

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

Christian History & Biography Celebrates 25 Years

Jennifer Trafton

The first issue of *Christian History* magazine, launched by Kenneth Curtis in 1982, was clear about its purpose: "An awareness of Christian history is one of the most neglected but necessary ingredients in the spiritual diet of Christians today. ... We are too easily captive to the contemporary and become unthinking assenters to our culture's seduction by the now, the latest, the present moment. understanding of Christian history will help us in many ways. We will uncover precedents in the past of how God has worked. We will gain perspective that will help us see our current situation in a new light. We will develop a sense of continuity and see how the unfolding of God's purposes transcends any single generation, century, denomination, geography, or ideology."

Twenty-five years and 94 issues later, *Christian History & Biography* still strives (as our mission statement says) "to explore the Christian heritage in a nonsectarian and warm-hearted spirit." We firmly believe that we're not just providing intellectual food for history buffs; we're giving Christians theological tools and historical models for wisely thinking and acting in the present. In short, the church cannot move forward into the future without listening to those who came before us.

But the leap from "Hmm, that's interesting and helps me understand our heritage better" to "This will change the way I think, worship, and act today" is not an easy one for many people. How often, in contemporary moral debates, do Christians refer to the past 2000 years for help in facing the current situation?

For our 25th anniversary issue, we wanted to take a sample of modern problems and historical figures and show how this could happen. We e-mailed scholars and long-time friends of the magazine and asked them to nominate one or more people from church history from whom they believed we have the most to learn in order to face certain pressing challenges in the 21st century. The open-ended invitation sparked a fascinating online conversation as suggestions poured in—proving to us that this is indeed a vital question for Christians today. Will we settle for collective amnesia, or will we take seriously the fact that being part of the body of Christ means acknowledging the **whole** body of Christ—across cultures, across denominations, across centuries?

We are saving many of these wonderful suggestions for future issues. The current issue represents only a small selection—a sampler box of chocolates to tempt the palate—focusing primarily on our social responsibilities in a fallen world. There are many more Christians from history who give us principles or models that we can carry with us into the coming century, and that's why we exist as a magazine: to introduce you to these spiritual ancestors.

The articles that follow include a wide range of perspectives—both on the part of the authors and the people they are writing about. You may agree, disagree, want to press a question further ... Tell us about it! You can e-mail us at history@christianitytoday.com or visit www.christianhistory.net/25thanniversary. This anniversary webpage will include selected reader comments on specific topics, resources for further study, and other special features. We'll also be posting testimonials from our subscribers about what the magazine has meant to them over the years, so send us your stories.

How can history inform our lives today? It's worth talking about for another 25 years, at least.

Next issue: Johann Sebastian Bach: Preaching Through Music

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Love Amidst the Brokenness

The fall of Rome was the 9/11 of the ancient world; Alaric, its Osama bin Laden. As the "eternal city" crumbled, Augustine of Hippo pointed Christians to the City of God—the eternal church on pilgrimage through a world that is not our home.

Timothy George

September 11, 2001, is frequently compared to December 7, 1941, as a day that will "live in infamy." But a more appropriate analogy might be August 24, 410, when the city of Rome was besieged and pillaged by an army of 40,000 "barbarians" led by the Osama bin Laden of late antiquity, a wily warrior named Alaric.

Before then, Roman coins bore the legend *Invicta Roma Aeterna*: Eternal, unconquerable Rome. It had been more than 800 years since the Eternal City had fallen to an enemy's attack. In many ways, Rome was like America prior to 9/11, the world's only superpower. But in 410, Rome's military power could not prevent its walls being breached, its women raped, and its sacred precincts burned and sacked.

There,
instead
of
victory,
is truth;
instead
of high
rank,
holiness;
instead
of
peace,
felicity;
instead
of life,
eternity.

When the Bible translator Jerome heard about the fall of Rome in faraway Bethlehem, he put aside his *Commentary on Ezekiel* and sat stupefied in total silence for three days. "Rome was besieged," Jerome wrote to a friend. "The city to which the whole world fell has fallen. If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" The British monk Pelagius, who was in Rome when the attack occurred, gave this report: "Every household had its grief, and an all-pervading terror gripped us."

Augustine, the bishop of Hippo in North Africa, began writing *The City of God* to counter those who said Rome's fall was the gods' punishment of the ascendant Christians, and to give guidance to fellow Christians who felt the world was crumbling around them. He completed this "great and laborious work," as he called it, just four years before his death in 430. Its influence extended to the Reformation and beyond. For 1,500 years, it has been the bedrock of a Christian philosophy of history.

Between the conversion of Constantine in 312 and Augustine's own conversion in 386, the Christian movement had been transformed from a small, persecuted sect into an officially established religion within the Roman Empire. Eusebius of Caesarea, the biographer of Constantine, had hailed the emperor as the 13th apostle and acclaimed his conversion in utopian terms. Nearly a century later, Augustine realized that such hopes were as misplaced as they had been premature. As wealthy refugees from Rome began to stream into Hippo with their horror stories of Alaric's acts—temples burned, women raped, citizens forced to flee for their lives—Augustine reminded his hearers that the City of God in its pilgrimage here on earth was not exempt from the ravages of time, that it was ever marked "by goading fears, tormenting sorrows, disquieting labors, and dangerous temptations."

Barbarian Invasion

Rome had been "falling" for some time. Alaric was merely the latest in a long line of barbarian chieftains whose forces had been pressing down upon Rome. The Visigoths, Alaric's tribe, began their incursion into the Roman Empire in the winter of 406, when the Rhine River had frozen solid and was easily crossed by thousands of hungry warriors seeking grain and gold and the beautiful artifacts Roman soldiers had

brought back to Italy from all over the known world. Alaric had already besieged Rome on two occasions prior to 410. Both times he had been bought off by bribes from wealthy Roman senators who thought such maneuvers could fend off imminent disaster.

When Alaric and his army appeared before the gates of Rome in 410, the besieged citizens were at the point of starvation and had little with which to bargain. They tried to bluff their way out of the crisis by telling Alaric that, if he invaded the city, thousands of Romans would rise up to repel him. Alaric replied, perhaps with a grin, "The thicker the hay, the more easily it is mowed down." He demanded everything they had—gold, silver, temple ornaments, anything that could be seized and carried away, including many of the slaves who populated the city. **And what will you leave us?** the negotiators wanted to know. **Your lives**, Alaric replied.

Then, on the fateful night of August 24, someone inside the city opened one of the 12 recently reinforced gates, and Alaric's army flooded into the streets of Rome. For three days they plundered, pillaged, and terrorized the city. Survivors told of carts filled with corpses, dogs barking and roaming free through the temple precincts, men hunted down and murdered in the public baths. Priests were assaulted, virgins raped, and one aged woman, Marcella, was brutally beaten because she had no gold to offer the attackers. When walking through the ruins of the Roman Forum today, one can still see the green stains of copper coins melted into the stone floor of the marketplace from the conflagration set by Alaric and his marauders.

In 455 (25 years after Augustine's death) the Vandals, led by a brigand named Genseric, invaded Italy and plundered Rome. It was even more devastating than Alaric's raid. The Roman Empire limped along until 476, the date of its decisive, definitive fall when another hairy barbarian warlord, Odovacer, deposed the beardless boy emperor, Romulus Augustulus. Thus, as one historian has said, "Rome joined the company of Nineveh and other fallen empires."

The events of 410, however, had a psychological effect not matched by later episodes. It set Augustine thinking about the meaning of history, the reality of time, and the calling of Jesus' followers to live with hope amidst tottering empires that come and go.

The Shape of History

In *The City of God*, Augustine forged a distinctive understanding of history that differed sharply from both the contemporary pagan paradigm and two other views that had prevailed in the early church until then.

First, he refuted the cyclical view of history—the image of history as a great wheel turning round and round, with no beginning or end. Today, we associate this view with Eastern religions such as Buddhism, but it was popular in Augustine's culture as well. Indeed, the myth of the eternal return was the dominant assumption of the age. When Paul preached about Jesus and the resurrection in Athens, the Athenians thought he was talking about a male God, Jesus, and his female consort, **Anastasis** (the Greek word we translate as "resurrection," Acts 17:18). Resurrection was a characteristic of the pantheon of dying and rising savior gods celebrated in the mystery religions and, with much more sophisticated language, in the philosophy of Porphyry and Plotinus that Augustine knew so well.

But Augustine could not square this philosophy with biblical faith. The first few words of the Bible contradicted the cyclical view of history: "In the beginning God created." Augustine reflected deeply on the creation narrative in Genesis. In Book 11 of *Confessions* he recorded a startling, brilliant discovery. He came to see that God had not only created both time and space but had created them simultaneously and interdependently. This insight, which Augustine derived from meditation on the Bible, anticipated Einstein's theory of relativity by 1500 years. History had a definite beginning point when God said, "Let there be." It had a decisive turning point in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it will

come to a certain consummation at a future time known only to God himself.

But within the Christian tradition, there were two other views Augustine also rejected. One was the apocalyptic view of history, which focused on the imminent end of the world and often included speculations and prophecies about the future millennium. Some of Augustine's contemporaries interpreted the fall of Rome in exactly this way, applying the angel's prediction in Revelation 14:8 to the events of 410: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Contrary to this interpretation, Augustine pointed out that, after all, Rome was still standing despite what had happened to her at the hands of Alaric. Perhaps God had not intended for the end to come just yet.

Augustine also rejected the progressive view of history. This was popular among those who stood in the tradition of Eusebius and sought to equate the Christian cause with the "converted" Roman Empire. Prudentius, a Christian poet, held such a view. In a poem written in 403, he personifies a Christianized **Roma** and has her say that, since the Christian faith has been embraced, "no barbaric enemy shatters my walls with a javelin and no man with strange weapons, attire and hairdress wanders around the city he has conquered and carries off my young men into transalpine prisons." Well, by 410, Alaric and his Visigothic conquerors were indeed wandering around the city they had conquered! This was the rude awakening that shocked the world. It helped Augustine to see ever more clearly the peril of identifying the City of God too closely with any earthly city, including Rome. "The Heavenly City outshines Rome, beyond comparison," he wrote. "There, instead of victory, is truth; instead of high rank, holiness; instead of peace, felicity; instead of life, eternity."

Chastened Virtue

What can we learn from Augustine's understanding of history in light of the fall of Rome? Augustine teaches us that Christians are those who live in time but who belong to eternity. He also teaches us that we must not equate any political entity—whether it be the Roman Empire, the American Republic, the United Nations, or anything else—with the kingdom of God. This is one side of the Augustinian equation, but there is another. Christians hold a double citizenship in this world. Like the apostle Paul—who could claim that his true political identity was in heaven (Phil. 3:20), but who also appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen when his life was at stake—so believers in Christ live as sojourners, resident aliens, in a world of profound discontinuity and frequently contested loyalty.

Political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain summarizes Augustine's counsel to believers beset by such fears and hopes: "[R]esisting altogether any notion of earthly perfection, Augustine offers instead a complex moral map that creates space for loyalty and love and care, as well as for a chastened form of civic virtue."

The key word here, **chastened**, calls for a posture of engagement that acknowledges, in the words of the old gospel hymn, "this world is not my home; I'm just a-passin' through," while **at the same time** working with all our might to love our neighbors as ourselves and to seek justice and peace as we carry out what Augustine calls "our business within this common mortal life."

There are two major (and regrettably common) mistakes Augustine wants us to avoid. One is the lure of utopianism—the mistake of thinking we can produce a society that will solve our problems and bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. This was the basic error of both Marxism and 19th-century liberalism.

The other error, equally disastrous, is cynicism. This creeps upon us as we see ever-present evil. We withdraw into our own self-contained circle of contentment, which can just as well be a pious holy huddle as a secular skeptics club.

Citizens of Another City

C. S. Lewis confronted the temptation to give in to lethargy and cynicism when he preached at the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Oxford on October 22, 1939. Less than two months earlier, Hitler had invaded Poland. Britain was about to face the horrible Nazi onslaught. This is what Lewis told the assembled students:

"It may seem odd for us to carry on classes, to go about our academic routine in the midst of a great war. What is the use of beginning when there is so little chance of finishing? How can we study Latin, geography, algebra in a time like this? Aren't we just fiddling while Rome burns?"

"This impending war has taught us some important things. Life is short. The world is fragile. All of us are vulnerable, but we are here because this is our calling. Our lives are rooted not only in time, but also in eternity, and the life of learning, humbly offered to God, is its own reward. It is one of the appointed approaches to the divine reality and the divine beauty, which we shall hereafter enjoy in heaven and which we are called to display even now amidst the brokenness all around us."

That is our calling, too, amidst the brokenness—including the threat of terrorism—all around us. We are to be faithful to God's calling, to bear witness to the beauty, the light, and the divine reality that we shall forever enjoy in heaven. We are to do this in a culture that seems, at times, like Augustine's: a crumbling world beset by dangers we cannot predict.

The Christian attitude toward history is neither arrogant self-reliance ("We can make it on our own") nor indifference ("It doesn't matter what we do anyway"), but hope—the hope that radiates from a messy manger, a ruddy tree, and an empty tomb. Christians are those who know that time and this world do not terminate upon themselves; they are penultimate realities that can never satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart, the restless heart Augustine wrote so much about. And so we live in this world not self-indulgently nor triumphantly, as though our future were in our own hands, but humbly, compassionately, committedly, and yes, ambiguously, as those who belong ultimately to another City, one with foundations whose builder is God.

That means, as Augustine said, that we are called to live by love. Love is the one thing we can experience in time that will remain in eternity. Faith, hope, love, these three; but love is the greatest. Love is eternal.

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The Starving Body of Christ

We live in a world of vast economic injustice, crippling poverty, and wealthy churches. So did "golden-mouthed" preacher John Chrysostom.

Bradley Nassif

In recent years, believers from all segments of the Christian community have begun to recover the social dimensions of the gospel. In the Catholic church, the legendary luminaries have been Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. In the Orthodox tradition, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos is helping to rebuild Albania after years of domination by the world's most oppressive communist regime. Evangelical endeavors have included Ronald Sider's book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and Rick Warren's "Five Year P.E.A.C.E. Plan"—a massive effort to mobilize one billion Christians to rid the world of poverty, illiteracy, and other social ills. These trends will surely grow in the years to come. But unless we are guided by others wiser than ourselves, we may build our ministries on sinking sand.

In the history of Christianity, John Chrysostom is mostly remembered as a great preacher. The epithet "Chrysostom" means "golden-mouthed." His name came to be identified with the liturgy that is now celebrated nearly every Sunday in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The greatest medieval Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, said that if he could choose only one book to read outside of Scripture it would be John Chrysostom's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. The Protestant reformer John Calvin adopted Chrysostom's method of preaching through the Bible book by book—a method still widely used in pulpits today.

You make golden vessels, but Christ himself is starving. You make golden chalices, but fail to offer cups of cold water to the needy.

Even outside the Christian world, John's influence has been great. After World War II, Charles Malik, a Lebanese Christian philosopher and board member of Harvard university, proposed that the social teachings of John Chrysostom be adopted as policy for the founding charter of the United Nations.

John's world was like ours—full of tensions, social injustices, love of money, and a "me first" mentality guiding every decision. In response to that world, he emphasized a Christian philanthropy that was rooted in the church's worship, the incarnation of Christ, and the Bible's command to love others. He believed that as we love and serve one another—especially the poor—we grow in the image and likeness of Christ. John's views on wealth and poverty have great potential to guide and challenge the church today.

Preacher, not people pleaser

John was born in Antioch, Syria, and trained in classical rhetoric and the literal interpretation of the Bible. While still a student, he decided to become a monk and gave up his possessions to serve God in the desert. For six years he subjected himself to such extreme forms of asceticism that he permanently injured his health. He returned to Antioch and soon became a priest. Most of his 600 sermons that survive were delivered there.

The city of Antioch was a great cultural center of the Roman Empire. John estimated that one-tenth of the population was rich, one-tenth was poverty stricken, and the rest were somewhere in between. He often preached against worldliness and neglect of the poor. In one sermon he asked the rich, "You say you have not sinned yourselves. But are you sure you are not benefiting from the

previous crimes and thefts of others?"

His fame soon spread to Constantinople, the eastern capital of the Roman Empire. In 398, John was kidnapped and elevated, against his will, to the honored status of bishop of Constantinople (head pastor of the capital). Once again the "golden-mouthed" preacher found himself in a worldly cosmopolitan city. The luxurious perks that accompanied the life of an imperial bishop did not sit well with his monastic spirit. As soon as he arrived, he began reforming the church. Despite his love for liturgy, he was critical of the ornate decorations in the Church of the Holy Wisdom where he ministered. On one occasion, he sold the golden chalices in order to give the proceeds to the poor. He declared, "You make golden vessels, but Christ himself is starving. You make golden chalices, but fail to offer cups of cold water to the needy. Christ, as a homeless stranger, is wandering around and begging, and instead of receiving Him you make decorations."

Eventually, John had a falling out with the Christian empress Eudoxia over her public display of vanity (she erected a statue of herself and placed it across the street from John's church). When Eudoxia exiled him in 407, John became one of those he cared most about—a homeless prisoner ignored and forgotten by the world. Forced to walk 400 miles, he slowly died in exile. His last words were, "Glory be to God for all things!"

Love, liturgy, and incarnation

The source of John's vision of the gospel was his love for Scripture. Jesus taught that treasures are to be stored in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-20). The apostle Paul wrote, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Thus John concluded, "A love for wealth is abnormal." He feared that possessions kept for selfish purposes were, in a sense, stolen from the poor. One cannot be rich without keeping others poor. "So destructive a passion is avarice that to grow rich without injustice is impossible," John argued; "The root and origin of riches must have been injustice."

For this reason, he envisioned a just society based on equality for all. Because all people are made in the image of God, John sought to defend human dignity regardless of social status. No private property should exist. Everything belongs to God and is given to us for our common use. Material things are not inherently evil. But injustice occurs when some people use material things for profit while others are starving.

John pointed to the book of Acts as a model of true community: "Observe the increase of piety," he said. "They cast away their riches, and rejoiced and had great gladness for greater were the riches they received without labor. None reproached, none envied, none grudged—no pride, no contempt. No talk of 'mine' and 'yours' ... Neither did they consider their brother's property foreign to themselves. It was property of the Master. Nor again did they consider anything all their own, for all was the brethren's."

Was John preaching communism? It's easy to conclude that if we only look at the statements above. But it's important to realize that John's concern for the poor was inseparable from his view of worship. He believed that the body of Christ in the Eucharist—the center of the church's worship—is vital, but it is not the only place where we see Christ embodied. All human beings (Christians and pagans alike) mirror God's image, but the poor, the suffering—those whom John could see "lying everywhere, both in alley ways and market places"—do so in a special way because they reflect the humility of his incarnation. When God became human, he took upon himself all the conditions of our fallen state, except sin. John's social theory flowed from this emphasis on the Incarnation.

Indifference to the poor, therefore, reveals poor worship. "You honor the altar at church," John says, "because the body of Christ rests upon it. But those who are themselves the very body of Christ you treat with contempt and you remain indifferent when you see them perishing." No person can grow in godliness unless he serves his brethren. It is not enough to worship at the altars of the church. The true

altars are the physical bodies of real men and women.

A teacher for the ages

John Chrysostom can guide the church in the coming century in five ways. First, he admonishes us to root our work in the gospel as revealed supremely in Scripture. Second, he reminds us that the kingdom of God is not of this world, so we should share our time, talents, and treasures with others, especially the poor and downtrodden. In so doing we should strive for equality as faithful stewards of God's creation.

Third, John appeals to the church, not political structures, as an agent of social change. Only the gospel can get to the heart of the cure. The transformation of the individual and the transformation of society are only possible through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Fourth, the gospel addresses both body and soul. We must keep in balance the need for personal conversion as well as social and economic justice.

Finally, all of this flows from love for others who are made in the image of Christ. That love is ultimately derived from a Christ-centered, Trinitarian faith focused on the Eucharist and publicly proclaimed in worship. There is a liturgy after the liturgy: The worship of God through loving service to the poor is an outgrowth of the public worship of the church.

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Contagious Compassion

Deadly epidemics and social traumas haunt the news and test the limits of our kindness and courage. How should Christians respond, when the church itself is so divided? Perhaps we need another Catherine of Siena.

James D. Smith III and Kimberly Dawsey-Richardson

These are disturbing times: We cannot escape news of the global AIDS crisis, the impending flu pandemic, the plight of political prisoners, the resurgence of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and the failure of leaders. The last century's fascination with progress has given way to longings for hope and belonging.

Harvard historian Clarissa Atkinson has observed, "Today, an awareness of dangers we can't seem to stop makes us, in some ways, more like medieval people than like our own great grandparents." If so, there may be no better mentor for us than the medieval saint and Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena. She lived in a time of almost apocalyptic fear. The Black Death and the institutional convulsions of the Catholic Church caused a devastated populace to cry out. Catherine stepped courageously beyond her own fears and society's conventions to heal the sick, speak truth to papal authority, and build a network characterized by dialogue and reconciliation in Christ's name.

Rebel in Rearing

Your love should be sincere: you should love your neighbors with the same love with which you love Me.

Catherine Benincasa was born in 1347, probably the 23rd of 25 children. As a young girl, she was known for her unquenchable cheer and golden brown hair. At age six, while walking home from church with siblings, she had a vision of Christ smiling and blessing her. The sense of affirmation that God was calling her to ministry was powerful and permanent.

Though her mother longed for a "normal" daughter, Catherine refused to be stereotypically feminine. On one occasion, she frantically chopped off her hair in hopes of being rejected by a suitor and being taken seriously by her family. She was steadfastly devoted to God's call and even dreamed of joining a monastery disguised as a boy. She did not want to marry or become a nun, yearning instead to serve God in her own way.

After great perseverance, she persuaded her family to let her join the Third Order of Saint Dominic at the age of 16. She participated in the community's devotional activities (in addition to her own stringent disciplines) while she lived at home, largely in her room. Seeking purity, humility, and communion with God, she wrestled for three years to gain dominion over her heart and fleshly impulses. Hers was a total surrender, with Word and sacrament as the foundation.

These three years concluded with a fervent awakening to the needs of the world outside. God led her away from thinking that she could not help her neighbor without losing her mind ("I want only to do good," she thought, "but let it be *my* way.") And he gave her a devotion that reflected Jesus' words: "Not my will, but yours be done." Arguably, the supreme test of her Christian character was her response to the most devastating pandemic in human history—the Black Death—and its aftermath.

"They Died by the Hundreds"

In the mid-1330s, there were initial reports of a widespread epidemic in China. Traders carried the infection to the Middle East and Europe. Contemporaries called it "the Great Mortality" and "the Black Death" because the skin of sufferers would often become blackened from infected lesions and hemorrhages beneath the skin. As more than half of the local population in many areas died, traditional social systems broke down and economies were left in upheaval. Dread and depression shrouded the land. One survivor in Siena described the scene:

Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another, for this illness seemed to strike through the breath and sight. ... Members of a household brought their dead to a ditch as best they could, without priest, without divine offices ... and they died by the hundreds both day and night. ... I, Agnolo di Tura, the Fat, buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed it was the end of the world.

How did survivors respond? The Florentine author Boccaccio offered readers an escapist world of denial, fantasy, and indulgence. Others relentlessly (often religiously) reminded people of impending death in literature, the visual arts, dance, and by penitential flagellation. Still others became profiteers in a time of economic scarcity and institutional malaise.

Unflinching ministry

Catherine would have none of this. Instead, she faced the grim realities and found hope in God as the greatest Reality of all. The result was a courageous, compassionate, and creative path of ministry. Catherine's devotion to the sick was as contagious as the Plague itself, charismatically drawing others to touch lives and transform situations. In the midst of poverty, terror, and stench, she and her entourage spread the aroma of Christ through selfless service.

Catherine resolved to love as Jesus loved in all circumstances. While tending to a widow with breast cancer that had eaten away her flesh, for example, Catherine was overwhelmed by nausea due to the horrible odor. So she forced her face into the oozing, open sore—skin on skin—reprimanding herself, "Ah, you presume to abhor this sister, who has been redeemed by the blood of the Savior, do you—you who could fall into the same sickness or an even worse one? As God lives you shall not remain unpunished!" Despite the patient's horror, she would not retreat until the Spirit had conquered the rebellion of her flesh.

While many she touched were overcome by physical ills, others struggled with injustice and the ills of a devastated society. One prisoner, caught in the grip of a system plagued by rivalry and power plays, sought Catherine's company in the moments before his beheading. "I have just taken a head into my hands and have been moved so deeply that my heart cannot grasp it," she told her confessor Raymond of Capua. "I waited for him at the place of execution ... he arrived like a meek lamb and when he saw me he began to smile. He asked me to make the sign of the cross over him ... I stretched out his neck and bent down to him, reminding him of the blood of the Lamb. His lips kept murmuring only 'Jesus' and 'Catherine,' and he was still murmuring when I received his head into my hands ... my soul rested in peace and quiet, so aware of the fragrance of blood that I could not remove the blood which had splashed onto me."

Preachin' it to the Pope

Catherine's courage and compassion spilled into other activities as well, changing views of women's roles in the process. She was unconcerned about making a mark as a **woman in ministry** and more

consumed by Christ's call for her to be a **woman who ministers**. As Pope Paul VI said when he named Catherine a Doctor of the Church in 1970, hers was a "charism of exhortation." She believed that purposeful, articulate communication was the key to personal care and conflict resolution alike.

It was Catherine who boldly informed Pope Gregory XI of the "rotten members who rebel against you." She commanded him to leave Avignon, where the papacy had become a French puppet, and return to Rome: "Be manly and not fearful. Answer God who is calling you to take possession of the place of the glorious shepherd, Saint Peter, who you represent. Restore to Holy Church the heart of burning charity which she has lost: she is all pale because iniquitous men have drained her blood. Come, Father!"

Such exhortations to the pope were a small part of Catherine's extensive correspondence. Her nearly 400 surviving letters and other writings bear witness to her widespread influence. She asked questions that others did not dare to ask, and demanded responses. Her communications raised popular awareness, rallied support for change, fostered reconciliation and healing, and unified Christians in service.

Living and Loving for God

The title of Catherine's most famous work, *The Dialogue*, expresses her life's theme. Catherine actively sought to restore wholeness and find the best possible outcome in each situation—a ministry made possible by her rich, deepening dialogue with God. In *The Dialogue* she records the Lord's innermost conversations with her: "Your love should be sincere: you should love your neighbors with the same love with which you love Me."

In the fearful chaos of her own "Dark Ages"—fraught with plague, schism, poverty, and fragmentation—Catherine's voice emerged with clarity and compassion. Her own mother, who had previously thwarted Catherine's attempts to live unconventionally for God, joined the Dominican Third Order after being widowed, and worked closely with Catherine and imitated her life. Catherine's life challenges us today as it exemplifies P. T. Forsyth's advice: "You must live with people to know their problems, and live with God in order to solve them."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

Setting the Captives Free

Oppressed women around the globe await those willing to carry on the legacy of Pandita Ramabai.

Robert Eric Frykenberg

Scripture reminds us that some people lie awake at night imagining new forms of evil. More often than not, such evil involves wasting the lives of women and children. In India alone, millions of girls, some as young as eight years old, are "hired," "rented," or simply "sold" or "married" to old men. Victims of drudgery or sexual exploitation, many do not live long, and those who survive—the "broken" or "used up"—are thrown into the street to beg. Widow burning was outlawed in 1828, but today thousands of lives are lost each year to "bride burning," when a mother-in-law "accidentally" spills burning oil on a new bride in the kitchen—usually for the sake of the dowry. About two million children around the world still succumb to "sex tourism" every year.

Many champions of women's rights have given their lives to alter such situations. Christian and non-Christian activists look back for inspiration to the 19th-century Indian social reformer Pandita Ramabai.

No one but
[Christ]
could
transform
and uplift
the
downtrodden
women in
India.

No word better epitomizes the lifelong quest and career of Ramabai than **mukti**—the term for liberty, freedom, release, or salvation. It expresses her own personal journey to Christianity. It is the name she gave to her school for rescued girls. Emblazoned on the Mukti Mission's newsletter, the "Mukti Prayer Bell," was an engraving of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, along with the ringing words, "Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof—Lev. XXV, v. x." This was her hope for millions of oppressed people, especially women and children for whom she fought throughout her life.

Ramabai's concern for the plight of women came from her father. A renowned Sanskrit scholar who had been ostracized for daring to teach his child-bride to read Sanskrit, he had been forced to wander the length and breadth of India with his small family, living on alms. He left his daughter a priceless legacy: rigorous training and a disciplined memory that enabled her to recite an enormous corpus of classical lore. After her parents and sister starved to death in a famine, Ramabai continued to wander until, at the age of 20, she was "discovered" by **pandits** (scholars) of Calcutta. Overnight, she became a national sensation.

In 1882, after social reformers invited her to teach young women, she spoke out against the degradations of child-marriage—which almost invariably resulted in homeless child-widows—and castigated men for their treatment of women. "I am the child of a man who had to suffer ... on account of advocating Female Education. ... I consider it my duty, to the end of my life, to maintain this cause ... in this land."

Meanwhile, Ramabai had been growing more and more disillusioned with ancient religious texts indicating that women had no souls, nor any place in eternity. Not long after she stumbled upon a copy of the Gospel of Luke, she had long discussions with Nehemiah Gore, a renowned Brahman Christian convert. She publicly declared her faith in Christ while she was visiting England. "I realized, after reading the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel, that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour he claimed to be, and no one but He could transform and uplift the downtrodden women in India." Her quest for **mukti** had reached its goal: "I was hungry for something better ... I found it in the Christian Bible and was satisfied."

When Ramabai attended her cousin's graduation from Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, her cause

found an international audience. Her speeches made her famous throughout America as a pioneer in the battle for women's rights. Frances Willard, president of the Women's Temperance Christian union, described Ramabai as "a woman-lover ... not man-hater, for she is too good-natured not to love all humanity ... but because women need special help."

Revenue from Ramabai's first English book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, and fund-raising efforts in America enabled her to found "Sharada Sadan" ("Home of Learning") for downtrodden women in Pune, India, in 1889. But when one of her students turned to Christianity, public outcries forced her to look for a new location. In the village of Kedgaon 30 miles away, on 100 acres of "base, stony, treeless and waterless" wilderness, Ramabai and her helpers dug wells, built housing, and set up schools. She called her new mission Mukti.

In 1895, Ramabai disguised herself as a *sannyasini* (female mendicant) and traveled on foot to the sacred sites of her youth, determined to rescue destitute women who were being forced into servitude and sexual degradation. She beheld unspeakable horrors: hundreds of agents enticing abandoned and helpless child-widows into institutions where they were shut up or rented out to men. Later such women were turned out onto the streets after they were deemed wasted and worthless, to "die a death worse than a starved street dog." Her initial effort to rescue seven wretched women nearly cost her life. She returned twice, during a terrible famine, to rescue and carry away scores of victims in her train of bullock carts—starving little girls (and on occasion a few boys) clad in filthy rags—and to give them a new life at the Mukti Mission. Literate and skilled "graduates" of Mukti went out into the world. Many became teachers or widely sought-after wives. Some attended colleges in America and became medical doctors.

Pandita Ramabai died in 1922, having just finished translating the Bible into the local language, Marathi. Her name, long banished from public memory in her own country because of her Christian faith, is being resurrected today by feminists and others who are carrying on her vision to help the downtrodden. "Pandita Ramabai Sarawati," wrote Amritlal B. Shah, "was the greatest woman produced by Modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all of history. Her achievements as a champion of women's rights ... remain unrivaled even after the lapse of ... a century."

Ramabai believed that, since all have been made by God and can be redeemed through Christ, no human being should be oppressed or excluded from the blessings of liberty. Reactionary forces could neither crush her spirit nor defeat her mission. Indeed, she often declared, everything she accomplished had been made possible by the *mukti* she had found in the Lord to whom she turned for strength.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

What is the role of the government? Can we build a Christian society in this world? Protestant Reformers Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin all grappled with those questions—and came up with different answers.

Tony Lane

In August 2001, Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore erected a 2.5-ton granite monument of the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the state Supreme Court building—raising a storm of legal controversy that ended in the forced removal of the monument and the removal of Moore from office. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Moore insisted, "The acknowledgment of God is basic to our society, to our law, and to our morality." But for others, the mixing of religion and public justice went too far.

The questions raised by this controversy—very familiar ones for Americans grappling with the separation of church and state—are some of the same questions that have faced Christians in many different historical situations. What is the proper role of the government in relation to the church? Should Christians be trying to bring about a "Christian society"? To what extent can we place our hope in politicians and political processes to accomplish this?

God has established two kinds of government among men ...

These questions came to the forefront in the 16th century when Europe was caught in a struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the emerging Protestants. We tend to think of the Protestant reformers as primarily interested in theological issues: justification by faith, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. But in a culture where religious life and civic life were so closely linked—where the pope fought battles and secular rulers appointed clergy, and where the ordinary lives of citizens were built around the beliefs and rituals of the church—it was impossible to escape the political ramifications of breaking ties with the Catholic mainstream.

The reformers developed their views within a political framework that was very different from ours, but the principles they set forth continue to influence Christian political involvement today.

Church and state

In 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation with his *95 Theses* arguing against the sale of indulgences, which the church granted to reduce a Christian's punishment in purgatory. Meanwhile, Ulrich Zwingli was working for reform in Zurich, Switzerland. Significant differences between these two reformers ended up dividing Protestantism into two branches, Lutheran and Reformed. Martin Bucer began as a Lutheran, moved to the Reformed camp, and then spent his life trying to bring the two sides together. Bucer significantly influenced John Calvin, who spent most of his ministry in Geneva (now in Switzerland) and became the greatest of the Reformed theologians. These four mainstream reformers are often called the "magisterial reformers" because they believed in cooperating with the magistrates (rulers) to bring about reformation.

In the 16th century, church and state were inextricably intertwined, much as the different departments of state are in a modern government. The magisterial reformers did not question this; they believed that it was proper for the government to support true religion and to suppress error. Christianity was not just a private matter but also a public matter. If the Reformation was to succeed, it would have to reform the

entire fabric of society, not just the beliefs of individual Christians. In order to stand up to the highest authorities of the Roman church and bring about widespread change, the reformers needed the support of secular rulers.

Some other reformers were revolutionaries who believed that the final struggle described in the book of Revelation was about to take place and that the godly should establish the kingdom of God by force. At the opposite extreme, the Anabaptists (who rejected infant baptism) believed that Christians should not be involved in the secular government at all, because the use of the sword to maintain order and administer punishment was contrary to the example set by Christ. The true church always stood in conflict with the world.

The magisterial reformers rejected both of these extremes. But they did not always agree about how to use politics to accomplish their spiritual goals.

Luther: Two kingdoms

Luther taught that there are two "kingdoms" or "realms." The spiritual realm involves issues of eternal life and salvation, which are the concerns of the church. The temporal realm involves issues of this world, such as politics and economics, which are the concerns of government. The spiritual realm is based on Christian revelation, the temporal realm on natural law. "God has established two kinds of government among men," Luther wrote, "the one is spiritual, it has no sword but it has the Word by which men ... may attain everlasting life. The other is worldly government through the sword which aims to keep peace among men, and this he rewards with temporal blessing." As long as sin exists, both gospel and government are necessary.

For Luther, it is appropriate for Christians to hold public offices: "Should you see that there is a lack of hangmen, police, judges, lords or princes and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the job." But the state has a strictly limited role to play—restraining sin (Rom. 13:4) and keeping anarchy at bay by preserving law and order (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Christians should be loyal citizens, but they should not fall into the trap of imagining that the state can be truly Christian in this fallen world. Luther saw the state as secular—not in the sense that it is religiously neutral, nor in the sense that it should not punish those who undermine true religion, but in the sense that we should not look to it to bring about the kingdom of God.

Zwingli: The Bible and the sword

Luther was against the use of military force to defend, let alone spread, the Reformation. On a 1510 trip to Rome, he had been scandalized to see Pope Julius II in armor leading his troops to war. This was not what he expected from a Christian minister. Then he saw his fellow reformer Ulrich Zwingli doing the same thing.

By 1525, Zwingli's reformation of the Church in Zurich was largely complete. The Catholic mass was abolished and replaced by a simple Communion service. His goal of a united evangelical Switzerland seemed within reach. But when he formed an alliance of Protestant cantons (Swiss states), the Roman Catholic cantons felt threatened and formed a rival alliance. The result was war in 1529. After a lull, fighting broke out again in 1531, and Zwingli was killed on the battlefield.

Luther interpreted Zwingli's death as the judgment of God. The image of Zwingli with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other (as his statue portrays him today in Zurich) was for Luther a contradiction in terms. Lutherans in general were more subservient to the state. When rulers made demands that were against their conscience (such as imposing Roman Catholicism), they believed in passive disobedience, not rebellion. They were not pacifists—they believed in the state's right to punish heretics—but they

respected the established authorities as given by God.

Many in the Reformed tradition, on the other hand, accepted the legitimacy of armed rebellion against tyrannical regimes. In the Netherlands, they fought to expel the Spanish; in Scotland, they fought to protect the Reformation; in England, they fought against a king and eventually executed him; and in the American colonies, where the (Reformed) Puritan influence was strong, they rebelled against England.

Bucer: Blueprint for a Christian society

Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin viewed the role of the state more positively than Luther. They believed that government's responsibility goes beyond merely preserving law and order; it also has the responsibility to bring about God's rule. Christians are called to make the gospel visible in all areas of society—whether politics, economics, the arts, or the media.

Bucer spent most of his career leading the Reformation in Strasbourg, but towards the end of his life he became a professor at the university of Cambridge. His book *The Kingdom of Christ*, written in 1550 (a year before he died) and addressed to King Edward VI, set forth a blueprint for a Christian England. Bucer's proposals encompassed not just church life but politics and economics. He argued that the laws of the land should be based on Christian principles—namely the two great commandments to love God and one's neighbor.

For example, Bucer proposed that begging should be outlawed so that the deacons of the church could administer effective relief, meeting the needs of those who were genuinely in need—not those who were simply too lazy to work. His vision of a comprehensive safety net for the poor, including steps to restore full employment and the goal of universal education, sounds amazingly modern. At the same time, he avoided one of the pitfalls of modern welfare states by taking care not to reward irresponsible behavior.

Unfortunately, Edward VI died in 1553 and with him any chance of implementing Bucer's blueprint.

Calvin: A model city

Unlike Bucer, John Calvin did live to see his vision of a Christian society take shape, at least in part, in the city of Geneva. Forced to flee France because of his Protestant beliefs, Calvin responded to a call to reform the church in Geneva. In the process, he transformed the city.

Calvin's goal went beyond the modest Lutheran aim of maintaining law and order; he wanted to build a godly society through the combined efforts of the ministers and the magistrates. In addition to preaching and administering the sacraments, the ministers kept a close watch over the spiritual health of the people, setting regulations on dress, dancing, Sunday behavior, etc. The government, for its part, maintained good schools, enforced godly laws, and punished wrongdoers. "These two things are widely different," Calvin argued, "because neither does the Church assume anything which is proper to the magistrate, nor is the magistrate competent to do what is done by the Church." Both, however had the same ultimate purpose: to restrain sin, encourage goodness, and build God's kingdom.

Calvin struggled not to impose a theocracy but to free the church from control by the civil magistrates so it could exercise its ministry to the full. This was not always easy, and he was forced to compromise again and again with stubborn magistrates. Moreover, many native Genevans found Calvin's rigorous discipline insufferable; these people, Calvin suggested, "should build a city where they can live as they want, since they don't want to live here under the yoke of Christ."

But the city also attracted many people, including refugees fleeing religious persecution, ministerial students, and others drawn by their admiration of Calvin. The Scots Reformer John Knox declared Geneva to be "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles."

Tension and transformation

Who was right? How should the church relate to society? In 1952, Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr described five basic Christian positions in his classic work *Christ and Culture*. The magisterial reformers represent the fourth and fifth positions, "Christ and Culture in Paradox" and "Christ the Transformer of Culture."

The Lutheran stance is "Christ and Culture in Paradox," which emphasizes the sinfulness of even "Christian" governments. As Luther put it, "It is one thing to change a government; another thing to improve a government." This position has many positive features: It is based upon a biblical view of human nature and sin, it avoids unrealistic expectations of politicians, and it avoids turning the gospel into a soon out-of-date political message. But on the negative side, one of the tragedies of the Nazi era was that the Lutheran approach helped persuade much (though not all) of the German church to accept Nazi rule passively.

The Reformed stance is "Christ the Transformer of Culture," which seeks, in a partial way, to bring about God's kingdom here and now. On the positive side, those holding this position have brought profound changes to society. Reformed (rather than Lutheran) Protestantism provided the cradle for capitalism and democracy. The Dutch, English, and American revolutions profoundly affected the course of history. The 19th-century struggle against slavery and the modern struggle against abortion are both attempts to bring a Christian voice to the political arena and show that Christ is the Lord of all of life, not just the "religious" part. However, one negative result of this position has been the use of military force and worldly weapons in the name of the gospel. Also, the current boom in political theologies has led many to confuse the gospel with secular agendas, just as Luther feared. In the words of Lutheran Mark Mattes, "The most important stance that the church can bring to the political realm is the truth that the political realm is never ultimate."

Today few theologians would accept the idea that the church should stick to religion and the state to politics, which is where the Lutheran "Christ and Culture in Paradox" approach can lead. On the other hand, experience proves that the Reformed "Christ the Transformer of Culture" approach can lead to baptizing secular ideologies or to treating politics like a holy war, damaging public perception of Christians as the bearers of Good News. While "Christ the Transformer of Culture" remains the ideal, it constantly needs to be challenged by the insights of "Christ and Culture in Paradox." Both Luther and the Reformed have positive lessons for us; both point to pitfalls to be avoided.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

The Lord of Consciences

Those who fight for religious freedom today stand in a long line of Christian predecessors, including Baptist leader Thomas Helwys.

James E. Bradley

Today, people widely assume that the theory and practice of religious toleration emerged from secular thinkers who were either anti-Christian or on the margins of Christian orthodoxy. But in fact, many of the earliest defenders of religious toleration were Christians. They based their arguments for the acceptance of others, including Muslims and Jews, squarely on the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. Therefore, there is no necessary connection between toleration and theological liberalism. Present-day advocates for religious freedom stand in a robust, distinctly Christian tradition.

For men's
religion is
between
God and
themselves.

Thomas Helwys (ca. 1575—ca. 1614) led the earliest Baptist congregation in London and was known for his radical views on civil government and religious toleration. Helwys lived in a dangerous era. Religious and civil uniformity were strictly enforced. The idea of allowing more than one Christian confession—to say nothing of different religions—within a civil jurisdiction was unheard of at the time. Fines, prison sentences, and possible death awaited those who dissented from the Anglican church, and it was dangerous merely to publish differing views. The English government pointed to the Old Testament to justify its belief that civil order depended on the union of church and state under the authority of the king or queen.

Helwys was entirely orthodox in his views on the Trinity and the atonement, but he defended the practice of adult baptism and therefore stood at odds with the state church. (At that time, infant baptism was linked with citizenship.) Helwys's belief in the lordship of Christ over conscience led him to question the authority of both kings and churches. His treatise *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612) was the first defense of religious liberty in the English language. Here he boldly stated, "The King is a mortal man, and not God, therefore hath no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them." Christ himself is sole Lord in his Church and sole Lord over the consciences of people, and this means that no human being can exercise authority over another's conscience. "For men's religion is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure."

Helwys argued that since Christ has come, and since Christ's kingship is spiritual in nature, all forms of coercion in matters of conscience are forbidden. But he went further: This liberty should be extended not only to all Christians, including Roman Catholics and those who believe in adult baptism, but even to heretics, Muslims, and Jews.

Because of severe persecution at the time, Helwys's ideas could not bear immediate fruit. He was imprisoned in London for his views and evidently died there. But the same line of distinctly Christian thought was taken up by Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island. In the New World, Williams's writings influenced the cause of religious freedom in individual colonies and contributed to the separation of church and state at the national level, a hallmark of the U.S. Constitution.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

Following Jesus in the Dark

The difficult choices of Dietrich Bonhoeffer show that, in extreme circumstances, the path to peace may not always be paved with clear ethical answers.

John G. Stackhouse, Jr.

Using torture to interrogate suspected terrorists. Intervening in other countries to stop genocide. Resolving ancient disputes and modern violence in the Middle East. Blowing the whistle on corporate crime. Restraining a rogue state. Confronting the crack dealers across town—or down the street.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has become the patron saint of hard cases, a guide to the ethically perplexed, an inspiration in a dilemma, a beacon in moral murk. His participation in a conspiracy to murder Hitler and his subsequent imprisonment and execution when the plot failed has become the defining moment of his short life. Bonhoeffer has much to offer us as we consider the terrible challenges of contemporary life. But he also offers us deep wisdom for living in the everyday as well.

The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live.

Bonhoeffer was born into a genteel German middle-class family with a distinguished and even noble heritage on both sides. His father, Karl, was a psychiatrist and professor at the University of Berlin, and his family enjoyed a large home, servants, and all of the security and pleasure of the establishment—even during the difficult years for Germany following World War I.

Young Dietrich was an intellectual prodigy who astounded his lightly religious family by devoting his talents to theology—earning his Ph.D. at Berlin in 1927 and then his **Habilitation** (a sort of "crowning degree" that came with an invitation to teach) in 1930. He was also ordained in the state Lutheran church and spent short stints in pastorates in Barcelona and London as well as Germany.

He visited America twice, with Union Theological Seminary in New York City as his home base. Appalled by the Americans' lack of theoretical theological interest, he became impressed by their practical concern—notably that of Reinhold Niebuhr. He also was deeply moved by African-American Christianity, and he often visited black churches in nearby Harlem, notably the grand Abyssinian Baptist Church. These experiences combined to press the academic Bonhoeffer further into pastoral and practical modes.

Pastor and conspirator

Back in Germany, as the Nazis came to power in the early 1930s and advanced their program of nationalism, revenge, and racism, Bonhoeffer responded in three ways.

Locally, he left the prestige of the university to head up a small, illegal seminary in the country to train pastors for the Confessing Church, a fellowship of Christians who believed that the primitive confession "Jesus is Lord" must be maintained against the cult of Hitler as Leader. During and shortly after this brief, intense two-year stint, Bonhoeffer wrote his two most popular guides to Christian living, ***The Cost of Discipleship*** and ***Life Together***.

Nationally, he participated in public and private debates about the relationship of the Nazi Party and the church, thus placing himself under the watch of the Gestapo. He successively lost the right to teach, preach, and publish.

Internationally, he used his extensive contacts in the ecumenical movement both to encourage the Western church to speak out against Nazism and to encourage other governments to put diplomatic pressure on the Nazis to ameliorate their programs. He became a formidable proponent of nonviolence at this time, and even made plans to travel to India to study the political philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi.

Bonhoeffer was related to several Jews and had a brother-in-law positioned in Army Intelligence (the **Abwehr**), so he knew better than most what the Nazis were doing in their anti-Semitic crusade. As war broke out and the Nazis intensified their racism and imperialism, Bonhoeffer agreed to join a conspiracy within the **Abwehr** to overthrow Hitler. He was hired by the **Abwehr** both to protect him from the Gestapo and to give him the opportunity to serve as a double agent. Ostensibly visiting his international contacts in ecumenical church work, he was supposed to be spying on other countries. But in fact, he acquainted friends elsewhere with the German Resistance and sought assurances that, should their plans succeed, the Allies would not capitalize on Germany's disarray to visit upon her even more grief.

When this duplicitous diplomacy came to nought, however (the British government in particular promised nothing to the German Resistance), Bonhoeffer came to despair of a nonviolent solution. The German armed forces went from success to success, Hitler's grip on his own nation seemed absolute, and the roundup of political and racial undesirables was increasing.

The conspiracy transitioned then from a nonviolent coup d'état to an assassination plot. Several attempts were made on Hitler's life, and all failed. When the last one injured but did not kill him, Hitler vowed to execute everyone involved. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law in the **Abwehr**, Hans von Dohnanyi, was arrested, and in his desk were names of co-conspirators, including Bonhoeffer. In April 1943 Bonhoeffer was arrested in Berlin, never to emerge again from Nazi custody.

Theologian in chains

During his two years in prison, Bonhoeffer simultaneously engaged in three acts—paradoxical, at least, if not contradictory. First, he continued to work on what he viewed as his **magnum opus**, the **Ethics**. This volume—never completed and later published in fragmentary form—set out themes for living as a Christian in the world, and did so with tremendous subtlety and creativity. He also wrote letters and other works, published later, which contained ideas and phrases that would inspire and intrigue many.

Second, he counseled his fellow inmates and even some guards, offering them hope and often negotiating better treatment for the prisoners.

Third, however, while he was producing this deeply important Christian theology and ministering as a pastor, he was also lying to the Gestapo, trying to protect what was left of the conspiracy and those already arrested. And his writings show that he had moved from the clear simplicity of his earlier views to a complex understanding of discipleship that took into account both peace and war, good government and bad, normal life and what later ethicists would call "boundary" or "borderline" situations of extreme moral challenge that offered no obviously "pure" choice.

Bonhoeffer felt let down by his church. The theology he had so assiduously learned in university did not prepare him to confront the diabolical programs of the Nazis, nor to condone the collaboration of both Catholic and Protestant hierarchies. Where was Jesus leading his disciples in this valley of the shadow of death? Surely not merely to self-defense. Not even merely to the freedom to preach the gospel.

What mattered instead was service to others, and particularly to the victims. What mattered—and here was Bonhoeffer at his most radical—was not one's own security and easy conscience, but the world one would leave behind for those who would follow: "The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live."

The true cost of discipleship

Bonhoeffer loved ordinary life. He was a talented pianist in a musical family and well known for his delight in the outdoors. He fell in love and got engaged—although he would be executed before he could be married. His writings, particularly the *Ethics*, exhort us to enjoy "the natural" as God's good provision for us:

The homes of men are not, like the shelters of animals, merely the means of protection against bad weather and the night or merely places for rearing the young; they are places in which a man may relish the joys of his personal life in the intimacy and security of his family and of his property. Eating and drinking do not merely serve the purpose of keeping the body in good health, but they afford natural joy in bodily living. Clothing is not intended merely as a mean covering for the body, but also as an adornment of the body. Recreation is not designed solely to increase working efficiency, but it provides the body with its due measure of repose and enjoyment. Play is by its nature remote from all subordination to purpose, and it thus demonstrates most clearly that the life of the body is an end in itself. Sex is not only the means of reproduction, but, independently of this defined purpose, it brings with it its own joy, in married life, in the love of two human beings for one another.

When things become extraordinary and unnatural, however, Bonhoeffer also saw clearly that our only choice is to do the best we can, to be as faithful to Jesus as we can. And that means not to sort out our actions on a neat ethical grid of right and wrong, but to strive to accomplish as much good as possible:

Responsible action does not lay claim to knowledge of its own ultimate righteousness. When the deed is performed with a responsible weighing up of all the personal and objective circumstances and in the awareness that God has become *man* and that it is *God* who has become man, then this deed is delivered up solely to God at the moment of its performance. ultimate ignorance of one's own good and evil, and with it a complete reliance upon grace, is an essential property of responsible historical action. The man who acts ideologically sees himself justified in his idea; the responsible man commits his action into the hands of God and lives by God's grace and favour.

If getting God's will done in the world means one must engage in conspiracy, deceit, and assassination, then Bonhoeffer was prepared to incur whatever guilt those evil actions entailed. Indeed, he did not want to call evil good, and thus he speaks of guilt that one would obtain if these actions were undertaken.

Thus the theologian who railed against "cheap grace" in *The Cost of Discipleship* later cast himself on the "costly grace" of God and—in *in extremis*—did the bad thing that good might come. He had been a pacifist, and always wanted to remain one. Violence was only a last resort, and a darkly strange one for the Christian. But Bonhoeffer recognized that God himself had used violence on others, as well as on himself, to accomplish good that could be realized no other way. We must not, Bonhoeffer concluded, strive to be more "holy" than God.

The Christian thus emerges from work in the world both dirty and bloody—and some of that blood, sometimes, belongs to others. Yet how Bonhoeffer looked forward to the end of the war and

the emergence of a new Christianity, a discipleship no longer domesticated by the state, a discipleship no longer construed as mere social conformity, a discipleship that enjoys all of the goods God has strewn along our way! This would be the "religionless Christianity" of a true discipleship.

And Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenges us still to shoulder our crosses and follow the Lord of All also through the places of ambiguity, violence, and costly grace on our way home.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

God's Image in Color

Racism continues to stain society and challenge the church's commitment to a color-blind gospel. Albert Lutuli's peaceful pursuit of justice in South Africa pointed a way forward for the generations to come.

Gerald J. Pillay and Carolyn Nystrom

Suppose that the year is 1958; you live in South Africa—and you are black. Your home is a two-room shanty on five acres in a rural area where in a good year, if you work hard, you can earn about \$60. It is government land, not yours. You may be ordered to leave at any moment for any reason.

You carry a pass that identifies you by name and race, and records every trip you have made more than a few miles from home. Your pass allows you to work, but only at the lowest types of physical labor. Jobs are assigned by race. You may marry but also only within your own race. If you find work in a city, you cannot bring your family with you; you eat and sleep with other workers in male dormitories on the edge of town. When you leave your work, after six months, to visit your family, you are quickly replaced. If you visit a town, you may stay only 72 hours. Your pass will note your entry and exit times. If you overstay, you may be arrested, questioned, or beaten.

To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticized God for having created men of color was the sort of thing I could not, as a Christian, tolerate.

You may not vote. You may not speak to the press. Your tribe used to elect a chief who settled local disputes; now your "chief" is a white government official, and you've never met him. Your children must leave your home the day they turn 18. Your younger children go to school, but it is a "Bantu school" where they learn to work, not read. You do not have enough to eat—ever. One out of three of your children dies of malnutrition before reaching the age of one.

This was Albert Lutuli's world when he was around 60. But Lutuli did not explode with violent hatred as did so many black South Africans in the next generation. Instead, he led his people into organized, nonviolent resistance, which eventually tumbled apartheid (government-sponsored racial separation) into oblivion. His example gives oppressed people everywhere courage to seek peace and justice.

Growing up South African

The first experiments with apartheid began in the late 19th century when the British colonial government attempted to curtail the growth and spread of its Indian laborers who were brought to Natal colony as indentured servants. In 1910, when the self-governing union of South Africa was established, these racial laws were extended to African peoples.

At that time Albert Lutuli, born in a Rhodesian mission station where his father served as an evangelist interpreter, was a young boy living in a rural area near the coastal city of Durban. His mother was widowed almost immediately after his birth and shared child-raising responsibilities with the family of an uncle who was chief of their village.

Throughout the first 20 years of his life, Lutuli lived and received his education within an African context inherited from European missionaries. In Lutuli's thinking, "Two cultures met, and both Africans and Europeans were affected by the meeting. Both profited, and both survived enriched." This concept became the theme of his life's work.

During Lutuli's first job as principal and solo teacher of an intermediate school north of Durban, his "religion received the jog that it needed" through the influence of "an old and very conscientious African minister, the Rev. Mtembu" and also the host family where he lodged, "an evangelist of the Methodist Church, named Xaba, the devout and peaceful atmosphere of whose home echoed my own." It was there that Lutuli was confirmed in the Methodist Church and became a lay preacher.

African chief

Lutuli spent the next 15 years studying, teaching, and serving as choirmaster at Adams College. The years were happy and peaceful for him. But outside the college walls, South Africa was far from peaceful. Between 1920 and 1935, racial segregation established itself at center stage. In 1922, the army quelled a miners' strike, killing 214—mostly blacks. By 1927, segregation became compulsory in 26 cities. Native Africans stirred. In 1923, several resistance groups combined to form the African National Congress.

Meanwhile, Lutuli married Nokukhanya Bhengu in 1927. Because blacks could not purchase land near the school, his wife lived some 80 miles away. "Behind our decision to live apart right from the first year of our marriage lay the spectre which haunts all Africans ... the spectre of impermanence and insecurity," he later wrote in his autobiography, *Let My People Go*. "Between 1929 and 1945, Nokukhanya bore me seven children ... We pray very hard about our children, most of all because of the South Africa in which they are growing up."

Lutuli's teaching career came to an end in 1935 when his tribal elders said they needed his leadership at home and his people elected him "Chief of the Umvoti Mission Reserve." There, he could finally live with his wife. For the next 16 years he served as tribal magistrate, mediator, adviser, and connecting link with the outer world for his 5,000 people living on 10,000 acres. "Now I saw, almost as though for the first time, the naked poverty of my people, the daily hurt of human beings." In Lutuli's culture, the position of chief was a lifetime commitment. It was a title he bore with honor (though eventually without legal sanction) until his death.

During those same 16 years, South Africa moved step by step from racial segregation to a full-blown national system of apartheid. Black voting rights were revoked in the Cape (1936), United Nations oversight was rejected (1947), the Afrikaner Nationalist party came to power determined to enforce apartheid (1948), mixed marriages were forbidden (1949), pass laws were intensified (1950), public protests against apartheid were forbidden (1950), U.N. criticism of apartheid was rejected (1950), and separate voting lists made it impossible for "non-whites" to vote (1951).

In 1952, the African National Congress (ANC), now grown to more than 100,000 members, joined with the South African Indian Congress in a "Campaign for the Defiance of unjust Laws." This passive resistance campaign consisted of mass meetings of up to 10,000 people. The resisters attempted to use white-only public facilities, stayed out past curfews declared for Africans, and publicly disobeyed pass laws. More than 8,000 were arrested—including Albert Lutuli. That year, Lutuli was elected President General of the ANC, an office he held until his death.

The Native Affairs Department insisted that Lutuli either resign from the ANC or resign from his position as chief; they could not allow a chief to encourage disobedience of any law. Lutuli chose the ANC.

"I have embraced the nonviolent passive resistance technique in fighting for freedom," he said, "because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further aspirations. The wisdom or foolishness of this decision I place in the hands of the Almighty."

"What the future has in store for me I do not know. It might be ridicule, imprisonment, concentration camp, flogging, banishment, and even death. I only pray to the Almighty to strengthen my resolve so that none of these grim possibilities may deter me from striving, for the sake of the good name of our beloved country, the union of South Africa, to make it a true democracy and a true union in form and spirit of all the communities in the land."

Behind-the-scenes leader

During the remaining 15 years of his life, Lutuli endured many of the hardships he had envisioned for the cause of justice, and for most of that time the condition of non-whites in South Africa got steadily worse. In 1952, he was placed under the first of four bans that limited his travel to within 15 miles of his home, screened visitors, and barred him from all public gatherings. He continued to attend Communion services because they were restricted to "communicants" and therefore not "public." He often preached at home because, he said, "I do not ever intend to ask permission to worship God with my fellow-Christians—I do not concede that any man has the right either to grant or to withhold this 'privilege.'"

In 1956 he was arrested for treason and spent a year in prison, and in 1958 he was prohibited from publishing. But throughout this period he continued to be an effective leader of the ANC. He orchestrated peaceful resistance from behind the scenes—such as the bus boycott of 1957 (when virtually all of the workers among the 100,000 Africans living in one square mile on the fringe of Johannesburg walked up to 20 miles to work each day in protest of increased bus fare), workers' stay-at-home days for "appropriate expressions of mourning," and mass demonstrations by African women who refused inclusion in the pass laws. Lutuli earned the respect of even hostile observers as "a man of absolute integrity and great moral force."

In 1960 the Nobel Peace Prize went to Lutuli "in recognition of his nonviolent struggle against racial discrimination." He was the first African to receive this prize. Still restricted to within 15 miles of his home, Lutuli was granted grudging permission in 1961 to travel to Oslo, Norway, to participate in the ceremonies, though the South African Minister of the Interior noted, "The government fully realizes that the award was not made on merit."

Gentleman of justice

In a setting where safety meant silence, why did Lutuli keep on resisting a separation of the races? A devout Christian, he believed in the doctrine of *imago Dei*: that he, a black Zulu, was made in the image of God. When he returned to South Africa from a visit to the United States in 1948, he learned that such travel would be prohibited in the future to black South Africans because "natives who travel get spoilt." Said Lutuli, "I was not spoilt abroad. I was spoilt by being made in the image of God."

Lutuli extended that grace to opponents when, in 1959, he was asked a question that hovered in the mind of every black person in South Africa: "Should we get rid of the whites?" Lutuli answered, "The aim should be to get him to repent of his wrongdoings rather than to work for his forceful removal out of the country." When asked why he allowed Communists to participate in the ANC, he implied that even Communists were created in God's image.

"I am in Congress precisely *because* I am a Christian," Lutuli said. "My own urge *because* I am a Christian, is to get into the thick of the struggle ... taking my Christianity with me and praying that it may be used to influence for good the character of the resistance. ... I am confident enough in the Christian faith to believe that I can serve my neighbor best by remaining in his company." Lutuli returned to this theme as a defense for his life's work when he was accepting the Nobel Prize: "To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticized God for having created men of color was the sort of thing I could not, as a Christian, tolerate."

Albert Lutuli did not live to see victory for his cause. The same year he received the Nobel Peace Prize, his own African National Congress created a military wing that became increasingly violent. For the next two decades, the laws implementing apartheid increased their stranglehold. In 1967, when the nearly deaf Lutuli was knocked down by a train while he was on a walk near his home, the bloodshed had hardly begun. But Lutuli was a gentleman of justice who spent his life staying the hand of violence while firmly proclaiming that people of all races should live in dignity with one another.

For him, integrity of faith and righteous political action were part of the Christian's witness in the world. Piety and social justice were both part of the same gospel. He spoke out against the kind of Christianity that "estranges [his] people from Christ. Hypocrisy, double standards, and the identification of white skins with Christianity, do the same." He wrote, "It is not too late for white Christians to look at the Gospels and redefine their allegiance. But if I may presume to do so, I warn those who care for Christianity, to go into **all** the world and preach the gospel. In South Africa the opportunity is 300 years old. It will not last forever. The time is running out."

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

Encounters with Islam

Few issues have more serious implications for Christian witness and global politics today than Christian-Muslim relations. We can learn much from Arab Christian apologist John of Damascus, eloquent Assyrian Church leader Patriarch Timothy 1, and tireless Protestant missionary Samuel Zwemer.

Andrew Saperstein

Relations between the Muslim world and the West dominate the international news. The events of 9/11, ongoing war in Iraq, developments in Afghanistan, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the Danish cartoon crisis, Pope Benedict's remarks on Islam, countless other lower-profile events—all reflect the fact that Muslim-Christian and Muslim-Western relations stand among the defining issues of our age. This situation compels serious followers of Jesus to consider precisely what Christ is calling us to concerning our Muslim neighbors—and our Muslim enemies.

Christians today are not the first to face this challenge. Since the sudden emergence of a vigorous and growing Muslim community in the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century, Christians and Muslims have been forced to negotiate the realities of face-to-face interactions in everyday life, in political relations between Christian and Muslim nations, and in all-too-common violent conflicts.

Unfortunately, violence has shaped Muslims' and Christians' views of each other and generated shame and anger on both sides. Marching under the banner of the cross, medieval Crusaders slaughtered thousands of Muslims, justifying their behavior in part as a response to Islamic aggression against Christians in the East. During the 14th and 15th centuries, Mongol warlord Tamerlane and his armies left great heaps of skulls across Asia as a symbol of their grisly ventures in the cause of holy war. More recently, European colonial powers have pilfered Muslim lands and subjugated their peoples in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. And today, murmurings of an impending "clash of civilizations" mingle with the din of violent confrontations involving Muslims and Christians on several continents.

While these painful realities must be reckoned with, there are brighter points in our shared history as well. Among the many past Christians who engaged Muslims in more constructive ways, three stand out: Christian apologist John of Damascus, Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I, and Protestant missionary to Arabia, Samuel Zwemer. These three men inhabited different times and places and had different callings, but they display to varying degrees certain critical features of constructive Christian-Muslim engagement: a commitment to Christian orthodoxy, to intentional, non-violent engagement of Muslims, and to the respectful accommodation of their words and deeds to Muslim experience.

John of Damascus: Defender of Orthodoxy

Born to a prominent Arab Christian family in 655, John of Damascus (Yahya al-Dimashqi in Arabic) spent the first years of his career as the chief financial officer to the Muslim caliph Abd al-Malik. He was later elevated to the position of chief councilor of Damascus. John was well educated, gifted in rhetorical skills, and fluent in Arabic, Syriac, and Greek. With his thoroughly multicultural upbringing he undoubtedly moved among Syriac-speaking Christians, Arabic-speaking Muslims, and other local groups with ease.

John was apparently not always in favor with his Muslim employers or with the broader Christian community. He found himself on the wrong side of an increasingly acrimonious political and theological divide when he challenged the iconoclastic edicts of Byzantine Emperor Leo III, defending instead the role of images in Christian worship.

Leo III retaliated by sabotaging John's reputation among his Muslim patrons: He arranged for someone to forge a letter in John's handwriting offering to deliver the city of Damascus into Byzantine hands. John left the service of the caliph and spent the remainder of his life in the monastery of St. Sabas, less than 20 miles from Jerusalem.

At St. Sabas, John devoted his time to anti-heretical writing. Given his firsthand knowledge of Islam, it is not surprising that he turned his attention to defending the Christian faith against Muslim teaching, which he considered to be a kind of Christian heresy. His polemical work for Christians, "Against the Ishmaelite Heresy," was, in keeping with the genre, intentionally derogatory in tone—a sort of "anti-creed" that explained, "This is what we do not believe, and here's why ... "

John's familiarity with Islam is evident throughout the work; he cites numerous details of Muslim faith and practice and quotes ten different Qur'anic verses. But his tone is not conciliatory, and he makes statements such as "Mohammed wrote many ridiculous books" and "Mohammed said: 'Oh by the way, God has commanded me to take your wife'"—clearly not an approach that promotes constructive engagement with Muslims.

But John was a product of his times, and he reflects a noble, if not always nuanced, commitment to Christian orthodoxy. His words represent the first substantive Christian engagement with the Muslim community in writing. In both good and bad ways, he set the tone for future Christian-Muslim interactions.

Patriarch Timothy I: Respectful Debater

Like John of Damascus, Patriarch Timothy I grew up as a Christian under Muslim rule. Born 50 years after John and 500 miles from Damascus, he came of age under the second great Muslim dynasty, the Abbasids of Baghdad. Timothy succeeded his uncle as bishop of the Assyrian Church, sometimes referred to as the Nestorian Church. In this role, he oversaw churches and missionaries as far away as China. (The rest of Christendom considered the Assyrian Christians heretical at that time, though this may have had more to do with politics than theology.)

As a Syriac-speaking Christian leader educated in the Greek classics and living among Arab Muslims, Timothy was ideally situated to be a bridge between the cultures and ideas of the classical West, the Assyrian Church, and the Muslim community. He developed the intellectual and diplomatic skills that would later distinguish him as the most nuanced of the early Christian leaders in his interactions with Muslims.

In 781, Timothy participated in a celebrated debate with the third Abbasid caliph, al-Mahdi. Given the respectful tone of both men, it is perhaps more appropriate to call the exchange a dialogue. Timothy's words are a model of how to maintain Christian orthodoxy while accommodating the message to Muslim perspectives and experiences.

Timothy later wrote of their exchange: "After I had paid to him my usual respects as King of Kings [the appropriate title of address to the caliph at the time] he began to address me and converse with me not in a harsh and haughty tone, since harshness and haughtiness are remote from his soul, but in a sweet and benevolent way." The caliph inquired about the Trinity, "If He is one, He is not three; and if He is three, He is not one; what is this contradiction?"

Speaking of the king as "his exalted Majesty," and addressing him with affection and respect, Timothy replied: "The sun is also one, O our victorious King, in its spheric globe, its light and its heat, and the very same sun is also three, one sun in three powers. In the same way the soul has the powers of reason and intelligence, and the very same soul is one in one thing and three in another thing. In the same way also a piece of three gold denarii, is called one and three, one in its gold that is to say in its nature, and three

in its persons that is to say in the number of denarii. The fact that the above objects are one does not contradict and annul the other fact—that they are also three, and the fact that they are three does not contradict and annul the fact that they are also one."

The dialogue, in the form of a question and answer session between the caliph and Timothy, extended over two days and covered a broad range of practical and theological concerns. The conversation was always cordial, as seen in their closing remarks: "And our victorious King said: 'We have hope in God that we are the possessors of this pearl (the pearl of true faith), and that we hold it in our hands.' —And I replied: 'Amen, O King. But may God grant us that we too may share it with you, and rejoice in the shining and beaming lustre of the pearl! God has placed the pearl of His faith before all of us like the shining rays of the sun, and every one who wishes can enjoy the light of the sun.'"

More than 1200 years after his famous discussions with Caliph al-Mahdi, Patriarch Timothy I still stands as a shining example of a man deeply committed not only to Christian orthodoxy, but also to reflecting the mercy of his Lord in the way he related to the Muslims among whom he lived.

Samuel Zwemer: Apostle to Islam

In 1867, nearly 1100 years after Timothy's dialogue with Caliph al-Mahdi, Samuel Marinus Zwemer was born in the small Dutch community of Vriesland, Michigan. Sensing a call to Christian mission during his studies at Hope College, Samuel was swept up by the momentum of the Student Volunteer Movement. He continued his theological education at a Reformed seminary and went on to receive practical medical training under a physician in New York. After deciding with a classmate to "get something definite underway," Samuel departed for Arabia in June 1890. The motto of his new Arabian Mission was Abraham's prayer for his son in Genesis 17:18: "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee."

His
kingdom
is
without
frontiers.
—
Samuel
Zwemer

Little did he know then that this prayer would absorb the rest of his life—nearly 62 years. Zwemer saw his life's work not as a struggle "against the Ishmaelites" (a term often used in the past to refer to the Muslim community), but as a struggle for them. Like Patriarch Timothy I, Zwemer viewed his call to engage Muslims not as an adversarial enterprise, but as an undertaking whose goal was to secure the blessings of God upon Muslims wherever they may be found.

Zwemer's approach focused on language, literature, and scholarship. Taught early on that "the learning of Arabic is a seven-day-a-week job," Zwemer devoted himself to the task, and he was later called upon to lecture and preach not only in his native English and Dutch, but also in the language of the Muslims to whom he was called. He founded the respected journal *The Muslim World* (still published today), wrote and distributed numerous books and articles aimed at bridging gaps of understanding between Christians and Muslims, and labored tirelessly to mobilize a generation of Christians to engage Muslims peacefully.

Living and traveling throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the entire Muslim world for decades, often under the worst of circumstances, Zwemer modeled the qualities of persistence and personal sacrifice (he buried three of his children in Arabia) that led eminent historian Kenneth Scott Latourette to state, "No one through all the centuries of Christian mission to Muslims has deserved better than Dr. Zwemer the designation of Apostle to Islam."

Though Samuel Zwemer was separated from John of Damascus and Timothy I by more than a millennium, he shared with them a deep commitment to orthodoxy and to intentional, peaceful engagement with Muslims. All three men possessed the cultural and linguistic skills as well as the willingness to engage in intelligent dialogue with Muslims. In the case of John and Timothy, these Muslims were their immediate neighbors; in the case of Zwemer, they lived on the other side of the world. Timothy and Zwemer accommodated their unwaveringly orthodox message to Muslims in ways

that were both relevant and respectful, and their example calls us to do the same as we engage Muslims today in our own and distant lands.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

The Postmodern Maze

Abraham Kuyper reminds us that only Christ can bring wholeness to our fragmented age.

Richard Mouw

In a 1990 forum in *Harper's Magazine*, five specialists on urban life—two architects, an urban planner, a sociologist, and a sculptor—discussed what has been happening to our public spaces. While they differed about how best to design our shopping malls, subway systems, and city centers, they were unanimous about the underlying problem: Our lives are increasingly characterized by "fragmentation and difference," and we need a new "sense of what we have in common while knowing our difference—a sense of wholeness."

This sense of wholeness seems even more unattainable now that we are into the 21st century. Jerry Springer regularly takes us from shouting match to shouting match, with no resolutions—and certainly no "meta-narrative," no overarching story of human existence—ever in sight. Zealous religious believers denounce each other, even as they are all being condemned by equally zealous critics of religion. Influential political leaders complain about growing incivility in their own ranks that they seem incapable of reversing. And many social commentators seem resigned to a world in which no light at all can be shed on the possibilities for unifying either our individual or our collective lives. Psychologist Kenneth Gergen argues that we can only resign ourselves to an "endless wandering in the maze of meaning"; indeed, we may need to come up with a new hymn to sing along the way: "Mazing Grace."

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'

In 1880, the Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper issued a bold proclamation that spoke to the growing fragmentation of society and social roles in his own day—and in ours: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'"

A Christian world-and-life view

Kuyper did not want to return to the ways in which people and governments had attempted to unify life in the past. He feared both an all-powerful state and a social order dominated by a single church. Kuyper was a Calvinist who recognized that his own spiritual forebears had often propagated political schemes that denied people the right to live by their basic convictions. God calls people freely to offer him their obedience, Kuyper insisted. Nothing is gained by imposing patterns of "Christian" behavior on human beings whose hearts have not been turned to the Lord.

Kuyper was an important political leader in the Netherlands. After a brief period as a pastor, he waged a successful campaign for election to the Dutch Parliament. For the next several decades, he led the Anti-Revolutionary Party (which he helped found)—and even served a term as Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905. But his interests extended far beyond politics. Though he had relinquished his clergy credentials when he entered political life, he continued to function as a theologian. He founded the Free university of Amsterdam in 1880. He led a breakaway movement out of the state-sponsored Reformed church to form the second largest Reformed denomination in the country. And all the while he wrote regularly for a daily newspaper he had established earlier in his career, as well as spending much time urging Christians to acknowledge Christ's lordship over all aspects of life—including farming, the arts, business, labor-management relations, and education.

In a series of lectures that he gave at Princeton Seminary during an American tour in 1898 (still in print as **Lectures on Calvinism**), Kuyper set forth the contours of what he labeled "a Christian world-and-life view" that provided a faith-based perspective on a variety of cultural areas, including politics, art, and the life of the mind. Christians must have such a perspective, he argued, if we truly believe that Jesus Christ is sovereign over all of creation's "square inches."

One creation, many spheres

Kuyper's many leadership roles corresponded nicely to his idea of "sphere sovereignty," a perspective that has strong affinities to contemporary discussions about civil society. Social scientists and philosophers have recently stressed the importance of "mediating structures." Neighborhood associations, the Rotary Club, Boy Scouts, churches and synagogues, amateur soccer leagues, extended families—these "living subcultures from which people derive meaning and identity" (as sociologist Peter Berger calls them) protect us from the all-encompassing tendencies of the state on the one hand and isolated individualism on the other.

Kuyper's teaching offers a Christian perspective on these matters. For one thing, he believed that the importance of these mediating structures goes beyond their practical value. The family, he insisted, is grounded in God's creating purposes for humankind. The state, therefore, does not **grant** rights to families; rather, political authorities must **recognize** the sphere of family life as having a right to exist and flourish—a right that is not theirs to grant or deny.

In Kuyper's view, God programmed the diverse spheres of human interaction into the original creation. When the Lord told the first human pair to "be fruitful and multiply," he was surely talking about procreation. But when he instructed them to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [it]," he was issuing a "cultural mandate," according to Kuyper. As Adam and Eve began to fashion tools and work schedules and patterns of interaction, they were "filling" the Garden with culture—and eventually, even without the appearance of sin, the Garden would become a City.

In that sense, not only family but art, science, technology, politics (as the patterns of collective decision-making), recreation, and the like were all programmed into creation so that culture would flourish in many different ways. God wanted artists to bring aesthetic excellence to the creation and scholars to advance the cause of knowledge. Economic activity would foster stewardship, while politics would promote justice.

Sin and grace

Human sin deeply affected all of this. Kuyper believed that humankind is in a state of rebellion against God—our natural tendency is to work against God's purposes. God's saving grace redirects our wills away from idolatrous projects, making it possible once again for us to glorify God in our personal and corporate activities.

According to Kuyper, there is an "antithesis" between believers and unbelievers in the present world: People of faith view life in a radically different way than others do. And there was no doubt in Kuyper's mind that the public square is a particularly strategic place for waging the ongoing battle between righteousness and unrighteousness.

But Kuyper also put forward a doctrine of "common grace" that tempered this picture: In addition to the saving grace that renews human hearts, God shows gracious favor even towards those who will not end up in heaven. He does this by working mysteriously to restrain sin and to stimulate works of culture that will fulfill his providential purposes. Some very positive gifts result from this divine activity in sinful human hearts.

We can see the fruits of common grace at work, Kuyper wrote, "wherever civic virtue, a sense of domesticity, natural love, the practice of human virtue, the improvement of the public conscience, integrity, mutual loyalty among people, and a feeling for piety leaven life."

Christ the King

Kuyper's overall prescription for how to order society has come to be labeled "principled pluralism." In our fallen world there are many worldviews at work, and Kuyper wanted people to be explicit about how their deepest convictions shaped their various activities—politics, schooling, farming, labor-management relations, etc. In politics, for example, there should be a variety of political parties based upon worldviews, each contending for their specific policies but none of them having any kind of favored status. The state should function not as a coach or cheerleader but as a referee, seeing to it that all perspectives—religious and irreligious—are treated impartially as they compete in an arena characterized by fair play.

Kuyper had begun his pastoral ministry as a liberal, but under the influence of ordinary Calvinist folks in his parish, he had soon experienced a profound evangelical conversion. He said their simple faith had been "a blessing for my heart, the rise of the morning star in my life." He referred to them affectionately as "the little people" and shared with them a deep personal faith in Jesus Christ. As he lay dying, no longer able to speak to his family gathered around, he pointed to the symbol of the Savior on the Cross that hung above his bed.

But for Kuyper it was not enough simply to trust in a personal Savior. Christ was for him also the risen and reigning Sovereign; one of his favorite phrases was *pro rege*, "for the King." The ascended Christ—to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given"—rules over a very complex creation. And its complexity, though distorted by sin, still shows forth God's creating purposes, which will be renewed at the return of Christ.

Like the urban planners convened by the *Harper's* editors in 1990, Kuyper called for a sense of wholeness to remedy the increasing fragmentation of life. But he insisted that recognizing this need should not lead to nostalgia for the past. Instead, we must look for an integrated worldview drawing together all the complexities of life, a worldview grounded not in an intellectual scheme but in the One who rules over all the square inches of the creation that he still loves—and that he will some day renew.

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Costly Love, Radical Forgiveness

What made African bishop Festo Kivengere rejoice in the face of monstrous evil?

Tim Stafford

In 1977, Festo Kivengere, an Anglican bishop from Uganda, published a short book entitled *I Love Idi Amin*. Amin was the African dictator routinely referred to as Africa's Hitler. Huge, hulking, alternating between charming buffoon and nightmarish thug, Amin murdered hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens. In February 1977, he arrested and killed Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum, simply because the Anglican bishops had dared to speak up against illegal executions.

Kivengere was one of the last people to see Luwum alive. He waited outside the building where Luwum was interrogated until guards forced him to leave at gunpoint. Expecting arrest, Kivengere escaped Uganda on foot. Within the year he had published his book.

A living church cannot be destroyed by fire or by guns.

I love Idi Amin? It was almost a reckless statement—as though, to put it in contemporary terms, someone standing in the smoke from the Twin Towers erected a sign saying, "I love Osama."

"The Holy Spirit showed me," Kivengere wrote, "that I was getting hard in my spirit, and that my hardness and bitterness toward those who were persecuting us could only bring spiritual loss ... So I had to ask for forgiveness from the Lord, and for grace to love President Amin more."

Kivengere's testimony goes beyond extraordinary forgiveness. He was an evangelist, sometimes called "the African Billy Graham." His book details outbreaks of revival as, in the same year as Amin's terror, Ugandans celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first missionaries' bringing the gospel. Imprisoned church leaders sing and share their testimonies. People come to Christ in vast rallies. Groups of lay people go from one diocese to another to share the gospel. Catholic and Protestant clergy, long estranged, unite to celebrate together. And all the time, terror reigns and many Christians are murdered. "I knew many homes where the family was living in supernatural peace, in spite of the fact that when the husband and father left home in the morning, they had no idea whether he would return that day or not." "A living church," Kivengere wrote, "cannot be destroyed by fire or by guns."

That statement echoes Augustine of Hippo. In *The City of God*, Augustine described two kingdoms, one temporal and one eternal. The eternal city of God could not be destroyed by invading barbarians, Augustine claimed, for its foundation was the faithful love of God. How should Christians respond to terrorism? To love your enemy and forgive him even as he crucifies you is the essence of the eternal city, as seen through Jesus' cross.

Kivengere did not pluck such a response from thin air. Ugandans knew their history. In 1885 a new king began to target Christians. His first victims were three of his court pages, ages 11 to 15, who resisted his homosexual advances due to their faith. Offered the opportunity of recanting, they refused and were burned alive in a public execution. Just before their deaths they sent a message to the king: "Tell His Majesty that he has put our bodies in the fire, but we won't be long in the fire. Soon we shall be with Jesus, which is much better. But ask him to repent and change his mind, or he will land in a place of eternal fire and desolation."

Stories like that were famous among Ugandan Christians. So Idi Amin was a familiar type to them. They knew about monsters and how Christians were to respond. Thus, "I love Idi Amin."

Kivengere survived Idi Amin's reign, and after Amin's ouster was able to return to Uganda for years of fruitful ministry. He died of cancer in 1988.

Tim Stafford is a senior writer for Christianity Today. His latest book is Surprised by Jesus.

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