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JOURNAL

MIDWEST CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"
 Galatians 4:16

Many years ago, in a town far, far away, or so it seems, two youthful believers—Joy and I (Don)—were part of a small church. I had grown up with an Atheist world view but had been a Christian for a few years. Joy had the blessing of being raised in a Christian home and had recently rededicated her life to Christ. We were both passionate about reaching non-believers wherever we found them, which we soon noticed mostly were NOT within the church. Along her merry way while in a bowling league, of all places, Joy met some Jehovah's Witness (JW*) women about whom she cared.

She had heard while growing up that the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society (WTBTS**) taught their followers (JWs) some weird things, but she wasn't sure exactly what was wrong with their belief system. When they spoke of their beliefs, it sounded pretty normal on the surface. They said they believed in Jesus and the Bible, but Mama had always told her JWs

were not real Christians, and Mama had proved to be nearly always right. ☺ Joy asked her pastor about JWs. He did not know much about them, but he gave her a tract. It was not a helpful tract, however, and it was very confusing. She found a book at the local Christian bookstore, but it was old and, again, just not very helpful. There simply was not very much out there at the time. She came close to giving up on this mission, but her heart would not let her—God would not let her.

She then stumbled across a TV interview on the *John Ankerberg Show*, which featured four women who were ex-JWs, and she finally found a wonderful source of knowledge and helpful materials. Wow, what a shock it was to learn the WTBTS was not just a "bit off," but was actually a dangerous, life-threatening

cult who was responsible for thousands of deaths due to their ban on blood transfusions. Not only that, *their* Jesus was an angel, *their* god "Jehovah" was a limited being who did not know the future, and *their* Bible was flagrantly "doctored" to reflect the WTBTS pet doctrines. If Joy was on a mission before, she was doubly so now, as she learned her dear friends were lost in this cult, and they and their children were in mortal as well as eternal peril.

To us, this became **Lesson 1** in evangelism: People invest their time, talent, and treasure to evangelize people they LOVE. Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Luke 12:34, NIV) But it also is true in reverse—where your heart is, your treasure will gladly follow. This is what happened to Joy and, in turn, infected me.

I think of these early days of our ministry as I talk with pastors who are trying to figure out how to get their people excited about evangelism. They come up with lots of possible roadblocks, some of which may be part of the problem and some of which may not be. But whatever the contributing factors may be, we believe love for the lost is *the* key. So we suggest pastors and elders pray that God will bring someone into their peoples' lives whom they will come to love enough to do what it takes to try to rescue them from Hell. Pastors have another powerful role to play in all this. Especially today, the average Christian in the pew needs to have their eyes opened to see through our gauzy American relativism, the "I'm okay, everyone's okay" propaganda, and really see their friends and loved ones as utterly lost and careening toward a cliff! This is where good preaching comes in.

—Continued on page 2



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“Lessons” Continued from page 1

Lesson 2: Lost People Need Answers

As time went on, we had opportunities to help others learn about the false teachings of the WTBS. Many of these were family members of JW's who often were unbelievers, but some were people like Joy—Christians who had become interested in this ministry because God had brought a JW into their life and they were compelled to try to help them find their way to the true God. At that time, we were running pre-recorded, 24-hour, help lines—a simple ministry which involved running the help-line ads in local papers, writing and recording a telephone scripts each week about the WTBS teachings which would allow people to call and listen without us picking up the phone. JW's need to be able to get information anonymously, because they are terrified for anyone to know they have doubts about their religion. After a time, others stepped up to run the help lines, while we switched over to a live line for people who were not afraid to call and needed information right away. The prerecorded lines referred people to our live line at the end of the message. The phone calls we received were very different. Sometimes, they were JW elders or family members of elders who were calling to argue with us or to tell us how mean we were to pick on the WTBS this way.

I (Joy) once got a call at 4:00AM from a woman who angrily railed at me and defended the WTBS particular beliefs for more than 45 minutes. When she would take a breath, I would respond to her charges and try to get her to think. Finally, she let me know she went door to door every week and demanded to know what I ever did in God's service. I said, “Well, I am sitting here talking to YOU at 4:30 in the morning...” ☺ You can only hope that something you say will come back to influence their thinking one day.

Other times a JW or unbeliever called who really wanted information. Craig was just such a call.

With the live line in place, one evening the phone rang, and Craig was on the line. He let me know he was a JW as were his wife and children, but he admitted he had some real questions. His wife was not happy about the fact he doubted what the WTBS calls “the truth.” (Doubts concerning the doctrine and/or the leadership of the WTBS is a major no-no for a JW—the kind of no-no that can get one disfellowshipped and shunned.) He said he thought he could perhaps get his wife to come and meet with us, but it would only be a one time shot. It would be the January 2—the day after New Year's Day.

Now Christmas is our favorite holiday—but JW's are very offended by Christmas celebration, so rather than offend Craig's wife right off the bat, we spent all of New Year's Day taking down Christmas decorations—inside and out! They arrived, and we spent the next four hours going through the Scriptures using their New World Translation (NWT) Bibles and Kingdom Interlinears (KIT) published by the WTBS. We explained the Trinity, Deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and looked at the history of the WTBS. It was a real humdinger of a discussion we had on that New Year's Day. Whew! One of our kitchen chairs got broken in the excitement—it all sounds so funny now.

As they left, Craig was excited and felt the things we had said to them made sense. Darlene, however, was not yet convinced. On the way home, they came to an agreement. They would call and find out if we would talk to the elders by phone and go over these issues with them. Darlene felt that if we wouldn't talk to their elders, it somehow would prove we were lying. When they arrived home they called. Craig listened while Darlene asked if I would talk to the elders by phone. My response was no. I later learned that at that point, she smiled feeling vindicated—while Craig was a bit downcast. That is until I uttered my next words, “We would rather meet them face to face.”

Well, what an adventure we enjoyed for the next several months! Craig soon accepted the Lord, and we helped him find a good church in their area. Darlene kept trying to get the JW elders to meet with us, but also decided she would accompany Craig and the kids to church. The elders kept refusing, the family kept going to church and meeting with us to work out the doctrinal issues, and it wasn't long before Darlene let go of the WTBS and became a Christian as well, along with the children. Because of the one phone call, an entire family came to the Lord! They were unbelievers who had questions.

There are so many people like Craig and Darlene—people who desperately need answers. Before he called us, Craig had called a Catholic Priest, since he had been raised Catholic, but the man had no answers for him—had no clue how to help him. Most people caught up in a cult would not call a church of any kind, but even if they did, how many

churches are equipped to handle these types of questions? As important as it is to pastor a church or serve as a missionary, there are other important areas of ministry as well. There is a huge mission field right here at home! This is the mission field Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. has been designed to reach.

Lesson 3: You May Be the Answer to Someone's Prayer

One day Joy received a call on the live line from a JW woman who said she was severely depressed and considering suicide. She was overwhelmed by all the WTBTs dictates. She said she would leave the organization, but she could not bear the fact that if she left, she then would be responsible for her children being destroyed at Armageddon. There are many severely depressed JWs out there in just such a condition—suffering in silence, since to voice doubt or weakness is to invite censure within the WTBTs organization. She was afraid to talk to me, and indeed, she would not give me her name, but she was desperate enough to dare to see what I might have to say. I talked to her at some length, answered her questions as well as informed her of many of the problems with the WTBTs history and doctrine. She had gotten the number from a recorded help line, but she finally asked me WHY I would run such a help line and why was I so interested in JWs. So I told her about meeting JW women on a bowling league and coming to care about them, etc. I was shocked when she told me she knew who I was and proceeded to tell me she had bowled with me for years on this same league! She did at last give me her name so I could send cassette tapes and documents to her. It was a pleasant shock to realize I had been able to help a friend. She told me later—after she and her family were all born-again Christians—she had been the one who had suggested to the group of JW friends to join this bowling league years earlier. This woman had been a JW for 24 years and her husband for 35. As it turns out, he had been wracked by doubts as well, but could not admit it to her for fear of ... you guessed it ... being responsible for the family being destroyed at Armageddon. They both became believers and joined a Christian Church. We continued meeting with them for a time to answer their questions and “unwind their minds” from cult doctrine and practice. At one point, we were told the husband’s elderly aunt, who was a Christian, had been praying for this couple for 35 years! We were the answer to this faithful woman’s prayer! The more we have met with people in false religious movements, the more we have come across this phenomenon—a friend or family member who is faithfully praying for their deliverance and salvation. Being the answer to someone else’s prayer is a great responsibility and one we take seriously.

Lesson 4: Rescuers Sometimes Need Rescue

In the Jan./Feb. 1996 *MCOI Journal*, we carried the story of Tina.¹ Tina, who lived in Indiana (we are headquartered in Illinois), was a very devoted Roman Catholic whose son-in-law, Terry, had been a JW for some years. Her daughter Deanna (Terry’s wife) had just informed her that she would no longer be celebrating holidays, because she was becoming a JW. To say Tina was concerned was an understatement. She was stricken! How could her daughter leave the one true (Roman Catholic) church? And if her daughter left the faith, who would pray for Tina when she was (someday) in purgatory? Tina went to her priest ... to no avail! The priest told her not to worry—everything would be alright! Tina was not comforted. Others to whom she spoke did not seem to have any solutions either. At one point, she spoke with her son in Nebraska who had just come across an ad in his local paper for our JW live line. He gave her the number. Tina called. We mailed her audio tapes, books about the WTBTs, and photo documentation showing the extreme problems in the history and doctrine of the WTBTs. Don regularly talked to her by phone, teaching her what she should say to her daughter, and how she might handle the situation. She would visit often as we taught her what to say, how to respond, and essential doctrine. We continually suggested she ask thought-provoking questions, without pressure for answers, and see what would happen.

One day, Tina called very upset to say that Terry had called and said he had heard she was reading “**apostate material**” (*any material which questions WTBTs teaching is considered “apostate”—and anyone possessing “apostate material” could be considered an “enemy”*), and he wanted her to bring it over so he could see it. She was frightened and didn’t know what to do. We reminded her to keep it “low key” and to keep the focus on the WTBTs organization. In fact, we told her to take the books and materials over there but leave them in her car. Then, when Terry and Deanna asked to see the materials, tell him the truth—she had been told that if she gave them the materials, and their elders found out,

—Continued on page 4

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HAVE NOTHING
TO DO WITH THE
FRUITLESS DEEDS
OF DARKNESS, BUT
RATHER EXPOSE
THEM.

~EPHESIANS 5:11~



“Lessons” Continued from page 3

the elders would forbid them to see her. We prayed with her. Tina loaded up the materials and drove over. When she went in and was asked for the materials, she told Terry and Deanna she would rather have a relationship with them in the WTBTs than to give them the materials and have no relationship with them anymore at all. Terry and Deanna both stated unequivocally that the elders would never do such a thing, and Terry marched himself out to the car to get the materials. He and Deanna sat up until the wee hours of the morning examining the books and materials and called the next day to tell Tina they were leaving the WTBTs. Tina was thrilled.

We began meeting with Terry and Deanna on a regular basis to answer their lingering questions. As we met, they came to understand and accept the Gospel, and they became born-again believers. We helped them find a good church in their area. But, along the way, daughter Deanna became concerned about her *mother’s* spiritual welfare. They began asking questions about the Roman Catholic Church and their beliefs and came to realize Tina was not born-again. So, we began teaching them how to ask questions and not make accusations.

The WTBTs and the Catholic Church are quite different, but they have some glaring similarities that can make Catholics very uncomfortable when these issues are gently brought to their attention. Both offer “organizational salvation”—the person is saved by their relationship with the organization, rather than their relationship to Jesus Christ. In both systems, works are needed for salvation, and the “salvation” they offer is never secure. *Grace* is a word both organizations use, but neither understands the concept. Both offer another mediator besides Jesus—Catholicism offers Mary, while the WTBTs offers the elite 144,000 class as their mediator. And there are many other prickly parallels. The issue of Mary came up between them, and when it did, Tina called and said we needed to meet.

They all made the trip together from Indiana, and we carefully explained the Gospel and answered *Tina’s* questions this time. Poor Tina—she didn’t think she could give up her Catholicism and especially her Marian devotion. In fact, according to Terry, Deanna and Tina, she had so many Roman Catholic statues, it was like a mini St. Peter’s Basilica at her house. ☺ We called, and put her on the phone with one of our Board of Directors and his wife, Bill and Joanne Kalin, who are former Roman Catholics, and they spent time listening and sharing their experience of leaving the Catholic Church. About two weeks later, Deanna called to say Tina had accepted Christ, and they had all of the statues in the driveway and wanted to know what to do with them. This was a first for us – what do you do with unwanted used statuary anyway? Joy thought it would be fun to take the statues over to Bill and Joanne’s house in the middle of the night and set them up in their front yard—but we thought better of it. ☺

Several years later, Tina, Deanna and Terry gave their testimonies at the Witnesses Now For Jesus Convention in New Ringgold, PA.² Tina’s husband, Jim, came to the convention to hear them speak. (Tina, Deanna, and Terry had been praying for his salvation for years.) While they were giving their testimonies, Jim began weeping, and before the night was over, he was a child of God.

One phone call from one lost Roman Catholic woman looking to rescue her family from a cult—but God took us all on an

adventure which brought the entire family (including Terry and Deanna’s children) to “...*the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3). And their story is out there to help others.

Lesson 5: God Reaches Non-believers in Unexpected Ways

Mike called the help line, concerned that his wife, Lynn, was in a cult. She had gotten ensnared into the WTBTs when they came to her door and offered her a “free Bible Study.” We met Mike for lunch, and one of my first questions was, “What do you have to offer her if she leaves the group?” He was puzzled. He was a non-practicing Roman Catholic and wasn’t particularly interested in God. He simply wanted his wife out of this group—right away—or he would divorce her. Obviously, Mike did not understand the spiritual deception of false religion. I thanked him for the lunch, but I pointed out that getting her to come out of the WTBTs organization could take a very long time—and in fact, she may never change her mind. If he wasn’t committed to the marriage and had nothing to offer her in place of her new-found beliefs, there did not seem to be much point in pursuing this any further. We parted ways. Mike called about six months later, said he loved his wife, and wanted to pursue it, since this religion was coming between them and causing them severe marital problems. We began meeting once a week.

Joy, as was her habit, gave him six to ten audio tapes at every meeting. (Like Mrs. Nelson being the neighborhood coffee pusher in the old time Folgers commercials, Joy was the neighborhood audio-tape pusher.) These tapes were about the WTBTs and their peculiar doctrines and practices, but they were also about the *true* faith, about salvation, and peace with God. Each week Mike would return with his stack of tapes and leave with more. We answered his questions and prayed for them.

One day, we came home a few minutes late for our meeting with Mike and found him sitting in his car listening to audio tapes. As we approached, he looked up with tears in his eyes and said, “I don’t know what is happening to me. I used to be normal, and now all I do is listen to these tapes.” Mike accepted the Lord, and soon, so did his children. He began attending a good Bible-teaching church with his children. This caused great consternation for Lynn, of course.

It was finally arranged for us to meet with Mike and Lynn and her elders in a setting where Mike and his wife could sit and observe without pressure while we and her leaders had to defend each of our respective positions. Lynn was rattled by that meeting, but she never left the group; she eventually divorced him. It was painful for Mike, but God used his loving attempt as a non-believer to rescue his wife to bring him and his children into a saving relationship with God.

Lesson 6: Ex-cultists Need Help Too

Leading someone to faith in Jesus Christ out of a cult or false religion, discipling them, and trying to help them find a good church is a calling—a mission right here in our own backyard. Often, churches do not know how to help a person who is lost in a cult, and they often fail to understand the particular issues with which an ex-cultist is dealing. Since they had been deceived and dragged into a religious organization by those who claimed to be “Bible teachers,” they now tend to be more skeptical of true and faithful Bible teachers. They just don’t know how

to tell the difference! And church leaders do not understand the struggle the ex-cultists are facing with this. The ex-cultist has also had their heads filled with all manner of false teachings, and even after rejecting and leaving the group, they still are steeped in false teaching until they come across someone who knows the peculiar doctrines of the group very well, can untangle them, and help the ex-cultist distinguish truth from falsehood. We have received calls from more than one pastor asking how to best minister to the new ex-cultist who has walked into his church. We tell them to be very patient with such a person, let them ask questions, and hopefully, find someone who is trained in apologetics to take them under their wing and help them make the transition.

The work of the pastor and the work of a missionary are different, but they do overlap in some ways. The pastor's work is primarily inside the church and the missionary's work is primarily outside the church. Missionaries learn about the culture, language, and customs of the groups to whom they minister. This is true whether it is overseas or here in America. Even though we live in the same neighborhoods, work at the same jobs, shop at the same stores, etc., each cult and/or new religious group has a unique world view, language (definitions for terms), and practices. They may be using the same *words* heard in any church on any given Sunday, but the group has assigned *different meanings* to those terms. Here's just one very important example: Jesus is the Son of God (Mt. 14:32), the Creator (Jn. 1:3) and sustainer of all things (Heb. 1:3) and is in fact, God (Jn. 20:28)! To all false religious groups though, Jesus may be called the "son of God," but they allege he, himself, is not God Almighty. To every false group, Jesus is *always* some lesser being—an angel, or a prophet, or a great teacher—but *not God* come in the flesh!

The work of the missionary is to learn, understand, and figure out how to cross the cultural and language barriers in order to communicate the saving Gospel, make a case for the Christian faith, and expose the teachings of the group as false. You can imagine how "popular" such work is in our relativistic culture. Even within the Body of Christ, there is a certain coolness toward any ministry involved in pointing out where someone or some group is *wrong*, but such is our calling. As missionaries, our task is to help the ex-cultist make the transition and get them into a solid, Bible-teaching church.

Lesson 7: Informing and Warning the Church

One of the main tasks of pastors is boundary maintenance—they are the shepherds, the watchmen. According to Acts 20:28-31, the Apostle Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders was not only to guard the flock from false teachers ("*savage wolves*") who were *outside* trying to sneak in, but also from false teachers who would arise from *within*. A large part of the Pastoral Epistles concentrate on these issues as well. Another of Paul's focal points is the "*... equipping of the saints for the work of ministry ...*" (Eph. 4:11-13, NKJ).³ Sometimes pastors and missionaries to New Religious Movements and cults come into conflict as false teachings and false teachers infiltrate or even promoted within the church. While there still are many wonderful pastors and elders who take their responsibilities very seriously, this charge to protect the flock has been neglected by a substantial percentage of Christian churches today. As a sad result, outright apostasy is on the rise. A large part of apologetics' ministry is helping pastors to fulfill their mission to guard the flock from wolves

without and within, as well as educate the average Christian so they are able to recognize false teachers who come to their door or come into their church. In these spiritually tumultuous days, days of encroaching spiritual darkness and apostasy, it behooves every Christian "*to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*" (Jude 3).

It is not pleasant to address problems within the church. Not at all. But it is our conviction that if we do not have the courage or integrity to expose false teachers or address major false teachings *within* the church, how can we, in good conscience, criticize false teachers and false teachings *outside* the church?

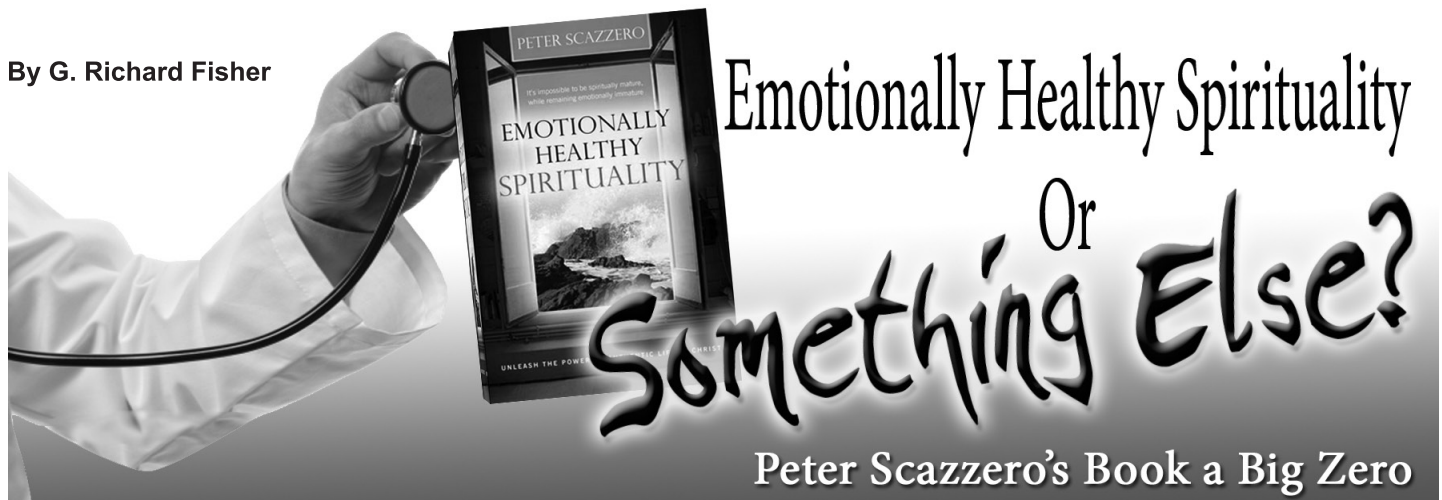
There are many examples of false teachers and false teachings finding their way into the church. Undoubtedly, it is also far more difficult today for pastors fully to carry out Acts 20:28-31 than in past generations, because there are so many sources of alternate spiritual truth—radio, television, bookstores, and internet—that compete with the local church for our attention and spiritual instruction. Flock members are "feeding" on a lot of junk food out there. There are televangelists promising greater spirituality in a much shorter time if we follow their lead. Many books and programs offer financial prosperity, deeper truths, dramatic "revivals," spectacular "miracles," physical healings, supposed healing of memories, deliverance from demons and addictions, and on and on and on. There is Osteen and Oprah and Benny and Deepak, and who knows who is new this week, or has the latest gimmick. There is also the so-called Evangelical left with their "emerging" spirituality—highlighting feelings and relationships while unceremoniously dumping essential doctrine, which they view as divisive. How many Christians have read or are currently reading *The Shack* without having a clue of its egregiously heretical nature. This stuff is walking right into the church on the shoes of some of our parishioners. And some of it is just slipping by the "watchman." Just keeping up with all of the false teaching in order to keep it out of the local church is a full-time job, especially since some of it unfortunately comes from well-known and/or trusted Christian sources.

One example is Gwen Shamblin and her Weigh Down Workshop. Her first book, *Weigh Down Workshop* was published by Double Day, sold over a million copies, and launched her into the national spotlight as a Bible-based diet program. Her second book, *Rise Above*, was published by none other than Thomas Nelson Publishers. Gwen and her video program were already making good headway into local churches, and with Thomas Nelson's imprimatur, she was solidly ensconced in church-sponsored small groups.

No one really questioned her doctrine for two primary reasons. First, it was viewed as a weight-loss program for women's ministry and not a Bible-teaching program. Second, Thomas Nelson Publishers is regarded as a Christian publishing house, and it was assumed (as is often the case) they had someone theologically astute vetting the work. So, by the time we at MCOI were first called, over a million Christians had participated in her program, at a cost of \$105.00 each, in addition to her conferences, and sales of other items. Christians had already sent her in excess of 100-million dollars. Gwen was and continues to be anti-Trinitarian, teaches a works-based salvation, claims the entire church is "**apostate**," asserts she is God's prophet for today, and workshop participants need to leave the "**apostate**" church (which was hosting her workshops) and join her "**one true church**"—Remnant Fellowship. She was teaching that in over

—Continued on page 18

By G. Richard Fisher



The entire world seems to be turning away from using rational understanding toward a reliance on mystical means as a basis for life.¹

Is the Emergent Church hyphenated or regurgitated? It all depends on whom you ask. I believe readers are astute enough to be able to discern that, and they will when they look at this analysis of a recent book.

Peter Scazzero's book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*² has been written for the purpose of introducing readers to the practices of contemplative spirituality called by Scazzero the "ancient treasures of the church"³ and "spiritual formation."⁴

Scazzero is a graduate of Eastern Baptist Seminary and pastor of New Life Fellowship Church in Queens, New York. He promotes the idea that ancient contemplative practices are the only way to spiritual health. This certainly is much in line with some segments of the Emerging Church Movement and especially the teachings of Brian McLaren, Robert Webber, Phyllis Tickle, and what is called the Ancient Future Faith Movement.

What is so strange and contradictory is that this call to ancient liturgy is seen as a way to aid the church at large when mainstream denominations employing these practices are declining in number and losing constituents on the altar of political correctness. Why would we want to be like them with their falling numbers and failing programs? What can they offer evangelical Christians other than failure?

Many are unaware of the underlying concept of the Contemplative Movement:

The underlying premise of contemplative spirituality is the belief that God is in all things and in all people, virtually in all of creation (panentheism*).⁵

Emergent leader Phyllis Tickle has floated the idea (and I paraphrase) that in taking the Eucharist, we feed on the body and blood of God to feed the God who is in us. In her view, we cannot trust the Bible, but somehow, we can trust rituals and mystical rites.

One of the huge red flags hoisted by Scazzero at the beginning of his book is his use of what is similar to the occult practice termed "automatic writing." Scazzero is bold to say:

... **write down how God speaks to you. When I read an edifying book where God is coming to me, I write inside the back cover a few sentences about each insight along with the page number. I can go back later and easily review what God said to me. You may want to journal or write in the margins of this book.**⁶ (emphasis mine)

He is bold to say:

I go back and read what **I have written** to review **truths God told to me** during that time.⁷ (emphasis mine)

This is nothing short of a public claim of divine inspiration. It tends to elevate Scazzero's jottings, and those who follow his suggestions, on a par with inspired Scripture. After all, he is writing "what God said to me," or so he claims. What he is suggesting to others and, in fact, doing is masquerading his form of the ancient, occult technique of automatic writing in Christian garb.

Our understanding of Scripture and our writings about our understanding of the Bible are not inspired. No one has written the words of God other than the God-inspired writers of sacred Scripture. Scazzero clearly is confusing divine *inspiration* (the writing of Scripture) with *illumination* (the understanding of Scripture). Charles Ryrie explains:

Generally the concept of illumination is related to the work of the Holy Spirit making clear the truth of written revelation. In reference to the Bible, revelation relates to the material, inspiration to the method of recording the revelation, and illumination to the meaning of the record. ... The believer was promised this ministry of the Spirit by the Lord before his death.⁸

Deut. 4:2, Prov. 30:5-6, and Rev. 22:18-19 militate against anyone claiming to have writings from God today or adding to God's Word. The Bible is enough. If new revelations match the Bible, we don't need them. If they don't match the Bible, then they are wrong.

On the other hand, automatic writing does assert that one is getting revelations from God or at least the other side. Early spiritualists found Ouija boards just too slow in getting the information and devised another, faster method:

Many spiritualists in the 1850's, however, found this a tedious and time-consuming exercise. A faster means was 'automatic writing,' in which spirit beings could communicate through the pen of a medium, but some complained that this produced many pages of unclear or meandering prose.⁹

One can only conclude that automatic writing comes either from the demonic or the imagination of the writer. Attempting to get truth this way explains why so many cults get it wrong with the extra-biblical writings they produce. How much of Scazzero's book was produced in this way?

The Historic Faith, Emotionally Unhealthy?

The success of Scazzero's book hinges on the reader believing that normal, historic, orthodox views of the Christian life

and sanctification are wrong and emotionally unhealthy. This, then, corresponds to/supports his assertion that real emotional health only can be found in **“contemplative spirituality.”**¹⁰ He claims his book will lead to **“a richer, more authentic encounter with the living God.”**¹¹

Part of this book is autobiographical as Scazzero unloads his soul regarding many of his past foibles and failures. Does he feel the need to bare his soul in wrenching confessions about his past irresponsibility and lack of spiritual growth? He talks of his deep, internal wounds from his messed-up background.

But why focus on the past? The better answer seems to be simply to stop obsessing on the past, get into a more balanced, disciplined, and biblical way of living, and forget what lies behind as you press forward (Philippians 3:13). However, that is not Scazzero’s answer. Scazzero shares the fact he spent 17 years immersed in the Pentecostal/Charismatic world,¹² yet he came up empty as far as his understanding of spirituality and still felt emotionally immature. He reads his own confusion into everyone and seeks to push the pendulum to an unbiblical extreme, as he dives headlong into the occultic practices of the medieval and current mystics. Had he gone back just a bit further, he could have found the Apostles and the Epistles as well as the Gospels. Scazzero’s book is an exercise in extremes.

Much of what Scazzero shares up to this point he calls the **“Iceberg Model”**¹³ and seems steeped in modern psychology and a secular, psychological understanding. It is a spin off of the idea there are deep, unconscious levels of the brain. This 90% untouched area of our life he calls **“the ‘emotional component’.”**¹⁴ It is Freudianism masked in religious garb. Scazzero alleges he would remain an **“emotional infant”**¹⁵ until this area was properly addressed. Apparently, salvation, grace, the Holy Spirit, and God’s Word does nothing and means nothing. This problem would take something revolutionary and out of the ordinary to solve and must be obtained in some special way. Allegedly, Scazzero has discovered that way.

Does Scazzero realize that he is drawing people into this in a bit of a devious way? He lays out the **“fruit of the Spirit”**¹⁶ and asks to what degree are these fruits **“realities in my life?”**¹⁷ Of course, everyone would have to say they fall short and do not put these into practice on a continuing basis. However, that may be okay. These “fruit” are the “product” of yielding to the indwelling Holy Spirit. They are character qualities for which Christians sign up every day. That we do not do them perfectly all the time shows our humanity and our continuing need to depend on God and keep repentance and confession current. Imperfection in the area of the fruit of the spirit does not mean we have to take a leap into the extremes of mysticism as Scazzero will suggest and do. That we are imperfect is one thing. That our imperfections (until we reach Heaven) require extreme, unbiblical answers is quite another. We all struggle, because life is difficult, and God is not finished with us yet. In reading 2 Corinthians, we discover even the great Apostle Paul had his ups and downs, his lapses, fits, and starts. Some days we run, other days we walk as in Isaiah 40:31. Yet other days, we crawl, and some days, it takes all we can do simply to stay pointed in the right direction. This does not mean we look for **“ANOTHER WAY”**¹⁸ as Scazzero calls his mystical formula. This other way has been tried and failed, and anyone knowing Church history would know that.

The mystics of the middle ages sought union with God and meditation to the point of hearing God’s voice within. This union

was a union of being, that is, merging with God in some kind of fusion of nature. It was an extreme that blurs and often destroys the differences between the Creator and the creature. It was unhealthy and bizarre, and it left one open to the delusion of believing our thoughts were the exact thoughts of God. Scazzero goes off in that direction:

positioning ourselves to hear God ... communing with God, allowing him to fully indwell the depth of our being; practicing silence, solitude, ... transformation toward ever-increasing union with God.¹⁹

All of this would be heartily affirmed by the extremist Roman Catholic mystics of the Middle Ages.

Scazzero’s language is troubling, and he is on the edge of mystical merging in God when he says, **“Healing our image of God heals our image of ourselves.”**²⁰ Is it unfortunate language, perhaps just imprecise, as it moves us into pantheistic** thinking?

There is no doubt we are indwelt by Christ if we are believers. We affirm Colossians 1:27, **“Christ in you the hope of Glory.”** However Christ is still Christ, and we are still creatures. Nowhere does the Bible say we become Christ, yet mystics and fusionists*** believe that is what happens. A follower of subculture author and teacher Norman Grubb once told me that Jesus so became her, and she so became Jesus, that when she sinned, it was Jesus sinning! What horrible heresy and delusion. However, this is where mysticism leads us. As well, Christ is not in us for communication or a fusion of being, but rather for salvation and safe keeping. The Lord communes with us and “speaks to us” in His Word.

Scazzero gives “thumbs up” to the early desert mystics²¹ as if they are an example of spiritual maturity and spiritual health. Nothing could be further from the truth! Derwas J. Chitty is the premier scholar on the desert mystics. His book is a classic. Though he is favorable and sympathetic to that early movement, he is also an honest historian. In his book *The Desert a City An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire*²² he divulges some interesting facts which I summarize.

1. The desert monks believed sin resided in our literal flesh and fleshly body.
2. The only way to overcome sin was to punish and chastise the body through rigorous self-denial and physical chastisements. Celibacy and fasting were sure ways to accomplish this, as was flagellation and mutilation of the body.
3. Since the devil left the city (because the cities were seen as Christianized), then he must dwell in the desert; there he must be faced head on.
4. The actual reproduction of the wilderness temptations of Jesus had to be the route to holiness.
5. They believed (and the public in general believed) this was the true way to acceptance with God and sainthood. These monks became the celebrities of the day.
6. Homosexuality was rife and spelled the end of most the desert mystics and the desert monasteries.
7. Strange and often heretical messages given in voices and visions were readily accepted.


On the last point, I can only say malnutrition, excessive sleep loss, and opening oneself to the demonic were the real

—Continued on page 16

The Twilight Saga

Your Soul For Immortality

by Marcia Montenegro



The *Twilight Saga* by Stephenie Meyer has sold over 85-million copies in 50 countries.¹ Movies have come out based on the first two books, *Twilight* and *New Moon*, and movies are due to come out on the last two books of the series, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*. Eager fans have stood in line to get the first copies of each succeeding book and have excitedly queued up for the movies. A line of merchandise has been spawned as well: jewelry, totes, clothing, wall calendars, perfume, and even bedding. This phenomenon should not be ignored by the Christian who wants to understand the diet our culture feeds on – and craves.

The books depict the romance between a teenager (**Bella**, age 17) and a vampire* (**Edward**) whom she meets at school. The obstacles and dangers in the romance, along with Bella's deepening bond with Edward's vampire clan, are the focal points of the story. A secondary plot involving Bella's friend Jacob, a Native American who is genetically a werewolf** (though called a "shape-shifter"*** in the last book), ties into the romance and, ultimately, is resolved though rather bizarrely. Bella's longing to become a vampire leads to explosive drama in the fourth book based on the fulfillment of that desire.

Stephenie Meyer's Dream

What was author Stephenie Meyer's inspiration for this tale of a human-vampire romance? Meyer, an observant Mormon, had a dream in 2003.² In the dream, she saw a young girl talking to a sparkling vampire in a meadow; they were in love, and he was explaining to the young girl how hard it was not to kill her.³ This dream was the impetus for the books, and Meyer quickly wrote the first book *Twilight*. She later followed it up with the three sequels. There was another dream to come, a terrifying dream, which will be discussed later in this article.

Erotic Abstinence, Blood Romance

One of the earliest praises of the *Twilight* books was that Bella and Edward do not have intimate relations. While it is true that they refrain, the reasons are not moral. Rather, Edward, as a vampire (which Bella discovers in the first book), is afraid that in his passion he will actually kill Bella. Although Bella often tries to persuade him to cross the line, Edward, more aware than Bella of his vampire strength and what it can do, resists.

The romance that is the linchpin of these books is somewhat tainted by the fact that the reason Edward is attracted to

Bella is the smell of her blood. This plays a significant role in the first book. Bella meets and gets to know Edward's clan, who are called his "family" in the books. This group has sworn to drink only animal, not human, blood; nevertheless, they are still attracted to human blood and must control themselves when they are around people. In fact, Edward is so fiercely drawn to the smell of Bella's blood that he continually struggles with the urge to attack her. He even says to her, "**You only have to risk your life every second you spend with me.**"⁴ As time goes by, his control is better but not total. In a harrowing scene at the end of the first book, when Bella has been attacked by a "bad" vampire, she lies badly injured and bleeding on the floor. Edward and some of his clan get there just in time to save her, but Edward and his "sister" Alice have to hold their breath to keep from smelling Bella's fragrant blood and attacking her. Two vampires in the clan, Emmet and Jasper, are unable to contain their bloodlust and leave the room. There is a similar scene in the second book, *New Moon*, where Bella has cut herself, and the smell of her blood is too much for the entire clan, save Carlisle, the "father" who is also a doctor (he has mastered his appetite for human blood).

Despite the abstinence, the books are fraught with sexual innuendo and an undercurrent of physical passion steaming just below the surface. After Bella discovers that the pallid Edward has been watching her at night in her room, she allows him to get in bed with her. Although nothing untoward happens, Bella hides this from her father. Is this the kind of behavior parents would hold up as a model for their children? Yet, mothers have read these books with their daughters and seen the movies with them.

Eclipse, the third book, offers one rather racy scene. Edward, in bed with Bella as usual, reaches down Bella's leg and then, as Bella recounts it, he "**pulled my leg up suddenly, hitching it around his hip.**"⁵ After kissing, Edward "**rolled till he hovered over me. ... I could feel the cool marble of his body press against mine,**" and then, "**Cold as ice, his tongue lightly traced the shape of my lips.**"⁶

In the same book, Edward, Jacob (a werewolf/shape-shifter who loves Bella), and Bella are in a tent, and the weather is frigid. Edward, being a cold creature, cannot keep Bella warm; so it falls to Jacob, who relishes getting under the covers with Bella and holding her all night. Edward, who is able to read Jacob's impure thoughts, becomes sullen and angry; and Jacob taunts him with suggestive remarks and double-entendres. Later, there is a near-bodice ripper scene when Jacob imposes himself on Bella in the tent in Edward's absence. Jacob kisses Bella "**with**

an eagerness that was not far from violence.⁷ The scene is non-graphic, but it is quite erotic and continues with Bella giving in and responding fervently to Jacob's advances.

After three books of passionate abstinence and innuendo, in the fourth book, *Breaking Dawn*, Edward and Bella marry. In spite of Edward's fears, they give in to the desire for marital relations. This leaves Bella horribly bruised all over her body, but alive. Eventually, after Bella becomes a vampire, Bella and Edward, who do not need sleep since they are vampires, have what is implied to be non-stop intimate relations. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*; but given that the books are touted as being squeaky-clean, it seems the adulation is misleading at best and dishonest at worst.

Better Than Human ...

The unending descriptions of Edward's physical magnificence are a noticeable theme in the first three books. Edward, being a vampire, is actually dead. He has no heartbeat and does not eat or sleep; he only drinks (animal) blood. Since he is actually a walking corpse, he is quite cold to the touch. This does not bother Bella. In fact, Bella's family and her human friends pale in comparison to the pale divine Edward, who has **"unbearable beauty"** even to **"an excruciating degree."**⁸ Edward is described in terms reserved for the ancient gods or for angels: **"Edward as he hunted, terrible and glorious as a young god;"** Edward has an **"angel's face,"** a **"gentle angel's smile,"** and **"exquisite face;"** Edward is the **"beautiful one, the godlike one."**⁹ Bella cannot imagine how **"an angel could be any more glorious,"** and she finds herself so captivated by him that she cannot move: **"His golden eyes mesmerized me."**¹⁰ A reader could choke on the saccharine near-worship of Edward.

Edward does not disintegrate or burn in the sun; he sparkles. **"His skin, despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface"** and Bella notes his **"sculpted, incandescent chest"** and **"scintillating arms."**¹¹ The breathless description of Edward as an angel or a god, and having a beauty almost beyond bearing, even possessing a **"seraphic face,"**¹² as well as his sometimes glistening body, makes it nigh impossible not to think of **"an angel of light."**¹³

In an interview with MovieFone, Meyer recounted a subsequent dream of Edward which frightened her:

I had this dream that Edward actually showed up and told me that I got it all wrong and like he exists and everything but he couldn't live off animals... and I kind of got the sense he was going to kill me. It was really terrifying and bizarrely different from every other time I've thought about his character.¹⁴

Could Edward possibly be an unbidden spirit guide for Meyer? She first saw him in a dream, and then sees him again in this dream where he actually threatens her. It is impossible to know, but it is not totally unlikely.

According to Meyer's lore, every vampire has a special gift, usually supernatural. Edward can hear other's thoughts; his sister Alice can see possible futures; Jasper can influence moods; Aro, the head of the Volturi (a sort of vampire ruling elite) can gather people's memories and thoughts by touching them; Jane, a member of the Volturi, can cause people to feel burning pain. The list goes on—especially in the last book, when more vampires enter the story.

Throughout the first three books, Bella longs to become a vampire. She wants to leave her humanity and family and enter Edward's world, which will give her immortality. This entails losing one's soul as well. Edward speaks of this possible change as **"bartering your soul in exchange for an eternity as a vampire."**¹⁵ Bella thinks of losing her soul as **"almost insignificant"** in light of her fear Edward might not want her.¹⁶

Being human is considered inferior. Once Bella becomes a vampire in the fourth book, her memories as a human seem vague and indistinct. She exults in her ability to move so quickly that it is a blur to human eyes, that she is powerful and strong, that she never tires, and that she can detect multi-layers of odors no human can smell. **"I was never going to get tired ... We didn't have to catch our breath or rest or eat or even use the bathroom; we had no more mundane human needs."**¹⁷

There is an almost-Gnostic downgrading of the human body and mind in favor of the vampires', who are described as godlike, brilliant, angelic, and are immortal. One cannot ignore Meyer's Mormon roots and faith in these passages, since Mormons believe everyone on earth was once in heaven as a spirit child begotten by Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, and good Mormons one day will be gods ruling their own worlds.

Moreover, Mormon marriages "sealed" in a Mormon Temple are supposed to last forever. One reason Bella wants to be a vampire is because she wants to be with Edward forever; since Edward will not do this without a marriage, the future for them is to be together in an eternal marriage as vampires.

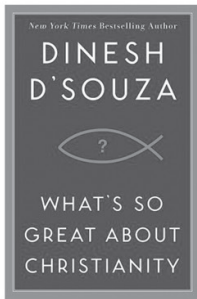
... Yet Slave To Instinct

Despite the vampires' godlike qualities, looks, and talents prominently featured in the story, the vampires are also very animal-like. Edward and his clan often **"hiss"** and **"snarl."** They curl their lips and show their teeth when angry; they crouch, ready to spring, if they sense danger. Edward and his clan only drink the blood of animals but know they can become unrestrained if they give in to their desire for human blood. Alice, a member of Edward's clan, explains to Bella that **"We're also like sharks in a way. Once we taste the blood, or even smell it for that matter, it becomes very hard to keep from feeding. ... to actually bite someone, to taste the blood, it would begin the frenzy."**¹⁸

Bella is told that **"newborns,"** that is people, who are newly made vampires, are unable to control their urge to attack people for at least a year or two. This does not sway Bella, who contemplates what it will be like once she is a new vampire. She realizes members of Edward's clan have been betting on how many people she will kill. Jasper, one of the clan, is hoping Bella will be more unruly, since he is the newest vampire and has difficulty controlling his thirst for human blood. Playfully, Bella states **"I guess I could throw in a few extra homicides, if it makes Jasper happy. Why not?"**¹⁹ Then she imagines the possible future newspaper headlines proclaiming the list of names of her victims.

Edward candidly reveals to Bella that when the vampires hunt, **"we give ourselves over to our senses ... govern less with our minds. Especially our sense of smell. If you were anywhere near me when I lost control that way ..."**²⁰ In another scene, Edward growls **"a low sound in the back of his**

—Continued on page 14



Book Review by Dan Cox

What's So Great About Christianity?

The title of Dinesh D'Souza's book *What's So Great About Christianity* is not a question. It is a statement—a powerful and persuasive statement about the fundamentally rational nature of Christian belief. Popular celebrity New Atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris would have us believe it is irrational to believe in God—especially the God of Christianity. These New Atheists argue that science, logic and reason all clearly point away from God. History, they say, is replete with examples of horrible things done in the name of religion and religions' gods. They contend we do not need religion to reveal truth or give moral guidance. We humans have discovered the truth about the origin of the universe, and there simply is no need for God. We do not need a Divine Lawgiver in order to live a good and morally upright life. We are quite capable of determining morality for ourselves. The “brights” (as opposed to those not-so-bright, dumb religious people) want to educate the masses so they will abandon their silly superstitions and embrace the “truth” of Darwinian Naturalism. The brights must also relieve society of something far more sinister than merely wrong belief systems, though. The ignorant people also need to know that religion—especially Christianity—is not only an incorrect belief system, but also it is *evil*.

So, what shall we say in response to these assaults? Shall we withdraw from the public square because, after all, the Gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing? No, that hardly would be a proper Christian response. *What's So Great About Christianity* is a sweeping tour de force that answers the arguments of the New Atheists and presents a compelling case for Christian faith and practice. The Apostle Peter issued this solemn injunction to all followers of Jesus in 1 Peter 3:15:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have ... (NIV)

As D'Souza points out, many Christians have fallen short in the arena of defense of the Gospel. Many of us are not prepared to give the reason for the hope we have. We are not ready to answer questions, handle objections and refute assaults on the faith. But, as our society becomes increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, it is even more important now to be prepared. We need to know *what* we believe and *why* we believe it. It is essential to be able to articulate clearly the good news of life and hope. Christians, too, need to know what's so great about Christianity.

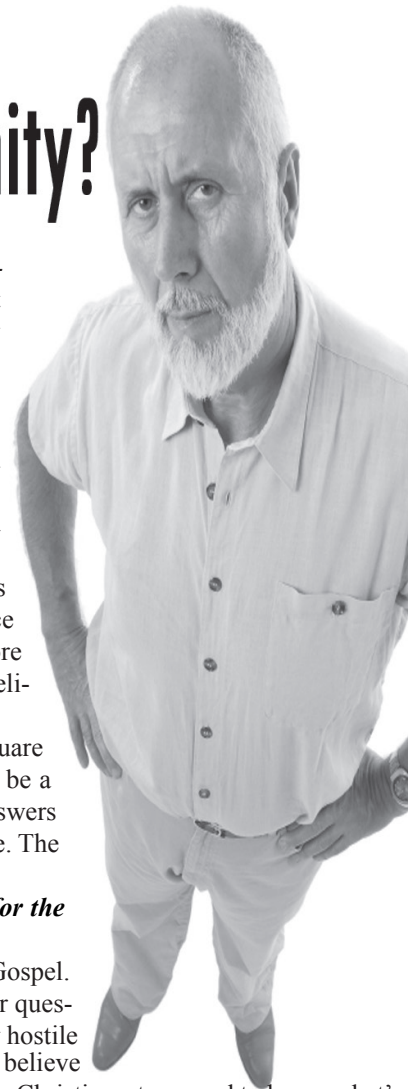
Overview and “Elephants”

The reader is presented with a systematic summary of the major arguments of the New Atheists and a Christian response. D'Souza pulls no punches, and he clearly states his aims and intentions:

1. **Christianity is the main foundation of Western civilization, the root of our most cherished values.**
2. **The latest discoveries of modern science support the Christian claim that there is a divine being who created the universe.**
3. **Darwin's theory of evolution, far from undermining the evidence for supernatural design, actually strengthens it.**
4. **There is nothing in science that makes miracles impossible.**
5. **It is reasonable to have faith.**
6. **Atheism, not religion, is responsible for the mass murders of history.**
7. **Atheism is motivated not by reason but by a kind of cowardly moral escapism.¹**

No doubt, some Christian readers paused after reading point three above and said, “Wait a minute ... did I read that sentence properly?” Yes, you did ... which raises an important point for consideration before examining the substance of D'Souza's arguments. This is one of those “elephant-in-the-room” issues which require acknowledgment before going any further. D'Souza believes God created the universe. However, Christians disagree as to *when* and *how* God created all things. Is the universe thousands or billions of years old? Is there any truth at all to the Theory of Evolution or is it all a lie? Christians have argued passionately about these issues, and no doubt, many will take issue with this topic as presented in *What's So Great About Christianity*.

When debating models of origins, Christians have advocated varying positions including Young-Earth Creationism, Old-Earth Creationism, Theistic Evolution, Framework Theory, and Progressive Creationism.* Young-Earth creationists will strongly disagree with D'Souza's view of how/when God created the universe, and thus will find the book objectionable on that subject. However, there is much to be gained in considering the rest of D'Souza's arguments regarding the history and future of Christianity, philosophy, suffering, morality and his analysis of the New Atheists.



Okay, that's one of the "elephant-in-the-room" issues. What's the other? The other concerns the nature of Christian faith as D'Souza defines it. Evangelicals appropriately will ask about his understanding of the Christian faith in light of the fact he has been identified with Roman Catholicism in the past. He was raised Catholic in India and moved to the United States while in high school. He describes his faith as a young man as very simple and lukewarm. He married an Evangelical Christian and started attending a non-denominational church in the Washington D.C. area. After moving to California, he began attending a Calvary Chapel church—a decidedly Evangelical church. There, he says, he found people who took their faith very seriously. It was then he got serious about his own faith and now pursues it with passion and vigor. Recently, his writing and speaking focus has shifted from political matters to Christian apologetics. He has been a featured speaker in apologetics conferences in Evangelical churches. With his growing prominence in Evangelical circles, it is altogether appropriate to review his book.

The Future of Christianity

So, what *is* so great about Christianity? D'Souza answers that question in eight parts. The first section, "**The Future of Christianity**," boldly asserts that Atheism is NOT on a triumphant march of global conquest. In fact, statistics and analysis point to the triumph of religion over Atheism with Christianity leading the way. Nietzsche famously declared, "**God is dead**" (*Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). It now appears reports of His demise have been greatly exaggerated.

Traditional religion is booming. Liberal Christianity is in full retreat. Despite the advances of secularization, traditional churches are growing, while liberal churches are dying out. Considering the United States is at the forefront of modernity, we might expect it to be thoroughly secular. But, it is not. America remains one of the most religious countries in the Western world to the great dismay of the secular progressives. True, Europe has moved away from Christianity, but the outlook worldwide is good. While Europe has retreated, Christianity is advancing in Central and South America, Asia and Africa. We may soon see large numbers of Asian and African Christian missionaries coming to proclaim the Gospel in the West.²

Atheists in the West have noted the growth of religion around the world and are perplexed. How could this be? Should not the forces of science and progress have convinced more people to repent of their silly, superstitious ways? Alarmed by the rising power of religion around the world, Atheists have grown more outspoken and militant. We are seeing an increase in the number of Atheist tomes declaring their intellectual militancy and moral self-confidence such as Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris's *The End of Faith*, Victor Stenger's *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, and Christopher Hitchens's *God Is Not Great*.

Buoyed by their conviction that science has totally vindicated their positions, they lash out at the God whom they consider an autocratic tyrant. They expend large volumes of ink detailing the historical crimes of religion. They view themselves as brave pioneers facing the awful truth of our lowly origins and hopeless fate with heroic acceptance. While their efforts to eradicate religion have seen some success in Europe, Canada, Australia and parts of the United States, it has been a worldwide failure. The Atheists know this, and as a result, they have become increasingly hostile to religion generally and Christianity particularly.

Christianity and the West

We might find it odd that there is such a great effort to teach our children hostility to religion, and specifically to Christianity, considering that Western civilization was built upon the foundation of Christian thought and morality. While many elements of this foundational influence could be stated, D'Souza chooses to focus on three central ideas: the separation of religion and government, the dignity of ordinary people and the equality of all human beings in terms of fundamental value and worth. As our society abandons these central ideas, the consequences are devastating:

In sum, the death of Christianity must also mean the gradual extinction of values such as human dignity, the right against torture, and the rights of equal treatment asserted by women, minorities, and the poor. Do we want to give these up also? If we cherish the distinctive ideals of Western civilization, and believe as I do that they have enormously benefited our civilization and the world, then whatever our religious convictions, and even if we have none, we will not rashly try to hack at the religious roots from which they spring. On the contrary, we will not hesitate to acknowledge, not only privately but also publicly, the central role that Christianity has played and still plays in the things that matter most to us.³

Christianity and Science

The fundamental question of this section of the book is this: Is there an inherent antagonism between Christianity and science? Atheist writers portray it as a "zero sum game" with Atheism on the side of truth, while Christianity represents ignorance, superstition and backwardness. Are we forever consigned to mutual enmity here? D'Souza thinks not.

It was Augustine who first proposed that God created time along with the universe. "Before" the universe, there was no time. We know from modern physics that, indeed, time is a property of the universe. Aquinas's cosmological argument and Anselm's ontological argument** are also cited as examples of early scientific reasoning. The kind of reasoning we see in Augustine, Aquinas and Anselm is typical of Christianity. There is very little of this in any other religion. And out of such reasoning, remarkably enough, modern science was born.⁴

In order for the scientific method to work, it is necessary for the universe to be unified, orderly and accessible. It is Christianity that provided the philosophical foundation for the scientific method to develop and flourish. In spite of the crucial role Christians and Christianity played in the development of modern science, Atheists often assert that the church persecuted men such as Copernicus and Galileo.

However, is this truly the case? Is that a fair perspective on what really happened? No. D'Souza lays out *all* the facts regarding these cases and demonstrates the Atheists' claims are wildly exaggerated and fail to deal with the pertinent facts which are damaging to their cause.

The Argument from Design

Here we descend into the portion of the book which some Christians will find troubling. As noted previously, there is a wide divergence of opinion found among Christians regarding creation models. The issue is quite capable of raising tempers and issuing forth charges and counter-charges of unfaithfulness

—Continued on page 12

“Christianity” Continued from page 11

to the core principles and truths of Christianity. The understanding of God as Creator, fidelity to the veracity of Scripture, “normal” biblical interpretation, the nature and first appearance of death in the creation, conflicting claims regarding the fossil record, arguments about Noah’s flood ... these and many more concerns have left many Christians confused.

On a personal note, I find this section a little disconcerting. I have trouble reconciling my “normal” biblical hermeneutic*** with some of the conclusions D’Souza draws here. But, that said, the cosmology enthusiast in me welcomes the challenge. Indeed, one of D’Souza’s objectives is to challenge and inspire healthy debate.

The fundamental question in this section is: Do the findings of modern science support or undermine the case for the existence of God? Also, does the design of nature point to a Creator, or can it be explained in purely naturalistic terms? D’Souza makes his case that science supports the case for the existence of God, and the evident design in nature points to a Creator.

The Big Bang Theory is a stunning confirmation of the book of Genesis. The universe had a beginning *in* space and time, and the origin of the universe was also a beginning *for* space and time. The observations of Edwin Hubble confirmed that the universe was much bigger than anyone thought, and it is rapidly expanding. This all was very bad news for Atheists. They would have preferred the Steady-State Theory which would have enabled them to support the claim of the eternity of matter. But, with Hubble’s discovery, confirmed by subsequent observations, the notion of an eternal universe was laid to rest. So, the universe and time had a beginning, and this naturally raises the question, “What caused the big bang?”

Atheists have struggled mightily with this question. Recently, I watched a documentary dealing with the latest developments in Superstring/ M theory† regarding the question of origins. Scientists have been working to discover what caused the big bang. Some believe the M theory could hold the answer. I was amused, though, as one particular Atheist scientist breathlessly explained how he believes our universe was caused when the edges of two membranes came into contact with one another. That caused the big bang and explains *everything*. Hmmm ... I hated to spoil his moment of triumphant glee, but I just had to ask myself, “Where did the *membranes* come from?” and “What caused them to collide with one another?” Apparently, those thoughts had not occurred to the scientist.

D’Souza also presents a strong case for the *Anthropic Principle* which holds that the universe has been finely tuned to permit life. Earth is amazingly, perfectly suited for human life. Former, renowned, Atheist Antony Flew points out how the fine-tuning of the universe at every level is simply too perfect to be the result of chance. Because of his life-long commitment to go wherever the evidence led, Flew now believes in God.

A major point of contention for many Christians, however, is found in chapter 13. D’Souza believes God designed and created the universe. However, *how* and *when* God did it is subject to debate. D’Souza states his assumption that we *know* the universe and the earth are billions of years old. He has no issue with Evolution per se as the mechanism by which God brought everything into being. At one point he says:

Once you see how much change can be produced within a species, it’s not hard to see how evolution can transform one species into another.⁵

Sorry, Dinesh, but this reviewer does find that hard to see.

As D’Souza sees it, the fundamental problem is not with Evolution; the problem is with Darwinism. In his opinion, Evolution is a well-supported and established scientific theory. He considers Darwinism to be a metaphysical stance and a political ideology. He concludes by saying:

Christians should not be afraid of the evolution debate, because there is nothing about it that threatens their faith. The Christian position is that God is the Creator of the universe and everything in it, and the evolution debate is about how some of these changes came about. For the Christian, the evolution debate comes down to competing theories about how God did it. My own view is that Christians and other religious believers should embrace evolution while resisting Darwinism.⁶

Many Christians do see a threat to Christian faith in the Theory of Macro-evolution. The problems are not only moral or political ideologies which might attend the theory. The problems are found in such concerns as the nature of hermeneutical principles, the existence of death and violence before humanity’s Fall into sin, the transmission of sin through the one man—Adam, and consequently, redemption through the one Man—Jesus Christ, to name just a few.

Christianity and Philosophy

How do we come to know truth? The New Atheists fancy themselves intellectually superior to us religious dolts, because they believe they rely on pure reason alone. They have no need for such a silly and irrational concept as faith ... or do they? The Atheist believes pure human reason is the only way to comprehend reality. And, they operate on the basis of a mighty large assumption here. As D’Souza states:

These men simply presume that their rational, scientific approach gives them full access to external reality. It is this presumption that gives Atheism its characteristic arrogance. Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins call themselves “brights” because they think they and their Atheist friends are simply smarter than the community of religious believers.⁷

But, is that arrogance misplaced? Are the “brights” justified in placing such great confidence in pure reason alone? German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) would beg to differ. Before Kant, people simply assumed our reason and our senses gave us access to external reality—things as they are in themselves. Through the use of reason and empirical investigation, it was believed human beings could come to comprehend the whole of reality. In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, however, he showed this assumption to be false. In brief, Kant demonstrated the limits of human-knowledge claims. It is foolish, he showed, to assert absolute-knowledge claims without first examining the limits of reason and empirical investigation.

Kant’s purpose here is not to have us sink into “paralysis through philosophical analysis” skepticism. He merely shows the folly of claiming absolute knowledge based on pure reason and empiricism alone. In effect, Kant demonstrates the validity of the philosophical basis for the Christian appeals to faith and revelation. “Faith” is not an irrational leap—it is quite rational and, in fact, necessary.

Another philosophical question D’Souza tackles is the subject of miracles. Christianity is a faith full of miracles, and it is ultimately based on the credibility of the miracle of the Resurrec-

tion. But, in a world of scientific and natural laws, are miracles even possible? Is it credible to believe in miracles? D'Souza ingeniously uses the most famous argument against miracles to show the very possibility of miracles. The argument against miracles advanced by Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) is shown to be invalid on the basis of Hume's own philosophy.

Christianity and Suffering

The PR machine of the New Atheists has been working overtime to convince people that religion is the source of most of the conflict and death in the world, and consequently, we all would be better off without it (cue John Lennon's song *Imagine* now). Atheists routinely speak of the Crusades, the Inquisition, witch trials and so forth. Some have even gone so far as to claim that millions upon millions of people have been killed in the name of religion.

The problem with this critique of religion as the bane of history is that it simply isn't true. As D'Souza points out:

The problem with this critique is that it greatly exaggerates the crimes that have been committed by religious fanatics while neglecting or rationalizing the vastly greater crimes committed by secular and Atheist fanatics.⁸

D'Souza then sheds light on the history of the Crusades and the Inquisition, the Salem witch trials, and the Thirty Years' War. Examining these and other conflicts, it becomes apparent there are many forces at work behind these conflicts other than "religion." These and other world conflicts were more about political power, money, land, and ethnic hatred to name a few factors. Religious doctrine had very little to do with them.

Having demonstrated "religion" is not the prime cause behind all the conflict and death in world history, D'Souza goes on to expose the truth regarding the role of Atheism in producing wars and killing. Communist China, Communist Russia and Nazi Germany killed people in astronomical numbers. Stalin and Mao's killings were done in peacetime, and they were inflicted on their own countrymen. Add to these Atheist tyrants such lesser luminaries as Pol Pot, Ceausescu, Castro and Kim Jong-il and you have millions more killed.

Some Atheists would have you believe the religiously inspired killings somehow reflect the true face of religion, while the killings of Atheist regimes are a distortion of the Atheist spirit of rational and scientific inquiry. This, however, is just a transparent sleight-of-hand that holds Christianity responsible for crimes committed in its name, while simultaneously attempting to absolve Atheism of the far greater crimes committed in its name.

Christianity and Morality

Who determines moral values? The Atheist asks if our moral values should derive from an imaginary being in the sky who has given us commandments to obey or else face the threat of eternal hellfire. Wouldn't we do better to understand morality in natural and secular terms—as adaptable rules we make up as we go along in order to serve human objectives like peace and coexistence?

D'Souza shows this is a false choice:

Morality is both natural and universal. It is discoverable without religion, yet its source is ultimately divine. Darwinist attempts to give a purely secular explanation of morality are a failure, and each of us knows—however disingenuously we deny it—that there are abso-

lute standards of right and wrong, and these are precisely the standards we use to judge how other people treat us. It is not Christian morality that is the obstacle to our moral freedom: it is the conscience itself, the judge within.⁹

The Darwinist has no explanation for the conscience. This internal arbiter gives us our highest sense of ourselves. Conscience typically intervenes on the side least convenient for us personally—on the side which costs us the most. With the exception of pathological people, the voice of conscience is clear and incontrovertible. It tells us what we are obliged to do—no matter how we may feel about it.

The Atheist also has difficulty explaining the notion of the soul and free will. For the materialist, we are nothing more than a large collection of atoms. Materialists attempt to explain everything about us as simply a product of the various physical interactions of our material constituent parts—the body. Yet, we also experience ourselves directly through the mind, which seems to function independently or in harmony with the body's sensory perceptions. This "mind/body problem" has bedeviled philosophers for centuries. We also experience consciousness of a different order and magnitude from that of animals. There is no good scientific or Darwinian account for consciousness.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the materialist, however, is the notion of free will. We appear to be at liberty to say "yes" to this or "no" to that. The materialist is forced to say, "We have no free will—our sense of 'choice' is merely illusion." Hence, all we think, speak, and do is a determined product of our material makeup. Nevertheless, the materialist will insist that criminals be put in prison, even though they had no choice in committing their crimes. I also find it curious that materialistic Atheists speak of the "evil" things Christians have done. If we follow the Atheists' system of belief, why are these Christians now to be scorned and held accountable for their beliefs and actions even though, they had no choice—they were simply believing and doing what their genes and brain chemistry determined?

We find ourselves today in the midst of a culture war—a struggle between traditional morality and the new, secular morality. Traditional morality is objective and is based on the idea that certain things are right or wrong no matter who says differently. Secular morality, however, says the source of morality is no longer the external code—it is the individual's inner heart. As one who has plumbed the depths of his own internal abyss, I shudder at this notion and do not recommend it. The secular moralist is seeking his inner self, and I don't think he is going to like what he finds when he gets there.

D'Souza next ponders the question, "Might there be something more than autonomy and self-fulfillment that drives the Atheist to cast off traditional morality?" Is it possible that unbelief can serve as an effective, and convenient, cover for selfish and irresponsible behavior? Is it possible the militant unbelief witnessed in the likes of Dawkins and Hitchens is not simply an intellectual matter of following where the evidence leads? Could there be a deeper issue at play in their unbelief?

D'Souza proposes that Darwinism is a way to break free from the confines of traditional morality. Perhaps the reason many Atheists are drawn to unbelief is to avoid having to answer for their lack of moral restraint. They sense Christianity places people under divine scrutiny and accountability. Atheism relieves them of

—Continued on page 15

“Twilight” Continued from page 9

throat; his lips curled back over his perfect teeth. His body shifted suddenly, half-crouched, tensed like a lion about to pounce.”²¹

So while vampires are portrayed as superior to humans in every way—faster, vastly stronger, smarter, sharper senses, breathtakingly beautiful, possessing supernatural powers, and immortal—they still devolve to this animal-like state when instinct takes over. This reveals Meyer’s vampires’ inability to breach the distinction between God and man, because despite the vampire’s godlike powers, he is not free from the bondage to his thirst for blood.

This portrayal is also an attack on the biblical truth that a person is made in the image of God;²² because although vampires are not considered human in the books, they actually are dead humans changed into vampires. They still look human and have human qualities such as intelligence, will, a sense of right and wrong, and philosophical questions about the afterlife (vampires can be destroyed) – all traits that reflect the character of God. To give them bestial instincts they are unable to master and to describe them in animal terms disdains the distinction that God made between man and beast.

From The Glorious To The Grisly

Edward’s clan—his **“family”** as the books call it—are all equally beautiful and swift, and blessed, of course, with various vampiric gifts. Once Bella is part of this, she experiences the joy of superseding the limitations of being human, and enters a new world that seems thrillingly blissful. However, there are gruesome scenes that range from disgusting to utterly repulsive.

In the first three books, Edward and his clan hunt animals in the woods, but it is not described. However, in the final book, after Bella becomes a vampire and hunts with Edward, we read about her kill of a mountain lion: **“My teeth unerringly sought his throat, and his instinctive resistance was pitifully feeble against my strength.”²³** Biting into the animal was **“effortless as biting into butter.”²⁴**

The account continues: **“The flavor was wrong, but the blood was hot and wet and it soothed the ragged, itching thirst as I drank in an eager rush. The cat’s struggles grew more and more feeble, and his screams choked off with a gurgle. The warmth of the blood radiated throughout my whole body, heating even my fingertips and toes.”²⁵**

Shortly after this, Bella remarks it was a **“surprisingly sensual experience to observe Edward hunting,”** and she notes that with his lips parted **“over his gleaming teeth,”** as he is about to bring down a deer, Edward is **“glorious.”²⁶** Later, they hunt with their young daughter, who is so advanced that she can join in. Somehow, the idea of a family pouncing on animals and tearing flesh with their teeth, then drinking and draining the animal of blood does not make for a wholesome image.

After becoming a vampire, Bella is afraid to meet her father, Charlie, because she worries that she cannot stop herself from attacking him. She remarks, **“Charlie smelled more delicious than anything I’d ever imagined. ... And he was just a few feet away, leaking mouthwatering heat and moisture into the dry air.”²⁷** This is Bella’s father! But the same situation arose when Bella had her baby, Renesmee. Her daughter was taken away after birth and she could not see her, because those around Bella feared she would attack her own child. Indeed, Edward

tells Bella the greatest pleasure for a vampire is to drink human blood.

The most grisly situation, however, is the labor and delivery of Bella’s baby. Bella became pregnant on her honeymoon while she was still human. Therefore, during her pregnancy, which progresses about nine times faster than a human pregnancy, the still-human Bella is carrying a half-human half-vampire child. Bella is not able to eat, and so the unborn baby is not getting nourishment. Consequently, Bella grows weaker while at the same time suffering great pain from the rapidly growing child who is breaking Bella’s ribs, one by one.

Edward figures out that the baby is craving blood—human blood. Fortunately, the clan has human blood available (it is not explained where they got the blood), and they give Bella cups of blood. At first, Bella is unsure about drinking it; but after the initial tasting, she declares it tastes good. Bella continues to down cups of blood until their stock is used up, and Carlisle has to rush out to procure more human blood.

The description of Bella going into labor is horrific. There is a **“ripping sound from the center of her body,”** a **“shriek of agony,”** and then Bella convulses and vomits **“a fountain of blood.”²⁸** Bella is so spent and damaged that the baby must be taken out, so Edward uses his teeth to rip into her flesh and gets the child out. Bella’s heart fails, and Edward plunges a syringe full of his **“venom”** into her heart. This starts the process of changing Bella into a vampire. Edward continues forcing his venom into Bella by biting her all over her body. For three days, Bella experiences an agonizing burning through her body as she goes from human to vampire. The depiction of these events is grisly and repugnant, and odious particulars are not spared.

Jacob **“imprints”** on Bella and Edward’s baby girl. Werewolves like Jacob find their mate through an instinctive **“knowing”** of who their mate is via an obsession for this person, which is called **“imprinting.”** There is no choice. This resolves the Bella-Jacob-Edward triangle but in a rather creepy manner. That Jacob will one day mate with this baby, and in the meantime cares for her (it is hard for him to be apart from her, and he does take care of her in the last book), is somewhat morally repellent.

That this kind of tale featuring creatures with these sorts of distasteful habits and full of so many nauseating details has been so widely lauded is baffling; and the fact there has been little or no reference to or warning about the abhorrent aspects of the books is even more perplexing.

The Forbidden Fruit

The illustration on the first book is an apple, and Meyer acknowledged it represents the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden.²⁹ Meyer states it is appropriate, because Bella gains a **“working knowledge of good and evil,”** and the apple says **“choice”** to Meyer.³⁰ It seems that to Meyer, the forbidden fruit is a good thing. Of course, in Mormon beliefs, the Fall into sin was a good thing, because it allowed man the ability to become a god in the future.

However, these books do not paint a clear line between good and evil. Bella consistently lies to her father and human friends; Edward and the vampires lie; Edward and Bella sleep together and though they refrain from complete intimacy, it is not platonic; vampires murder humans as a natural part of their nature; and Bella is willing to surrender her soul in order to become a vampire.

Although Edward and his clan do not hunt humans, when they host a large gathering of vampire friends in the last book, they accommodate those who do hunt humans (which is most of them). The vampires promise not to kill anyone within a 300-mile radius, and Edward, as “**a gracious host,**” lends them cars. Bella even remarks there is “**rampant murder being condoned.**”³¹

The forbidden fruit was forbidden by God. God told Adam he could eat fruit from any tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.³² Disobeying this command was the Fall into sin and brought the curse of sin and death to all creation and to the descendants of Adam. It is because of this blight of sin that Jesus came and died on the cross, paying the penalty for those sins, so that those who believe in Him can be redeemed and have eternal life with God.

Therefore, it is at the very least taking God’s Word lightly to spin the idea of eating the forbidden fruit into something that could be good. But as it turns out, the forbidden fruit is an appropriate symbol for this saga, because that is what it offers: the glamorization of a morally muddy tale, full of the grisly and the grotesque. ☒

***vampire**=the reanimated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of persons asleep. (Merriam-Webster online dictionary) [Note: Meyer’s vampires deviate somewhat from the traditional vampire.]

****werewolf**=a person transformed into a wolf or capable of assuming a wolf’s form. (Merriam-Webster online dictionary)

“Christianity” Continued from page 13

this burden. It provides a hiding place for those who do not want to acknowledge or repent of their sins. Perhaps Marx’s dictum needs to be revisited: It is not religion that is the opiate of the people, but Atheism is the opiate of the morally corrupt.

One final moral question D’Souza considers is the problem of evil: Why do horrible things happen in this world? This question is a serious challenge for the Christian. However, this also poses serious problems for the Atheist in that Atheism offers no comfort to the suffering. It offers no purpose to those grappling with meaninglessness. It offers no hope to those who are contemplating their own mortality. As the renowned philosopher, Woody Allen’s character “Kleinman” famously said, “**It’s not that I’m afraid to die, I just don’t want to be there when it happens**” (from Allen’s 1972 book *Without Feathers*).

Evil and suffering are indeed difficult subjects for the Christian. But this does not mean they are not serving a higher purpose which is beyond our ability to fully understand now. God has given us free will. The vast majority of evil that has occurred in the world is the direct result of human beings misusing their capacity to choose. Christians can also point to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. God is not detached and aloof from the suffering of His creation. He entered into it through the Person of Jesus Christ, and conquered evil, death and Hell.

Christianity and You

In the final section, D’Souza issues an appeal for persons to seriously consider the claims of Jesus Christ and to embrace the life that is offered in Him. As noted earlier, however, it is important to note we do not know for sure how he is defining his terms

****shape-shifter**=one that seems able to change form or identity at will; *especially*: a mythical figure that can assume different forms (as of animals). (Merriam-Webster online dictionary)



Before trusting Christ in late 1990, **Marcia Montenegro** was a professional astrologer and taught astrology for several years, as well as having been involved in Eastern and New Age practices. Through her ministry, Christian Answers for the New Age, Marcia speaks around the country and writes on New Age and occult topics.

Based in Arlington, VA, she is the author of ***Spell-Bound: The Paranormal Seduction of Today’s Kids***. (Life Journey/Cook, 2006).

ENDNOTES:

1) <http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/> 2) Lev Grossman, “Stephenie Meyer: A New J K Rowling?” Time Magazine, April 24, 2008. 3) Ibid. 4) Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*, (NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 305. 5) Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 186. 6) Ibid., 187. 7) Ibid., 526. 8) Meyer, *Twilight*, 289, 227 9) Ibid., 343, 262, 341, 340, 459, 357. 10) Ibid., 241, 263. 11) Ibid., 260. 12) Ibid., 283. 13) “**No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,**” 2 Cor. 11:14. 14) Julie, “Stephenie Meyer Reveals Details of New Dream About Edward Cullen,” March 29, 2009, <http://www.twilightgear.net/twilight-news-and-gossip/stephenie-meyer-reveals-details-of-new-dream-about-edward-cullen/2493>. 15) Meyer, *Eclipse*, 541. 16) Ibid., 528. 17) Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, (NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 482-483. 18) Meyer, *Twilight*, 414. 19) Meyer, *Eclipse*, 343. 20) Meyer, *Twilight*, 225. 21) Ibid., 345. 22) “**God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,**” Genesis 1:27. 23) Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 422. 24) Ibid. 25) Ibid., 422-423. 26) Ibid., 425. 27) Ibid., 507. 28) Ibid., 347. 29) http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight_faqs.html#apple 30) Ibid. 31) Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 607. 32) Genesis 2:17.

in this chapter. Is his call to embrace faith in Jesus Christ coming from an Evangelical understanding or a Roman Catholic point of view? That said, though, there is nothing in this chapter, as it is written, with which an Evangelical would disagree or find objectionable.

D’Souza has presented a compelling case for faith. One might argue, however, that all he has done up to this point is present a compelling case for some sort of religious faith—not necessarily Christianity. Why should someone embrace Christianity in particular? D’Souza responds by demonstrating the compelling uniqueness of Christianity. Religion can be described as man’s attempt to reach God. Christianity is different:

But Christianity is not a religion in this sense. Christianity holds that man, no matter how hard he tries, cannot reach God. Man cannot ascend to God’s level because God’s level is too high. Therefore, there is only one remedy: God must come down to man’s level. Scandalous though it may seem, God must, quite literally, become man and assume the burden of man’s sins. Christians believe that this was the great sacrifice performed by Christ. If we accept Christ’s sacrifice on the basis of faith, we will inherit God’s gift of salvation. That’s it. That is the essence of Christianity. To some it may seem ridiculously simple. In this simplicity, however, there is considerable depth and richness.¹⁰

Conclusion

I think it is fair to say that Dinesh D’Souza has done an outstanding job of demonstrating what’s so great about Christianity. His arguments are a powerful answer to the attacks of the

—Continued on page 17

“Healthy” Continued from page 7

origins of these voice and vision experiences. Does Scazzero look upon all of this with favor? Obviously, mysticism spells the end of discernment. The enforced celibacy and starvation of the mystics mark them as having departed from the faith according to 1 Timothy 4:1-7. How in the world can Scazzero call all of this “emotionally healthy spirituality”²³, when it is anything but?

The Grand Illusion

Scazzero adds to his favorites the Dominican Meister Eckhart and St. Teresa of Avila.²⁴ Teresa of Avila was heavily into devotion of the Virgin Mary, often went into stupors and trances, and had visions of the devil. She was a proponent of purgatory and automatic writing. She was bulimic† and claimed to have powers to levitate. A levitating host was said to be delivered to her lips. She was often ill and suspected of blood letting and self cutting. She also claimed seeing angelic appearances. Though she said she had literally married Jesus in what she called the 5th chamber, she would have horrible visions of Hell. All of these things are documented by her biographers.²⁵ Teresa of Avila is the worst of the worst. One should pity such a person, and these things should be exposed and condemned, not show cased. Is Scazzero just ignorant of these things, or is he really endorsing them? In either case, he needs to wake up and acknowledge this is not biblical, spiritual health, but rather it is some kind of twisted, insane form of religious extremism. If someone today lived like Teresa, they would be hospitalized for their own good.

Mystics like Teresa should be pitied, not paraded. How she and others like her can be touted as examples of emotional health or be seen as emotionally healthy is beyond me. There have to be better examples and role models in Church history. Would biblical role models be far fetched?

Another favorite of Scazzero is Trappist monk Thomas Merton.²⁶ Who was Merton? Merton was a mystic monk and an advocate of non violence who died by accidental electrocution in 1968 at age 53. Merton was a contemplative mystic and pantheist who claimed, “the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.”²⁷ It is written of Merton:

In his later years Merton became increasingly attracted by Buddhist and Hindu spiritual wisdom, which he felt stressed experience rather than doctrine.²⁸

One should not be mislead here, since Buddhists do hold to certain doctrines after all. They do believe:

... that each human being is caught in a potentially never-ending cycle of reincarnation.²⁹

Some may come back as a spirit or an animal as they work out self atonement in each new life. A Buddhist ignores the Scriptures and only adheres to the writings and teachings of Buddha called Tripitaka. Buddhism is just another false and heretical guide admired and endorsed by Scazzero via Merton. Unfortunately, Scazzero is not taking his own advice, and one wonders how he can give the following advice:

The possibility of self deception is so great that without mature companions [sic] we can easily fall into the trap of living in illusions.³⁰

If we consider books and writers as companions, and I do, then Scazzero has made some terrible friends. Because he is influenced by so many who are heretical, he might want to consider if he is trapped “living in illusions” and “self deception.” The Word of God is the truth that can keep us anchored in reality.

When Paul speaks of “*sound doctrine*” as in 2 Timothy 4:3, the word *sound* is the Greek word meaning *healthy*. True spiritual health begins with proper belief and good doctrine.

When Scazzero alleges “**Emotionally healthy spirituality is about reality, not denial or illusion,**”³¹ how can he be unaware Teresa of Avila was over the edge mentally, and Thomas Merton was into the belief of pantheism and not distinguishing creature from Creator? Is Scazzero aware of Merton’s teaching of reincarnation?

Additionally, Scazzero promotes the false teaching of ancestral bondage when he says there is a profound impact from our ancestral family “**and significant others going back to the mid 1800s,**”³² and this is “**embedded in our DNA.**”³³


Is this in the realm of reality? Has he seen DNA studies that demonstrate this? He includes great uncles and aunts from 150 years ago; and he says their sins still impact us today—sins from 150 years ago? How does he know it is exactly 150 years? Suppose my ancestors 150 years ago were believers, what then? Scazzero thinks there is some special action needed to break from our parents’ sins.

Of course, he quotes the typical “spiritual bondage” verses (Exodus 20:4-6), but he never puts the emphasis where it belongs. The verses are clear that God’s judgment continues on those *who continue to hate Him* (verse 5 my emphasis). Exodus 20:6 tells us God is “**but showing mercy to thousands** [generations], **to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**” It is plain that redemption clears away any ongoing *determinative* influence of the parents’ sins. Our parents may influence us, but they do not determine if God’s Spirit and grace are operative in our lives. Consider Ezekiel’s words:

What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? “As I live” says the Lord God, “you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. ... The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” (Ezekiel 18:2-3, 20, emphasis mine)

In the end, Scazzero does not give us a real, practical, biblical solution for ancestral bondage. He tells us to get to know the “**Beaver System Model**” to try and understand our family,³⁴ and to get a “**mentor, spiritual director, counselor or therapist.**”³⁵ The “**Beaver System Model**” is a five-level, secular model which is supposed to help us judge if our family is severely disturbed, optimally healthy, or somewhere in between. Most people easily could figure that out just by reading what the Bible says about healthy families and healthy relationships. A far more biblical route, as far as a way out of the past, would be to not dwell on the past and to focus on the present, to take responsibility for oneself and put off the old man and put on the new. Also, rid oneself of bitterness, say “no” to old family patterns of behavior, and start being an example and blessing to one’s family. God’s grace and His indwelling Holy Spirit makes that all possible, and God’s Word tells us how. I am only stuck in the past if I think I am, and I remain there in my negative musings. Mull over Ephesians chapters 4-5 and Philippians chapters 3-4 for a few weeks. This will be a mind changing exercise.

There is so much more that could be critiqued about Sca-

zzero's book, but space is a limitation. It is like deciding what things are the worst in a very large landfill. I have sorted through what I thought was the worst of it, though certainly much more could be said. Scazzero's book certainly will be welcomed by those in the Emerging Church today. What is called "**emotionally healthy spirituality**" turns out to be not so healthy and has been a big part of the decline of the mainstream denominations as some people have grown weary of ritual, thread-bare, ancient mysticism, and unreality. In truth, the so-called Emergent Church Movement is just repackaged liberalism. Phyllis Tickle has already renamed it "The Hyphenated Church," but in reality it ought to be called the Regurgitated Church—it is just medieval mysticism and its practices ruminated and brought up all over again. 

All quotations are from the New King James Version of the Holy Scriptures.

***panentheism**=(from Greek πᾶν (pân) "all"; εν (en) "in"; and θεός (theós) "God"; "all-in-God") is a belief system which posits that God exists and interpenetrates every part of nature, and timelessly extends beyond as well. Panentheism is distinguished from pantheism, which holds that God is synonymous with the material universe. Briefly put, in pantheism, "God is the whole"; in panentheism, "The whole is in God." (Wikipedia)

****pantheism**=is the view that the Universe (Nature) and God are identical, or that the Universe (including Nature on Earth) is the only thing deserving the deepest kind of reverence. The word derives from the Ancient Greek: πᾶν (pan) meaning "All" and θεός (theos) meaning "God" - literally "All is God." As such Pantheism promotes the idea that God is better understood as a way of relating to nature and the Universe as a whole - all that was, is and shall be - rather than as a transcendent, mental, personal or creator entity. (Wikipedia)

*****fusion**=a merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole. (Merriam-Webster)

†bulimic= a serious eating disorder that occurs chiefly in females, is characterized by compulsive overeating usually fol-

lowed by self-induced vomiting or laxative or diuretic abuse, and is often accompanied by guilt and depression—called also *bulimia nervosa*. (Merriam-Webster)

Review by **G. Richard Fisher**, Researcher for Personal Freedom Outreach, Advisory Board Member for Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.




ENDNOTES:

1) Arthur Johnson, *Faith Misguided*, (Moody Press, Chicago Illinois, 1988) p 11 **2)** Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006 **3)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 2 **4)** Ibid., 2 **5)** Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, (Lighthouse Trails Publishers, Silverton Oregon) p 85 **6)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 2 (Emphasis mine) **7)** Ibid., 86 **8)** *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1973) p 277 **9)** Mitch Horowitz, *Occult America*, (Bantam Books, Random House, New York, 2009) p 67-68 **10)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 2 **11)** Ibid., 3 **12)** Ibid., 13 **13)** Ibid., 16 **14)** Ibid., 19 **15)** Ibid., 19 **16)** Ibid., 20 **17)** Ibid., 20 **18)** Ibid., 21 **19)** Ibid., 45 **20)** Ibid., 57 **21)** Ibid., 58 **22)** Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire*, (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1999) **23)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 61 **24)** Ibid., 65 **25)** See, *Teresa of Avila* by Cathleen Medwick, Doubleday, New York, 1999 **26)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 75-76 **27)** Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, (Lighthouse Trails Publishers, Silverton Oregon) p 85 **28)** *Twentieth Century Dictionary of Christian Biography*, J. D. Douglas, General Editor, Baker Books, Grand Rapids Michigan 1995, page 252 **29)** *Pocket Guide to World Religions*, Winfried Corduan, (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove Illinois, 2006) p 29 **30)** Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville Tennessee, 2006) p 87 **31)** Ibid., 93 **32)** Ibid., 95 **33)** Ibid., 100 **34)** Ibid., 110 **35)** Ibid., 114

"Christianity" Continued from page 15

New Atheists. He has demonstrated it is fundamentally rational to believe in Christianity. Atheism is not the inevitable conclusion of intelligent, rational people, but rather, it is shown to be intellectually inferior and not worthy of the Atheist's faith.

Atheists will find a serious challenge to their faith that cannot be ignored in this book. Seekers will find a stimulating and thrilling invitation to believe. Christians will find much to challenge and encourage them in this book. The first "elephant in the room"—D'Souza's belief in Evolution as the mechanism by which God created the world—will no doubt be a significant obstacle for many Christians. That issue aside, however, Christians can celebrate this book as a triumphant, and joyful, response to the Atheist attacks on Christianity. Christianity is great because Jesus Christ, our God and Savior, is great. 

***Young-Earth Creationism** interprets the Genesis Creation account as depicting God's creation of all things thousands of years ago in six, consecutive, 24-hour periods. Noah's flood is viewed as a worldwide deluge that submerged all land and destroyed all humans and all land-dwelling air-breathing animals except those aboard the ark. This flood accounts for virtually all of Earth's geological features, fossils, and biodeposits such as coal, oil and natural gas.

Old-Earth Creationism holds to the truthfulness of both the biblical account of Creation and the findings of mainstream science which propose the Earth

and the universe are billions of years old. Old-Earth Creationists hold to a variety of positions with respect to the proper interpretation of the days of Creation in the Genesis Creation account and the nature and extent of Noah's flood.

Theistic Evolution is the view that God created all things through Evolutionary processes over a period of billions of years. Theistic Evolutionists hold to a variety of positions with respect to the extent of God's intervention in the natural order. Some believe God intervened only once at the origin of the universe, while others believe He intervened and directed the Evolutionary process at numerous points.

Framework Theory interprets the Genesis Creation account as a pattern (or "framework") of events which serve as metaphors for God's creative activity in the Kingdom of Heaven. Framework Theorists see little or no chronological ordering of the biblical Creation events; and they see few, if any, points of contact between the findings of mainstream science and the message of Scripture.

Progressive Creationism is the view the universe and Earth are billions of years old, and God created all things through an Evolutionary process that included numerous interventions to produce new life forms which did not descend from a common ancestor.

****Aquinas's cosmological argument** is an argument for the existence of God based on causation. It states every effect requires a cause, and nothing in the world is the cause of its own existence. There must be a First Cause responsible for the chain of effects, and this First Cause we call God.

Anselm's ontological argument is an argument for the existence of God based on the idea that God is the greatest conceivable Being. God is defined as "**that than which no greater can be thought.**" To exist in reality is greater than to exist in the mind only; and therefore, by definition, God necessarily exists.

—Continued on page 19

“Lessons” Continued from page 5

60,000 churches across 30 denominations when we received our first request for information!⁴

One of the calls we received a few years ago was from Pam Prescott. She asked if she could tell her own story and so, carry on Pam!

When my daughter Aimee mentioned that she joined a group called Weigh Down Workshop, I was not concerned. After all, Gwen Shamblin and Weigh Down had been around for years! I knew many people who had been involved. Several years ago, there was even a group at my church.

But soon I noticed some changes in Aimee’s behavior and new jargon that she would slip into conversation when we talked. She frequently spoke of “obedience” and talked negatively about “praise of man.” On Christmas Day, 2007, she told me there was more to having eternal life than just accepting Jesus as your Savior. She said that it depended on obedience. If you were struggling with sin, and had idols you could not lay down, there was NO assurance you were going to heaven. My heart broke, as I knew Aimee and her family were in serious spiritual trouble.

My concern escalated when Aimee and her daughter MacKenzie (11) became involved in Gwen Shamblin’s church—Remnant Fellowship. Husband Steve and son David (18) soon followed. I watched my grandchildren’s lives change because of their new involvement in Remnant. David did not attend his Senior Prom because their family would be traveling to Tennessee (1200-miles round trip) to attend one of Remnant’s festivals.⁵ MacKenzie cried as she and I decorated gravesites that Memorial Day. She said “Grandma, I don’t think I am going to Heaven. I am just not good enough!” At 11 years old, MacKenzie was being indoctrinated to Remnant’s teaching of earning your way to Heaven.

I looked at the Remnant Fellowship web site and saw that the group—which called themselves a “New Religious Movement”—did not believe in the Trinity. I knew this was BIG TROUBLE. I had always believed when a group denied the Trinity, it was not Christian.

I had been a Christian for over 30 years. I had been teaching Bible studies to adults for 20 years, and was Sunday school superintendent for 10 years. I was on the church board. I spoke to various Christian groups. But after 30 years of being a committed, growing Christian and very involved in my church, I knew I did not have a solid foundation and could not address this issue. While I believed in the Trinity, I could not define it. *Did it really matter* if we worship Jesus as either a.) God or b.) the Son of God (but not one with God)—as long as we worship Him? *I did not know!*

Surely, I thought, my church, with about 4,000 in attendance each week, would be equipped to handle this situation. But, one pastor said the church was not experienced in dealing with cults, since we did not have many in our area. (I thought about the Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Hall I passed on the way to church every week...) I called another of our pastors, who upon looking online, confirmed that Remnant Fellowship was, indeed, a cult and referred me on to someone in another state who might be of assistance. After three more referrals, I was put in touch with Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. and Don and Joy Veinot.

Praise God! Don and Joy knew all about cults and

New Religious Movements, and they were well acquainted with Gwen Shamblin and Remnant Fellowship. As I spoke with Don on the phone, he assessed Aimee’s family’s situation and taught me some basic foundational truths. He calmed me down and coached me on how to interact with Aimee, what to expect from Remnant Fellowship and literally walked me through countless conversations and encounters with Aimee and Steve. Best of all, he and Joy prayed.

All the while, the clock was ticking as Aimee and Steve became more involved with Remnant Fellowship and planned to move to Tennessee in the summer so David could begin college there in August. Obviously, Aimee and Steve were being coached from Remnant on how to deal with me. They were absolutely militant.

But finally one night, Aimee came to my house filled with anxiety and confessed she was extremely confused and was desperate to know truth. I suggested we contact someone who was an expert on these things, and Aimee agreed to meet with Don Veinot. I called to set up the appointment for later in the week. Don agreed to travel five hours to Aimee and Steve’s home to meet with them.

However, within a couple of days, Aimee had a change of heart and was back to her militant self again. She no longer wanted to talk with Don. She assured me that Remnant teaching was “truth,” and she was on the right track.

When Aimee called Don to cancel, he engaged her in conversation for over an hour ... both of them with Bibles open. He piqued enough interest that Aimee and Steve decided they should keep the appointment and listen to what Don had to say.

By time Don arrived at their home, Aimee and Steve had found Don’s *MCOI Journal* articles online and the Holy Spirit had opened their eyes to truth. Don went through the key verses and explained them in their true context, talked about world views, and the importance of understanding basic doctrine in order to be able to guard against false teachers. He cautioned them to check out what the pastor may be teaching. Aimee and Steve clearly saw they were involved in a cult and made the decision to leave Remnant Fellowship immediately.

Today, Aimee and her husband are attending a Bible-based church and weekly classes to increase their knowledge of sound doctrine. They take advantage of opportunities to reach their friends in Remnant Fellowship as the Lord opens doors. My grandson David is involved in a campus ministry at college and planning a career in some type of ministry. MacKenzie is secure in her relationship with Christ and active in her youth group. I have continued to read and increase my knowledge of foundational doctrines. After all of the study and preparation through this ordeal, the Lord recently opened a door for me to share the Gospel with my 79-year-old parents. They eagerly prayed to receive Christ after years of being uninterested and even somewhat hostile toward the Gospel. I have other children who are not following the Lord yet; but I am trusting that in the Lord’s time, they also will give their lives to Christ.

The Financial Lesson

It is a sad reality that pointing out heresy, false teachings, and false teachers within the church can be quite unpopular, and

it does affect our financial support. For about five years in the 1990s, we had a weekly radio program that focused on apologetics issues. When our program was about JW's or Mormons or other recognized cults, our callers were overwhelmingly supportive of what we were saying; but when we talked about Benny Hinn or some other false teacher who had fans within the churches, we got some angry calls from Christians as well. How could Hinn be a false teacher? Did he not broadcast on a Christian radio station? There seems to be a sort of "white hat" vs. "black hat" mentality in a large part of the church. All teachers viewed as being within the church "community" wear white hats and should not be questioned; only those demonstrably outside the church community are fair game for exposure. Many Christians were supportive of our *MCOI Journal* exposure of Gwen Shamblin; however, some (even some pastors) were angry we would question their decision to allow her to teach in churches. Some people were angry when we reasoned that Y2K was not likely to bring about the end of civilization as we know it. After all, lots of Christians on TV said it probably would. There are many more examples we could give. People sometimes accuse us of being "divisive," or sometimes we are called "doctrinaire." This can be a difficult ministry for those reasons. The stands we must take hurt us financially as well. People will not support this type of ministry if they feel it is being divisive; or they will drop their support if they are a fan of someone we expose as a false teacher. Hence, we always have been bi-vocational. Although we would be thankful to be fully supported, we have maintained other employment to provide our personal support and make up for any short falls in the ministry finances.

Another dilemma MCOI and other missions to cults and New Religious Movements face is that most churches either don't know of our existence; or if they do, they do not view it as a mission to support. Although they may be glad we are a resource when needed, they do not participate in financial and prayer support. If there is an advantage to this, it would be that no one honestly can say we are in it for the money. © The lessons for us are simple:

1. People invest their time, talents and treasures where their heart is
2. Lost People Need Answers
3. You May Be the Answer to Someone's Prayer
4. Rescuers Sometimes Need Rescue
5. God Reaches Non-believers in Unexpected Ways
6. Ex-Cultists Need Help Too
7. The Church Needs Help and Information
8. All missions, including this one, need financial support.

This is not exhaustive, but rather it is merely a "tip of the iceberg." This is not a ministry Joy and I would have chosen had we even known of its existence 30 years ago. It is a ministry for which I thank God every day that He called and entrusted to us in spite of ourselves. The havoc which false teaching brings is difficult to watch, but the rewards are compounded when we have the opportunity to witness someone's eyes light up as they come to understand Who Jesus Christ is, or how to understand the Doctrine of the Trinity, or explain the physical Resurrection. As they, in turn, get passionate about their faith and reaching those about whom they really care, the kingdom is expanded. None of us will know the full extent of our efforts on this side of Heaven. Like the apostles, we persevere to help the church and reach the lost—"I know Whom I have believed, and am

persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." (2 Tim. 1:12).

***Jehovah's Witness (JW)**=Members of the WTBS are called Jehovah's Witnesses.

****Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBS)**=The government or clergy of the Jehovah's Witness



Don and Joy Veinot are co-founders of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., which is a national apologetics ministry and mission to new religious movements based in Wonder Lake, IL. He and Joy, his wife of 37 years, have been involved in discernment ministry as missionaries to New Religious Movements since 1987. Don is on the Board of Directors for Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), a consortium of discernment ministries. In addition to being staff researchers and writers for the *Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal* and co-authors of *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, they have been published in the *CRJ Journal*, *PFO Quarterly Journal*, *Campus Life Magazine* and other periodicals. Don was ordained to the ministry by West Suburban Community Church of Lombard, IL at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, Israel in March of 1997. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Tina's Story, <http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/1996/96janfeb.pdf>, starting on page 8
- 2 The audio can be purchased from Blue Mountain Christian Retreat (<http://www.bmcr.org/media.aspx>) and is very encouraging.
- 3 We develop these issues in more depth in the Summer/Fall MCOI Journal article "An Indistinct Sound" (<http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2005/05sumfall.pdf>)
- 4 We have written 4 articles on Gwen Shamblin and her organization. Weighted Down with False Doctrine (<http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2000/00fall.pdf>), Weigh Down Workshop – A Cult? (<http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2001/01win.pdf>), Camping With Gwen (<http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2002/02sprsum.pdf>), and The Pied Piper is Shamblin (http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2008/Spring_Summer_2008.pdf)
- 5 Part of Gwen Shamblin's teaching includes the necessity of keeping the Jewish Festivals and Holy Days with the exception of Sabbath Keeping.

"Christianity" Continued from page 17

*****Hermeneutics** (from Greek *hermeneuō*, meaning *interpret*) is the art and science of determining principles of proper biblical interpretation.

†**Superstring Theory** speculates that all particles and forces in the universe can be explained as the result of tiny bands—or strings—of energy vibrating at different frequencies in ten dimensions. Scientists have debated five different versions of String Theory, all of which require 10 dimensions.

M Theory is an attempt to unify the five different String Theories into one unified "**theory of everything**" which proposes that all particles and forces in the universe can be explained as strings of energy vibrating in 11 different dimensions. "**M**" is reported to stand for "membrane," although other suggestions have been given such as "magic," "mystery" and "mother."

Dan Cox is pastor of the Wonder Lake Bible Church in Wonder Lake, Illinois. A graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he has served at WLBC since 2001. In addition to his pastoral calling, he has also taught philosophy at a local college and serves as the chaplain of the Wonder Lake Fire Department.



ENDNOTES:

- 1) D'Souza, Dinesh, *What's So Great About Christianity*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007; xvi-xvii. 2) *Ibid.*, 8-12. 3) *Ibid.*, 81
- 4) *Ibid.*, 91. 5) *Ibid.*, 150. 6) *Ibid.*, 157. 7) *Ibid.*, 172. 8) *Ibid.*, 208
- 9) *Ibid.*, 230. 10) *Ibid.*, 290

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In This Issue:

- | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Page 1 | <u>Lessons from the Mission Field</u> | by L.L. (Don) and Joy A. Veinot |
| Page 6 | <u>Emotionally Healthy Spirituality</u> | by G. Richard Fisher |
| Page 8 | <u>The Twilight Saga</u> | by Marcia Montenegro |
| Page 10 | <u>What's So Great about Christianity</u> | by Dan Cox |