all-purpose buzzword that can send editors cowering.

What should trouble mainstream journalists is the extent to which much of the big media kowtows to the homosexual activists. There is no similar outreach to people with different religious and political perspectives. There is no “recruiting” for heterosexual, churchgoing, pro-life, conservative Bush supporters, for example. Now that would be true diversity.

There’s a lot of talk these days about ethics in journalism following several scandals involving plagiarism and made-up stories. But the public’s major concerns about the media are not being addressed, or even discussed. Journalistic subgroups, which appear to the public to be for the purpose of advancing legislation and cultural change, do not help with journalism’s credibility problem. They add to it. —Cal Thomas | © 2004 Tribune Media Services
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>You must have a bus ministry.</td>
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<td>You must have praise choruses.</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<td>You must humble yourself before God.</td>
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Phone fanatics

In Bahrain, phone numbers are apparently becoming status symbols. The Agence France-Presse news service reports that a businessman who specializes in selling mobile telephone and license plate numbers is selling the number 91119 for $13,200. The entrepreneur, Abdullah al-Hammadi, has sold about 5,000 high-status numbers since starting his business in 1988, including a license plate number for $74,000.

Dirty old man

A Vietnamese man is going for a record that few would want to hold: world's longest hair. Tran Van Hay, 67, has not had his hair cut in 31 years—or washed in six years—and it is currently 20 feet long. If Guinness World Records confirms the length at 20 feet, Mr. Tran, who usually keeps his mane tied up in a scarf, would beat the current record by nearly four feet.

Car trouble

Loaded gun? Check. Cash bag? Check. Bandana for mask? Check. Accused bank robber Knute Falk had almost all the details taken care of when he allegedly made his first heist. But when he stepped outside a Bank of America branch in Beaverton, Ore., to make a getaway with his impressive haul of $188,665, he noticed the detail he had forgotten: Mr. Falk had parked the getaway car too far away.

He then returned to the bank and demanded keys from bank customer Steven Sturtevant. But when Mr. Falk couldn't figure out which key operated the car, he returned again to ask. By this time, police tracked down the transmitter in the stolen loot and arrested Mr. Falk just as he began his getaway. Mr. Sturtevant says Mr. Falk told him he would leave the keys under the front seat when he was finished with the car: "He was very polite."  

Whining at Winer

Thousands of bloggers, or online journal writers, are furious at blog pioneer Dave Winer, with one blogger calling him an "egomaniacal blowhard" and another accusing him of "blog murder."

His crime: He decided last month to stop hosting 3,000 blogs on his servers—a service he had provided for free since 2000. He said time constraints and poor health prompted the decision, but that didn't stop a barrage of whining aimed at Mr. Winer. "I can't have 3,000 people who depend on me for free stuff yelling and screaming at me saying, 'I need this now,'" he said. "I gave and I gave, and I paid a great price."

Den of robbers

Bangkok Buddhists apparently have more clout than American baseball fans. A Thai Buddhist monk drew the ire of locals when he sold corporate advertising space on everything from temple walls to ceremonial fans. Bowing to pressure, Prakru Uthaithamnaree, head monk of Sarnamnaree temple, has agreed to remove the advertisements. "It does not violate any Buddhist rules," he said, "but if Buddhists say it is inappropriate, I will change it."

Hard cell

Perhaps Robert A. Hill just didn't apply enough grease. The West Virginia inmate earlier this year broke a window in his cell, greased himself, and tried to escape through the 6-inch opening. His head and arm made it through, but the rest of his body became stuck—for four hours as prison personnel tried to free him from the tight spot. As part of a plea agreement last month, Mr. Hill will spend 10 to 18 years in the jail—and he'll pay $35,000 to repair the damage to the cell.
CULTURE BEAT

A different World

Around the World in 80 Days is the latest joint venture between Disney and the family-oriented Walden Media. This classic Jules Verne story was filmed before in 1956, winning five Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The Disney/Walden update has merit, but on the whole wastes the potential of this fantastically exotic story.

There's not much objectionable content in Around the World in 80 Days (rated PG for action violence, some crude humor, and mild language), and some of the stunts are fun. But a remake invites comparison to the original, and, by comparison, this new version suffers.

Phileas Fogg remains the central character, but his identity has changed. The original had Fogg (David Niven) as the most proper of proper English gentlemen, exacting and self-controlled to a fault. The new Fogg (Steve Coogan) is a crackpot inventor, good-hearted but misunderstood by the world. (Does every character written for kids these days have to fit that same mold?) Niven's character was calm and unflappable, committed, always to doing the honorable thing. Mr. Coogan's Fogg is always flapped. He's given a more pressing motivation, too: Rather than simply standing by his word and honoring a bet, the new Fogg is promised the top position at the Royal Academy of Science if he achieves the title feat.

More frustrating for the story, though, are the changes made to Fogg's loyal valet, Passepartout, played in the original by the winning Cantinflas and in the remake by Jackie Chan. In both films, much of the action centers on this character, not Fogg. But in Disney's version, Jackie Chan's name appears above the title—making this, as much as anything else, a Jackie Chan movie. It's no exaggeration to say that the film is one long string of fight scenes with varied backdrops.

The first film had one battle, with some savage Indians, as the journey took Fogg and his traveling companions through the American West. The rest of the film took time to drink in the fantastic changes in scenery and culture. Jules Verne's stories are as much about the wonder of new, exotic locations as they are about the adventure of reaching them. That sense of wonder is almost entirely absent from Disney's remake. The new version of Around the World appeals more to audiences interested in seeing Jackie Chan work his martial-arts magic and watching "bad guys" get kicked in the crotch. —Andrew Coffin

Books on screen

Television exists to sell products. In addition to hawk ing laundry detergent and SUVs, television sells books. Lately, a few titles have rated full-fledged commercials, but usually television sells books through interviews with authors on talk shows.

This is a win-win system for everyone. Talk shows need guests; audiences benefit from learning about new books; and authors need free publicity. So when Dan Rather turns all 60 minutes of the venerable news show 60 Minutes into an infomercial for Bill Clinton's new book, My Life, and when the Today show mends its feud with Good Morning America to simulcast an interview with Mr. Clinton, and when all of the news shows and 24-hour news networks cover Mr. Clinton's appearances on all of these other shows, they are selling a lot of books.

The eagerness of broadcasters to turn themselves into Home Shopping Networks to sell Mr. Clinton's book illustrates the media bias in favor of this particular former president. (Why didn't Richard Nixon get on all the interview shows? Or Jimmy Carter?) It also shows the limitations of the visual media in dealing with the written word.

Television likes larger-than-life personalities with charisma and a hint of scandal, so Bill Clinton is its perfect celebrity-author. Other authors that were big on television were Gore Vidal, George Plimpton, and Truman Capote.

But most authors are not "personalities"; they are writers, and coming to terms with the printed page is very difficult for a visual medium. Oprah actually did a good job at this with her book club, since she hosted the authors only after she took her legions of viewers through the process of reading the book and discussing it.

C-SPAN also does a good job with books, typically having a host sit down with an author at a table to talk not about the author but about the book. To be sure, this is not very visual; it lacks television pizzazz. But written words need to be treated by words, whether written or spoken. The visual medium, with its sensationalism and celebrity-mongering, just gets in the way. —Gene Edward Veith
**Tiger tale**

*Two Brothers* is an involving adventure tale for kids with enough subtext and nuance for parents, a rarity among “family” films. It comes from director Jean-Jacques Annaud, returning to familiar territory 15 years after *The Bear*, his celebrated account of an orphaned bear cub in the Canadian wild. This time, Mr. Annaud’s focus is on two Bengal tigers taken from their home in the Asian jungle.

The tiger siblings in *Two Brothers* (rated PG for mild violence), Kumal and Sangha, are separated from their mother and each other by famed hunter Aidan McKory (Guy Pearce). The simple story follows each brother (and, along the way, McKory) in their separate directions, leading up to a dramatic reunion in a royal fighting ring.

Mr. Annaud, known for taking his camera to unexpected places, assembled some remarkable footage of the two tigers. The film’s production notes claim that 99 percent of the animal shots are of real tigers, a remarkable feat considering the human characteristics—even emotions—imparted to the cubs. Despite this, the film never sinks into the kind of cloying sweetness that mars most animal movies. The tigers remain ferocious animals, and the film is stronger for it. In fact, the tigers are more captivating on screen than any of the human characters. Like *The Bear* and Mr. Annaud’s earlier *Quest for Fire*, much of *Two Brothers* is wordless, and it’s most effective during these quiet animal-centric moments.

Even the film’s conservationist message is balanced. McKory isn’t a stereotypical evil white invader. In the end, he lays down his gun, but his transition from hunter to helper happens while still acknowledging the danger these jungle beasts pose to man.

Released in the shadow of much bigger event movies, the overbeat *Two Brothers* may be the most rewarding family film of the summer. —Andrew Coin

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**PLAYING IN A HOME NEAR YOU**

New video and DVD releases for the last two months. Not included are direct-to-video releases, foreign-language films, or classic re-releases.

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<td>Brother Bear (PG)</td>
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<td>Cat in the Hat (PG)</td>
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<td>Catch That Kid (PG)</td>
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<td>Chasing Liberty (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Cheaper by the Dozen (PG)</td>
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<td>Fighting Temptations (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Girl with a Pearl Earring (PG-13)</td>
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<td>In America (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Last Samurai (R)</td>
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<td>Looney Tunes: Back in Action (PG)</td>
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<td>Lost in Translation (R)</td>
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<td>LOTR: Return of the King (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Master and Commander (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Matchstick Men (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Matrix Revolutions (R)</td>
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<td>Miracle (PG)</td>
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<td>My Baby’s Daddy (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Mystic River (R)</td>
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<td>School of Rock (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Secondhand Lions (PG)</td>
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<td>Secret Window (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Shattered Glass (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Spartan (R)</td>
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<td>Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over (PG)</td>
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<td>Timeline (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Torque (PG-13)</td>
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<td>Welcome to Mooseport (PG-13)</td>
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**CRITICS:** Average (on a 0-10 scale, with 10 as best) of reviews from five publications (Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Washington Times, Miami Herald, and Critics.com).

**CAUTIONS:** Quantity of sexual, violent, and foul-language content (on a 0-10 scale, with 10 high), from www.kids-in-mind.com.

Movies reviewed by WORLD are denoted in red. They can be accessed at www.worldmagblog.com.
NEVER STOP...

He was soon to be executed, but he never stopped preaching or learning. In his life and death, the Apostle Paul set the standard for what every minister of God ought to be. At Southwestern Seminary, God-called men and women are pursuing the same goal of igniting hearts on fire for the lost and filling minds with the wisdom of God. Will you join us in this pursuit?

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Do the work of an evangelist...bring the books, especially the parchments. 2 Timothy 4:5, 13
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# Best-Selling CDs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Weeks on Chart</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Worldview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Beautiful Letdown</td>
<td>Switchfoot</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Grunge-lean (as opposed to grunge-light).</td>
<td>“I want to see miracles; to see the world change; / I wrestled the angel / for more than a name, / for more than a feeling, / for more than a cause. / Singing spirit, take me up in arms with you. / You’re raising the dead in me” (“Twenty-four”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wire</td>
<td>Third Day</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exuberant contemporary black gospel.</td>
<td>“Sometimes I wonder why You even love me / and why You ever chose to call me ‘Child.’ / Then I remember / it’s by Your sacrifice / I can say that / I am Yours and You are mine” (“You Are Mine”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spirit &amp; Truth</td>
<td>Bishop Eddie L. Long</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle-of-the-road celebrations of several generations’ worth of evangelical favorites and some that will be.</td>
<td>“If I had a moment to testify, / to tell about His goodness and to tell you why, / why I serve a Savior, why I lift Him high, / why I serve my Jesus, let me tell You why: / He’s been so good to me” (“He’s Been So Good To Me,” featuring Darwin Hobbs).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hiding Place</td>
<td>Selah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle-of-the-road celebrations of several generations’ worth of evangelical favorites and some that will be.</td>
<td>“If I had a moment to testify, / to tell about His goodness and to tell you why, / why I serve a Savior, why I lift Him high, / why I serve my Jesus, let me tell You why: / He’s been so good to me” (“He’s Been So Good To Me,” featuring Darwin Hobbs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Casting Crowns</td>
<td>Casting Crowns</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Worshipteam rock.</td>
<td>“I will love You, Lord, always, / not just for the things You’ve done for me. / And I will praise You all my days, / not just for the change You’ve made in me. / But I’ll praise You, for You are holy, Lord, / and I’ll lift my hands, but You are worthy of so much more” (“Life Of Praise”).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Overall Quality
-更好的生产质量: 虽然Mac Powell的Eddie Vedder impression 不如Scott Stapp’s,但其总体质量仍然更好。
-创作质量: 因为去除了U2的影响，Creed更有可能获得更高的评价。

## Worldview
- “I want to see miracles; to see the world change; / I wrestled the angel / for more than a name, / for more than a feeling, / for more than a cause. / Singing spirit, take me up in arms with you. / You’re raising the dead in me” (“Twenty-four”).
- “Sometimes I wonder why You even love me / and why You ever chose to call me ‘Child.’ / Then I remember / it’s by Your sacrifice / I can say that / I am Yours and You are mine” (“You Are Mine”).
- “If I had a moment to testify, / to tell about His goodness and to tell you why, / why I serve a Savior, why I lift Him high, / why I serve my Jesus, let me tell You why: / He’s been so good to me” (“He’s Been So Good To Me,” featuring Darwin Hobbs).

## In the Spotlight

- Given our cultural climate, it’s hard to imagine Columbia/Legacy’s motives for releasing Are You Bound for Heaven or Hell?: The Best of Reverend J.M. Gates. Consisting of 19 sermonettes (circa 1926-1930), it would seem to cater to no discernible audience, so antiquated a moment of black-American culture does not capture. Yet, despite Rev. Gates’ tolerance-testing lack of eloquence and cultural refinement, his homilies can still hit home.
- With a bluntness and a wit that would later come to characterize the deliveries of comedians like Redd Foxx and Richard Pryor, Rev. Gates (1884-1945) and his trio of respondents identify as impediments to heaven not only debt (“Pay Your Policy Man”) and sloth (“Things That You Can Move Don’t Ask God to Move”) but also an obsession with one’s own appearance (“Kinky Hair Is No Disgrace”) and feminism (“Mannish Woman”). If the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences ever inaugurates a “Politically Incorrect” Grammy, Rev. Gates would make an ideal recipient.
"We are opening the door of amnesty."

Saudi Crown Prince ABDULLAH, who last week offered Islamic militants one month to turn themselves in to authorities or face the "full might" of the kingdom. The state will not give the death penalty to anyone who takes up the offer, he said, and will only prosecute those who have hurt others. State Department spokesman Rick Boucher would not comment on the offer: "This is a decision for the Saudi government to make."

"Say hello to everyone."

Former Iraqi dictator SADDAH HUSSEIN in his first letter to family members since his capture by U.S. forces in December. In the letter, given to Newsweek by one of Saddam's lawyers, the prisoner says his spirit and morale are high.

"I'm deeply grateful to the president and to my country. But I won't fly."

Singer-actress DORIS DAY on why she would not be in Washington last week to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The 80-year-old Ms. Day says she developed a fear of flying during trips with Bob Hope to entertain U.S. troops.

"62."

The number of new low-carb ice cream products introduced in the United States this year through May 3, according to PRODUCTSCAN ONLINE. Only 19 were introduced during all of 2002 and nine during all of 2001.

Experts agree: Ten key factors are converging to turn today's gold bull market into what may be the greatest in history, dwarfing the 1970's gold bull in the process.

Back then, $35 an ounce gold skyrocketed to $850 by 1980 for a stunning 2,261% increase.

Now, today, opportunity has come full circle, and converging factors may again make gold "The Investment of the Decade." They include:

**FACTOR #1/ The Looming Oil Crisis**

Even as the price of oil tops its record highs, the world is heading toward an energy disaster the likes of which may make the 1970s seem like a bump in the road.

Inflation resulting from this higher oil is predicted to send gold on its own record-setting pace.

**FACTOR #2/ Rising Interest Rates, Rising Gold**

Rising rates are inevitable. Fortunately, gold has a track record of thriving on them. During gold's 2,261% rise in the 70s, interest rates rose as well! Gold is your antidote for coming interest rate hikes.

**FACTOR #3/ The Bursting Real Estate Bubble**

With rising rates, the respected magazine, The Economist, recently wrote: "The global housing boom that has propped up the world economy in the past few years is teetering on the edge of a crash."

A real estate correction could leave gold as the only investment game in town.

Seven More Reasons ...and Two Free Reports


Lear Financial
Gold and Silver Asset Management
Ask us about our Golden IRA!
‘I HAVE NEVER ORDERED TORTURE’

WASHINGTON: White House release of memos on prisoner treatment supports the president, but the debate is politically painful  by Bob Jones

MEMO TO PRESIDENT Bush: Public debate over the use of torture may not be good for one’s political health. After weeks of resistance, the White House on June 22 released hundreds of pages of documents detailing years of internal wrangling over how to treat prisoners in the War on Terror. In a flurry of memos among the Pentagon, Justice Department, and White House—some dating back to late 2001—top administration officials scoured the law and searched their souls for a legal and moral definition of torture.

The final guidelines appear fairly benign, but some much harsher tactics were approved and then rejected along the way. That has critics, both left and right, worried about America’s moral standing in the world, international support for the war, and the treatment of American soldiers who fall into enemy hands.

On strictly legal terms, few could argue with the president’s February 2002 memo calling for “new thinking in the law of war.” Stateless terrorist groups like al-Qaeda were not parties to the Geneva Convention, Mr. Bush noted, and thus were not covered by international laws protecting prisoners of war. Nonetheless, the president ordered, the U.S. military would “treat detainees humanely, including those who are not legally entitled to such treatment.”

But what would constitute “humane” treatment? Officials were still wrestling with that question six months after the presidential directive. “Cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment” would not be a crime, argued Assistant Attorney Gen. Jay Bybee in a memo dated Aug. 1, 2002. In order to rise to a strict definition of illegal torture, “Physical pain . . . must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure.”

For much of the next two months, military officials and government lawyers debated a list of acceptable interrogation techniques. “Exposure to cold weather or water is permissible with appropriate medical monitoring,” read an October memo prepared by a task force at Guantanamo Bay, where Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees were being held. “The use of a wet towel to induce the misperception of suffocation would also be permissible.”

Armed with such arguments, a Pentagon policy memo dated Nov. 27, 2002, allowed a wide range of interrogation techniques, including stripping prisoners of their clothes, intimidating them with dogs, questioning them for 20 hours at a stretch, and forcing them to wear hoods. When the memo noted that prisoners could be forced to stand for up to 4 hours at a time, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld scrawled in the margin, “I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?”

Despite his initial hard line, Mr. Rumsfeld—without explanation—backed off two months later. Final guidelines touted by the White House prohibited techniques such as nAKedness and dogs, and even relatively innocuous techniques such as solitary confinement and verbal insults required personal authorization from the Secretary of Defense.

Still, critics contend, the guidelines spelled out on April 16, 2003, applied only to prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, offering no protections to detainees in other facilities, including the notorious Abu Ghab period near Baghdad. The administration still won’t reveal its more widely permitted interrogation techniques, because doing so would allow future
detainees to prepare in advance against their questioners.

Though the wholesale document release was meant to quiet critics, questions are sure to linger. Some military experts worry that by rationalizing away the Geneva Convention, the Bush administration has encouraged mistreatment of U.S. soldiers who fall into enemy hands.

Likewise, the high-level hair-splitting over the definition of torture may hurt the president's cherished reputation for ethics and morality. Already, polls show Americans are evenly split on the question of which presidential candidate shares their values. A very public debate over smothering prisoners with wet towels can hardly help Mr. Bush's numbers.

"I have never ordered torture," the president insisted on the day the documents were released, and nothing seems to contradict that claim. But in politics—as in interrogations—perception is everything.

Open societies vs. closed ones

WITH INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION focused on alleged torture by U.S. troops, China quietly canceled a United Nations fact-finding mission intended to substantiate claims of torture in the world's most populous country.

After a decade of resistance, Beijing had finally agreed to a late-June visit by Theo van Boven, a UN expert who compiled a report citing the Chinese in 170 torture cases. Just days before his departure, however, Chinese officials changed their minds. Maybe later in the year, they said.

Mr. Van Boven's terror dossier was chilling. A typical entry: "Luo Xiaoyu was reportedly detained in the summer of 2000 ... frequently beaten with spiked clubs by guards ... her body was reportedly swollen, her buttocks torn and bleeding and pus kept running down her legs." Ms. Luo is a member of Falun Gong, an outlawed sect that borrows heavily from Buddhism.

Authorities have also begun cracking down on one of China's largest Protestant house churches. On April 17, gunmen in a police car kidnapped its founder, Xu Shuangfu, and are reportedly holding him for ransom. Nine days later about 50 all of Mr. Xu's fellow believers were arrested. Police reportedly tortured and beat to death Gu Xianggao, a 28-year-old among them.

Despite its own brewing torture scandal, the United States can still exert pressure to stop such abuses, says Nina Shea, director of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. "We can say, 'Look, our record isn't perfect either. But the way you handle this when you have abuse is by allowing an open press to investigate, having hearings and [instituting] court proceedings.'

"This is the way an open, responsible society works. We don't deny it, we don't cover it up, and we don't promote the people responsible."
Too late, too soon

IRAQ: On the one side, Iraqis impatient with the long transition to elections in January; on the other, those worried that too much remains undone. Squeezed in the middle: the United States | by Priya Abraham in Washington

A WEEK BEFORE THE MUCH-anticipated U.S. handover of sovereignty, it was business as usual in occupied Iraq. Coalition forces continued to battle insurgents, killing 23 foreign fighters in a Fallujah home. Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists beheaded a South Korean hostage, who pleaded for his life on Al Jazeera TV. And Islamist militants vowed to assassinate the country’s interim prime minister, even before he could be sworn in.

Deadline or not, security remained the Iraqi government’s biggest headache going into the June 30 handover. Prime Minister Iyad Allawi’s interim government offered its blueprint to deal with the insurgency: Imose martial law where necessary, expand the Iraqi army, and create new police and paramilitary units. “They are trying to destroy our country, and we are not going to allow this,” Mr. Allawi said on June 20.

Iraqis are determined to succeed, but many see their hope not in the June handover to a government imposed by outsiders, but rather in elections slated for January 2005. The January voting will mark the first time Iraqis have chosen their own leaders since Saddam Hussein took power in 1979.

For some Iraqis, at least, it can’t come a moment too soon. “Basically this interim government is 13 months too late and elections, which are hopefully slated for January 2005, will also be 13 months too late,” said Entifadh Qanbar, Iraqi National Congress spokesman, addressing a June 16 symposium in Washington.

Besides coming too late, the interim government taking power on June 30 also suffers from a lack of credibility, said Michael Rubin, a former Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) adviser. “The Iraqis accuse us and the United Nations of trying to appease every surrounding Arab country except Iraq” when choosing leaders for the new government, according to Mr. Rubin. Jordan, for example, favored Mr. Allawi, while Ghazi al-Yawar, named as provisional president, was a favorite of Saudi Arabia.

Despite reservations about their new leaders, most Iraqis seem happy to bid farewell to the CPA. Mr. Rubin said the Authority had a “tin ear toward symbolism.” Furthermore, officials rarely ventured outside the heavily fortified “Green Zone” where they were insulated from the day-to-day hardships caused by their security measures, including barricaded roads and bridges that created intolerable commute times.

But even with the CPA poised to disappear, U.S. officials left much crucial work undone. Mr. Rubin complained that coalition forces still hadn’t secured Iraq’s porous borders, the main gateway for foreign insurgents pouring into the country. Nor did the United States secure a “status of forces” agreement with the new Iraqi government, leaving some 135,000 American troops in a kind of limbo with their host country.

Without such an agreement, Iraqi courts, for instance, could claim jurisdiction to try U.S. soldiers accused in crimes or civil disputes. “We’re taking long-term harm for short-term expediency,” Mr. Rubin said.

While CPA missteps may fade, U.S. policy is still not geared toward helping the nation build unity, according to critics. “What I do worry about is the United States has this tendency to talk about—instead of an Iraqi strategy—a Sunni strategy or a Shia strategy,” Mr. Rubin said. “They’re relying too much on communalism.”

Such divisions threaten even the cherished goal of January elections. Although Iraqis long to vote for their own leaders, no one seems to know just how the voting will work. Islamists favor proportional representation, in which parties, rather than individuals, win seats in parliament based on the number of votes they receive. Others like Mr. Qanbar prefer a system similar to that in the United States, where each electoral district sends a single representative to the national legislature.

No matter which system prevails, Iraqis know the January elections—like the June handover—won’t bring immediate peace and prosperity. They’ll have to endure more “business as usual” before their investment in democracy pays off.
Speakers for All Occasions:
Christian School Fundraisers; Pro-life Dinners; Youth Conferences; Churches;
Women’s Conferences; Seniors Conferences; Men’s Outreach; Prayer Breakfasts;
Political & Business Events; Lecture Series; Colleges

Also Representing:
Gary Witherell
Joel Rosenberg
Andy Andrews

Stephen Mansfield
Josh Weidmann
Mike Williams

321 Improv Comedy
Bob Smiley
Bean & Bailey

Laurie Polich
Nancy Stafford
Melody Green

Angela Thomas
Andria Hall
Peggy Wehmeyer
How shall we then vote?

RELIGION: Evangelicals tweak the language of their political manifesto after news media reports characterize it as a call for retreat | by Lynn Vincent

It was the news media version of the “telephone game”—the parlor pastime in which players whisper a message at one end of a room and hilariously distort it by the time it reaches the other.

But the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) wasn’t laughing. On June 20, CBS News and the Associated Press wire reported that the group, which represents 52 Bible-teaching denominations and independent churches, was urging its members to back away from politics—particularly from knee-jerk Republicanism.

The AP reported that the NAE was “mulling guidelines that would warn the faithful against allying themselves too closely with any one political party.” The guidelines’ authors, according to the story, “said evangelicals must step back from politics.

NAE is indeed considering guidelines, and has been since its 2001 convention in Dallas-Ft. Worth, said Richard Cizik, NAE vice president for government affairs. But the 12-page declaration—For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility—intends the polar opposite of the media spin: It urges Christians toward, not away from, public engagement.

“Never before has God given American evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy,” a draft version of the declaration reads. “Disengagement [from politics] is not an option. Instead, girded by biblical principles, evangelicals should march boldly into the public forum.

Mr. Cizik spent June 21 doing damage control, explaining to concerned callers that the real intent of NAE’s declaration was to “address any reservations Christians may have in getting involved in politics, and to give the biblical rationale for doing just that.”

One result of the news fracas was that the NAE quietly jettisoned language that seemed to discourage evangelicals from their traditionally close association with the GOP. Evangelicals, the original version read, “must guard against over-identifying Christian social goals with a single political party, lest nonbelievers think that Christian faith is essentially political in nature.” News media reports had highlighted that statement above all others in the 3,500-word document. “We changed that line today,” Mr. Cizik told WORLD on June 21. “We had been in the process of doing so, but we knew today that we had to.”

NAE may also have known that some elements of its new declaration would raise eyebrows among some conservative evangelicals. In its effort to balance liberal and conservative political views, the group named Ron Sider, a left-leaning seminary professor and Clinton apologist, to co-chair the drafting committee. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Mr. Sider explained the manifesto as an attempt to think through “a sophisticated, integrated, comprehensive [political action] framework that is grounded in biblical values but takes in the complexity of the world.”

For many Christians, the question will be whether the world’s “complexity” requires solutions like affirmative action or socialist economics. While the report rehearses well-known evangelical positions on commitment to family, the pursuit of mercy, and opposition to abortion and gay marriage, it also contains a healthy—even liberal—dose of terms like “social equality” and “economic justice.” It champions “legal remedies for the lingering effects of our racist history,” and “structural” (read: government) solutions to “gross disparities in opportunity and income,” suggesting that the Bible models periodic redistribution of wealth. Christians, the declaration also states, should recycle. There is even a veiled reference to global warming.

“For the Health of the Nation” may be, in parts, a valuable corrective to evangelical thinking about the potential scope of faith-based political activism. But critics say the document’s implicit—and sometimes explicit—inconsistency that government programs are the antidote to social ills misses the biblical mark and could prove divisive in the long run.

“The debate evangelicals are having among themselves today is not whether Christians should be concerned for justice, which we should, but what role and how large a role government should have in creating that justice,” said Michael Cromartie, vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. “The debate we now need to have is whether certain policies have created more justice for the marginalized, or have they made matters worse? Many eminent social scientists think the latter.”

Evangelicals “must guard against over-identifying Christian social goals with a single political party.”

Early draft of NAE “Health of the Nation” manifesto changed in response to criticism: “We knew … we had to,” says NAE’s Cizik.

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15 votes short

MARRIAGE: Activism for the Federal Marriage Amendment seems lagging as Senate backers seek supporters before a July 12 vote | by Lynn Vincent

For the past four Sundays, Ken Keeley, a married man, has had a date both before and after church—a date with potential voters. Between services, the retired businessman has posted himself in the expansive sky-lit atrium of Beaverton Christian Church in Beaverton, Ore. His mission: to help Oregon’s Defense of Marriage Coalition gather enough signatures to put a constitutional marriage-protection amendment on the state’s November ballot.

Mr. Keeley’s never been much of an activist, he said, but the recent attacks on traditional marriage have fired him up. People in his 2,000-member church seem fired up, too: “They’re eager to sign [the petition],” he said. “When they see it, they say things like, ‘It’s about time!’”

Some Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) supporters had precisely the same reaction when Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) finally scheduled debate on the national measure for July 12. Political opponents challenged Mr. Frist’s timing, suggesting that he purposely shoehorned what is certain to be an explosive, chamber-dividing debate onto the Senate calendar just before the Democratic National Convention, when Sen. John Kerry is officially nominated as the party’s nominee for president.

Sen. Frist denied that motivation. Although he did note that Sen. Kerry was one of only 14 senators to vote against the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, the majority leader explained that the clock is ticking down on the current Congress. “I only have 42 legislative days left and about 17 different bills to pass. Therefore I need to plan out my 42 days.”

For amendment supporters, passing the FMA in the next 42 days will require changing at least 15 minds. Congressional staffers say the measure, which would amend the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, is at least that many “yes” votes short of the 67 it needs to pass.

Meanwhile, more than a third of Americans have never even heard of FMA, according to a Barna Research study released June 21. That poll, which surveyed 1,618 adults, also showed public opinion almost evenly split on the FMA: 46 percent of respondents for and 44 percent against, with 10 percent undecided. That differs from a recent Wirthlin Poll that showed strong public support for the FMA.

If true, the lack of public awareness revealed in the Barna study may explain the citizen silence on Capitol Hill. Conservatives had predicted that after the Massachusetts Supreme Court created a right to same-sex marriage, and San Francisco officials sponsored a gay-nuptial fest in defiance of California law, Americans would bombard Congress with letters, phone calls, and e-mails of protest.

That didn’t happen. The Barna report attempts to explain why: “Although few Americans are homosexual, and most adults believe that marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman, many Americans believe that this is a ‘grey area’ of morality that is best left without tight legal definitions.” Even many self-identified born-again Christians, the report notes, are not convinced that their definition of marriage should be included in the federal Constitution.

State constitutions are another matter, however. Like Ken Keeley in Oregon, conservatives have been busy with state-level marriage-protection measures in Oregon, Michigan, Arkansas, Montana, Ohio, and Arizona. Arkansas activists have already gathered more signatures than they needed to meet a July 2 deadline for a ballot measure there. Michigan organizers are a third of the way done. And the Montana Family Foundation has gathered more than half of the signatures it needs for a November ballot initiative.

Polls in several states show a majority of voters support amending their constitutions. But without the Federal Marriage Amendment, state action (or inaction) might not even matter.
Rowland up the river

POLITICS: Ex-political wunderkind won’t be impeached, but may face felony rap | by Lynn Vincent

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN, INTO the fire. When Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland on June 21 announced his resignation, he escaped the blast furnace of impeachment threats. But a federal probe involving allegations of graft and bid-rigging in his administration continues to burn.

Federal investigators have already enlisted a coterie of cooperators to testify against the once-popular Republican. Chief among them: Former Rowland deputy chief of staff Lawrence E. Alibozek, who pleaded guilty in March 2003 to charges of awarding state construction contracts in exchange for gold and cash. Mr. Alibozek’s crimes are emblematic of the allegations against the governor himself. Those include TV-movie-style corruption, such as allegations that Gov. Rowland had, over the years, developed an affinity for French champagne, Cuban cigars, and estate vacations—all “gifts” from contractor friends who later won business from the state.

But investigators had since 2002 probed more serious charges, such as the steering of millions of dollars in state contracts and loan guarantees in return for cash and hidden kickbacks. Gov. Rowland steadfastly proclaimed his innocence, but in June state representatives headed an impeachment inquiry subpoenaed him to testify. The administration fought the order, but on June 19 the Connecticut Supreme Court upheld it, and the governor decided to resign.

That decision choked off a sparkling political career that included two terms in the Connecticut statehouse and three in Congress. In Washington, he racked up a conservative voting record and consistently opposed abortion. As governor, though, Mr. Rowland’s pro-life convictions melted in the heat of Connecticut’s liberal politics, and he ultimately embraced abortion-on-demand.

His successor, Lt. Gov. M. Jodi Rell, will offer no fresh hope to activists fighting abortion in the state. Ms. Rell, 58, who will serve out the remaining 2½ years of Gov. Rowland’s term, is a member of Republican Majority for Choice (RMC), a group whose membership roll includes New York Gov. George Pataki, Sen. Arlen Specter, and President and Mrs. Gerald Ford. In October 2003, RMC threw a reception honoring Ms. Rell for her pro-abortion commitment.

“Her leadership on women’s reproductive health issues is outstanding,” gushed the RMC national co-chair Jennifer Blei Stockman. “It is no wonder that The Hartford Courant has called her the moral compass for the [Rowland] administration.”

It would turn out to be a compass that couldn’t find true north. Though Gov. Rowland championed the inner-city poor and proved a steady hand in a crisis—from the slayings of employees at state lottery headquarters in the 1990s to the Sept. 11, 2001, aftermath—his resignation marks his entrance into a dubious club: He will become the ninth governor in U.S. history to leave office under the pressure of a criminal investigation, but without being impeached.

The most recent was another Republican, Arizona Republican Fife Symington, who quit his post in 1997 after being convicted of federal bank and wire fraud charges that were later overturned. Arkansas Democrat Jim Guy Tucker resigned in 1996 after being convicted of two Whitewater-related felony charges.

Gov. Rowland may yet face felony charges. Had he completed his term, he would have become the longest-serving governor in modern Connecticut history. Now, though, history will likely link his name with scandal. “I think it’s the scandal that will always be the opening line in his obituary,” said Jon Purmont, a historian at Southern Connecticut State University. “Going out on a cloud like this, that cloud is never lifted.”

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Swift response
A “Battle of the Books” that began 300 years ago still rages on

The 1700s also had culture wars. The century was the Age of the Enlightenment, but it was also the Age of Neoclassicism. It produced not only Voltaire, the radical man of reason, but Edmund Burke, the great theorist of conservatism; the French Revolution, with its hostility to Christianity, but also the American Revolution, with its biblical view of human limits.

The two sides cast their different philosophies in terms of a debate: Who is better, the Ancients or the Moderns? The English statesman Sir William Temple wrote a treatise in which he argued that the Ancients, the great thinkers and writers of classical antiquity, were far better than the Moderns, the thinkers and writers of his day, for all of their scientific accomplishments. He used as an example, among others, the supreme excellence of a classical author named Phalaris.

One of Temple’s political enemies replied with a treatise of his own, in which, drawing upon sophisticated Enlightenment-era scholarship, he showed that the Phalaris writings that were the foundation of the arguments were actually forgeries from a much later period. Phalaris was, in fact, a Modern.

Temple had made a fool of himself. But a conservative clergyman and man of letters named Jonathan Swift, for whom Temple was a patron, rushed to his defense. Swift, the satirist best known for Gulliver’s Travels, shot back with an odd piece of fiction called “The Battle of the Books.”

It was an account of a battle in St. James’s library between the old books and the new. The style was that of the classical epic—or, more precisely, given his comical subject matter, “mock-epic.” When the battle was joined, Aristotle easily dispatched Descartes with an arrow, which “quickly found a defect in his head-piece.” Virgil made short work of Dryden, but—like Homer’s Hector and Ajax—they made peace and traded each other’s armor. After all, Dryden translated Virgil into English. Dryden go: the better of the trade, since his armor was made of rusty iron, while Virgil’s armor was made of gold. “However, this glittering armour became the Modern yet worsen than his own.”

“The Battle of the Books” goes on in this vein, with the Homeric warriors of the Ancients thoroughly beating up on the pipsqueak Moderns. And yet, Swift knew it was not so easy. The tale ends with the outcome undetermined, since it was not clear which side would ultimately prevail.

Swift knew the real conflict between the Ancients and the Moderns had to do with ideas, attitudes, and worldviews. He captures these underlying issues in a fable. Just before the battle, a bee flies through a spider’s web. The spider comes out, railing at the bee for destroying his property, and the two begin to argue over whose approach to life is best.

The spider says that he is superior, since everything he has comes from within himself. He goes on to cite his mathematical and technological superiority, since he can spin out from within himself the most elaborate of cobwebs.

The bee points out that while the spider lurks in his little corner, he flies through the air and with his buzzing and droning makes music. He takes his raw material not from himself but from the flowers. “I am obliged to Heaven alone for my flights and my music,” says the bee, “and Providence would never have bestowed on me two such gifts without designing them for the noblest ends.” He admits the spider is good at mathematics, but his web is insubstantial.

“I hope you will henceforth take warning,” he tells the spider, “and consider duration and matter, as well as method and art.” As for spinning everything out of himself, it is evident that “you possess a good plentiful store of dirt and poison in your breast.”

And then the bee defines the difference between the Ancient and the Modern mind: Is the nobler creature “that which, by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an overweening pride, feeding and engendering on itself, turns all into excrement and venom, producing nothing at all but flybane and a cobweb; or that which, by a universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax?”

The spider, centered on the self, is like a postmodernist, constructing his own truths. But the bee finds truth from outside himself and processes what he finds into honey that gives sweetness, and wax, made into candles, that gives light.

Swift wrote his satire in 1704. Exactly 300 years later, the battle of the books continues.
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TRUTH AND FICTION

COVER STORY: A Christian publishing company aims to restore a great literary heritage: high-quality, general-market fiction written by Christians and from a biblical worldview | by Gene Edward Veith

Christian fiction has become a genre unto itself, filled with clichés, conventions, and pop-culture imitations. And yet, Christian authors were once the giants of literature, writing about all of life from a Christian worldview and using their art to influence the imagination of the whole civilization.

What writers, publishers, and readers need today is not just Christian fiction but fiction informed by a Christian worldview, with the potential to break through once again into the wider culture. Toward that end, WORLD is working with WestBow Press, Thomas Nelson’s new fiction division, to sponsor a fiction-writing contest to discover a new wave of Christian writers.

OME 45 PERCENT OF ALL TRADE BOOKS SOLD TODAY IN the United States are fiction. Although Christian writers were the great pioneers of literature, for awhile evangelicals, both authors and readers, lost interest in fiction. But this has been changing. Fiction is the second-biggest-selling category for Christian publishers, just after “Christian living,” making up 15 percent to 20 percent of all their sales.

Lately, Christian authors and publishers have been imitating the pop culture, with its formulas and conventions, rather than creating genuine literary art. But Christian writers and Christian readers are growing in their tastes and in what they are capable of writing and reading. Though for awhile Christian novels were only read by Christian readers, the barriers that ghettoized explicitly evangelical books have been coming down. Christians have a powerful literary tradition, extending well into the modern era, ready to be reclaimed and carried on.
**Divine narrative**

The Christian literary heritage begins with the Bible. God reveals Himself not primarily through visions or mystical experiences but through a book. Thus, Christians have always prized reading.

God's revelation in the Bible—the very word means "the book"—comprises many literary forms: poetry, laws, letters, and while it does contain passages of theological discourse (for example, the epistles of Paul), much of God's Word consists of narratives. That is to say, stories.

A narrative is a rendition by language of an unfolding action. Whereas expository writing sets forth ideas, narrative re-creates an event. A story gives us characters, dialogue, and description, all of which enables a reader or listener to enter into the experience vicariously by imagining what took place.

The Bible's narratives are true and historical. (Prose narratives in the historical style that are fictional would not be invented until the 18th century.) But God's Word gives us true stories of human beings, in particular places and times, doing things, enduring conflicts, and interacting with each other and with God: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the saga of the patriarchs, Moses and the children of Israel, the historical narratives of the judges and the kings, the exile and the return, the four Gospels recounting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the story of the church in Acts, the mysterious last days in the book of Revelation. Christians have always known that such stories bear rich meanings and that reading them is a profound blessing.

Narratives, whether true or fictional, depict characters, portrayals of human beings. These characters act, creating the story's plot. Nearly always, the plot entails some kind of conflict, whether an external battle against some enemy, an inner struggle within the heart of a character, the clash of different beliefs, or a combination of all three. There is also a setting, the sense of place and time where the action takes place, and a theme, the truths or insights that the story conveys.

The plot of a story is not just a sequence of random events. Rather, a plot tends to have a definite structure: a beginning, middle, and end.

The Bible, as the Book of books, has a plot of its own, contributing a particular shape to Western narratives. It sets forth a clear beginning: the creation of the universe. There is conflict: human sin vs. the grace of God. The narrative has a middle, a climactic turning point, in which the conflict is resolved: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the book moves to a definite conclusion, a dénouement tying up all the loose ends into a happy ending: the coming of Christ, the last judgment, and His eternal reign. Not only the biblical narrative but all of human history is taken up into this story, as is the life of the individual believer.

Biblical narrative is very different from the narratives of pagan mythology. Those are organized into cycles. Time repeats itself, with multiple creations and endlessly recurrent patterns. Thus, Greek epics begin in the middle of an already occurring action. Greek plays are organized into cycles of generations caught in the webs of a constantly repeating fate. The Bible's stories, though, show time as a straight line, with not only a beginning and middle and end but a direction. Thus, Western narratives after the Bible tend to follow a chronological order in which characters can change and grow. Also, myths take place in an idealized realm removed from ordinary human experience. Biblical narrative, though, takes place in specific places and times, emphasizing historicity and stylistic realism.

While biblical narratives are true stories that may be pleasing and even instructive and worth studying, as long as they understood that the events they recorded never happened. Thus, the early Christians, as far as Western literature is concerned, invented fiction.

**Life as it should be**

The highest biblical authority for fiction, of course, is the example of Jesus Christ, who taught the kingdom of God by means of parables. Indeed, says Matthew, "He said nothing to them without a parable" (Matthew 13:34). The term comes from the Greek word for "comparison" and was a common ancient genre that explained a truth by comparing it to a hypothetical tale. Jesus used parables to communicate vast spiritual truths to the fallen human mind. His parables, though, did not make the truths He was revealing simpler or easier to understand. Rather, He used parables not only to make things clearer but apparently sometimes to make them more difficult (Matthew 13:10-17), since one symptom of the fallen human mind is to seize upon some superficial knowledge while remaining blind to the full truth and failing to "understand with the heart" (Matthew 13:15).

Some Christians, historically, have objected to fiction on the grounds that it consists of "lies." But Sir Philip Sidney,

**THOUGH VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE IS NOWHERE NEARLY AS POWERFUL AS ACTUALLY EXPERIENCING SUCH THINGS IN REAL LIFE, THE BENEFITS OF READING FICTION SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.**

with his Puritan sympathies, decisively answered that objection in 1595 in "A Defense of Poesy." A lie, he said, is something affirmed to be true when it is not true. A piece of fiction, though, "affirmeth not." It is not presented as something true, but, by its very name, something made-up, an imaginative
construction. History, philosophy, even theology, said Sidney, are full of lies: statements put forward as true when they are really false. Fiction, on the other hand, because it never affirms, never lies.

And yet, Sidney says that fiction is connected to a larger truth. Fiction, he said, presents life not as it is, but as it could be and should be. Sidney believed that literature had an important function in the teaching of morality. Fiction can instruct us in the human condition and provide models for us to emulate or avoid, training us to take delight in what is good and to be repulsed by what is evil.

William Kirk Kilpatrick, in *Psychological Seduction* and *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*, has shown how the moral formation of children is shaped by stories. Children learn to root for the "good guys"—and to identify with them—and to fear and be repulsed by the "bad guys." It is not enough to tell children abstractly what is right and what is wrong. For them to internalize morality, it must be brought to life.

Fiction does not need to be moralistic to be a good influence. The very act of entering into a character's point of view is training in empathy, the ability to "rejoice with those who rejoice" and to "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Fiction also gives us vicarious experience; the ability to imaginatively experience something without having to experience it in real life. It becomes possible to undergo life-shaping experiences—the danger of war, the trials of love, the stimulation of travel, the overcoming of suffering—from the comfort and safety of one's easy chair. Though vicarious experience is second-hand and nowhere nearly as powerful as actually experiencing such things in real life, the benefits of reading fiction in broadening a person's horizons should not be underestimated. Reading fiction can also be a way of reflecting upon the human condition—its tragedies and comedies, its complexity and glories—and it can serve as a mirror to help readers know themselves.

Of course, that fiction can have such a powerful positive influence means that it can also have a negative influence. Vicarious experience can be sinful, with some fiction encouraging evil fantasies and emulation of models that are destructive. Readers need discernment and taste, and they need high-quality books to read.

**Romance novels**

The earliest fiction in Christian Europe was the genre known as the romance. This refers not primarily to love stories but to medieval tales of knights, chivalry, and adventure. Love was usually an issue in the medieval romances, which led to the later meaning of the term, but their main characteristic was an emphasis on plot, external action, and fantasy (as opposed to hard-edged realism).

The romance tradition includes Christianized versions of pagan legends (such as *Beowulf*). It also includes imaginative sagas of Christian kings and heroes (King Arthur). The impulse toward fantasy also manifested itself in symbolic stories (the quest for the Holy Grail) and theological allegories (*The Divine Comedy*).

Realistic fiction, though—as in novels that emphasize characters and their inner lives in an actual-seeming setting—developed much later. At first, these took the form of mock-old-worlds, which made fun of medieval ideals by contrasting them with actual life (Cervantes's *Don Quixote* [1605]). Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) took the medieval genre of the Christian allegory and rendered it with an innovative realism. Then there were the pseudo-histories, renditions of romantic plot devices (such as being stranded on a desert island) in a historical style (Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* [1719]).

The first modern novel is probably Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, published in 1740. This work consisted of a series of letters from a young serving girl trying to make her way in the big city. Before long, her employer tries to seduce her, leading to elaborate abductions and escapes as Pamela defends her chastity against a dastardly villain, who eventually becomes converted. The letter device allows Richardson to develop what would become hallmarks of modern narrative: Instead of the author narrating the tale, the main character, Pamela, tells what happened to her in her own voice. And the rather slender and far-fetched plot becomes secondary to the character delving into her own inner life.

After *Pamela*, the novel as an artistic form exploded in popularity and variety. The early novelists, by and large, worked from a Christian worldview. Pamela knew that extramarital sex was wrong, and she resisted a predatory man to keep her virtue. Even stories that had little explicit religious content assumed a moral and spiritual order. Right and wrong were objective categories. Human beings were seen as sinful, yet spiritual beings in a challenging yet ordered world. The early novels' constant themes of love, marriage, family, responsibility, duty, and purpose were all informed by a biblical view of life.

Jane Austen, the pastor's daughter, wrote unparalleled fiction about the comedies and dramas inherent in her small country parish. Charles Dickens invented unforgettable characters and sparked social reforms.

Other novelists took up explicit Christian themes and explored them in their depths. Nathaniel Hawthorne explored the dark recesses of our fallen human nature. Fyodor Dostoevsky plunged into the mysteries of sin and redemption. George MacDonald explored his faith both in realistic novels and in highly symbolic and evocative fantasies.

Even in the supposedly secularist 20th century, Christians continued to make their mark as fiction writers. A number of Catholic writers wrote powerful works that addressed the spiritual emptiness of modernity with a vision of Christianity that was seldom merely the theology of Rome: Graham Greene (*The Power and the Glory*); Walker Percy (*The Thanatos Syndrome*); Flannery O'Connor (*The Violent Bear It Away*). Then there were the enormously popular and influential Christian fantasists J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*) and C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*).

These authors were all published by secular, general-market publishing houses. They gained wide audiences and critical acclaim. They also influenced their cultures and touched the lives of their readers, in some cases bringing them to faith.

Yet, ironically, evangelicals—readers, writers, and publishers—were largely ignoring fiction, until they invented a genre of their own.

**Genre fiction**

In the United States, many conservative Protestants separated themselves from the increasingly secularist modern culture. Part of this was due to Christians who wanted to be uncontaminated by the godless culture, and part of it was due to the godless culture's hostility to Christian faith.

The Christian publishing industry grew up and its products were sold in
Christian bookstores. Most of the books put out were devotional helps, Bible studies, and guides for Christian living. Except for a few historical novels and Bible retellings, there was very little fiction.

Then, in 1978, Frank Peretti’s spiritual thriller *This Present Darkness* was published, a dark tale about a titanic conflict between demons and angels that loomed behind a small town’s controversies. Jan Dennis, who was Mr. Peretti’s editor with Crossway, told *WORLD* that his manuscript had been turned down by 15 publishers before Crossway took a chance and put it into print, in a tiny print run of only 4,000 copies. But the Christian horror novel sold over 2.5 million copies.

Mr. Peretti’s novel and its sequels showed evangelical readers the power of fiction (though, arguably, many of them were so inexperienced with fiction that they took the “spiritual warfare” motif as fact, instead). Evangelical publishers now had a market for fiction, which they proceeded to serve with a great variety of products. Today, as much as one-fifth of the sales for Christian publishers comes from fiction: Christian romance novels, Christian horror, Christian science fiction, Christian fantasies, Christian conspiracy novels, Christian political novels, Christian techno-thrillers.

The limitation of this fiction is that it is mostly “genre fiction,” that is, fiction written according to a predictable formula based on prefabricated models. It is geared mainly to entertainment, rather than reflection. It follows conventions, rather than being original. It is written to sell, rather than to be a serious, complex work of Christian art.

Writing in a particular genre need not prevent the work from being valuable. Great literature too has its conventions. The “novel of manners” perfected by Jane Austen and followed by many more is about social interactions leading to marriage. Mysteries, with their detectives solving a crime, follow strict conventions, and yet the form has produced some outstanding writing, including that of Christians (Dorothy L. Sayers, P.D. James). But too often, in the hands of indifferent writers, genre fiction is little more than a collection of clichés.

The bigger problem is that for all of the different genres it follows, evangelical fiction has become a genre unto itself, with conventions of its own. One-dimensional virtuous characters contend against one-dimensional villains. The style is preachy. The theme is moralistic. The plot is characterized by implausible divine interventions. While the convention demands a conversion, the characters are never allowed to do anything very sinful, or, if they do, the author is not allowed to show it. At the end, all problems are solved and everyone lives happily ever after. It is all sweetness, light, uplift, and cliché.

The biblical complexities of sin and grace, the inner conflict between the old nature and the new, the necessity to bear one’s cross, are missing. So is biblical realism. So is the ability to draw in unbelievers and confront them with the hard truths of God’s Word.

What happened is that while evangelicals at one time pulled away from engagement with the culture, they rejected the high culture of ideas, creativity, and the arts. But they embraced uncritically the pop culture, the realm of entertainment, pleasure-seeking, and shallow commercialism. While the modern and postmodern high culture may be hostile to the biblical worldview, Christianity can compete with the high culture on its own terms by claiming and building upon the absolutes of truth, goodness, and beauty that current worldviews have abandoned. But in embracing the pop culture, evangelicals have opened themselves up to what is shallow, fake, and empty in contemporary life. Instead of filling those voids, pop-Christianity falls into them.

But Christian fiction is changing, heralding perhaps a more fruitful engagement with the culture on the part of American evangelicals.

Mainstream breakthrough

The LEFT BEHIND BOOKS BY TIM LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins were, in many ways, conventional Christian fiction, following the genre of End Times novels. And yet, the 12 books in the series, swept along by millennium fever, dominated the bestseller lists for a decade. They sold so many copies that they broke out of the Christian bookstore market, into the Barnes & Noble and Borders, into airport newsstands, onto the *New York Times* bestseller lists, which once excluded books from Christian publishers no matter how many they sold.

“Left Behind did break down the barriers,” said Mr. Dennis. “It became so huge that it was given an opportunity...”
allowed their worldview to shine through (John Grisham, *The Firm*; Tom Clancy, *The Hunt for Red October*). Christian publishers wanted to attract writers like that. Lately, some talented new authors have emerged from Christian circles, and now Christian publishers are more inclined to turn them loose.

**WestBow’s experiment**

THOMAS NELSON IS THE BIGGEST Christian publisher. Moreover, it is the ninth-biggest publisher of every kind in the world. Currently, over half of its sales are in the general marketplace. The company has just launched a new fiction division, WestBow Press.

Allen Arnold, the head of WestBow, told WORLD that “the days of traditional Christian fiction are over.” His plans are to publish authors who write from a distinctly Christian worldview but whose works go beyond the typical formulas and have the potential to reach beyond the typical Christian marketplace to have an impact on the culture as a whole. “We don’t publish Christian fiction,” he said. “We publish fiction from a Christian worldview.”

He wants to free Christian authors, who often feel constrained by secular publishers to tone down their faith and who feel constrained by Christian publishers who will not let them tell their stories.

“We’ll only partner with authors who write from a Christian worldview, but the stories will be true to what the stories are about,” Mr. Arnold said. “Sometimes faith will be explicit; sometimes more implicit.” Just as the biblical worldview encompasses all of life, the fiction he is looking for need not even be conventionally “religious,” as long as it embodies the reality that God has made.

This does not mean that WestBow will blindly emulate secular publishers. “Readers should know they need not fear being corrupted by a WestBow book,” he said. “We will never publish something that we feel we could not stand with before God.” But there will be no predetermined model or list of rules. There will be no attempt to imitate commercially successful patterns. We should not try to copy what the world is doing or what other publishers are doing, he told WORLD. “We should be tapping into the ultimate creator of all—God—the source of true creativity.”

WestBow inherited Thomas Nelson’s other fiction titles, so some conventionally Christian fiction remains on their list. Mr. Allen stressed that the company will still publish books specifically for the Christian market. But the new division has higher goals. He wants WestBow to become one of the top 20 publishers of general-market fiction.

The vision of publishing high-quality works of art by Christians for general audiences may seem ambitious. But Mr. Allen points out that this is the way it used to be. Christian formula fiction is relatively new, dating just to the 1970s. “Before that, Christian writers wrote for everyone.”

WestBow takes its name from the printing press and bookshop operated by the original Thomas Nelson back in Edinburgh in 1798, which was located on a street named West Bow. That shop sold Bibles, and it also sold *Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and, later, books by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcott, and other of the best authors of his day. Why shouldn’t we have Christian writers like that today? Why shouldn’t Christian literature have the cultural influence that it once did?

But God needs to call and equip writers equal to that task. And those writers need to be discovered, mentored, and brought to the public.

To that end, WestBow, in its search for new talent, is working with WORLD in the WORLDview fiction contest. (See the sidebar for details.) If you are a storyteller, enter the contest. If you are a reader, check out the entries that will be posted on WORLD’s blog site, giving your feedback and voting for your favorite. Either way, do your part in carrying on the Christian literary tradition.
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FREEDOM SUMMER

LITERATURE: The National Endowment for the Humanities turns to the classics to stamp out "American amnesia" | by Priya Abraham in Washington

Is America a melting pot, a salad bowl—or a sheet of jazz music? In the mid-1990s, the National Endowment for the Humanities devoted $6 million to town-hall meetings where Americans could discuss their collective identity. The freewheeling “conversations” never did define what that was, although former NEH president Sheldon Hackney came up with jazz music as a national metaphor—because it’s nonhierarchical.

Bruce Cole, NEH president since 2001, thinks we need only look back to see what it means to be American. He calls widespread ignorance of U.S. history our “American amnesia.” So when President Bush launched his “We the People” initiative under the agency through 12th grade, and among them are some perennial standouts: Beatrix Potter’s The Tale of Peter Rabbit, Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 and George Orwell’s 1984 and Animal Farm.

The bookshelf’s most surprising asset, however, is the oddly Christian Chronicles of Narnia, by C.S. Lewis. Chosen because they “convey lessons about the struggle against oppression,” NEH officials explained that the seven volumes also teach about the responsibilities of freedom.

In the second of the series, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Aslan the lion frees Narnia from the rule of the wicked White Queen. But many of the land’s talking animals abuse their newfound liberty, and pay by becoming mute. The lesson the NEH
hopes young readers will learn: Free creatures, and free individuals, enjoy their freedom only when they learn to use personal restraint.

The NEH has compiled its first two “We the People” bookshelves from established classics, published in or before 1885. To make the cut, each book had to offer knowledge about American history, culture, or values. Classics on the freedom bookshelf also highlight a wide swath of national history. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Paul Revere’s Ride educates readers about the American Revolution, just as the subject is flagging in schools. To Be a Slave, by Julius Lester, offers firsthand accounts of slaves and former slaves starting from when they left Africa and stretching into the 1900s. Willa Cather’s My Antonia opens windows onto immigrant life in Midwestern Nebraska.

Thousands applied for last year’s courage bookshelf. To qualify, each applicant had to offer supporting events that emphasized the theme, such as pizza party discussion groups or essay contests.

The NEH is also reaching deep into communities previously shunned by federal programs. Alfrida Day is one example. The Illinois homeschooler received the first courage bookshelf this year, but has been turned down in the past for other programs because she didn’t represent a public school. “I was surprised when we got it,” she said. “It’s really nice to be included—we are educating our children.”

But too many students aren’t being educated on basic American history. The “We the People” website lists several polls to make its point. From 2002: None of the nation’s 50 top colleges required courses in American history. From 2001: More than half of high-school seniors thought Italy, Germany, or Japan was a World War II ally.

And now the War on Terror provides even more reason for historical literacy, said Erik Lokkesmoe, NEH communications director. “We focus a lot on how we’re fighting, where we’re fighting, but not why we’re fighting. . . . Part of national security is to protect the ideals that make us free.”

That kind of focus might comfort conservatives leery of the agency, a survivor from Lyndon Johnson’s failed Great Society program, especially as its funding grows. From 2003, the NEH budget increased $1 million to $135 million this year, its biggest percentage increase since 1979. For 2005, Mr. Bush has requested $162 million. This is small change by federal standards, but Mr. Cole hopes it will rub out American forgetfulness.
As a boy, he read books while riding his bike to school, narrowly dodging trees and automobiles. He later worked as a typesetting apprentice, fueling his love of the printed word. Favorite bookstore: the legendary Powell’s Books in Portland, Oregon, which he first discovered as a teenager in the ’70s. Currently on his nightstand: a three-volume history of the German people, and a book of the life and theology of Caspar Olevianus. He went through a church history phase a few years ago and hasn’t quite recovered. As a result, theological students browse his home library for textbooks. Also a renowned surgical oncologist, his rare first editions are all surgery and anatomy books. WORLD reader Dr. Kenneth Feucht donates many books to students and new libraries, “just to make sure they have some good books in there.”

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Kent Philpott lives in California, where he has been the pastor of Miller Avenue Church, Mill Valley, since 1985. Ordained in 1966, he was awarded the degrees of Masters of Divinity by Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, and Doctor of Ministry by San Francisco Theological Seminary. He is a regular visitor to the prisoners of San Quentin Prison and a coach of the San Quentin Pirates baseball team. He is also the author of Are you really born again? and Why I am a Christian, published by Evangelical Press, and For pastors of small churches, published by Earthen Vessel Publishing.

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INTERVIEW: Novelist Bret Lott on using his God-given talents in his vocation, writing about forgiveness, and "setting God in the midst of these stories"

by Gene Edward Veith

BRET LOTT IS A CRITICALLY acclaimed, bestselling novelist, who was recently appointed the editor of the prestigious literary journal The Southern Review. He is also an evangelical Christian who writes openly about his faith.

The author of half a dozen novels, several volumes of short stories, and a memoir, Mr. Lott is a Southern Baptist. Widely respected in literary circles, he found a mass audience in 1999 when Oprah Winfrey chose his novel Jewel, about a woman and her Down syndrome daughter, for her book club. (See WORLD, March 13, 1999.) That pro-life novel was one of the most popular of Oprah’s selections, selling some 2.5 million copies.

Mr. Lott here speaks with WORLD about his latest novel, A Song I Knew by Heart, and his vocation as a Christian writer.

WORLD: Christian writers often complain that they are not taken seriously—by secular publishers, critics, and general readers—because of their Christianity. Some try to tone down or to veil expressions of faith. In this novel, though, you don’t seem to hold anything
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back. You write about conversion, baptism, prayer, blessings, grace, and there is hardly a page without some reference by Naomi, narrating her story, to God and her relationship to Him. And yet, you are published by secular publishers, critically acclaimed, and have a wide general readership. How have you managed this?

BL: I think this has come about through recognizing that the more I talk about Christ, the more I am able to talk about Christ.

My early books were not obviously Christ centered, but pointed toward my vision of art as being redemptive, of writing as being an act of faith in view of a God who loves us and who died for us. My books have never been existentialist downers, but have arrived at a place wherein loss has been accommodated; the question for all of my characters, at the ends of their books, has been, Given what I have lived through, the sorrow and triumph both, how do I now live?

As I have grown up, both as a writer and as a man of God, I have come to see that boldness in simply setting God in the midst of these stories has allowed me the boldness to set God in the midst of these stories.

God blesses us when we go boldly to the throne of Grace, and though certainly I could count good reviews and a wide readership as blessings, I think the true blessing in simply letting characters have a real relationship with Christ is that God and His love for us—His forgiveness—is being seen and felt by readers who, in this present culture, don’t know the joy of forgiveness, and the redeeming quality of love.

WORLD: A Song I Knew by Heart is a remarkable retelling of the book of Ruth, in contemporary terms. Do you find that your readers pick up on the biblical origins of your plot, or is biblical illiteracy so rampant that they miss the connection? What was it about the biblical story that made you want to write about a modern “Naomi,” “Ruth,” and “Beau(az)?”

BL: By and large, people have recognized the origin of the story, though it’s interesting that a couple of reviewers in the print media haven’t—those folks to whom so many readers look for advice about which books to read, it turns out, might very well be the least Bible-literate.

But it was and is my hope that one needn’t have read the book of Ruth to enjoy the story. I don’t want a reader to feel it necessary to have that background, as it were, in the Bible to appreciate a story about a love of this depth and magnitude, although every time I have spoken somewhere about A Song I Knew by Heart the subject has always been the fact of this being a retelling—a reseeing—of a story it takes 15 minutes to read in the Bible.

I wanted to write this story for many years, because it is a story about a relationship that is, in our present culture, something of an ugly thing. The joke, of course, is always about the enmity caused by the in-laws. But one of the truly beautiful and deepest love relationships in the Bible is that between in-laws, between mother-in-law Naomi and daughter-in-law Ruth.

My novels are always, finally, about family, but blood relationships and marriage relationships. What I found most mysterious and moving about this relationship is that it is based on a relation that is simply in law, not blood, and yet it is one of the most eternally moving moments in the Bible.

Most people who don’t know much about the Bible think that buried somewhere in there is a passage about a man and a woman pledging to each other that “where you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people, your God shall be my God” because they’ve heard it so many times at weddings. But the fact is, this is Ruth’s testimony of love to Naomi, and testimony to one of the most enduring stories of the Bible.

WORLD: There are differences, of course, between your characters and those of the Bible. Your Naomi is struggling with the burden of sin and her inability to accept forgiveness. You treat that sin with both realism and delicacy. Some Christian readers object to being exposed to any kind of “negative elements,” while some Christian writers believe they should write with no holds barred when it comes to depictions of sin, putting in their characters’ bad language and blow-by-blown descriptions of their sex lives. How do you navigate these issues as a writer?

BL: I don’t think I’ve ever been a writer who has held back on depicting the fact of sin in the lives of my characters, because it has never seemed to me that sin holds back. Sin is devastating, by design, and so any gauzy fade-outs or euphemistic voice-overs have never been of any interest to me.
Describing sin in and of itself ought not to be anything that titillates or draws attention to itself outside the context of the scene. Period. Navigating those waters—trying to write about temptation and sin without writing it in a way that tempts the reader beyond the context of the character in the story—is a balancing act that calls for the writer—me—to understand why one of my characters sins in the first place, and then to write that scene as an observer instead of a participant.

I do that, as best as I am able, with the assistance of a knowledge of the effects of sin, because I am a sinner myself. I walk that tightwire, again, as best I can, fully recognizing that sin is devastating, but can at times be tempting, because I have been tempted in my life, and know the effects of sin as well.

**WORLD:** In your novel, there is a wonderful and deeply moving epiphany in a nursing home, where an adult son is holding the hand of his elderly father, who has been paralyzed by a stroke. This becomes a catalyst for Naomi, who realizes that “to live was to receive love, and to give it away.” That is a great line and a great theme that you make real throughout the whole novel. It is an expression of Luther’s doctrine of vocation, which says that the purpose of our lives is to love and serve our neighbors, and, in turn, to be loved and served by God through our neighbors.

**BL:** A couple of years ago my wife Melanie and I went through a missions series at our church in which the motto, if you could call it that, was “We are blessed to be a blessing.” If one believes that receiving blessings is what our relationship to God is about, then one is only a consumerist. It seemed to me that Naomi, who has been blessed with the gift of a love that finds as its centerpoint forgiveness, and who has hoarded that gift of love rather than given it away, was in effect dying of consumption—dying of keeping the gift of love. If we want to love others, we can’t merely accept it. We have to give it away.

**WORLD:** How do you see being a novelist as a Christian vocation, that is, as your calling from God?

**BL:** There’s this wonderful word you read again and again in the Bible: talent. We grow up reading it in the Bible and thinking of it as a slab of gold or something like that. But then we have also grown up hearing the word uttered everywhere around us as well, but being used as some sort of innate gift from elsewhere that magically shows up.

Of course the fact of these two words being the same speaks to their fact in our lives: We are given the gifts we are given—the talents—and so must spend them as we would the gold spoken of in the Bible. Hoarding them—there’s that word again—doesn’t allow God’s love for us to be witnessed, doesn’t allow others to see His fact in our lives. God has called me to do this, and I respond with my willingness to do this.

**WORLD:** Flannery O’Connor is a great Southern writer who writes about her faith. Her writing is violent and scathing, as well as being bitingly humorous and full of grace. Your writing, though, is kinder and gentler.

**BL:** I wish I had Flannery O’Connor’s humor and bite and faith! She’s my literary hero, because she pulled no punches whatsoever, and her stories, no matter how violent, always, always, always pointed toward Grace, the redemption available to us confused sinners who are convinced we don’t need it.

But you’re right—my fiction is kinder and gentler. I think this is because I don’t see my role as a writer to be banging my readers over the head with a skillet—they get that from the present culture every waking minute of every day. My job is to let them look into the lives of people who have gone overlooked in all the hoopla-hoopla of this present world, and see the depth of love and sorrow and commitment and love these people have for each other and for God. ☺
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SINGLEMINDED

LITERARY TRENDS: Why must Christian “chick lit” always reach the same destination as its secular counterpart—the altar? by Lauren Winner

I DON'T KNOW WHO COINED THE phrase “chick lit,” but I can tell you when the genre started garnering attention—in 1998, when Viking published Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones’s Diary. A charming chocoholic London singleton obsessed with losing weight, and even more obsessed with finding true love, Bridget Jones changed publishing. Her diary was followed not only by a sequel, Bridget Jones on the Edge of Reason, but also by scads of other chick lit novels: Jane Green’s Jemima J, Sophie Kinsella’s Confessions of a Shopaholic, Jennifer Weiner’s Good in Bed, and on and on.

And now we have Christian chick lit. One reviewer called this new sub-sub-genre “Bridget Jones goes to church,” and that’s about right. The heroines are still chocoholics, they’re still worried about their waistline, they’re still on the hunt for a hunk. The difference is, they’re believers. They scope men at church 20s and 30s groups, not at late-night clubs.

Some critics have greeted the advent of Christian chick lit with a certain disdain. It’s just like Christians to be Johnny-come-lately, now that the secular world is saturated with chick lit, the CBA gets on board. This could be seen as the perfect example of what Walter Kirn, writing in GQ two years ago, called a Christian alternaculture, in which “everything in mainstream culture gets cloned and then leached of ‘sinful’ content.”

But I, personally, welcome Christian chick lit with enthusiasm. Chick lit, to be sure, is not Great Literature—but it is entertaining. It’s fun to curl up with a light-hearted novel whose protagonist reminds me of myself. And who cares if Christian authors are, to some extent, mimicking Helen Fielding? Ms. Fielding, after all, was mimicking Jane Austen, and no one dismissively accused her of cloning Regency fiction and leaching it of 18th-century content.

So herewith, a brief introduction to my two favorite Christian chick lit heroines.

First meet Ashley Stockingdale, whose story begins in What a Girl Wants, and continues in this summer’s sequel, She’s Out of Control. (A third novel, With This Ring, I’m Confused, is in the works.) Ashley, who’s begun to suspect that she’s “single for a reason” instead of “single for a season,” is a fun-loving patent attorney with a penchant for Prada. Ashley’s best friend, Brea, is happily married; the single’s pastor’s wife has just announced she’s pregnant; and Ashley is beginning to get sick of Sunday lunch at TGIFriday’s with the church singles group. So though she insists that she “live[s] a full life as a Christian single, and [isn’t] waiting for life to start when I get married,” Ashley is starting to wonder who, exactly, her future mate is, and why he hasn’t yet pulled up on a great white steed—or at least in a Mercedes SLK320.

Ashley’s English alter ego is Theodora Llewellyn, star of Theodora’s Diary and Theodora’s Wedding. Thirty-something Theodora holds down a respectable white-collar job, maintains loving relationships with her slightly eccentric family, nurtures a romance with the sports-obsessed but

Bridget Jones’s Diary author, Helen Fielding, signs copies of the sequel, Bridget Jones on the Edge of Reason.
amiable Kevin, and takes occasional trips to Greece. She also worships at the wacky St. Norbert's Church, where she organizes church fetes and befriends wise, elderly women. In two delightful novels, readers accompany Theodora through mishaps at the office, dating debacles, and a little undercover detective work. I was sad when I finished Theodora's Wedding. I will miss Theodora's company.

One would expect Christian chick lit to differ from its secular counterpart, and in some ways it does. There's much less imbibing. And the sexual escapades that are the *sine qua non* of secular chick lit are absent. (When Theodora's boyfriend surprises her with a weekend in Italy, she insists upon separate rooms.)

But there are also many similarities between the secular and Christian chick lit novels. The Theodora novels are undoubtedly inspired by Bridget Jones. They're set in England, and they follow the same diary format (though Bridget began her diary on New Year's Day, and Theodora begins hers at the end of June, noting that an unexpected case of chicken pox, which leaves Theodora in bed and quarantined, is actually a "blessing in disguise. I am determined to use the time to grow spiritually ... by keeping a journal. ... I know it's a bit unusual to start a diary at the end of June, but I've never been one to pander to convention"). On the whole, *Theodora's Diary* and *What a Girl Wants* feature the same witty dialogue, the same charmingly self-effacing and slightly insecure heroines, and the same endearing Greek chorus of friends that combined to make *Bridget Jones's Diary* such a success.

And just as *Bridget Jones* wickedly satires modern office politics and drunken London nightlife, the Theodora and Ashley novels cast a sardonic eye on contemporary evangelicalism. In *Theodora's Diary*, for example, Theodora's friend Charity—a perfect Christian who has umpteen children and who has never so much as returned a library book late—turns up at church hysterical because her daughter Zilpah "has been asked to peruse the most unsuitable reading material" at school. Charity has petitioned the teacher and the headmaster, but they only pooh-pooh her concerns.

Charity is frantic because "one of the main characters... is a witch. And there's all sorts of magic kingdoms and pagan creatures," and the book seems to promote "the worship of animals." Finally Charity pulls the offending book out of her bag—
Bridget Jones gets her happy ending . . . in the arms of delectable Mr. Darcy. Her Christian counterpart, Theodora Llewelyn, similarly finds happiness by securing a diamond from the ever-faithful Kevin. Ditto Ashley Stockingdale and her beau Seth.

And that is perhaps the one place where Christian chick lit's imitation of *Bridget* goes too far. In their uncritical hewing to the marriage plot, these Christian novels tell an incomplete story.

The problem is not with any one individual novel. I don't begrudge Theodora her titular wedding. I hope she and Kevin live happily ever after. (Perhaps we'll meet her in a prequel, representing the sub-sub-sub-genre Christian mommy lit, sort of Allison Pearson meets Stormie Omartian.)

The problem is that Christian chick lit as a genre seems motivated by the assumption that the happiest ending—the only ending that makes sense—is girl-gets-guy.

Indeed, this was the one thing that ticked me off when I first read *Bridget Jones's Diary*. I'd been reading along, utterly identifying with the plights and anxieties of neurotic Bridget, feeling equally worried about my dance card (would it ever be full?), my mother (would she ever quit haranguing about maximizing my beauty potential?), and my diet (if I ate cottage cheese and carrots all week, could I squeeze into that dress?). I sympathized when Bridget fell for the cad who really didn't care about her. I sympathized as her mom nagged her about her glaringly nude ring finger. I sympathized when she embarrassed herself on the job.

And then, at the end of the book, I stopped sympathizing. (In fact, I threw the book across the room.) What I had hoped—what I had assumed, actually, because I was new to the genre and didn't yet know its conventions—was that the novel would end when Bridget somehow learned to stop worrying *quite* so much about shedding pounds and finding Mr. Right. I didn't expect her to foreshadow dating, give all her designer duds to Goodwill, and contentedly porn out as an act of resistance to a patriarchal culture that wants women to look like waifs. I just wanted her to begin to derive some sense of self from something other than a boyfriend.

And when Bridget finally won Darcy, I felt duped. Here I'd identified with Bridget for 200 pages—her struggle was my struggle, her saga was my saga, and I actually took some comfort in reading about her travails (misery loves company, but didn't want to leave it at home because "you never know what powers these materials might have." Is it Harry Potter? Nope. Charity is freaking about The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

Theodora and Ashley also share with their secular cousins a certain plot line, what scholars call the marriage plot. The marriage plot has a venerable heritage. We find its origins not in *Bridget Jones*, but in the novels of the 18th century, typified by Austen. The marriage plot turns on pairing off a man and woman, testing them to see if the match is appropriate, and finally leading them down the aisle. The trajectory of a woman's life is one long courtship culminating in marriage, and marriage is the end of the story.

Chick lit, Christian and secular, has more or less followed the marriage plot.
I guess, even if the company is fictional. But there was no way for me to identify with wooing a billionaire attorney who would be played by Colin Firth in the film. Bridget went happily off to Never-never-land, and I was still at home with my dance card and my bathroom scale.

My wildly off-base expectations about Bridget's denouement now sound a little absurd. I've read over 40 specimens of chick literature, all of which end as Bridget ends—with the girl bagging the most eligible bachelor in London (or New York, or L.A.).

Yet some small, stubborn part of me expected, when I turned to the new Christian chick lit, a new ending. I imagined that the plot would not move us relentlessly toward coupledom, but might open up space for that Christian alternative—a hip, urban gal who finds a way of making peace with singleness, peace found through security in God, the community of the church, and the slow transformations of discipleship. After all, in the Christian moral vocabulary, marriage is a good thing, but it is not the only good thing. Singleness is also a good thing. Jesus, we might remember, managed to live a perfect life, and, Dan Brown's suppositions to the contrary notwithstanding, the only marriage plot it included was the eschatological wedding feast with the church.

Indeed, for Christians, marriage and singleness are not merely "lifestyle options," they are callings, and both the state of marriage and the state of singleness have something to teach the church. What marriage teaches the church is something about the communion between people that is now possible through Jesus Christ; what singleness teaches the church is the eschatological reality that singleness, as it were, trumps marriage. Singleness reminds the church that our most basic and fundamental relationship is not that of husband and wife, or parent and child, but with Christ and the rest of the church, as His Bride.

That I expected a plot twist in Christian chick lit is, perhaps, just as naïve as my original hopes for Bridget. For the contemporary church, with its emphasis on marriage and the nuclear family, so rarely proclaims this good word about singleness. Christian chick lit seems the perfect place for that proclamation.

INTERVIEW: Frank Schaeffer discusses life as a wartime parent and how watching his son join the Marines and go to the Middle East changed the way he thinks about his relationship with his famous father | by Susan Olasky

This is the seventh in an occasional series of e-mail interviews with writers, scholars, and others who help form the culture in which we live. WORLD hopes that readers, by listening to influential people who do not necessarily share WORLD’s perspective, will be better equipped for discussion and evangelism, and will be challenged to sharpen their own understanding. (Previous interviewees: Paul Theroux, Brian Jacques, Anne Lamott, Charles Murray, Joseph Epstein, and William F. Buckley.)

FRANK SCHAEFFER IS THE OUT-spoken son of Francis and Edith Schaeffer. Now a member of the Orthodox Church, Mr. Schaeffer has found what he calls his “fundamentalist” background to be a rich source of inspiration for his novels and other writings. Frank Schaeffer wrote in an essay on Beliefnet, “The Christian fundamentalists who stumble across my novels because of the family name detest them because they’re about religious people and are set in Europe, where my parents had their mission. Some evangelical readers take them as biographies and are offended that the parents in the stories are portrayed warts and all, thus besmirching the memory of Francis Schaeffer. Other fundamentalists just don’t like anything that pokes fun at the narrow legalistic Christianity in which they have invested themselves and with which they are infecting their children.”

In that same essay Mr. Schaeffer criticized both the political right and left for trying to force him into one camp or the other. Those who like his nonfiction books about the military tend to hate his novels, he says. Those who love the novels think he’s all wrong about the military. “So I’m caught in the shrinking space between two calcified political doctrines of the left and right. My correspondents seem so certain of everything—especially that God is on their side.”

Where is Mr. Schaeffer? “I hope there is still room in our polarized country for Christians like me, who don’t subscribe to any one-dogma-fits-all. It seems to me that life is too short, sweet, and mysterious for us to be able to exhaustively ‘explain’ anything much, let alone explain everything with certainty.”

WORLD: Faith of Our Sons is a journal of your experience as a military dad whose son was on active duty in Afghanistan. Do you think the increased information flow makes it harder or easier to be the parent on the home front now than it was during World War II?

FS: I think the information flow with e-mail and phone makes it easier for the military parent. What makes it harder is all the barrage of instant “real-time” TV news coverage. As a parent you get hooked on one hand and just wish the news was more serious and less entertainment orientated on the other. But it’s hard not to watch night and day and try and learn if your loved one is OK.

WORLD: When your son decided to enlist in the Marines, you and your wife had a hard time understanding his decision. You also found yourselves living among people who didn’t understand or admire what he’d done. They were basically hostile or indifferent to the military. How did your son’s decision transform your thinking about the military and war?

FS: I have to admit that before my son joined the Marines I was like a lot of my friends are now. I just assumed that the military was for other people, not my family. How I have changed is that what happens to our men and women is now intensely personal to me. I cry over the news of deaths, and am angry at how the widows and children of those killed in action are treated, which is not well, as I point out in the appendix of Faith of Our Sons. What happens to the “military family” is now MY problem. And I wonder why so many of our leaders have no children serving. I was once someone who had elitist attitudes regarding our military too. My son cured me of that, rather shame me!

WORLD: Your friend Frank Gruber, a Hollywood producer, is a major character in the book. He’s opposed to the war and hostile to the military, yet he loves you and your son. Explain what that relationship is like and how it survives such major differences in worldview?

FS: Frank is an agnostic Jew and I’m a practicing and believing Christian. Frank and I go way back to when he represented me when I was directing movies. We became friends and our friendship is based on a common commitment to our families. We disagree on a lot but both have been married to the same woman for many years—something all too rare in both "secular" and "Christian" circles these days. We both love our children, believe in family and love. What we differ over is the sort of issues the "culture wars" are being fought over, but our friendship survives those disagreements because we both love our families and also because we both love America.

WORLD: The papers are full of news and photos of the prison-abuse scandal. You write that your son was involved in
some activities too hard to talk about. What does he say about the scandal?

FS: He does not say much. As a parent I have to let John open up when he wants to and not push too hard. He went to war, not me, and he has earned the right to say or not say whatever he wants on the subject. I know, however, he will be angry with anyone that hurts the good name of the U.S. military, and as such he will want those who did the wrong thing brought to justice.

WORLD: Your father, Francis Schaeffer, was a great influence on many WORLD readers. Now that you’re a father, watching your son forge his own way, explain how it’s changed the way you think about your relationship with your father.

FS: In my book *Faith of Our Sons*, I say that I wished my dad was still alive so I could have shared the pain of sending my son to war and gotten his advice. I guess it takes living life to understand what we as children put our parents through. My dad and I were very close, but having John go to war has taught me that my own dad must have also suffered when he watched me as a young man starting life and wished he could reach out and guide me.

WORLD: You became an Orthodox Christian some time back. Are your children following that path? What role did your religious faith play in your waiting time?

FS: My children all did in fact join the Orthodox Church. The role faith played had nothing to do specifically with Orthodoxy as far as doctrine goes but to do with the absolute need for prayer and depending on grace. I have no idea how some of my secular friends get through life, but having John deployed taught me again that prayer and feeling God’s love and grace is the indispensable aspect of life, as basic as breathing.

WORLD: Has your opinion about the war in Iraq changed over the past year? If so, how? Do you fear that your son’s sacrifices may be in vain? What should the United States now do in Iraq?

FS: I’m only a military parent with no special insight into the war in Iraq. But for what it’s worth, my sense is that we needed to send a message to the Muslim-Arab world that the days of cutting and running as we did from the Marine barracks bombing in Beirut to the bombing of the Cole have to be over. My own view is that successive American administrations have sent the wrong signal from the time our hostages were taken by the Iranians almost to the present. So I don’t know how it will all come out in Iraq, but I do know we have to finish the job now we are there for better or worse. I note that the discussion of the war would be different if more of our leaders, including the president and members of Congress, had children serving the way that the Roosevelts did in World War II. We’d be a stronger country morally if our leaders had some “skin in the game.” Right now out of 535 members of Congress only six have kids serving.

WORLD: It’s 20 years since your father died, soon after writing *A Christian Manifesto*. What do you agree with and what do you disagree with in his *Manifesto*? If you were to write a Christian manifesto, what would it be like?

FS: I think I’d look at the whole culture from the point of view of trying to figure out how a very soft society can defend itself in the face of radical violent Islam. I would not only look at the internal threats of moral collapse as he did, but look at the fact that we are now under very real external attack. We now live in different times than my dad wrote in. The new fact we have to face is the rise of radical Islam.
Passionate companion

FRANK SCHAEFFER'S LATEST BOOK, *Faith of Our Sons: A Father's Wartime Diary*, is exactly what the title suggests: the proud, sometimes anguished, and often-angry account of his life during the 11 months his son John, a corporal in the U.S. Marines, spent fighting in Afghanistan.

He recounts the hours and days waiting to hear from John after every bit of bad news trumpeted 24/7 on cable TV. Short phone calls bring joy but also worry: Did he really sound OK? Letters and e-mails from other Marine families, shared in the book, help him deal with the uncertainty, while anti-war political statements made by officials of his church hurt.

The book isn't a patriotic homage to military service. It's too raw and personal for that. Some pages cry out, "Feel my pain," "Feel my anger at those leaders whose kids don't serve." But that emotional honesty and immediacy, expressed often with bad language, make real his experience to those who have never shared it. Those who have shared it will find in Mr. Schaeffer a passionate companion.

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BESTSELLERS: Popular fiction, feminist scholarship, and even Christians’ false piety have helped revive the ancient Gnostic heresy—perfect timing for a new manual for worldview thinking | by Gene Edward Veith

THE DA VINCI CODE BY DAN BROWN has sold more than 7 million copies in a little over a year. That sets a record for sales within a one-year period, so that its publisher can claim that the book is the biggest-selling adult novel of all time.

The book is indeed a thriller, hard to put down, with its exciting action, twists and turns, and unfolding puzzles. But this work of fiction puts forward certain ideas as true, and a good number of readers are accepting them as true: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and their bloodline continues to this day. His true teachings had to do with the worship of “the sacred feminine.” The Church suppressed His message with its patriarchal institutions and dogmatic theology, twisting the teachings of Jesus into an oppressive, life-denying system of harsh moral rules, the subjugation of women, the repression of sexual freedom, and sinister conspiracies to control society. Traces of the true Christian goddess worship can be found throughout the history of Western art, literature, and architecture, because the true faith has been preserved by an elite secret society.

All of these assertions are just false. They are ably refuted in works like Cracking the Da Vinci Code by James L. Garlon and Peter Jones and Breaking the Da Vinci Code by Darrell L. Bock. Even secular historians know these claims are nonsense. (No, Jesus did not get married; His bride is the Church. No, there were not 80 other gospels written earlier than those that made it into the New Testament. No, the Emperor Constantine did not compile the Bible. No, the Priory of Zion is not an ancient society; it was started in the 1800s. You can say a confident “No!” to just about every claim made by Mr. Brown.)

But this novel, with its enormous popularity, is just one attempt, in the words of postmodernist jargon, to deconstruct Christianity and to reconstruct it into a completely different religion.

The Da Vinci Code draws on mythology that has been current in occult and New Age circles for years, but they all draw on the ancient heresy of Gnosticism. As Mr. Garlon and Mr. Jones show in their exposé of the novel, The Da Vinci Code draws very specifically on Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt.

Gnostic myths reject the objective, created order in favor of an inner-directed secret knowledge. Since the creation is evil, so is the Creator, so the Gnostics turn the Old Testament upside down: God is attacked as a cruel, oppressive deity, while the serpent in the garden and Satan himself are seen as the good guys. Christ is not God in the flesh who died on the Cross but a mystical avatar who gives knowledge to the spiritual elite. Since the physical body doesn’t matter, sexual immorality is not problematic, and gender distinctions are illusions.

Today, feminist theologians are trying to bring back Gnosticism, thinking that it makes possible a higher view of women. In doing so, they are putting out seemingly scholarly works that repeat the howlers of Dan Brown’s fiction. According to Elaine Pagels, a theologian at Princeton University, the Gnostics were an authentic expression of early Christianity. They were suppressed by the early church because of their enlightened treatment of women, and the church fathers constructed the creeds of orthodoxy in order to silence the Gnostics and keep women in line. Like Mr. Brown, Ms. Pagels believes Christianity is simply a construction to keep a patriarchal, oppressive system in power, and they both advocate a revival of Gnosticism to take Christianity’s place.

Another contemporary apologist for Gnosticism, the literary critic Harold Bloom, says that Gnosticism has already
taken Christianity’s place. Mr. Bloom wrote a book titled *The American Religion*. That religion, according to him, is not Christianity but Gnosticism. He makes the point that the religions and denominations that grew up on American soil tend to be experiential, nondoctrinal, and highly individualistic—marks, he says, of Gnosticism. In his historical survey of American religious figures, he finds other specific marks of Gnostic mythology. The heroes of his book, those who are most Gnostic according to his analysis, are Mormons and *liberal* Southern Baptists.

Whether or not Mr. Bloom is right, it is certainly true that we are experiencing a Gnostic revival today. The current postmodernist worldview, which rejects objective truth in favor of the notion that truth is nothing more than a construction of the mind, is itself intrinsically Gnostic. This ideology lies behind Ms. Pagels’s scholarship: Historic Christianity, she assumes, is a construction. Following the tenets of feminist post-Marxism, she further believes that such constructions and their imposition on others are what they are simply to give power to one group (such as white, heterosexual males) and to keep other groups (such as minorities, women, and homosexuals) under their control.

These ideas are also explicitly maintained in *The Da Vinci Code*, which also explains why Mr. Brown and Ms. Pagels feel so free to make things up, in defiance of all objective evidence. If you are a Gnostic who does not believe the objective world really exists and that all truths are mere constructions, you can construct “truths” of your own to advance your power agenda. There really is no difference between fact and fiction. It is all fiction.

And if Christians have unwittingly succumbed to the Gnostic heresy, it is more urgent than ever that they learn what the biblical worldview really is and the difference that worldview makes as Christians live in the world.

Thus, a new book by Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Crossway), comes at the perfect time.

Christians have been learning to attend to “worldviews”—both the non-Christian ones that surround them (lest their thinking be distorted by the culture),
and the Christian one (so they can apply biblical truth to all of life and be a positive influence on that culture). Exactly what this entails, though, and how to apply worldview thinking in practical terms have not always been clear. Total Truth makes this clear. On one level, this book is a lucid, easy-to-understand manual for worldview thinking. But it also breaks new ground in worldview analysis.

Ms. Pearcey, who studied under Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri in Switzerland, applies his thinking in some insightful new ways. She demonstrates how and why the artificial distinctions between “facts and values,” “public and private,” have driven Christianity out of the external, objective world of “real life.” To the point that today, Christianity is seen both by opponents and adherents as nothing more than a personal, interior preference, something that exists only inside a person’s head.

She shows how Christians themselves cooperated in their own marginalization with a false piety centered in personal experience rather than objective truth. She shows how it is, for instance, that faculty members in a Christian college can say that they believe in the doctrine of Creation while, at the same time, teaching evolution in their classrooms. They affirm creation as a “value,” an inner conviction that gives them a sense of private meaning. They affirm evolution as a “fact,” an objective, scientific explanation. The two realms are completely separate. Their acceptance of scientific materialism makes no dent in their personal faith. And their personal faith has nothing to say about the objective world.

Ms. Pearcey ranges far and wide, from the history of ideas to contemporary issues faced by Christians today. She has an extensive section on Intelligent Design, the critique of Darwinism with which she has particular expertise. She shows how nearly every non-Christian worldview can be untangled by simply applying the Christian paradigm of Creation (what does this worldview think is the origin of the world?), the Fall (what does this worldview think is the source of human problems?), and Redemption (what does this worldview think is the solution that would put things right?).

She deals with gender issues. (Men have been consigned to the public sphere of brutal but meaningless facts; women have been seen as the source of inner, humanizing values. Trying to go from one realm to the other, without the biblical wholeness, gives us the feminization of the church, feminists who try to be masculine, and men who are alternatively macho and wimpy.)

She deals with apologetics and the culture wars, evangelism, and genuine Christian spirituality. She also shows how Christianity can be brought back into the external world once again. And for all of its intellectual and theological sophistication, Total Truth is written in a way that the average layperson will understand and appreciate.

The total truth of Christianity is far superior in every way to the total fabrications of postmodern Gnosticism.
A Biblical way to deal with the health care crisis

With rising health care and medical insurance costs, many Christians are looking for a better way to provide for health care needs. For the past eight years Samaritan Ministries has been enabling Christians to help one another with medical burdens through a unique ministry which does not require the use of insurance.

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"It really warms the heart to see that especially in these days there are still people who think about others. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for this wonderful gift. We really enjoy the school bag and the items that are in it." (MG)

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Credit risk

PAYING BILLS ON TIME IS NOT always enough to maintain good credit. A recent survey by the Public Interest Research Group found that nearly 80 percent of the credit reports it reviewed contained errors. And one in four included errors serious enough to deny credit or cause the consumer to pay higher interest rates as a potentially risky borrower.

With that in mind, consumers are advised to examine their reports from all three credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and Trans Union—at least once a year or before applying for new credit. The reports are available without charge in several states, and will be provided free nationwide by late next year.

The credit agencies are required to provide consumers with a toll-free telephone number and access to personnel during normal business hours to help resolve mistakes, but the credit bureaus haven't always complied.

In 2000, the three agencies paid a total $2.5 million to settle federal allegations that they blocked calls from more than a million consumers. And last year, Equifax agreed to pay an additional $250,000 to resolve allegations that it didn't do enough in 2001 to answer calls from consumers.

Wealth share

Aided by an improving economy, Americans gave at near-record levels last year. In its annual report, the Giving USA Foundation said donations in 2003 by individuals, estates, foundations, and corporations totaled $240.7 billion or 2.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product. The nation's all-time charitable giving high reached 2.3 percent of GDP in 2000.

Giving USA attributed last year's increase to a higher household net income, a stronger stock market, and improved corporate profits.

Religious organizations received the most contributions, with an estimated $86.4 billion, or 35.9 percent of all the giving. Of the 10 charitable categories documented by Giving USA, only educational organizations and foundations saw a decline in donations from 2002 to 2003.

As they see their giving levels climb upward, many charities and other tax-exempt organizations are keeping an eye on Washington, D.C.

That's because federal lawmakers are set to assess claims that nonprofit groups are using their tax-exempt legal status as a cover for criminal behavior. "We need reforms to shut down the hucksters who twist the good will and generosity of others for their own personal benefit," said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa). ☞

BALANCE SHEET

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer is seeking restitution and unspecified damages from Enron Corp. and several subsidiaries for allegedly manipulating market prices during the state's 2000-01 energy crisis and costing Californians billions of dollars.

The Bush administration will not create a national do-not-scan registry to discourage unwanted e-mail, fearing it could backfire and become a target list for new victims. The Federal Trade Commission told Congress that senders of unwanted sales pitches might mine such a registry for names.

United Airlines lost its bid for $1.6 billion in federal loan guarantees last week, a blow to the nation's second-largest airline as it tries to emerge from bankruptcy. The Chicago-based airline has been operating under bankruptcy protection for 18 months. Rising fuel prices will cost the company $750 million more than it expected.

Sprint Corp. said Wednesday it would eliminate 1,100 jobs due to increasing competitive pressures in the long-distance market. Competitors AT&T and MCI have said they won't lose long-distance business over price, meaning revenues are likely to drop across the industry. Sprint has cut more than 22,000 jobs in the last two years. ☞
TIME IS IT. Over 92% of people who own exercise equipment and 88% of people who own health club memberships do not exercise. A 4 minute complete workout is no longer hard to believe for all the people who since 1990 have bought our excellent ROM machine (stands for Range of Motion). Over 97% of people who rent our ROM for 30 days wind up purchasing it based upon the health benefits experienced during the tryout, and the ROM performance score at the end of each 4 minute workout that tells the story of health and fitness improvement. At under 20 cents per use, the 4 minute ROM exercise is the least expensive full body complete exercise a person can do. How do we know that it is under 20 cents per use? Over 90% of ROM machines go to private homes, but we have a few that are in commercial use for over 12 years and they have endured over 80,000 uses each, without need of repair or overhaul. The ROM 4 minute workout is for people from 10 to over 100 years old and highly trained athletes as well. The ROM adapts its resistance every second during the workout to exactly match the user’s ability to perform work. It balances blood sugar, and repairs bad backs and shoulders. Too good to be true? Get our free video and see for yourself. The best proof for us is that 97% of rentals become sales. Please visit our website at: www.FastExercise.com

The typical ROM purchaser goes through several stages:
1. Total disbelief that the ROM can do all this in only 4 minutes.
2. Rhetorical (and sometimes hostile) questioning and ridicule.
3. Reading the ROM literature and reluctantly understanding it.
4. Taking a leap of faith and renting a ROM for 30 days.
5. Being highly impressed by the results and purchasing a ROM.
6. Becoming a ROM enthusiast and trying to persuade friends.
7. Being ignored and ridiculed by the friends who think you’ve lost your mind.
8. After a year of using the ROM your friends admiring your good shape.
9. You telling them (again) that you only exercise those 4 minutes per day.
10. Those friends reluctantly renting the ROM for a 30 day trial.
Then the above cycle repeats from point 5 on down.

The more we tell people about the ROM the less they believe it.
From 4 minutes on the ROM you get the same results as from 20 to 45 minutes aerobic exercise (jogging, running, etc.) for cardio and respiratory benefits, plus 45 minutes weight training for muscle tone and strength, plus 20 minutes stretching exercise for limberness/flexibility.

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Engine trouble

INVESTIGATORS WANT TO KNOW WHY Microsoft.com, Yahoo.com, Google.com and other major websites were hit by a purported cyber-attack last month. The incident made these destinations sluggish or inaccessible to many users for about two hours.

This case is unusual because the attack did not focus on the well-known web powerhouses but on Akamai Technologies, a unique service provider that aims to make internet browsing more reliable. The company runs a giant network of 15,000 servers in 60 countries and uses them to distribute data for its 1,100 clients.

The attack was apparently a distributed denial-of-service attack, in which some of Akamai’s systems were hammered with junk data intended to make them slow down or stop working. The company said that the “sophisticated, large-scale” strike impacted its Domain Name Service, which converts monikers like “Microsoft.com” and “Yahoo.com” into numbers that internet routers can understand.

When names could not be translated, many users found the sites inaccessible. Those reportedly affected included Symantec, FedEx, Apple Computer, AltaVista, and Lycos. Akamai says it is cooperating with the FBI and other government agencies in investigating the attack.

Clearing the air

WILL DIGITAL RADIO UPSTAGE THE FAMILIAR AM and FM bands? This new technology promises better sound quality and less static—and some call it as big a change as that from black-and-white to color TV.

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) sends CD-quality sound over the air, along with text messages such as news headlines, weather reports, and song titles. Unlike satellite radio services, these stations are free to anyone who can receive the signal.

The technology was designed by a startup called iBiquity, which is partially owned by ABC, Clear Channel, and Viacom, and billed as “HD radio” in the United States. Other countries have had the technology for several years.

The recording industry is taking enough notice of the technology to express concern about piracy. Like normal radio, DAB signals can be recorded and played back. Last month music lobbyists asked that copyright protection be added to discourage people from distributing copies of songs. The FCC is still writing rules for digital radio, and anti-piracy measures could be mandated by law.

Right now, only about 100 stations across America broadcast DAB signals, and the receivers are still pricey. Widespread adoption could take several years, just as the FM band slowly grew to prominence.

BITS & MEGABYTES

Drivers heading down long highway stretches in Texas may soon find an oasis of free wireless Internet access at rest stops. Officials want to offer complimentary Wi-Fi to get motorists to take more frequent breaks. For those without laptops, they also plan to offer use of PCs with internet access for a fee.

A comScore Networks study of the nation’s 10 largest financial institutions found that 22 million consumers logged in to their accounts in March, a nearly 30 percent increase from a year earlier. More than 4.6 million Americans paid at least one bill via a bank online payment service in the first quarter this year, up from 1.9 million two years earlier.

Chinese bureaucrats want internet service providers to sign a “self-discipline pact” meant to stop the spread of content that Beijing says threatens “national security” or “social stability.” Signers are told to direct their users to “healthy online information.” Existing laws already order online firms and cybercafes to censor any criticism of the Communist government.

Black market narcotics are easy to find on the web—and underground druggists are willing to sell them, according to the General Accounting Office. Investigators were able to buy the painkiller hydrocodone (also known under the brand name Vicodin) from eight U.S. sites without having to visit a doctor for a prescription. They paid three to 16 times the normal price, which suggests that these “pharmacies” target a clientele that cannot get medications conventionally.
DIAPER DANDIES

ALL IT POST-LEBRON SYNDROME.
This year about a half dozen high-schoolers made the jump from their hometowns to the first round of the NBA draft. The talents of some of these NBA neophytes are unquestioned.

Dwight Howard, a born-again Christian high-school student, may have the finest skills in the draft. Raised by his grandfather (a Korean War-era Marine veteran), Shaun Livingston has a combination of discipline and size that could make him an outstanding point guard. Even if Georgia high-school product Josh Smith doesn't make it big in the NBA, he can always fall back on the $12 million deal he signed with Adidas. And then there's Sebastian Telfair, the sub-6-foot guard from New York. Mr. Telfair's size may be a detriment in the NBA, but it has already landed him on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

Many more high-schoolers, seeing what LeBron did last season, thought they could make it in the draft. Thankfully, four of the longest shots to be drafted out of high school withdrew their names once it became apparent they would not become instant NBA superstars. But Mississippi high-schooler Jackie Butler refused to give up the dream and now faces a tough road to NBA riches equipped with little more than an NBA-ready body.

ALL OR NOTHING AT ALL: Since 1996, 26 players have tried to make the jump from high school to the NBA. How they're faring...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kobe Bryant</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Traded to L.A. (for Vlade Divac), became one of the NBA's brightest stars, and is now a free agent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jermaine O'Neal</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>Languished before a trade to Indiana vitalized his career. On track to become the most dominant O'Neal in the NBA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taj McDavid</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>Scouts agreed McDavid lacked the talent to play for a frontline college team, much less in the NBA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy McGrady</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Became a scoring superstar in Orlando, but losing has prompted demands for a trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Harrington</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Blossomed into a key player in Indiana's rotation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashard Lewis</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>Averaged nearly 18 points per game last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korleone Young</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>Played ugly three games before Detroit gave up on him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis Richardson</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>After a draft-day snub, he drifted and eventually spent time in prison for robbery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Jonathan Bender</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Slowly growing into a contributor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon Smith</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Quickly traded to Dallas, where he showed himself to be an emotional wreck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius Miles</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>L.A. Clippers</td>
<td>Once a can't-miss prospect, Miles is on his third team even before his 23rd birthday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeShawn Stevenson</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>In his fourth pro season, he averaged over 10 points per game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame Brown</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Quickly written off as a draft-day bust, Brown is growing into a fine NBA big man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyson Chandler</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>L.A. Clippers</td>
<td>Injuries helped last season to become a big disappointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy Curry</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>Playing for the desperate Bulls, Curry started most of Chicago's games at center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSagana Diop</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>His three starts and 2.3 points per game average from last year were career highs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qusmane Cisse</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>Dropped to the second round because of a bum knee, but Denver ended up dropping him partially because he was three inches shorter than advertised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Key</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>Found his way back into the classroom, Los Angeles City College, and plays for the basketball team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amare Stoudemire</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Phoenix</td>
<td>Stoudemire was an instant force in the NBA, averaging over 20 points in just his second season. But reports have swirled this summer saying the Phoenix forward accepted more than $100,000 from agents while in high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeAngelo Collins</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>Off-court problems (an assault conviction as a freshman) caused him to slip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giedrius Rinkевичius</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>Rinkевичius, a Lithuanian transfer to a Maine school, moved to Texas after his NBA career fell short.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenny Cooke</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>[not drafted]</td>
<td>Failed in his tryout for Boston last season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeBron James</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>If Kobe Bryant started the last generation of high-school wannabes, James may start the next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis Outlaw</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>Played six games in his first season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndudi Ebi</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Played 32 minutes with Minnesota last season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendrick Perkins</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>His 8-for-15 field-goal shooting would have been good if it hadn't represented his entire first season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Lang</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>Now plays for Oklahoma in the USBL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Free House Church Book

An actual email from a reader:

"I can't tell you how much I appreciated and enjoyed your compilation "Ekklesia". You (and all the contributors) shed much light and maturity on what the New Testament has to say about church practice and confirmed my convictions even more that the Church today is bound by traditions other than that of the early Church. Your ministry and example are definitely a resource. Again, I thank you for your ministry at NTRF and for the Grace "laboring within"!

P.S. I also enjoyed the audio cassette of the radio show... what a great tool for introducing the concept of meeting in homes... May God bless you and all the brothers and sisters at NTRF and the Church that meets in your house!"

Raymond H., Forked River, NJ, Feb 1, 2004

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The answer

As our country finds it more and more difficult to understand and to influence the overwhelming chaos in the world, it is wonderful to read of our president as a man of prayer, morals, and unwavering convictions ("Holding the line," June 5). There have been mistakes, and each new day finds more reports of violence, economic uncertainties, and conflicts that seem to have no answer. But the truth is that Jesus Christ is the only answer, and I thank God that President Bush realizes that seeking Him is the most important thing he can do each day. —STEVE McQUEEN, Beaver, Okla.

Divided

Having recently been elected to my third four-year term as a school board director for a 13,000-student public-school district, I have come to the same conclusion as Joel Belz and some influential members of the Southern Baptist Convention ("Public divide," June 5). I can no longer encourage Christian parents to send their children to our blatantly secular public-school system, and certainly not if they're serious about ensuring their children receive a biblical worldview education. To the extent that I can influence the curriculum, and help provide a quality education for those students whose parents are not concerned about such things, I believe that God is calling me to serve my community on the school board. Sometimes it's a lonely job.

—CARL JOHNSON
Silverdale, Wash.

As the Pinckney-Shortt resolution points out, the choice is clear. If we are to take responsibility for our children receiving a Christ-centered education, we can no longer turn them over to the state for anti-Christian indoctrination.

—DOUG PRUITT
Richmond, Va.

At the Pinckney-Shortt resolution points out, the choice is clear. If we are to take responsibility for our children receiving a Christ-centered education, we can no longer turn them over to the state for anti-Christian indoctrination.

—DOUG Pruiett
Richmond, Va.

As a retired teacher from a family of public-school teachers, I'm thankful our grandchildren either attended private schools or were homeschooled. I admire those teachers with integrity and common sense who remain in our schools, and there are isolated districts that haven't yet lost their moral compass. But sending our children to public schools today is like taking them to a restaurant where good food is occasionally served, but more and more often there is "poison in the pot."

—KATHRYN THOMPSON PRESLEY
Bryan, Texas

I'm not going to argue that the public schools aren't in dire straits, but I think WORLD should consider the impact you are having on Christian educators in this country when you attack public education. I see the pain in my wife's eyes when she reads such columns. She teaches at a large public high school in a very rough part of Dallas, where the light of the gospel is needed the most. Yet I fear that if some Christians had their way, that place would never see the gospel.

—STEVE BROWN
Dallas, Texas

As someone homeschooled until I entered a public school in seventh grade, I agree that the public-school system has problems, but I don't believe that a "mass exodus" is the way to fight this godless environment. I believe churches and families should do a better job of teaching their kids to fight for their faith; much like my church has.

—LISA GRACE DUVICK, 15
Ames, Iowa

This matter calls for prayer and insight on the part of the parents. We need to honestly assess each child's strengths and weaknesses. Those who show the ability to withstand temptation and also influence their peers in a godly manner are desperately needed in our public schools. Those more easily swayed would benefit from a more sheltered environment. Our nation needs public, private, and home schooling. May the children in each school be molded into the best possible witness for God.

—KEVIN HULL
Alexandria, Ohio

Canadian fruit

The application of Muslim law in Canada ("Theocracy. Canadian style," June 5) should be a warning to the United States about the fruits of postmodern tolerance. Our founders asserted religious freedom, as defined by the Second Amendment, while religious tolerance attempts to equalize all religious beliefs. Let us hope that our leaders, particularly in the judicial branch, understand the difference.

—SHANE ATKINSON
Nolensville, Tenn.
Real leaders

As a black conservative, I was glad to hear a voice such as Mr. Cosby's speaking out about the problems in black American families ("Cosby's diagnosis," June 3). Regarding Cal Thomas's comments about "black leadership," I want to clarify that it is not always represented by the Jesse Jacksons and the Al Sharptons of the world. My leaders are the J.C. Wattses, the Colin Powells, and even the James Dobsons and William Bennett.

—Paul Denham
Averill Park, N.Y.

As one of your black readers, I appreciate when you highlight the achievements of black Americans, Christian or not. Although Mr. Cosby took some flak from liberals, he echoed what many of us not just believe but have seen firsthand. It's frustrating to see media caricatures that reinforce negative stereotypes of minorities, but even more disheartening when some people live up to such stereotypes. Not all do.

—Danette Matty
Roseville, Minn.

Golding's grasp

As a public high-school history teacher, I'd be lost without your insight into current events. Thanks, too, for Gene Edward Veith's column about The Lord of the Flies ("Golding's anniversary," June 3). Golding had a real grasp of man's fallen, sinful nature. I often discuss with my students whether we are born inherently good or inherently evil. One look at The Lord of the Flies shows both our propensity to fulfill the desires of the flesh and our need of a savior.

—Mark Albert
Hamilton, Mont.

Straw column?

In "Worth a mass" (June 3), Andree Seu does a nice job of spotlighting the high tension between Catholic politicians and the faith they simultaneously profess and dismiss. Unfortunately, she portrayed the Catholic Church's system for dealing with...
marriage-annulment requests as a straw man, summarily torched with a verse of Scripture. Mrs. Seu provides no insights into annulment from an established, orthodox Catholic voice, just some quirky quotes from a lone priest whose credentials on the subject at hand, or lack thereof, are never disclosed.

—DAVID PEARSON
North Branford, Conn.

Minority voice

Kudos to WORLD for allowing a minority voice to be heard (“Here comes the flood,” May 29). Gays as an overt subculture are here to stay. How are we as Christians going to respond? With anger and prejudice, or with “salt” and charity?

—DAVID GRESSMAN
Brea, Calif.

Worth 1,000 words

For years now I’ve appreciated Krieg Barrie’s illustrations which accurately portray (without words) the crux of whatever subject is being presented. His works are impressive week after week.

—STACY BURGER
Indianapolis, Ind.

Evolving nightmare

I, like Joel Belz, am not surprised at the atrocities at Abu Ghraib (“No preservatives,” May 22). Those who perpetrated the abuse played out the postmodern, relativistic worldview that permeates our society. Our kids are taught that they are the result of random chance, blobs of cells that have evolved over billions of years. Thus, life has no meaning, no value, no dignity, and there is nothing beyond the grave. Because truth is relative, no one can condemn you because your behavior cannot be measured against an absolute standard. This worldview will, in the end, destroy this country unless we repent of our rebellion against God’s moral absolutes and He brings a revival in our land.

—FRANK NOLTON
Goodrich, Mich.

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On point

Thank you for publishing the points of view on the Federal Marriage Amendment by Mike Farris and Don Wildmon ('Point, counterpoint,' May 22). If Mr. Wildmon wishes that Congress would implement Mr. Farris proposal, why isn't he working for it? Doesn't he believe God is big enough to give us the whole pie?

—SUSAN WILLIS
Stotts, Conn.

Correction

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor was on Dec. 7, 1941 ("Around the horn," June 19, p. 37).

SEND LETTERS TO: Editorial Dept., WORLD, P.O. Box 20002, Asheville, NC 28802; e-mail mailbag@worldmag.com; or fax (828) 253-1556. Include full name and address. Letters may be edited to yield brevity and clarity.
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Grrrls’ claws

Nancy Drew with a bad attitude:
The “grrrl lit” genre at least admits the failures of feminism, but the in-your-face attitude is here to stay

In The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan used magazine literature as an indicator of attitudes toward women fostered by women. In throwaway short stories about wives and mothers, she detected the outlines of a powder-pink prison: Post-war women were being conditioned, and girls were being taught, to have no ambitions beyond the decorative domestic celebrated in McCall’s.

Growing up in the years she was writing about, I wasn’t aware of my ambitions being flattened via reading material. My friends stormed the library for Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden, while I favored biographies and series books about nurses. The heroines I remember were smart, proactive, and self-confident. Little did they know how oppressed they were.

Female protagonists were soon to have their eyes opened by the women’s movement. Throughout the 1970s and early 80s, they suffered mental, emotional, and physical abuse at the hands of the patriarchy, a trend that shifted down to young-adult novels. But feminism has passed on to a new generation, and women’s fiction has entered a new phase. The overearnest victim stage is fading, to make room for a brash and breezy genre unanticipated by those who demanded to be taken seriously back in the 70s—“chick lit.” The corresponding young-adult category is “grrrl lit.”

As near as I can tell, the word grrrl originated with the “riot grrrl” movement: a rash of assertive (is there any other kind?) female rock bands of the early 90s. The spelling of the essential noun varies in the number of r’s, but its spirit leaps out with a swipe of half-concealed claws. Grrrls are tigresses in training, working up the nerve and experience to become smooth, powerful women with cool boyfriends. And, after fantasy novels and movie/celebrity tie-ins, grrrl books are the bread and butter of young-adult publishing.

“Grrrl” protagonists can be classified into distinctive types, some of them holdovers from the earlier stages of feminism. “Sheroes” are females who excel in traditional male roles, such as saving the world. The basic premise is best suited for fantasy, like the popular series novels by Tamora Pierce, in which determined young women triumph over fierce opposition to become renowned warriors.

“Survivors” are a staple of realistic fiction: girls who suffer some form of abuse (usually male), flounder in guilt and doubt, and finally find strength in themselves to overcome. Survivor novels peaked in the mid-1990s, but Laurie Anderson’s Speak (FSG, 1999), about a 14-year-old rape victim, still sells briskly in paperback.

“Superfriends” celebrate power in numbers. In The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants by Anne Brashares (Delacorte, 2001), four friends discover that a single pair of used jeans fabulously fits all of them. Before going their separate ways for the summer, they vow to mail the pants to each other in two complete cycles. Sharing their experiences at summer’s end, they realize that friendship—not faith or family—is the greatest stabilizing element of their lives.

A new kind of grrrl is prowling the bestseller charts—the “Sassy Scenairst” who records her adventures in life and love with comic angst (Omigosh! The Hunk is picking me up at seven, and is that a ZIT on my NOSE?!). Mia Thermopolis, of The Princess Diaries, is the best known of this type, but a better example is Georgia Nicolson, the slinky London lass who introduced herself in Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging. Angus rode rather obviously on the success of chick lit classic Bridget Jones’s Diary, but unlike Bridget, who is anxiously seeking Mr. Right, Georgia is trolling for Mr. Makeout. Her adventures so far have taken four volumes, the last of which is Dancing in My Nuddy-Pants (don’t ask).

What distinguishes Georgia Nicolson and other grrrls from Nancy Drew is attitude: a will to claim their territory and define their terms of occupation as girls. They are also funny—brashly so in The Princess Diaries, satirically in Angus, ruefully in Sisterhood, cynically in Speak. Humor signals that the feminist movement has passed beyond its angry, earnest beginnings and is now able to laugh—even at itself. That’s good news and bad news. The laughter is often a wry acknowledgment that feminism hasn’t delivered on all its promises. But the in-your-face attitude is here to stay.

A virtuous female protagonist, who can find? Try browsing the novels of Joan Bauer (Squashed, Rules of the Road, Hope Was Here, etc.) for heroines who have no ax to grind and don’t apologize for “mundane” ambitions. Ms. Bauer’s novels are too sunny for deep insight, but they’re a breath of fresh air after Georgia’s nuddy-pants—and funny, too. Young ladies who don’t aspire to grrrlhood may want to check them out.
Society and souls
Treadmill books on where we are and where we’re going

In the last treadmill books column (April 24) I offered seven innings of books about a variety of topics. Now we come to the eighth and ninth, where the pressure is on.

Think of the eighth inning in a close game as one in which each team tries whatever it can to get one more run across the plate, and you have a good picture of our divided culture. Michael Barone’s Hard America, Soft America (Crown, 2004) succinctly explains a chunk of the divide: Part of America is ruled by competition and accountability, and part tries to protect people from tough realities. Since countries to survive must be mostly hard, it’s important to protect children for a time and gradually build up their stamina for the tough races to come; schools that offer social promotion and ban dodge ball are overly easy. Robert Shogan’s War Without End: Cultural Conflict and the Struggle for America’s Political Future (Westview, 2002) is a moderate liberal’s well-written and generally fair overview of the culture war from the 1960s to the present.

Welcome to the Ivory Tower: Confessions of a Conservative College Professor, by North Carolina’s Mike S. Adams (Harbor House, 2004), illuminates one key theater of our culture wars. Ben Shapiro’s Brainwashed (WND Books, 2004) provides sprightly writing, devastating description, and useful stats about how rare Republicans or conservatives are at university after university, from the Ivy League to UCLA. One chapter titled “The War on God” shows the overwhelming anti-religious bias among the professoriate, with one curious exception: Islam gets favorable treatment, since again and again professors call it a “religion of peace.”

The limitations of academia are evident in Tevi Troy’s Intellectuals and the American Presidency: Philosophers, Jesters, or Technicians (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), which shows how we professors who advise politicians envision ourselves as philosophers but generally fall into the second or third camp. The limitations of Washington media and political operatives are evident in two funny novels by Jeffrey Frank, The Columnist (Simon & Schuster, 2001) and Bad Publicity (Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Hard America is firm but fair, and that’s particularly vital to note in the harsh light of Abu Ghaith. The Man Who Shocked America: The Life and Legacy of Stanley Milgram (Basic, 2004) explores the life and legacy of a generally atheistic social psychologist best known for 1960s experiments that purportedly showed the willingness of Americans to torture others if they thought they were participating in a scientist-sanctioned experiment; pundits for a time used that research to contend that the dark night of fascism was only moments away. Dave Donaldson and Stanley Carlson-Thies provide an optimistic view in A Revolution of Compassion: Faith-Based Groups as Full Partners in Fighting America’s Social Problems (Baker, 2003).

The ninth inning is the metaphorical life-or-death time for a team, and that’s when we move from books about society to books about souls. How-to books often make good gifts, but here’s one that every incoming freshman should receive: J. Budziszewski’s How to Stay Christian in College (NavPress, 2004). Chapters about the academic, sexual, and political myths prevalent on campus are particularly valuable. Michael L. Simpson’s Permission Evangelism: When to Talk, When to Walk (Cook Communications, 2003) also provides good advice on how to act when surrounded by unbelievers.

Christianity is the one religion that is simultaneously hard (God is holy) and soft (God is loving) because Christ’s sacrifice makes reasonable what would otherwise be a contradiction. Great sermons emerge from tough minds and warm hearts which understand that, and Sermons That Shape America: Reformed Preaching from 1635 to 2001 (P&R Publishing, 2003) contains some of the best. University of Georgia scientist Henry Schaefer takes on Darwinian and other lies in Science and Christianity: Conflict or Coherence (The Apollos Trust, 2003), and Erwin Lutzer’s The Da Vinci Deception (Tyndale, 2004) explodes a bestseller’s nonsense.

I’ll end with two books that can puncture the pride of progressives who see Christian belief as outmoded. Alister McGrath’s The Twilight of Atheism (Doubleday, 2004), a magisterial look at “the rise and fall of disbelief in the modern world,” shows that atheism was weighed in the 20th century and found wanting. I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek (Crossway, 2004), ardently turns the tables on those who see belief in Christ as either crutch or blind leap.

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The True Story that Rocked India

Avatar of Night is the true story of one man’s epic quest in the heart of India. Tal Brooke spent two years in South India in the inner circle of India’s most powerful self-proclaimed godman & miracle-worker and saw things that seemed to obliterate all Western conceptions of reality. What had at first appeared as the prized state of godlike enlightenment, which seemed just within reach, became something else. Sai Baba’s outward divinity concealed a much darker reality.

When this 400-page bestselling insider’s account was published by India’s largest press, Vikas Publishing, it rocked India. Critics have praised this book for its literary depth and unsparring look at the truth, sometimes at the author’s expense. India Today’s cover expose on Sai Baba (Dec. 4, 2000) showed a picture of Avatar of Night as the groundbreaking book that first revealed the dark side of this enigmatic miracle-worker whose followers number in the many millions.


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Is Your Worldview Really Trinitarian?

*Trinity & Reality:*
*An Introduction to the Christian Faith*
by Ralph A. Smith

The Trinity is the heart of the Christian gospel, but Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seldom occupies that position in contemporary discussions of the Christian worldview. This book helps fill the need by unveiling the Trinity at the center of reality.

Ralph Smith shows how Trinitarian life shapes covenants, creation, revelation, miracle, kingdom, self, church, and eternity. He compares the Trinity to opposing viewpoints, including secularism and other religions, highlighting the practical implications of Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian views for the individual and society.

This book provides basic training for all Christians, especially students, high school and up, who desire to transform the foundations of culture.

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*A Walk Through the Christian Home*
by Douglas Wilson

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The driving desire of the gospel is “my life for yours.” Our desire should be to have this love transform everything we do, room by room. This book works its way through every part of the house, examining each part in light of Scripture. The claims of God are always total, and this should be evident on the doorposts and in a sink full of dishes.

Self-centeredness destroys in monotonously similar ways. Giving up life for another produces a harvest of kindness and mercy. Household questions should always begin with, “is this my life for yours?”

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