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Enjoy these six recent articles and a series of poems that stand out to me as shining examples of Beautiful Orthodoxy.



HAROLD SMITH
President and CEO

CT MAGAZINE

The Christians Who Annoy Us Are the Christians We Need Most May 2015

This review, of former editor Collin Hansen's book *Blind Spots*, describes how and why today's church is so divided. Each church "tribe"—which Hansen identifies as the courageous, the compassionate, and the commissioned—has its strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots. Which means each tribe needs the other two to live out a full and well-rounded gospel.

Katelyn Beaty, Managing Editor

CT MAGAZINE

Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon July/August 2015

Transgender identity is a confusing part of today's sexual identity landscape. Out of that confusion, many Christians would rather the transgender issue simply go away. Instead, CT asked Mark Yarhouse, the leading Christian scholar on LGBT identity, to explain the phenomenon, and help local churches articulate a clear and compassionate response to transgender persons in their midst.

Katelyn Beaty, Managing Editor

Moore on the Margins September 2015

Russell Moore is heading the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention in a time of massive cultural change. In this profile, former CT news editor Sarah Pulliam Bailey captured Moore's personality quirks and, more central, how he is helping Baptists to live out a more cross-centered, and less politically motivated, gospel.

Katelyn Beaty, Managing Editor

THE BEHEMOTH

Are Butterflies a New Creation After All? February 19, 2015

When some people hear that *The Behemoth* is a magazine that draws heavily from science and nature, they imagine it full of articles about origins fights and climate policy debates. Instead, they find it full of awe and wonder at a big God and his big world. Whether it's an article about biology, theology, or history (or in this article's case, all three), *The Behemoth* aims to remind readers that creation and its creator are much bigger and much more wonderful than they had imagined.

Ted Olsen, Editor

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN

How to Love an Atheist June 2015

Rather than approaching secular culture and non-believers with a caustic, us-against-them stance, this article epitomizes Beautiful Orthodoxy in the loving and empathetic tone it offers. Communicating the truth with love (Ephesians 4:15) is not just a matter of the words we choose but also the general posture we have toward those with whom we disagree. As a former atheist herself, Dr. Alicia Britt Chole encourages us to embody the gospel by treating atheists friends and loved ones with the same dignity and honor Jesus himself showed to the religious outsiders he interacted with.

Kelli Trujillo, Editor

SMALLGROUPS.COM

Diversity in Community Changes Us February 2015

Natasha Robinson shares why she chooses to go to church with white people and explains why intentionally choosing diversity is important for Christians. She paints a beautiful picture of what can be when we choose to get to know "the other."

Amy Jackson, Managing Editor

BOOKS & CULTURE

Four Poems September/October 2015

These are four poems by Brett Foster from the September/October issue of Books & Culture, marking the 20th anniversary of the magazine. Brett died on November 9, 2015. Included below is the introduction

that appeared with the poems. Re-reading it now, I am deeply thankful for the hope we share.

We are all strangers in a strange land, but certain circumstances tend to heighten our awareness of that condition. Brett Foster, associate professor of English at Wheaton College, is a poet and translator of poetry, a Renaissance scholar, a lover of Shakespeare and of theater more generally, husband to Anise, father of Avery and Gus, a member of All Souls Anglican Church. In June 2014, out of the blue, he was diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer. The first poem below, "Prayer Before Reading St Mark's Gospel," was written in July 2014; the other three are from this summer.

John Wilson, Editor

The Christians Who Annoy Us Are the Christians We Need Most

Why learning from those outside your tribe is essential to the church's witness.

Fred Sanders

Confronted with the stubborn fact of church disunity, every new generation of Christians asks the same question: “Why can’t we all just get along?” And every old generation has the same set of answers at the ready. “We already tried to get along before you got here,” say some. “All the things that divide us are nonnegotiable,” say others.

In any generation, the friction among Christian “tribes” is palpable. Collin Hansen, the editorial director for the Gospel Coalition, approaches this subject not as an impartial observer but as a committed member of a particular tribe: the “young, restless, Reformed” believers whose emergence he profiled in a classic 2006 ct cover story and a 2008 book by the same name. Yet his latest work, *Blind Spots: Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate, and Commissioned Church* (Crossway), suggests a strategy for “church unity and an effective gospel witness in the world.”

This is a matter of no small urgency, Hansen argues, because a divided witness won’t suffice to gain a hearing for the gospel in the current cultural climate. In the foreword, NYC pastor Tim Keller describes the book as “an extended essay on how Christians in Western societies today . . . need to respond to a culture quickly growing post-Christian.”

To this end, Hansen proposes that Christians learn from believers who make them uncomfortable, because the ones who annoy us are likely the ones we need most. Instead of trying to be well-rounded, we should settle for being well-surrounded. If we can’t embody all the strengths of every Christian tribe, we can at least associate with brothers and sisters who have what we lack (and lack what we have).

Two-Thirds Blind

There are three types of Christians in Hansen’s telling. There are the courageous, who love to take a stand against clear opposition and relish a clarifying doctrinal dispute; the compassionate, who sympathize, listen with all their hearts, and seek to heal whatever pain they find; and the commissioned, who keep their focus on evangelism and outreach to unbelievers, devising new forms of communicating the gospel as the need arises. Each type habitually partners with like-minded believers. As Hansen writes, “We tend to cluster around Christians with similar personalities, who reinforce our strengths but turn a blind eye to our weaknesses.”

And we all have weaknesses. Within each of the three groups, Hansen says, we are “conditioned by our various cultures and experiences to hear certain aspects of the gospel more clearly than others.” Or, to use the metaphor of the book’s title, we can end up “at least two-thirds blind” if we look only with our own eyes.

Even as Hansen celebrates each of the three types, he remains keenly aware of their blind spots.

The courageous, for example, are often so certain of their convictions that they have trouble heeding legitimate criticism, and suspect other Christians of being theologically naive. The compassionate are so motivated to comfort their wounded neighbors that they neglect to speak uncomfortable truths at all, and blame other Christians for doing most of the wounding. And the commissioned are so eager to reach their culture that they uncritically adopt everything the culture has to offer, having no patience for theology or mercy ministry that lacks an immediate evangelistic payout.

Hansen's key point is that "each group goes bad to the degree it distances itself from the others." His solution is to have each group confess its need for the others.

This is a brief book (120 pages) geared for immediate impact, written in a tone that alternates between chatty and prophetic. Hansen doesn't pretend to hover above the fray. He freely admits belonging to the type labeled "courageous," and that he struggles to see his own blind spots. "With my highly attuned gift for discerning other's motives," he observes, "it didn't take long for me to see what's wrong with everyone else." By candidly admitting his bias, Hansen both models what he preaches and tells a more gripping story.

When Hansen realized he could not see past his own presuppositions on crucial questions, he began experimenting with taking the perspective of fellow Christians motivated by mercy or mission. Hansen knows by experience how deep the ruts of routine run: "You bemoan the church's ineffective public witness in a changing culture, yet you offer the same self-congratulatory solution to every new challenge." Here is a way out.

Reading *Blind Spots*, I was reminded of John Wesley's response to concerns that a growing narrowness and isolation were jeopardizing his revival movement. He watched his Methodist conferences turn in on themselves, splitting apart as they grew self-confident. "I thought it might be a help against this," he said, "frequently to read, to all who were willing to hear, the accounts I received from time to time of the work which God is carrying on in the earth, both in our own and other countries not among us alone, but among those of various opinions and denominations." And so he did, giving monthly reports of God's movements out beyond Methodist land. Today's evangelicals, no matter where they reside on Hansen's map of motivations, ought to strongly consider doing something similar.

The Best Defense

Strengths are almost always the bright side of weaknesses, and that holds true for *Blind Spots*. The book's great strength is in finding a new way to slice the pie. Hansen avoids rehearsing intractable denominational or confessional divisions. He makes no mention of the liberal-versus-conservative narrative that drives our evangelical heritage. By ignoring these categories in favor of his own, Hansen opens up new possibilities. But these fault lines haven't gone away. It's left to the reader to figure out how Hansen's advice would play out across them. And it's hard to believe his categories (which represent "the heart, the head, or the hands of Jesus") have as much purchase on actual church life as the older categories, tired as they may be.

But this book of cultural analysis moves almost subliminally towards a concluding Bible study that is its best moment. Hansen paraphrases 1 Corinthians and applies it to the modern church. "God has a plan to unify us in our diversity," and our blind spots mean we need to make friends unlike us. Then comes an extended meditation on John 15, and a call to abide in Jesus himself rather than adjusting our mutual perceptions and fiddling with our fellowship ratios. "Abiding in Christ," Hansen recognizes, "is the best defense against the blind spots that destroy our joy in following Jesus and set us against other believers with different gifts and callings."

Blind Spots dares evangelicals to forge powerful new experiences of unity in diversity. Jesus prayed that his church "may be one," as the Son and the Father are one, so that a watching world

might know God's loving purposes (John 17:20–23). When we allow Hansen's trio of "disharmony, discouragement, and disillusion" the final say, the world sees us—and we see each other—through a profoundly distorted lens.

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Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon

The leading Christian scholar on transgender issues defines the terms and gives the church a way forward.

Mark Yarhouse

I still recall one of my first meetings with Sara. Sara is a Christian who was born male and named Sawyer by her parents. As an adult, Sawyer transitioned to female.

Sara would say transitioning—adopting a cross-gender identity—took 25 years. It began with facing the conflict she experienced between her biology and anatomy as male, and her inward experience as female. While still Sawyer, she would grow her hair out, wear light makeup, and dress in feminine attire from time to time. She also met with what seemed like countless mental-health professionals as well as several pastors. For Sawyer, now Sara, transitioning eventually meant using hormones and undergoing sex reassignment surgery.

Sara would say she knew at a young age—around 5—that she was really a girl. Her parents didn't know what to do. They hoped their son was just different from most other boys. Then they hoped it was a phase Sawyer would get through. Later, two pastors told them that their son's gender identity conflicts were a sign of willful disobedience. They tried to discipline their son, to no avail.

Sara opened our first meeting by saying, "I may have sinned in the decisions I made; I'm not sure I did the right thing. At the time, I felt excruciating distress. I thought I would take my life. What would you have me do?" The exchange was disarming.

I have worked with people like Sara for more than 16 years. Although most of my published research and clinical practice is in the area of sexual identity, I regularly receive referrals to meet with people who experience conflicts like Sara's. The research institute I direct, housed at Regent University in Virginia, published the first study of its kind on transgender Christians a few years ago. My experiences counseling children, adolescents, and adults have all compelled me to further study gender dysphoria.

From this research and counseling background, I hope to offer the Christian community a distinctly Christian response to gender dysphoria.

Defining the Terms

First, let's define our terms. "Gender identity" is simply how people experience themselves as male or female, including how masculine or feminine they feel. "Gender dysphoria" refers to deep and abiding discomfort over the incongruence between one's biological sex and one's psychological and emotional experience of gender. Sara would say she lived much of her life as a woman trapped inside a man's body. When a person reports gender identity concerns that cause significant distress, he or she may meet criteria for a gender dysphoria diagnosis.

The previous version of the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual included the diagnosis "gender identity disorder." It highlighted cross-gender identity as the point of concern. The newest version refers instead to "gender dysphoria," moving the discussion away from identity

and toward the experience of distress. A lack of congruence between one's biological sex and gender identity exists on a continuum, so when diagnosing gender dysphoria, mental-health professionals look at the amount of distress as well as the amount of impairment at work or in social settings.

It is hard to know exactly how many people experience gender dysphoria. Most of the research has been on "transsexuality." The term refers to a person like Sara who wishes to or has identified with the opposite sex, in some cases through hormonal treatment or surgery. The American Psychiatric Association estimates the number of transsexual adults as low as 0.005 to 0.014 percent of men and 0.002 to 0.003 percent of women. But these are likely underestimates, as they are based on the number of people who visit specialty clinics.

The highest prevalence estimates come from more recent surveys that include "transgender" as an option. "Transgender" is an umbrella term for the many ways people express or present themselves differently from those for whom there is a match between their gender identity and their biological sex. So not everyone who is transgender experiences significant gender dysphoria. Some people say their gender resides along a continuum in between male and female or is fluid. They do not tend to report as much distress. Prevalence here has ranged from 1 in 215 to 1 in 300.

This means that transgender people are much more common than those formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria, but not nearly as common as those who identify as gay or lesbian, which is 2 to 4 percent of the US population.

While on the topic of homosexuality, let me clarify that gender dysphoria and transgender issues are not about having sex or attraction to the same sex; they are about an experiential mismatch between one's psychology and one's biology. People often confuse the two, likely due to transgender being a part of the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) discussion.

Psychologists and researchers don't know what causes gender dysphoria. The most popular theory among those who publish on this topic is the brain-sex theory. It proposes that the brain maps toward male or female, which in nearly all cases corresponds with various biological indicators of sex: chromosomes, gonads, and sex hormones. In rare instances, the normal sex differentiation that occurs in utero occurs in one direction (differentiating toward male, for example), while the brain maps in the other direction (toward female). Several gaps remain in the research behind this theory, but it nonetheless compels many professionals.

Recently a mother came to me, worried about her 7-year-old son. "What can we do?" she asked. "Just last week, a woman at the park said something. I couldn't believe she had the nerve. I'm afraid the kids at school might do worse."

The mother noted that her son's voice inflection seemed more like a girl's and that he pretended he had long hair. Over the past weekend, he had grabbed a towel and put it around his waist and said, "Look, Mom, I'm wearing a dress just like you!"

Whether and how to intervene when a child is acting in ways typical of the opposite sex is a controversial topic, to say the least. It's important to remember that in about three of four of these cases, the gender identity conflict resolves on its own, lessening or ceasing entirely. However, about three-fourths of children who experience a lessening or resolution go on as adults to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual—a fact that psychologists don't fully understand at this time.

What happens to children when their gender identity conflict continues into adulthood? Psychiatrist Richard Carroll proposes that they face four outcomes: (1) live in accordance with one's biological sex and gender role; (2) engage in cross-gender behavior intermittently; (3) adopt a cross-gender role through sex reassignment surgery; or (4) unresolved (the clinician has lost contact with the person and doesn't know what happened).

Sara pursued the third outcome. Bert pursued the second. He's a biological male who for years has engaged in cross-gender behavior from time to time to "manage" his gender dysphoria. He wears feminine undergarments that no one apart from his wife knows about. He has grown his hair out and

may wear light makeup, and this has been enough to manage his dysphoria.

Crystal pursued the first. She has experienced gender dysphoria since childhood. It has ebbed and flowed throughout her life, but she's able to cope with it. She presents as a woman and has been married to a man for 12 years. He is aware of her dysphoria.

Few studies have shown that therapy successfully helps an adult with gender dysphoria resolve with their biological sex. This may be one reason professionals generally support some cross-gender identification in therapy.

As someone with gender dysphoria considers different ways to cope, what might the Christian community distinctly offer them?

Three Lenses

To answer this question, let me first describe three cultural lenses through which people tend to “see” gender dysphoria.

Lens #1: Integrity The integrity lens views sex and gender and, therefore, gender identity in terms of what theologian Robert Gagnon refers to as “the sacred integrity of maleness or femaleness stamped on one’s body.” Cross-gender identification is a concern because it threatens to dishonor the creational order of male and female. Specific biblical passages, such as Deuteronomy 22:5 or 23:1, bolster this view. Even if we concede that some of the Old Testament prohibitions were related to avoiding pagan practices, nonetheless, from beginning to end, Scripture reflects the importance of male-female complementarity set forth in creation (Gen. 2:21–24).

The theological foundation of the integrity lens raises the same kind of concerns about cross-gender identification as it raises about homosexuality. Same-sex sexual behavior is sin in part because it doesn’t “merge or join two persons into an integrated sexual whole,” writes Gagnon. “Essential maleness” and “essential femaleness” are not brought together as intended from creation. When extended to transsexuality and cross-gender identification, the theological concerns rest in what Gagnon calls the “denial of the integrity of one’s own sex and an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness or femaleness formed by God.”

The integrity lens most clearly reflects the biblical witness about sex and gender. While it may be challenging to identify a “line” in thought, behavior, and manner that reflects cross-gender identification, people who see through the integrity lens are concerned that cross-gender identification moves against the integrity of one’s biological sex—an essential aspect of personhood.

It should be noted that some Christians do not put gender dysphoria in the same category as homosexuality. They may have reservations about more invasive procedures; however, they don’t put gender dysphoria or trying to manage dysphoria in the same class of behaviors that Scripture deems immoral.

Lens #2: Disability This lens views gender dysphoria as a result of living in a fallen world, but not a direct result of moral choice. Whether we accept brain-sex theory or another account of the origins of the phenomenon, if the various aspects of sex and gender are not aligning, then it’s one more human experience that is “not the way it’s supposed to be,” to borrow a phrase from theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

When we care for someone suffering from depression or anxiety, we do not discuss their emotional state as a moral choice. Rather, the person simply contends with a condition that comes in light of the Fall. The person may have choices to make in response to the condition, and those choices have moral and ethical dimensions. But the person is not culpable for having the condition as such. Here, the parallel to people with gender dysphoria should be clear.

Those who use this lens seek to learn as much as they can from two key sources: special revelation (scriptural teachings on sex and gender) and general revelation (research on causes, prevention,

and intervention, as well the lives of persons navigating gender dysphoria). This lens leads to the question: *How should we respond to a condition with reference to the goodness of Creation, the reality of the Fall, and the hope of restoration?*

Those drawn to the disability lens may value the sacredness of male and female differences; this is implied in calling gender dysphoria a disability. But this lens also makes room for supportive care and interventions that allow for cross-gender identification in a way the integrity lens does not.

Lens #3: Diversity This lens sees the reality of transgender persons as something to be celebrated, honored, or revered. Our society is rapidly moving in this direction. Those drawn to this lens cite historical examples in which departures from a clear male-or-female presentation have been held in high esteem, such as the Fa'afafine of Samoan Polynesian culture.

Whereas the biological distinction between male and female is considered unchangeable, some wish to recast sex as just as socially constructed as gender. To evangelicals, those who want to deconstruct sex and gender norms represent a much more radical alternative to either the integrity or disability lens.

To be sure, not everyone drawn to the diversity lens wants to deconstruct sex and gender. What is perhaps most compelling about this lens is that it answers questions about identity—"Who am I?"—and community—"Of which community am I a part?" It answers the desire for persons with gender dysphoria to be accepted and to find purpose in their lives.

A Distinctly Christian Resource

I believe there are strengths in all three lenses. Because I am a psychologist who makes diagnoses and provides treatment to people experiencing gender dysphoria, I see value in a disability lens that sees gender dysphoria as a reflection of a fallen world in which the condition itself is not a moral choice. This helps me see the person facing gender identity confusion with empathy and compassion. I try to help the person manage his or her gender dysphoria.

Even as Christians affirm the disability lens, we should also let the integrity lens inform our pastoral care. That lens represents a genuine concern for the integrity of sex and gender, and the ways in which maleness and femaleness help us understand the nature of the church and even the gospel.

Yet we should reject the teaching that gender identity conflicts are the result of willful disobedience or sinful choice. The church can be sensitive as questions arise about how best to manage gender dysphoria in light of the integrity lens. And we can recognize that we live in a specific cultural context, and that many gender roles vary from culture to culture. When I consider how to best counsel my clients to manage their gender dysphoria, however, I add the caveat: in the least invasive way possible.

Christians can also acknowledge how the diversity lens affirms the person by providing an identity not addressed by the other two lenses. The diversity lens emphasizes the importance of belonging. We must remember that the transgender and broader LGBT community are attractive because they answer the bedrock question, "Where do I belong?" Most churches want to be a community where people suffering from any "dysphoria" will feel they belong, for the church is, after all, a community of broken people saved by grace.

A few years ago, my research team at the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity conducted the first study of its kind on transgender Christians. We collected information on 32 biological males who to varying degrees had transitioned to or presented as women. We asked many questions about issues they faced in their home, workplace, and church, such as, "What kind of support would you have liked from the church?" One person answered, "Someone to cry with me rather than just denounce me. Hey, it is scary to see God not rescue someone from cancer or schizophrenia or [gender dysphoria] . . . but learn to allow your compassion to overcome your fear and repulsion."

When it comes to support, many evangelical communities may be tempted to respond to transgender persons by shouting “Integrity!” The integrity lens is important, but simply urging persons with gender dysphoria to act in accordance with their biological sex and ignore their extreme discomfort won’t constitute pastoral care or a meaningful cultural witness.

The disability lens may lead us to shout, “Compassion!” and the diversity lens may lead us to shout “Celebrate!” But both of these lenses suggest that the creational goodness of maleness and femaleness can be discarded—or that no meaning is to be found in the marks of our suffering.

Most centrally, the Christian community is a witness to the message of redemption. We are witnesses to redemption through Jesus’ presence in our lives. Redemption is not found by measuring how well a person’s gender identity aligns with their biological sex, but by drawing them to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and to the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into his image.

As Christians speak to this redemption, we will be tempted to join in the culture wars about sex and gender that fall closely on the heels of the wars about sexual behavior and marriage. But in most cases, the church is called to rise above those wars and present a witness to redemption.

Let’s say Sara walks into your church. She looks like a man dressed as a woman. One question she will be asking is, “Am I welcome here?” In the spirit of a redemptive witness, I hope to communicate to her through my actions: “Yes, you are in the right place. We want you here.”

If I am drawn to a conversation or relationship with her, I hope to approach her not as a project, but as a person seeking real and sustained relationship, which is characterized by empathy as well as encouragement to walk faithfully with Christ. But I should not try to “fix” her, because unless I’m her professional therapist, I’m not privy to the best way to manage her gender dysphoria. Rather, Christians are to foster the kinds of relationships that will help us know and love and obey Jesus better than we did yesterday. That is *redemption*.

If Sara shares her name with me, as a clinician and Christian, I use it. I do not use this moment to shout “Integrity!” by using her male name or pronoun, which clearly goes against that person’s wishes. It is an act of respect, even if we disagree with the choice, to let the person determine what they want to be called. If we can’t grant them that, it’s going to be next to impossible to establish a relationship with them. The exception is that, as a counselor, I defer to a parent’s preference for their teenager’s name and gender pronoun. Even here I talk with the parent about the benefits and drawbacks of what they want and what their teenager wants if the goal is to establish a sustained, meaningful relationship with their child.

Also, we can avoid gossip about Sara and her family. Gossip fuels the shame that drives people away from the church; gossip prevents whole families from receiving support.

Chapters in Redemption

In some church structures, the person’s spiritual life is under the care of those tasked with leading a local congregation. In this case, we have to trust church leadership to do the hard work of shepherding everyone who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior. We trust, too, that God is working in the lives of our leaders to guide them in wisdom and discernment. We trust that meaningful conversations are taking place, and we can add our prayers for any follower of Christ.

In other church settings, it might be us as laypeople who are called into a redemptive relationship with the transgender person. After all, Christians are to facilitate communities in which we are all challenged to grow as disciples of Christ. We can be sensitive, though, not to treat as synonymous management of gender dysphoria and faithfulness. Some may live a gender identity that reflects their biological sex, depending on their discomfort. Others may benefit from space to find ways to identify with aspects of the opposite sex, as a way to manage extreme discomfort. And of course, no matter the level of discomfort someone with gender dysphoria experiences (or the degree to which

someone identifies with the opposite sex), the church will always encourage a personal relationship with Christ and faithfulness to what it means to grow in Christlikeness.

Certainly we can extend to a transgender person the grace and mercy we so readily count on in our own lives. We can remind ourselves that the book of redemption in a person's life has many chapters. You may be witness to an early chapter of this person's life or a later chapter. But Christians believe that God holds that person and each and every chapter in his hands, until that person arrives at their true end—when gender and soul are made well in the presence of God.

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Moore on the Margins

Russell Moore, public-policy leader for the largest Protestant denomination in America, isn't too worried about Christians' loss of power. In fact, it might just be the best thing to happen to them.

Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Living in the idyllic suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee, Russell Moore didn't expect to see female bodybuilders tanning naked across the street on a hot June day.

So the eighth president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, took to one of his pulpits: Twitter. "These people told me we ought to keep all the neighbor kids inside while they are naked out here. Y'all have never seen me this mad," tweeted Moore, a father to five boys.

Moore chuckled recounting the story while holding his youngest during family dinner. The day after his neighbors agreed not to tan naked in their front yard, Moore tweeted, "So far today we still have our First Amendment religious freedom and everyone in my neighborhood has their clothes on outside. #winning"

Compared with today's myriad court battles in which Christian individuals and organizations worry that their religious freedoms will soon vanish, tanned bodybuilders seem like a minor threat. But the encounter epitomizes the way Moore is practicing patient pluralism—and helping a denomination of about 16 million do the same—in a time when Christianity seems to many as odd as the notion of female bodybuilders was a century ago.

"When identifying as a Christian, there's an oddness and strangeness to the claim in some places," Moore, 44, told *Christianity Today*. "But the conception of Christianity as a strange thing is a good thing for the gospel because it lines up with what the gospel is.

"Christians are becoming aware that there's a large portion of society who would be relieved if all the evangelicals were raptured."

While Moore's youngest son ran around the house after dinner, his shorts came off. As Maria Moore got up to retrieve the toddler, Russell pointed across the street. "They're going to say, 'Get your own house in order before you fix mine.'"

Back to Baptist Roots

In the two years since Moore, the former dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), took to leading the ERLC, Southern Baptists have watched many of their beliefs—including, most notably, their beliefs about religious freedom—challenged in courts and by rapidly changing public opinion.

But even before the Supreme Court struck down all state bans against same-sex marriage this June, claims of being a "Moral Majority rang hollow for US Christians," Moore said in his ERLC inaugural address in 2013. For his part, he embraces the cultural margins.

"We are a prophetic minority who must speak into a world that is . . . exactly what Jesus promised us the world must be," he said.

In this way, Moore's leadership recalls "the days when Baptists were not at the center of culture but were outsiders, calling the culture into account for its failing," says Barry Hankins, coauthor of *Baptists in America* with fellow Baylor University historian Thomas Kidd. "That resonates with a

certain part of Baptist history, but it's also quite different from the 20th century, a more triumphal approach, a more insider approach.”

In 1920, Southern Baptist statesman George W. Truett gave his most famous speech, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” from the steps of the US Capitol to an estimated 10,000–15,000 attendees. He taught that Baptists and Americans had a shared goal: “Democracy is the goal toward which all feet are traveling, whether in state or in church.”

By contrast, Moore spoke not at the Capitol but at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, led by senior pastor Mark Dever. There, Moore warned a modest audience of about 400 against pursuing a Christian America.

“[F]or too long we have assumed that the church is a means to an end to save America,” he said. “America is important. But the end goal of the gospel is not a Christian America. The end goal of the gospel is redeemed from every tribe and tongue and nation and language. . . . We belong to another kingdom.”

“Moore has an important message: How do you live when you’re in exile?” says Fox News commentator Kirsten Powers. “Let’s stop the pity party and instead say, ‘We’re in exile, and this is not the first time God’s people have been in exile.’”

Alongside their Anabaptist cousins, Southern Baptists have traditionally seen themselves as on the margins of mainstream culture. Baptist teaching promotes the separation of church and state, warning that the church must maintain a healthy distance from political affairs in order to speak prophetically to political and social issues.

Alongside Puritan Roger Williams—arguably the first proponent of church-state separation in America—Southern Baptists also take cues from Isaac Backus and John Leland, 18th- and 19th-century preachers who stood against tax-supported churches in Massachusetts and Virginia. The men’s legacies loom large: The ERLC’s office in Washington, D.C., is named after Leland, and a portrait of Backus hangs just inside Moore’s Nashville office.

“One of the things we lost in training in Baptist life is the teaching of why religious liberty is central and important in the Baptist tradition, which I see as Baptists’ contribution to the larger world,” Moore said. “We have to be arguing for religious liberty for everyone.” This means, for example, that Moore has publicly praised court rulings that protect the freedom of Muslims to practice their religion.

After the Supreme Court ruled in 2014 that Hobby Lobby wouldn’t have to cover certain forms of employees’ contraception due to the for-profit owners’ religious claims, Moore tweeted, “This is as close as it gets to a Southern Baptist dancing for joy. . . . The Court reaffirmed a fundamental guarantee for religious liberty for all people.”

Suit-and-Tie Guy

Appearing ever ready to testify on Capitol Hill, Moore sported a red tie and ERLC-branded cufflinks the summer day I visited his Nashville office. There, Moore leads 25 employees and manages a budget of \$3 million. The bobbleheads on his bookshelves include theologian C. H. Spurgeon, former president Thomas Jefferson, evangelist Billy Graham, and musician Hank Williams. Together they symbolize Moore’s vision of mixing theology, religious liberty, evangelism, and culture to guide SBC public policy.

Moore says the main difference between him and his predecessor—Richard Land, who led the ERLC for 25 years, when the Religious Right enjoyed significant influence in Washington—is that he sees himself first as a preacher-evangelist, and only second as a public policy advocate.

Land left the ERLC post in 2012. Before he stepped down, he came under fire for allegations of plagiarism in his radio broadcasts, and for remarks related to the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. At 69, Land today heads the nondenominational Southern Evangelical Seminary near Charlotte,

North Carolina. He still positions himself as an evangelical spokesman, sending out statements in press releases after national events as he did as president of ERLC. (Land, who agreed to an interview at the 2014 SBC convention in Baltimore, later declined through a spokesman to speak with CT.)

Land was credited alongside other conservative religious leaders for helping to ensure George W. Bush's second presidential term in 2004. In 2002, Land had sent a letter to Bush, signed by other Christian leaders, that offered moral justification for a preemptive military strike against Iraq. Toward the end of his ERLC tenure, Land became more intertwined with specific political candidates, endorsing Mitt Romney in 2012.

Moore, by comparison, has yet to align himself with a major candidate for the 2016 election and is careful about which Washington groups he partners with. And while Land had a booming radio presence, Moore finds a captive audience on social media.

"Many people assume the tone change is because I'm associated with a younger wing of evangelicalism," Moore said. "I think it's more because I grew up in an older, blue-collar revivalist church that ended every service with an invitation hymn."

Moore was raised by a Catholic mother and a Baptist father in a working-class neighborhood in Biloxi, Mississippi, a longtime hub for commercial fishing. He studied at the University of Southern Mississippi, New Orleans Baptist Seminary, and SBTS, where he earned a PhD in systematic theology. In the early 1990s, before seminary, Moore was an aide to US Congressman Gene Taylor, a Catholic pro-life Democrat from Mississippi. (Since then Moore has switched to the Republican Party.)

"I started my young adulthood working with the greatest public servant I've ever known," Moore wrote in 2006. Taylor's ability to transcend partisan politics arguably inspired Moore to do the same.

So has his family's experience adopting two boys from Russia before he and Maria went on to have three biological sons. Moore's adoption advocacy, notably in the book *Adopted for Life* (and a 2010 CT cover story), has given him a broadly evangelical platform that combines theological, cultural, and political engagement.

"I associate him closely with the adoption issue, which is not immediately political but creates a very personal, compassionate image," said Molly Worthen, a historian at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

"Before adopting, it wasn't that I was anti-immigrant or anti-orphan, but I didn't care about those issues the same way," Moore said. "Orphan care moved me into a place that I had intellectually but didn't have viscerally.

"The orphan care movement carries with it all of the possibilities and pitfalls of evangelical social action. In order for it to be effective, it has to work on the local church level . . . and it means the church taking on the risk of welcoming people who have the possibility of hurting them."

"Moore understands that even beneath the issues, there's a person," said Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren after speaking on an ERLC panel at the 2014 SBC convention. "There are the theological issues and the social and political implications, but there's also a person behind every ethical and moral decision."

Moore admits he has not always seen the people behind contentious issues. In 2000, as a research assistant to SBTS president Albert Mohler Jr., he attended a gathering of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, mostly comprising moderate Baptists who withdrew from the SBC in the 1980s. Moore wrote a series of critical stories for Baptist Press, and Cooperative Baptists called his reporting unethical and inaccurate. Moore said what he wrote was true, but his attitude toward the Cooperative Baptists was wrong.

"I became pugnacious. I almost delighted in catching these people in their errors," Moore told CT. "It showed me a side of myself that I find forbidden in Scripture: 'The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome' [2 Tim. 2:24]."

At least one leader compares Moore's tone to that of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who became Pope

Francis three months before Moore became head of ERLC.

Both men “have been misunderstood as though they are compromising the Christian witness on hot-button issues,” said Robert George, the Catholic legal scholar at Princeton University. “They’re simply proclaiming the historic Christian doctrine on sin and mercy toward the sinner. They’re saying, ‘Let me give you the rest of the story, which is mercy.’”

Moore got into hot water last year for criticizing Christian radio shows for lacking that mercy.

“I listened on the way back up here from my hometown to some Christian talk radio this week, against my doctor’s orders,” Moore said at the ERLC’s 2014 Leadership Summit, in a talk titled “Walking the Line: The Gospel and Moral Purity.” “Honestly, if all that I knew of Christianity was what I heard on Christian talk radio, I’d hate it, too. There are some people who believe that fidelity to the gospel simply means speaking, ‘You kids get off my lawn.’”

Syndicated radio host Janet Mefferd called on Moore to apologize, saying his remarks were “over the top.” She defended hosts’ approach to discussing homosexuality.

Moore suggested that some commentators had been too focused on sexual immorality. “We have not been called simply to condemn,” Moore said. “We have been called to reconcile.”

Big-Tent Calvinist

But make no mistake: Moore is as traditional in his theology as Mohler, who led SBTS and the larger Southern Baptist world into a conservative resurgence that it enjoys to this day.

When Mohler assumed the SBTS presidency in 1993, he required new faculty to affirm the inerrancy of Scripture and oppose women’s ordination. Moore rose quickly through Southern’s ranks, joining the faculty in 2001 and becoming dean in 2004.

“Moore and I see eye to eye on almost all issues of significance besides the great raging debate of opera vs. country,” Mohler told CT. “He’s very much on the wrong side.”

Moore describes himself as a four-point Calvinist (he’s not on board with Limited Atonement), but a “big-tent” one who will work alongside Arminians. Today he downplays the differences between the SBC’s Calvinists and non-Calvinists.

“I said I was a conscientious objector in the debates,” Moore said. “Some of the perceptions are overblown, and many of them are differences between theologically oriented people and practically oriented people.”

Still, Moore must be understood in the context of Southern’s Reformed sensibilities, said Bill Leonard, a church historian at Wake Forest University. “Total depravity and a response to the principalities of this world are closely related in his theology,” said Leonard, who taught at SBTS during its moderate days in the 1970s. “One of the responsibilities of government is to hold at bay the totally depraved multitude.”

Greg Wills, dean of SBTS’s school of theology, told CT, “Russell thinks it’s important not to talk about the evils of gambling, but [that] these are issues in which individual human beings are suffering depravation so they are vulnerable to the enticements of state lotteries. He addresses materialism, structural social issues, while insisting on the traditional position on gambling.”

Moore does not hesitate to critique theology he sees as aberrant or harmful.

“The pro-life aspect of the Religious Right saved the evangelical movement in this country,” Moore said. “It alerted evangelicals that theological liberalism doesn’t just kill churches. It kills people, too.”

Still, he believes the Religious Right was too optimistic about political power. He openly criticized a 2010 rally that media personality Glenn Beck, who is Mormon, held with Christian Right leaders, including Land.

“Beck is not preaching the gospel,” Moore told CT, recalling his outrage at the time. “But it seemed like it because he was preaching on values. In order to make ourselves a moral majority, we

have deemphasized the gospel and replaced it with a vague sense of values.”

Anchored by Jerry Falwell Sr.’s Moral Majority, many Christian Right groups drove agendas opposing abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment and supporting prayer in school and tuition tax credits for private religious schools. With the diminished influence of many conservative Christian institutions in Washington, today leaders like Moore are less inclined to claim a “majority” label. And though he has not publicly criticized other leaders in Washington, such as Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, the two have not collaborated in the way Land and Perkins did.

“I don’t have that relationship with Russell that I had with Richard,” Perkins, who repeatedly declined CT’s interview requests through a spokesman, told *National Journal*. “I don’t know Russell that well. I think he’s still trying to find his way.”

Moore’s path has led him away from the Family Research Council’s mode of political engagement (which CT editorialized against as “caustic” in 2012). Moore’s challenge is whether he can carve out middle space between the separatism of a “prophetic minority” and the guidance on key issues that many evangelicals will be looking for during an election year.

“There is reason to wonder where evangelicalism will go after taking leave of the Religious Right, whether into suspended political animation or into the sort of political activism that avoids the points of greatest tension with the ambient culture,” Moore wrote for *First Things* in 2013. The problem for many evangelicals, says Moore, is not that the Religious Right was too conservative. It’s that the Religious Right, in seeking political power or to reclaim America, sacrificed gospel distinctiveness.

“Today the center of American evangelicalism is, theologically speaking, to the right of the old Religious Right,” wrote Moore. Evangelicals work on orphan care, creation care, human trafficking, racial reconciliation, prison reform, and economic inequality, as well as abortion, economic freedom, and marriage, “with decidedly conservative motivations and strategies—and theologies,” he wrote.

Which is why Moore may be a fitting figurehead for evangelical public policy leading up to November 2016, during which, absent an evangelical pope, media will look to him to speak for the movement. He appears regularly on television and radio as an evangelical spokesman. As an invited guest of the White House and Congress, he shifts between prophetic dissent and hearty support, depending on the issue.

Moore has been invited to meet with President Obama five times, each on the issue of immigration, an issue the SBC has made a priority. But he also publicly disagrees with the President on abortion and same-sex marriage. An avid Wendell Berry fan, Moore advocates for creation care, though he has warned of environmentalists “sounding the alarm on global warming.” He believes the death penalty is sometimes warranted.

Moore has served as board chair of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an organization that promotes complementarianism, believing that men and women serve different roles in the church and home. When gender informs the public discourse on abortion or contraception, Moore regularly highlights work by evangelical women. His closest advisers, however, are men, including an executive staff weighted with SBTS graduates. When it launched in 2014, the ERLC’s research institute included 3 women on a staff of 70.

Moore hosts regular conference calls with SBC pastors, updating them on issues and offering guidance on public-policy questions. Always armed with a beverage before fielding questions, he says he recently switched from his usual diet soda to unsweetened iced tea. “Isn’t that such a Yankee thing to do?” he lamented. On one call, a pastor asked him how to criticize the President in a way that is Christian.

“Make sure you are publicly praying for the President and honoring him in situations where you’re not criticizing him,” Moore said. “Some of the ways I’ve heard people pray for the President have been things like, ‘Lord, we pray you turn his wicked heart.’”

Instead, Moore told pastors, they can suggest disappointment without passive-aggressive prayers. “Signal that you really do want the President to succeed but you’re disappointed with what he’s doing,” he said.

Take Down That Flag

As the United States rapidly grows more diverse, Moore said that the SBC still has much work to do on race. The ERLC’s summit this spring featured several plenary talks from African American leaders on why racial reconciliation remains a core gospel issue.

Next to the bobbleheads in Moore’s office is a photo of black sanitation workers protesting labor conditions in 1968 Memphis. Citing years of poor treatment, unfair wages, and discrimination, some 1,300 sanitation workers walked off the job in protest. “It reminds me of human dignity,” Moore told me, pointing to the photo.

The SBC originally formed in 1845 in a split from the American Baptist Convention over whether Baptists who owned slaves could also serve as missionaries. Many SBC leaders were either silent on or actively opposed the civil rights movement through the 1970s, and many congregations segregated blacks. Today about 20 percent of the 50,000 Southern Baptist congregations are predominantly nonwhite.

Moore noted the SBC’s historical ties to slavery in his 2013 inaugural address. “We must be those who recognize as we speak to the outside world, and especially those of us who are a part of this great denomination, a denomination that is summed up in its very name—the fact that we were founded, at least partly, to justify man stealing, and kidnapping, and slavery, and lynching,” Moore said.

Both Moore and predecessor Land nod in appreciation to Foy Valentine—a moderate who led the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission (now the ERLC) from 1960 to 1987—on his civil rights work. While many Southern Baptist preachers attempted to remain neutral on race, Valentine urged engagement.

When Land took over the agency in 1987, he led the SBC’s Racial Reconciliation Resolution of 1995 after convening eight black and eight white SBC pastors and scholars. The committee’s resolution apologized for “the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” SBC opposition to civil rights, and the exclusion of blacks from SBC churches.

But race remains a tricky issue for a denomination in which nonwhite pastors fill far fewer leadership positions. The SBC elected its first black president, Fred Luter, in 2012. As he cycled out of office last year, the SBC replaced him with Ronnie Floyd, a white pastor.

“You and I just passed the wall of SBC presidents,” Moore said, referring to the portraits of all-but-one white men. “If in 10 years Fred Luter is the only person of color on that wall, that will not be progress.”

Moore tried to make progress this summer by calling for the Confederate flag to be removed from atop the South Carolina Capitol. For a leader whose home state’s flag features a Confederate battle flag in the upper-left corner, the statement was remarkable.

“The cross and the Confederate flag cannot co-exist without one setting the other on fire,” he wrote two days after nine black churchgoers were fatally shot at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. “White Christians, let’s listen to our African American brothers and sisters. Let’s care not just about our own history, but also about our shared history with them.”

Moore’s conviction solidified after Hurricane Katrina, when a national guardsman gave him a Mississippi flag from the wreckage of Biloxi, Moore’s hometown. Moore tacked the flag on a pegboard in his basement study.

But on a day when Moore was preparing to host African American friends, he noticed the Confederate cross in the corner of the flag—and couldn’t imagine trying to explain why he had the flag

hanging in his home. As Moore unpinned the flag from the wall, it fell apart in his hands. The memory came roaring back after Charleston, when he decided it was time to speak publicly. Observers said it enabled political leaders to eventually pull the flag down.

“How can you address education inequities and economic inequities when we have the basic problem of imagery that divides us?” said Burns Strider, a Southern Baptist from Mississippi and a faith adviser to Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton. “Russell’s speaking out as a conservative had an immediate ripple effect.”

Strangers and Exiles

As Moore and I waited for dinner, Moore’s dachshund trotted over to the feet of his master, who rolled his eyes. The dog was a hasty promise Moore made when he told his boys they would be moving to Nashville and two of them began to cry. The dog’s name? Waylon, after country musician Waylon Jennings.

“Country music and hip-hop are the only two popular music forms in America that have a more holistic view of a person and deal with sin,” Moore said. “Both of those forms of music at their best tend to be more honest.”

Moore may be uniquely equipped to speak the cultural language of two generations at once. As a member of Generation X, Moore appears ready to calm a boomer generation anxious about millennial Christians, who are generally more left-leaning politically than their parents and less likely to join a church. He occasionally meets with hip-hop artists like Lecrae, though he retains deep affinity for his Mississippi church that sang Fanny Crosby revivalist songs.

“My grandmother is in the slow process of dying,” he said. “I realized I could sing to her hymns that she and I would both know and it would be meaningful. I’m not sure that would be the case for my kids. I get older Southern Baptists and I get what they see being lost.

“On the other hand, I’m encouraged that we have a millennial generation defined theologically instead of politically.”

“Keep Christianity strange” is the central message of Moore’s new book, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Broadman & Holman). “The temptation is to do with America what the prosperity gospel does for the individual,” Moore told CT. “If you do these things, you’ll have blessings and wealth.”

As he navigates the waters between Southern pulpits and Washington corridors, Moore is trying to thread the needle of leading Christians to shape public policy without being co-opted by political leaders.

Moore is the rare person in politics who tends to leave you more hopeful after you meet, said Joshua DuBois, who ran the faith-based office under President Obama. “He is resetting the boundaries of appropriate dialogue in the public square. He’s trying to wake up evangelicals to the world around them.”

Moore may be preparing evangelicals to be in the minority, but he has also been teaching that Christians must remain culturally engaged or risk losing their religious liberty.

“We are strangers and exiles, on our best days, but we are not orphans and wanderers,” he writes. “Our strangeness is only hopeful if it is freakishly clinging to the strange, strange mission of Christ crucified and risen.”

As US Christians feel more and more like exiles, Moore seems more than ready to lead them into the wilderness.

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Are Butterflies a New Creation After All?

Their metamorphosis has inspired spiritual metaphors and biological debate for centuries.

Ted Olsen

If you were to describe how a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, it would probably sound a lot like Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. You might not include his bits about chocolate cake, lollipops, sausages, and pickles—but you know he gets it basically right. A caterpillar hatches from an egg, eats until it gets really fat, then creates its chrysalis shell. After a few weeks it pushes its way out and becomes “a beautiful butterfly”!

But wait, how *did* the caterpillar turn into a butterfly?

You have to love the answer at kidsbutterfly.org: “This is not easy to explain.” It goes on to try: “You can say that inside the chrysalis the caterpillar changes clothes and turns into a butterfly. (An esoteric explanation: Inside the chrysalis the caterpillar structures are broken down chemically and the adult’s new structures are formed.)”

Right. But getting “broken down chemically” isn’t exactly compatible with “changing clothes,” unless you’re talking about a sartorial stew. The most frequently used word to describe the inside of a chrysalis at its most transformative moment as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly is *soup*. There’s no caterpillar carefully attaching wings to its back, or half-caterpillar half-butterfly hybrid. It’s just a wet, gooey mess in there.

The caterpillar’s body has melted, special enzymes dissolving tissues as the creature digests itself. Its legs? Gone. In fact, if a caterpillar lost one of its legs during its life, not to worry: The butterfly will have six anyway upon its emergence. The caterpillar’s eyes? Liquefied into the protein sludge, to be remade into some new part of the butterfly. The antennae? Gone: New ones are being grown.

It’s only been since 2013 that we’ve been able to actually watch a caterpillar turn into a butterfly. With 3D CT scans, British researchers watched as some caterpillar organs survived the enzyme breakdown. The guts didn’t dissolve, but instead changed—dramatically and quickly. The caterpillar’s breathing tubes, meanwhile, hardly changed at all.

Before these new experiments with CT scans, researchers had mostly applied what they knew from fruit fly and blowfly metamorphosis, as well as what they’d learned from destroying chrysalises and looking inside. The new research doesn’t significantly change what we know about metamorphosis—it just gives us a few more details, confirmations, and some great visuals.

But earlier efforts to watch the transformation were not so successful.

Eels from Mud, Flies from Corpses

From early classical writers to the 1600s, Westerners believed that small creatures like insects did not reproduce sexually. Instead, they believed that small creatures were simply born out from the dead remains of unrelated animals, or out of inanimate matter like earth and water.

Aristotle’s view that terrestrial elements could combine with “vital heat” to spontaneously

generate life dovetailed with Christian readings of God's commands in Genesis. "Let the earth bring forth the living creature" (1:24) and "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" (1:20, KJV) were taken literally.

"If there are creatures which are successively produced by their predecessors, there are others that even today we see born from the earth itself," Basil of Caesarea, one of the greatest theologians of the early church, preached in one Genesis sermon. "In wet weather she brings forth grasshoppers and an immense number of insects which fly in the air and have no names because they are so small; she also produces mice and frogs. In the environs of Thebes in Egypt, after abundant rain in hot weather, the country is covered with field mice. We see mud alone produce eels; they do not proceed from an egg, nor in any other manner; it is the earth alone which gives them birth."

Basil's sermon isn't just an example of longstanding views on spontaneous generation. His comment that insects "have no names because they are so small" is telling, too. Bugs didn't attract much attention before the late 1600s, except in cases where they provided metaphors: the "king" bee provided a God-given model of monarchic rule. Ants were praised for their industriousness, in accordance with Proverbs 6. Locusts had several biblical connotations.

And butterflies were a sign and evidence of the resurrection.

"As it is miraculous to our eyes but at the same time clearly evident, that from dead caterpillars emerge living animals, so it is equally true and miraculous that our dead and rotten corpses will rise from the grave," wrote Johannes Goedaert.

Goedaert (1617–1668), a Dutch painter who was one of the first Europeans to argue for more attention to the broader world of insects, invariably is described by historians as "pious." Like nearly everyone else, he saw butterflies as metaphors and a promise of resurrection. But unlike most others of his day, Goedaert found the whole world of insects a wondrous menagerie pointing to God's glory.

"[T]here is no creature so small, or by the attentive observation thereof one can find immediate cause and ample reasons to glorify God, and wonder at his marvelous wisdom and providence," he wrote. "The truth of this I have discovered by the observation of worms, caterpillars, maggots and other crawling animals." After all, he noted, the Psalmist wrote that God rejoices in all his works (Ps. 104:31), including "things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts" (v. 25, KJV).

The painter observed his subjects closely, from egg to caterpillar to butterfly. He was impressed by how specific caterpillars generally created the same kinds of chrysalises, which produced the same kinds of butterflies. He still thought of them as different animals: butterflies emerging from the corpses of dead caterpillars the way maggots seem to emerge from dead cattle. But one observation surprised him: He watched as two identical caterpillars of the same apparent species "died." But out of one chrysalis, "a Butterfly is produced." Out of another, "82 Flyes."

"These things I have had the experience of, and Observed them, not without admiration because it seems besides, if not against the usuall course of Nature, that from one and the same Species of Animals, an Offspring of different species should be gendred."

Unbeknownst to Goedaert, what had actually happened was that a parasitic wasp had laid eggs inside or on top of one caterpillar before it pupated, and the wasp larvae had fed on its host inside the chrysalis. But for a while it seemed like anything was possible—not only could one animal emerge spontaneously from a dead animal of a different species, but it wasn't always the same kind of animal emerging!

This idea, that caterpillars and butterflies are two different species, was soon successfully challenged. (More on that in a moment.) But the argument has persisted.

In 2009, the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) published an article by British zoologist Donald Williamson. He argued that butterflies and caterpillars essentially evolved separately, as two different organisms—and that somewhere along the line the two species accidentally but successfully mated.

The theory makes a lot of sense, University of Vermont biologist Bernd Heinrich wrote in his 2012 book on animal death, *Life Everlasting*. During metamorphosis, caterpillar DNA is essentially “turned off,” and butterfly DNA, which had been suppressed, is “turned on.” Heinrich writes:

A new theory claims that because the metamorphosis . . . is so radical, with no continuity from one to the next, that the adult forms of these insects are actually new organisms. . . . In effect, the animal is a chimera, an amalgam of two, where first one lives and dies and then the other emerges. . . . Regardless of how it came about, there are indeed two very different sets of genetic instructions at work in the metamorphosis . . . and these are as different as different species, or even much more so. They thus represent a reincarnation, not just from one individual into another, but the equivalent of reincarnation from one species into another.

As Heinrich notes, it’s an aberrant view among biologists. Williamson was ridiculed for proposing it, and *PNAS* quickly published a rebuttal (but not a retraction).

The Butterfly Inside

In the 1600s, within a year of Goedaert’s *Metamorphosis*, another Dutch butterfly lover had found a simple way to convince people that the caterpillar and the butterfly were indeed the same animal: Johannes Swammerdam simply cut open a caterpillar that was preparing to become a chrysalis. Inside were rudimentary wings and legs—“a Butterfly enclosed and hidden in a caterpillar, and perfectly contained within its skin.”

Yes, inside the chrysalis there’s a soup. And tissues from the caterpillar are liquefied and turned into parts of the butterfly—but at the same time, the parts of the butterfly have already started growing inside the caterpillar, even before it enters its chrysalis.

Swammerdam’s finding was a tremendous blow to the theory of spontaneous generation, which he saw as “the straight road to atheism . . . for if generation were at random, man could be generated in the same way, as some have been rash enough to write.”

Random chance doesn’t decide whether a butterfly or 82 flies emerge from a chrysalis, Swammerdam wrote. “All God’s works are based on the same rules.”

“A worm or caterpillar does not *change* into a pupa, but *becomes* a pupa by the growing of parts; so also this pupa, we may add, afterward does not *change* into a flying beast, but . . . *becomes* a flying beast,” he wrote. The changes a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly “are nothing else than those of a chick, which is not changed into a hen, but becomes a hen by the growing of its parts.”

But if Swammerdam thought his research was a blow against atheism and random chance, he also recognized that his work undercut efforts to use butterflies “to explain the resurrection of the dead.” Good riddance, he said:

This clearly exposes the error of those who have wanted to prove the resurrection of the dead by these natural and intelligible changes, which not only goes entirely beyond the order that can be observed in nature, but has no parallel in nature either. . . . These small animals do not die, as man does, in order to rise again; all that happens to them is that their limbs are improved.

In short, the resurrection is a promise of the world to come that we can’t imagine based on what this world shows us. Caterpillars suffer only an “idle and imaginary death.” (Though, with a possible wink, he did grant it “worthy of notice that when I viewed a deformed worm . . . changed into a fly it was in no way deformed, its body being then perfect after its change, or rather its *resurrection*.”)

For Swammerdam, taking away butterflies’ literal resurrections didn’t make them less of a [tool]

to see God’s glory and work in the world—it made them more of one, since they indicated that God was revealing himself in the smallest details of the smallest creatures.

“Who is not delighted and convinced when he rightly considers these wonders of God?” he wrote. “[They show] that the omniscient and good God is understood and known from his visible things, in that he reveals his invisible things so powerfully to us in the visible ones, so that his eternal godhead is displayed there radiantly; so that no one should be pardoned in his sin who has received the law of nature, the law of Moses and that of the gospel; after which all peoples will be judged, whether they shall be acquitted or condemned.”

Nor did Swammerdam think the metaphors these animals offered were useless. On the contrary, his *Bible of Nature* is full of moral instruction, theological reflection, and spiritual asides that follow from his biological insights. The short lifespan of mayflies should remind us of how fleeting our own lives on earth are, he argues. Rhinoceros beetles’ difficult early stages of life should remind us of Paul’s promise that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” And even fly metamorphosis can be a visible reminder of “how near our resurrection and reformation is” and “the real metamorphosis of the human mind . . . [when] we cast off the ancient dirt of avarice, pride, and envy, and change those vile passions for the most sweet and gentle love of Christ.”

The humblest of animals may prompt these insights, Swammerdam says. And taken together, one can’t help but be overwhelmed by “the inscrutable God and the unfathomable Creator, wonderful and matchless in his works.”

But still, Swammerdam had favorites: “There is nothing in the world of nature which deserves greater admiration than the change of a caterpillar into a winged insect.”

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How to Love an Atheist

A former atheist shares 5 compelling principles

Dr. Alicia Britt Chole

*Truth was dead.
God had never lived.
Life was filled of pain.
And death was the end of life.¹*

These beliefs formed my worldview as a young atheist: I sincerely believed that there was no God. When people hear my story, they often tell theirs with something close to agony in their eyes: a son, a daughter, a brother, a mother, a spouse, a colleague—someone they love denies God’s existence. “Your journey from atheism to faith,” they whisper, “gives me hope that one day they will know God.”

Hope and atheism? Yes, indeed! When you love an atheist, you have great reason to hope. Their words may wound you. Their actions may confuse you. But the God in whom you hope is mighty to save and relentless in his loving pursuit of their souls. To complement your prayers for their salvation, I offer you five “Be’s” for those who love atheists.

1. Be Respectful: People Rarely Choose Atheism Lightly

I like atheists. Without exception I have enjoyed the company of every authentic atheist I have met. (*Authentic*, however, is a key adjective because occasionally pretenders don the cloak of atheism to satisfy their addiction to arguing, and I have a painfully low tolerance for posers of any variety.) In general, atheists are thoughtful, witty, and deeply committed to their perceptions of reality.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *respect* means “consideration” and “regard,” not agreement. Respect invites us to remember that people have a reason for what they believe. Some inherit atheism from their families or cultures. Some turn to atheism to make sense of the planet’s insanely inequitable distribution of health, wealth, and safety. Some choose atheism for scientific or (like I did) philosophical reasons. And some default to the belief in the wake of painful disillusionment with God and his people.

Reasons matter. In fact, *what* your loved one believes is simply the outcome of *why* they believe. Like a good doctor, instead of being distracted and distraught by the fruits of their beliefs, focus on discerning the roots of their beliefs. Respectful listening can reveal root causes, and root causes can give us specific direction for intercession. So as Peter advised, “If someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way” (1 Peter 3:15–16).

2. Be Humble: An Honest “I Don’t Know” Inspires Trust

How lovely it would be if all we had to do to win a debate with an atheist was utter truth and, regardless of our eloquence, our loved one would offer a sigh of relief, say, “Ah, there it is,” and run into the arms of Jesus! Human debates, however, are won more by skill than by truth. If you find yourself mismatched in skill with an atheist, all is not lost: humility can still win their trust.

As a young atheist, my response to Christian friends’ attempts to “give an answer” ranged from

mild amusement to bewildered annoyance. Our discussions would end in debate, and our debates would end in their tears. Then they would utter these weighty words: “We don’t know, Alicia. We don’t have an answer. But we do know that Jesus lives and that he loves you.”

“I don’t know” is a surprisingly smart answer when it is true. And believing when we do not have all the answers is a decent working definition of *faith* (Hebrew 11:1). My friends’ faith, far more than their “answers,” made it past my mind and stirred my spirit.

3. Be Encouraged: Unbelief Does Not Alter God

Unlike fictional Santas and fairies that lose their power when humanity’s believe-o-meters run low, God’s existence is neither strengthened by belief nor weakened by unbelief. God is prior. In other words, his existence precedes ours.

Our greatest shout cannot thicken his presence, and our greatest doubt cannot thin his presence. Your loved one’s unbelief does not offend God: he still is and he still loves.

A secular radio station host once asked me if a certain ridiculously heretical best-seller made me nervous. “God’s not nervous about this book,” I replied. “So I’m having a hard time figuring out why I should be nervous.” Your loved one’s unbelief does not make God nervous. He is, after all, rather secure. Take heart, for God specializes in the pursuit of stubborn souls:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name,
I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’” (Isaiah 65:1, NIV)

4. Be Teachable: Learn from Them

Your loved one’s atheism cannot void the fact that they are gloriously covered with God’s fingerprints. Their very existence bears his signature. They are “formed by [his] hands” (Isaiah 64:8). I believe that we can learn from everyone (and everything) God created. What is their strength? What is their hobby? What is their skill? Ask earnest questions about it—then listen and learn.

Why? Because being teachable is a practical application of being respectful and humble. Because honoring others’ strengths honors their Creator. Because listening is a form of love, and love penetrates skepticism at depths debate can only dream of. Because learning from others opens the door for them to learn from you. Being genuinely teachable is surprisingly disarming.

5. Be Present: Christ Is Within You

Whether by phone or in person, whether by email or over dinner, when your loved one is near you, they are near Jesus. By a mystery we can only faintly comprehend, Jesus takes up residence in his followers. As Paul said, “Christ lives in you” (Colossians 1:27). Astounding!

Though as a young atheist my Christian friends’ buoyant beliefs were irritating, their presence was soothing. I liked being near them. Only later did I realize that the peace I felt was the Prince of Peace within them. At the end of the day, all their well-intended explanations paled in comparison with the gift they gave to me: the present of presence. They were close enough, long enough, that because God is, his reality echoed through their humanity and something deep within me began to awaken.²

The Rest of the Story

People often ask if my God-encounter resolved all my philosophical angst. In a word: no. I still have

questions, but now I ask them looking into God’s eyes. Occasionally, I stumble upon a partial answer. But always, I find myself walking more closely with the God who mentors my mind. The goal of faith was never answers. The goal of faith is intimacy with Jesus—our near-yet-infinite, timeless-yet-ever-new treasure.

And now for the rest of the story:

“God is,” I realized. My worldview was irreparably altered.

I had never considered myself a prisoner, but instantly I knew that I was free. I had never considered myself dead, but now I knew that I was alive. The encounter was depositing within me a gift: faith—a living, growing substance not made by human hands. Escorted by faith, I entered an indescribably beautiful, stunningly satisfying, adventure-filled mystery:

Truth is not dead.

God has always lived.

Life is full of pain.

Death is but a door.

And the God who is, aches to love us.³

¹ Alicia Britt Chole, *Finding an Unseen God: Reflections of a Former Atheist* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009), 11–13.

² Chole, *Finding an Unseen God*, 145.

³ Chole, *Finding an Unseen God*, 164.

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Diversity in Community Changes Us

Why I go to church with white people.

Natasha Sistrunk Robinson

When I posted “I Go to Church with White People” on my blog, I was nervous. It was the first piece I’d written about racial issues. As an African American woman raised in the black church in South Carolina, my choice to worship at a predominantly white church was not normal. God, however, opened my eyes to the need for intentionally choosing a diverse community.

Embracing a community of faith that is diverse, trusting, and mutually submissive can humbly reveal much about God, and even more about ourselves. Diverse community can give us a clear lens to know and love God, plus help us understand our blind spots. This renewed vision compels us to love others well.

Multicultural small groups—those that are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse—can be a catalyst to help us love our neighbors because they bring us close to “the other”—people who are different from us in some way. Simple proximity to “others” is a good first step.

We truly become a united people, though, through sacred moments together as a result of prayer, study, listening, and learning. Through the fellowship and community of diverse believers, our hearts are changed and we can re-enter a diverse and changing world again and again as reconciled, transformed, and renewed people who glorify God.

When a watching world sees true heart change, it’s a compelling witness. This change begins by drawing close to God and embracing a diverse community. The Holy Spirit changes people, and he uses changed people to miraculously change other individuals, organizations (including the church), and the world.

Diverse Community Helps Us Grow

We naturally value unity in sameness—intimate connections with those who are like us. But it isn’t as natural to experience unity with “the other.” In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul writes that unity in the body of Christ requires complete humility, the bond of peace, gentleness, patience, and bearing with each other in love (4:2-3). Although God has graced us with different gifts and callings, Paul’s number one priority is that the church labors for unity in the faith, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity in Christ (4:12-13). Christ is glorified and the church is edified when there is sound teaching on, leadership toward, and strong commitment to unity in the body of believers. By embracing diverse community, we learn to unite with one another and grow together in light of our differences.

A multicultural community challenges us to revisit what the Bible says about loving our neighbor and “the other.” Divisions in the body are often caused because sin has blinded us. Furthermore, we are far more lenient on those with whom we experience commonality than on those who are different than us. In their classic book, *Divided by Faith*, Christian sociologists Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith report, “People do not evaluate ingroup and outgroup members in the same way.

Even when performing exactly the same actions, ingroup members are evaluated more positively and outgroup members more negatively.”

This reality is not simply a concern of our day—we see this partiality toward self-interest and self-preservation throughout the Bible. But God has called us into a new life reflected by a new way of righteous and holy living. Righteous living includes the way that we think about and interact with God and our neighbors. Paul writes: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to *their* needs... . Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:29, 31-32, emphasis added).

In our human nature, it is quite easy to become bitter, enraged, angry, and slanderous toward strangers in the world, particularly when we feel threatened, sense a difference of morals or values, or feel that our rights or expectations have been violated in some way. The world watches our violent behavior as we fight political battles, disengage coworkers, and dishonor or disrespect people in authority—whether a pastor, the President, or our bosses.

Paul has a straightforward command for this type of behavior: “Stop it!” These are selfish and self-seeking attitudes reflective of our former way of life which is corrupted and deceitful in its desires. Oftentimes, these sinful attitudes are not revealed until we are confronted by those who see things differently than us because of their own life experiences. When we’re confronted with our sin, God invites us to confess it. By embracing diverse community, we learn to confess our sins to one another.

Once we confess, we must ask the Lord for help and commit to wholesome speech that is considerate and edifies others according to *their* needs. Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to be kind and compassionate to one another. This kindness and compassion is reflected in the right speech and our willingness to forgive when we are offended. Living in a fallen world, it’s inevitable that we will hurt each other—intentionally and unintentionally. In light of those offenses, however, God empowers and compels us to forgive each other. By embracing diverse community, we learn to forgive one another.

Diverse Community Presents a Compelling Witness

The Apostle Paul was originally a persecutor of the church before God literally removed the blinders from his eyes and allowed him to see that the gospel was a message of reconciliation for both the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul was only able to teach what he had learned from his personal encounter with Jesus and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Before he lay down his rights and his life for the world, Jesus offered a prayer to his Father for all believers: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through [the apostles’] message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).

Getting close to God is an important first step that draws us near to others. Paul understood this when he reminded the church in Ephesus of the gospel’s intent to abolish the hostility between the Jews and Gentiles, and draw them together as one united and peaceful body (Ephesians 2:15-16). Christ “came and preached peace to you who were far away [the Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [the Jews]. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:17-18).” Get close to God and your former enemy. This is the apostle’s command.

Notice in Jesus’ prayer, however, that he takes unity to another level. Where Paul calls us to get close, Jesus prays for us to get “in.” He wants us to get “in” because the world is watching, and by getting “in,” the world may believe that the Father has sent the Son. Jesus says that he is “in” or “one” with the Father, and that the Father is “in” or “one” with him. While the two are distinct persons and have distinct roles, our God is united in purpose and spirit.

Jesus goes even further in his prayer to reveal the great mystery that through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, which is actively at work in the hearts of all who believe, we, too, can be “in” or united with God in purpose and spirit. By being united with God in the diverse and universal body of Christ, which is the church, all the world may see and testify that Jesus is Lord.

This is the only reason that unity in the body matters at all. Our living as reconciled people—first reconnecting the broken relationship with God our Creator, and then redeeming the broken relationships with other humans—is a testimony to the world that we are a new creation and a new family because Christ has come.

Diverse Community Prepares Us to Reach Out

It matters that Christ has come and that the world sees us relate to each other differently as a result. It also matters that we intentionally relate to the world differently. When we intentionally commune with “others” from different tribes, languages, people groups, and nations, we are better able to empathize with the plight of the diverse people groups who are in the world and outside of the church. Our proximity and unity with one another *inside* the body opens our eyes to transform the way that we relate to those *outside* the body of Christ.

The gospel comes alive in our daily lives when we remember that in the middle of this same prayer, Jesus said to his Father, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one... . Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15, 17-18).

Multicultural groups that pray, share the Word of God, embrace their differences, and value the uniqueness of “the other” in the body of Christ are then launched into the world as transformed and sanctified people to the glory of God. Together we stand as one in him in the world.

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Four Poems

by **Brett Foster**

Prayer Before Reading St Mark's Gospel

Please attack my colonialist ego,
o lion-face, o ancient evangelist.
The carcinogenic self, gleeful
but cruel in its unhealthy glow,
needs every means of resistance,
nor do I expect your treatment to be
remotely easygoing, if any freedom
is to be won from tumor, polyp, cyst.
Don't let my withheld forgiveness
be among the glittering cargo
of my sickly little boat, battered, kissed
by fortune's surges. Let me bestow
instead regard to every fellow narcissist,
to thief and punk, humbug and arsonist.

Poem with a Phrase from George Herbert

Even if the body's garment has been rent,
it can still become an establishment
for rebuilding spirit, new, tender, and quick.
If there is no market for one's sickness,
there is at very least an etiquette
for feeling better—felt pain and everything met
in extremity, that is. There exists
the tumor, cyst, or grisly polyp, and Christ
resides, persists amid these hundred hells,
his garment hemmed with pomegranates, golden bells.

A Thank-You Note, to Be Accompanied with Lyre

I have spent only three days here so far,
and have been gut-sick the entire time,
but I've managed to write three poems
I think I can live with, poems about living
and the other option. I hope I can live
with them. Besieged by adversities, I give
Praise to Somebody for sweet verse's

irresistible remedies, and so much more.
What more can an invalid ask for?
A fourth poem, you ask? Well, here it is.
At least let's praise art's ancient deities.
While Euripides staged tragedies in Athens,
raging reminders of our sad entanglements,
these Pan-foot gods were making merry,
cavorting in their floral dances, alive forever,
plagueless in the wide fields of Arcady.

Incantation

pistle and plunger
year like a dungeon
salt air and sea swell
all shall be well
reaching the edge
gives no more privilege
it so feels
like a telos
glimmer of sun
running in haggard
shows no regard
for so many hazards
these are the ill rhymes
of an untimely pilgrim