



# COMPASS

Christmas 2001

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*The Quarterly Journal of  
Non-religious Christianity*

*Pointing the way to revival  
and transformation*

## **PRAYER FROM THE ASHES**

**THE DAY THAT RESET  
OUR PRIORITIES**

## **JOY TO THE WORLD**

**CHRISTMAS FOR A  
PLANET IN CRISIS**

## **SECOND BLESSING**

**ANALYSING THE JABEZ  
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**HEXING HARRY – FRIEND OR FOE?**





**delirious?**



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# God news



We did wonder. What would readers think of us, placing Harry Potter on the cover? Would it appear trivial in the light of September 11th? What would our American cousins think of it?

*Compass* exists to promote prayer among Christian believers, unity among churches and ministries and has a mission focus. That's why we carry stories of effective mission around the world – both evangelistic and social action. One leads to another, and in many cases revival has turned to transformation of peoples and cultures. So we're interested in stories centred around prayer, relationships and the gospel.

But 'the news is not the news' – Malcolm Muggeridge quipped – 'it is merely an extraction of events going on'. He bemoaned the fact that there were powerful people, particularly in TV news departments, who trawled through hundreds of items each day and determined what the news was. The tragic loss of over 5,000 lives on September 11th is of course news whichever way you look at it. But hundreds of thousands of people have disappeared in Sudan – news that gets little more than a mention. There is the unbelievable persecution, torture and killings of Christians in China. In parts of Nigeria there remains the terrible harassment of Christians, the burning of church buildings, homes and schools – and mini-massacres go on almost every day. Past editions of *Compass* have reported on the situation in North Korea and China.

So we have covered September 11th. How could we ignore it? But Harry is in 200 countries and 47 languages, and is shaping values and perspectives among the young and impressionable. Will its supernatural, fantastical theme help or hinder discussions about the gospel and the God of miracles? Gary Pritchard shares his views.

Another book is causing quite a stir. *The Prayer Of Jabez* has done rather well, selling a staggering eight million copies. Why? Clive Price gives us the story – but asks some important questions.

So life in all of its ugliness and beauty, joys and horrors, goes on – reported and unreported. But God not only notes it all. He has involved himself in the pain, loss and tragedy. He was in the Twin Towers way before the fanatical terrorists came. And through these and other tragic events, the work of Christ's Church and initiatives such as Alpha, God is reconciling multitudes to himself. Alpha is now in 128 countries, most prisons in the UK – and in these islands alone there are well over 7,000 courses currently running.

So who knows what is really going on? What is the news from God's point of view? It's been said that we are not merely humans having a brief spiritual experience, but we are spirits having a brief sinful human experience. And in the age to come, we may be surprised at the news of who was in the kingdom and who was not. For as someone once said, 'God has a soft spot for sinners – his standards are quite low'. Thank God.

Gerald Coates, Editor

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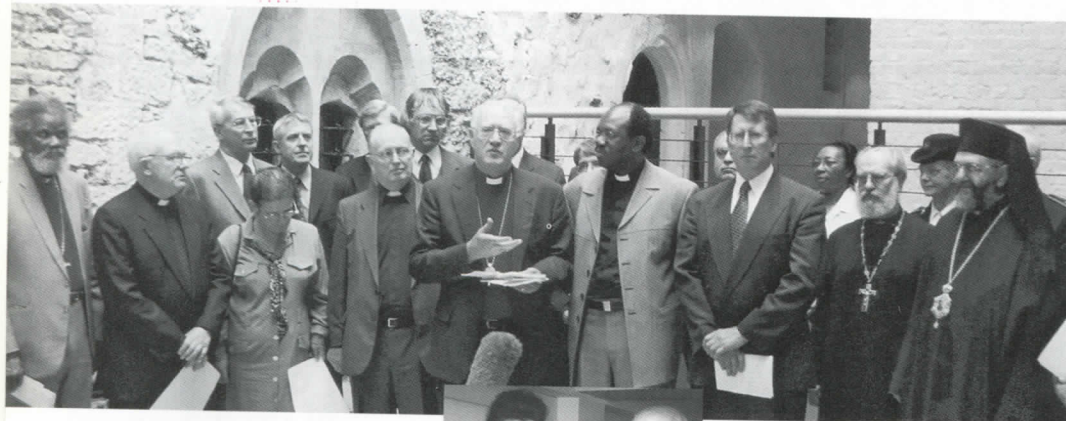
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## PIONEER.



# HOME news



## LEADERS UNITE IN COALITION

A DIFFERENT kind of coalition emerged in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks on America. A coalition of Christian leaders, issued 'an invitation to prayer' at Lambeth Palace.

Twenty national leaders of various denominations and groupings were present (as pictured) – including Roger Forster (Ichthus), Matthew Ashimolowo (KICC), Joel Edwards (Evangelical Alliance) and Gerald Coates (Pioneer).

It was in fact the first time that denominational leaders from Methodist, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutherans, Salvation Army and Afro-Caribbean community were together with the New Church leaders.

'We sense a deep anxiety in the community,' Dr Carey told reporters. 'The evidence is at Canterbury Cathedral where people are coming in great numbers. Eight hundred have been arriving at Exeter Cathedral – which normally has an attendance of 150.'

Because of the duration of the expected crisis, a 'day of prayer' was felt to be inappropriate. 'This was the beginning of a fresh initiative for Christians of all persuasions to gather in homes, schools, the workplace – as well as special events – to pray together for national leaders, restraint, for Christian unity and for the current environment of



**'The evidence is at Canterbury Cathedral where people are coming in great numbers. Eight hundred have been arriving at Exeter Cathedral – which normally has an attendance of 150.'**

uncertainty to give opportunity for the good news of Christ's salvation,' said Gerald Coates.

Numerous events were arranged hastily, from 24-hour prayer through to 24/7, led by Peter Greg sending out 5,000 e-mails about the invitation for prayer. Coincidentally, leaders across the Midlands had already arranged a prayer event that drew almost 3,000 people to the Bethel convention centre in the Birmingham area.

'At the civic reception there were numerous mayors, councillors, police, emergency workers and church leaders,' said Coates. 'The all-night prayer meeting – which began at 9pm and finished at 5am – covered issues dealing with racism, nationalism, support for civic leaders, church leaders and of course for political leaders handling this long term situation.'

Coates led one of the hour-long sessions that went on until midnight. 'It was a privilege to see what has happened across the area where Christians of all persuasions have been gathering for all-night prayer for two or three years now,' he added. 'God's favour and blessing is on their relationships and was therefore clearly evident in the prayer gathering.'

## WHO WANTS TO BE A HERO?

CONTESTANTS on the hit TV show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* are mythical heroes following in the

footsteps of Odysseus and Heracles, say psychologists. And, despite his mortal outward appearance, quiz-master Chris Tarrant is really a messenger of the gods.

Dr Martin Roiser and Dave Stevens from London's Thames Valley University explain that like the heroes of ancient Greece, contestants embark on a journey into the unknown and face tests of courage before finding their reward.

Brave participants willing to take risks are 'ordinary people transformed' in the classical tradition. 'They are our heroes. They are different from habitual quiz players who tend, unheroically, to memorise lists of facts.' (ananova/The Psychologist)

## CHALKE CHATS TO LIB DEMS

POPULAR speaker, writer and TV presenter Steve Chalke spoke at the recent Liberal Democrats Conference in Bournemouth – urging councils to put their faith and their money in faith-based service providers.



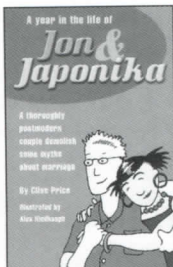
His speech opened a debate organised and chaired by Lib Dem Shadow Secretary for Work and Pensions Steve Webb and the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors. Chalke (pictured above, left of photo) had been invited because of his role as initiator of Faithworks, a national campaign set up to highlight the social contribution made by faith-based groups and churches.

During the debate he quoted from new guidelines, encouraging councils to work more closely with faith groups. The local government guidelines were commissioned following pressure from Faithworks campaigners. (Faithworks)



## MARRIAGE MYTHS

**HE CONSTRUCTS** websites. She sells organic pet food. He's in love with cars and computers. She enjoys black and white movies and whale song. He drives a big off-roader belching out black diesel fumes. She tries to stop builders uprooting trees. He's of Scottish descent. She's part Irish, part Russian, part Serb-Croat.



They're hopelessly incompatible. Yet they decide to spend the rest of their lives together. Their names are Jon and Japonika. And they are Britain's first ever cartoon couple to spearhead a national campaign promoting marriage.

This virtual husband and wife not only start out on the biggest adventure of their lives, but also expose a few myths about marriage on the way. Their life-changing journey is described in candid detail in a new book simply called, *A Year In The Life Of Jon & Japonika* – produced exclusively for National Marriage Week 2002.

Resources available for those wanting to take part include not only the Jon & Japonika 80-page quality paperback, but also an eye-catching poster and online leaders' manuals. They are all designed to help people organise Marriage Week events during 10th-17th February 2002, such as practical relationship support workshops and Valentine's Day celebrations.

'Churches are asked to commit to implement an activity that will broadly occur in and around the dates of National Marriage Week,' said NMW Director Richard, 'to invite friends and neighbours of church members and make it as outward-looking as possible. For churches already involved in family support, Marriage Week offers an opportunity to celebrate and publicise that involvement, as well as to reflect and evaluate.'

**(For more details on National Marriage Week, phone 01202 883887 or visit the official websites at [www.futureway.org.uk](http://www.futureway.org.uk) and [www.jonandjaponika.com](http://www.jonandjaponika.com))**



## SONG OF PRAISE

**A WORSHIP** song in the charts? That could be the result if enough copies shift of the latest single from rock band Delirious. Their classic praise anthem *I Could Sing Of Your Love Forever* is to be released into the mainstream marketplace on December 10th.

Re-recorded to be the cornerstone of a forthcoming 'Best Of...' compilation *Deeper*, the song has taken on a whole new lease of life. 'It was amazing,' said lead guitarist Stu G, 'to end up with a song that is so familiar but recorded in a way that sounds so fresh.'

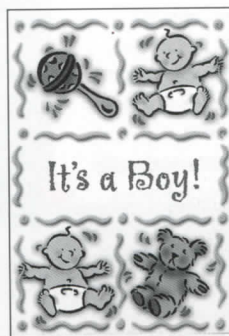
The magic ingredient seems to be a healthy dose of gospel choir, adding a fresh touch of drama to the song. The earlier version was recorded in 1994 and released on the very first *Cutting Edge* tape – and has always been a favourite among fans and band members alike. Delirious are currently on tour – for details, visit their website [www.delirious.co.uk](http://www.delirious.co.uk) (**Furious Records**)

## 'PRAY AGAINST TERROR' CALL

**INTERCESSORS** must declare war on terror – remembering that 'the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world' – says 24-7 prayer leader Pete Greig.

'Bush and Blair may not have realised it, but the "war on terrorism" is primarily spiritual,' he wrote in the 24-7 October newsletter. 'Our battle is not against flesh and blood.'

'The bitter fruit of Satan's dominion is terror in the heart of a grieving widow, terror in the heart of a starving Afghan refugee, even terror in the heart of a terrorist. So the stakes are high as we pray.'



Greig believes people's prayers are being answered. 'Amid many setbacks,' he said, 'God appears to be staging a comeback! Many churches are reporting a sharp increase in attendance. Ninety per cent of Americans claim to have taken to prayer.'

'The Bible is back on top of the bestsellers' lists and even people like Madonna, George Bush and Oasis star Noel Gallagher are going public with prayer. It may not be revival, but it's not a bad start.' (24-7)

## NAPPY CHRISTMAS

A BRAND new greetings card – said to be a 'totally absorbing' outreach tool – could change the way some churches evangelise their communities this Christmas.

Evangelist Steve Legg has come up with this novel way of presenting the gospel message – by wrapping it up in the language and symbols of 'new birth' announcements.

The 'It's A Boy' card tells the Christmas story and challenges the recipient to ask the giver for more information or to visit a specially dedicated website – [itsaboy.org.uk](http://itsaboy.org.uk).

Future plans for the 'It's a Boy' campaign include a local church resource manual full of exciting and unusual outreach ideas such as baby showers and 'new dad' evenings.

'This simple idea ties into the booming baby subculture which all ages can relate to – from siblings to grandparents,' said Legg. (For free sample copy, send an SAE to Breakout Publishing, PO Box 3070, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 6WX).

## GOSPEL CHALLENGE

**SPREADING** the gospel is becoming increasingly difficult in our pluralistic society, according to a recent survey among 2,000 evangelicals.

But Britain's social and cultural diversity could provide 'an immense opportunity' for strategic mission, says the Evangelical Alliance's UK Evangelism Co-ordinator Paul Harris. The EA's Commission on Strategic Evangelism is considering the results of the survey.





# WORLD NEWS

## WORLD 'GETTING WORSE' FOR BELIEVERS

**A PLEA** for religious tolerance amid the war against terrorism was issued at the annual International Christian Human Rights Conference in London.

'I fear that I must confirm a lethal reality,' said Steven McFarland, Executive Director of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'the world today is an inhospitable place for millions of religious believers. And it's getting worse.'

'When the world changed on September 11th, the background against which we struggle for religious freedom changed with it. In a war on terrorism, many democratic governments may be tempted to forego the pursuit of human rights and religious freedom.'

Demoting human rights – especially religious freedom – from foreign policy priorities would be 'a serious mistake,' he added. 'Religious freedom, tolerance, interfaith understanding, the rule of law, and due process aren't luxuries – they are absolutely necessary to combat terror and the conditions that incubate terrorism.'

'Advancing religious freedom is one of our most potent and indispensable weapons against religion-cloaked terrorism. It is key to the war's success – not an impediment to its favourable prosecution.'

Christian Solidarity Worldwide leader Mervyn Thomas, chairing the conference, called on Tony Blair to be consistent in supporting religious freedom during the war against terrorism. **(CSW)**



**Tony Blair called to be consistent in supporting religious freedom**

PHOTO: BENEDICT PARSONS



His California-based Zoo World Ministries (ZWM) puts on demonstrations, sponsors top skateboarders and produces its own brand of boards and clothing called 777 that offers an alternative to the dark skulls-and-demons themes often associated with the sport.

Shippy believes the thrills associated with skateboarding and other extreme sports point to deep needs in some of the participants. 'There's a lot of spiritual warfare in extreme sports. And it's not just attempting crazy tricks. It's the lives these kids live. They come from broken homes, violent backgrounds, hopelessness – not all, but too many of them.'

One of the world's best skateboarders is Jamie Thomas, who attends a Calvary Chapel church in Southern California. The 28-year-old is known for his 'Jesus on the Cross' manoeuvre, where he flies through the air with his hands outstretched to symbolise a crucifix. **(Charisma News Service)**

## RELIGION BOOSTS SELF-ESTEEM

**YOUNGSTERS** who feel good about themselves are typically churchgoers. According to the Associated Press, a recent study concludes that teenagers who participate in religious activities have higher self-esteem than those who don't.

The authors of the University of Michigan study – that was released at a recent meeting of the American Psychological Association – believe the findings indicate that churches and religious institutions teach teenagers how to have positive images of themselves. **(Charisma News Service)**

## SKATEBOARD IS PULPIT ON WHEELS

**TO MANY** teenagers it's just a skateboard, but to Steve Shippy it's a pulpit on wheels. The former BMX amateur champion is using the popular street sport to reach some in the fast growing extreme-sports scene with a message of radical faith.



## BIBLE CLAMPDOWN IN MADRID

**A BRETHREN** church in Vallecas, a Madrid suburb, has been refused permission to stage an open-air Bible reading marathon. The congregation, which has existed for 50 years, was turned down by the mayor who belongs to the government centre-right party, the Federation of Spanish Evangelicals' I C Press (ICP) reported.

Church members had applied for permission to use a public thoroughfare for a four-hour public reading of the Bible – an event staged in other Spanish cities without problem. One of the church leaders even said they would use another location if the council preferred.

But the council allegedly rejected the application on the grounds that the event would be 'in detriment to the use of the public thoroughfare', said ICP – even though the go-ahead has been given before for Roman Catholic processions at Easter and on other traditional feast days that caused far more congestion. ICP said that when church members pointed out the apparent inconsistency to the council, they were told, 'That's different'. **(Charisma News Service)**



## FUTURE TEENS BAFLE ELDERS

**TEENAGERS** are getting harder to understand than ever, according to a top Christian researcher. George Barna says that the next wave of adolescents will baffle their elders by happily embracing conflicting beliefs and values, and unorthodox views about God.

President of the California-based Barna Research group (BRG), Barna dubs the new generation the Mosaics in the light of their five major attributes. These are, his research concludes, their 'eclectic lifestyle...non-linear thinking style...fluidity of personal relationships...cut-and-paste values profile...hybrid spiritual perspective'.

The BRG studies found that teens' top-ranked faith-related goal was to have peace with God – but it ranked only seventh overall in relation to other goals. Research also concluded that the Mosaics have the lowest likelihood of being involved in church life when they are older and of living on their own of any group of teenagers surveyed in the last 20 years.

## TERRORISM PROMPTS DIVORCE RETHINK

WHILE thousands of homes have been shattered by the September 11th terrorist attacks, others are being brought back together. Hundreds of couples have decided not to go through with divorce and try to patch things up instead, says *The Houston Chronicle*.

Around 400 family-law suits have been dismissed in Harris County Family Law courts – more than three times the usual number. The tragedy 'puts it all in perspective,' said lawyer Annette Henry. 'Whatever was driving you crazy no longer seems so significant.'

(Charisma News Service)

## MISSIONARY WITNESSES TO HIS ABDUCTORS

**A MISSIONARY** survived an armed carjacking after witnessing to his abductors. Lance Hines' faith so impressed the five men who took him at gunpoint that they spared his life, asked him to pray for them – and even gave him some money to pay for a taxi ride home.

'God definitely gave me the grace right when I needed it,' said the Assemblies Of God worker after his ordeal in Lusaka, Zambia. 'He took care of me the whole time.'

Hines was snatched after he had driven some Bible school students to their homes after a church service. His abduction was one of five in the city on the same night – and in one of the others a person was shot and killed, according to the *Assemblies Of God News*. Father of three Hines said he thought he was dreaming at first. 'But when I saw the AK-47 in my face and 9 mm pistols on both sides, I knew it was for real.'

Hines was driven around the city for 45 minutes. Surprised at his calm manner, his abductors asked him why he was not afraid. When he told them he felt God's presence, they mocked him. But he continued to talk to them about God, and by the end of the ride they were listening to Christian music.

When they let him go 15 miles outside the city, the gang asked for prayer. Hines asked for some of the money they had taken from him to get back to Lusaka. 'The Lord gave me grace,' he said.

(Charisma News Service)

## MIRACLE MUM SURVIVES LIGHTNING STRIKE

**A CALIFORNIA** woman who survived a lightning strike says God miraculously spared her life. Adelina Mondragon, 27, was barbecuing chicken on a backyard patio for her sister's birthday party in Sonoma when a bolt struck her, melting a Jesus pendant given to her by her husband on their wedding day, *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported.

'I felt like my whole body was burning,' Mondragon said later. 'I felt like I was dying. I was very, very scared.' She cried out for her four-year-old son, Ismael, who was near her side, and heard him say, 'Mommy, don't die'.

Mondragon suffered first and second-degree burns on her neck, inner thighs, back and other places where metal on her clothing conducted the heat. Her doctor said she was 'extraordinarily lucky' to survive and not suffer from heart or muscle damage.

(Charisma News Service)

Lightning lady  
says God saved her

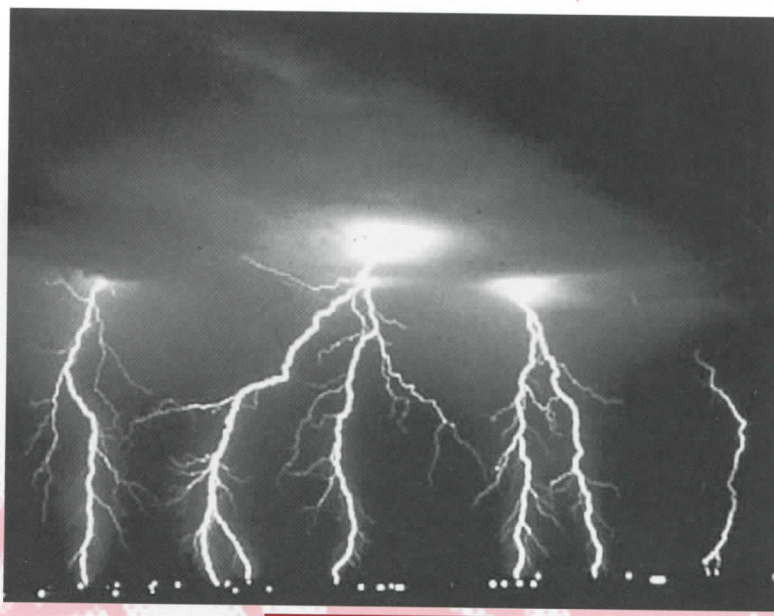


PHOTO: HORSBURGH.COM

## VOLCANO TRIBE GETS GOSPEL FIRE

**A PRIMITIVE** Philippine tribe displaced by a volcanic eruption ten years ago is discovering that God is a consuming fire – through the work of a charismatic African American missionary.

Since 1997, Elizabeth Copeland of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), America's largest Pentecostal denomination, has been ministering to the small, dark-skinned people of Sapang Bato, a remote village in Pampanga province in the Philippines.

The villagers, known as the Aetas, lived secluded in the mountains, partly because they were shunned for their dark skin and coarse hair. When Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, they were relocated to an area devoid of electricity and water, leaving them in poverty.

Copeland, a former fashion designer, responded by setting up factories to manufacture the Aetas' woodcarvings and intricately woven fabrics. By meeting the Aetas' physical needs, the 62-year-old missionary has been able to preach the gospel.

(Charisma News Service)



# Prayer rises

**In the wake of September 11th, one of the few things we can be certain of is that people are turning to prayer. Gerald Coates reflects on the day that reset the world's priorities**

**P**resident Bush is not what we thought he was and did not do what we thought he would do. Similar things could be said of 'President' Blair. He has become what we thought he would never be. The former is uniting his nation; the latter is concerned with uniting nations.

But there is little doubt whatever that our world, its cultures and peoples, have irrevocably changed since September 11th. The Twin Towers have gone, the Pentagon breached, enemies unified, religion honoured and vilified.

Airlines, shops, holiday operators, hotels, theatres and service industries have all been heavily affected across North America and Europe and beyond.

PHOTO: PA NEWS

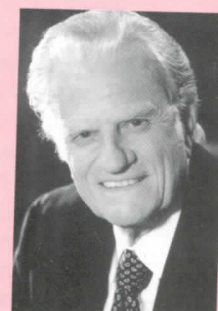
## Is the stage set for revival?

**Soon after the terrorist attacks, there were reports of a new awakening across America. More people were praying, buying Bibles and attending church — but will it last? Clive Price compiles the stories**

**T**HE stage has been set for 'a new spirit' in America. That was the message from world evangelist Billy Graham when he gave a brief sermon during an interfaith service at Washington's National Cathedral to mark the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Graham noted that the tragedy could give a message of hope to the present and future. 'Yes, there is hope for the present,' he said, 'because I believe the stage has already been set for a new spirit in our nation.'

'One of the things we desperately need is a spiritual renewal in this country. We need a spiritual revival in America. God has told us in his word time after time that if we repent of our sins and we turn to him, he will bless us in a new way.'





# from the ashes



My wife Anona and I were shopping in a south-west London supermarket when I got the first phone calls. Amazingly, it was considerably less than one hour since two aircraft deliberately crashed into New York's Twin Towers.

'Are you near a TV screen?' asked Andrew, an 18-year-old I have been helping to mentor. Then similar messages came from Chairman of *March For Jesus* Steve Clifford, *Delirious?* lead singer Martin Smith and my close friend and colleague Noel Richards.

All were incredulous and mesmerised by TV images I hadn't yet seen. We gathered our purchases, and quickly drove back across the Thames to our London apartment. We sat like television addicts, unable to switch the set off.

## INTENSE SEASON

Tennis commentator Gerald Williams called a couple of days later. 'This is the other Gerald here,' he quipped. 'I have just returned – would you believe it – from New York where I have been commentating.'

He stayed near Heathrow overnight, and drove to his North Wales home on that fateful day. Nearing his town he stopped for lunch. 'I was watching TV for a full five or six minutes before I realised this was actually happening. I could not believe it. I thought I had been watching fiction.'

We all did.

But reality was bound to hit just about everywhere. Television programmes and cinema films were pulled as so much looked embarrassingly inappropriate.

Journalist A A Gill commented, 'We have spent the best part of a decade, being uncritically fascinated and tickled by (celebrity) people.

'How could we have not seen that Calista's waist measurement, Tom's sexuality and Arnold's worldview, did not amount to a hill of beans?' He added somewhat soberly, 'We now know that a real fireman is more inspiring, compelling and worthy of our attention, than Sly dressed up as a fireman'.

The nightmare brought together the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and well over 1,000 evangelicals for prayer in London Westminster.

Phone lines were hot at London's Evangelical Alliance offices – with Joel Edwards, the Archbishop of Canterbury and several others including myself, pushing for an intense season of prayer (see report in our 'home news' section).

There were thousands of prayer meetings in homes, church buildings, cathedrals and conference centres, schools, businesses and universities. Muslim leaders attended Christian events – both small and private, large and public.

That was preceded by a Christian alliance of leaders – never gathered before – which included the Archbishop of Canterbury, Baptist, Methodist, Greek Orthodox, Moravian, Black Pentecostal

and New Church leaders such as Roger Forster and Matthew Ashimolowo.

It was no good trying to pretend everything was going to be OK, or that the lull which followed the outrage would lead to nothing. It was about to lead to something.

The New World Order re-emerged in Prime Minister Blair's speech. A resolute President Bush surprised even his opponents who hugged and feted him. Dr Billy Graham spent a night in prayer with him and Bush had already surrounded himself with committed Christians – including Colin Powell – who urged restraint and justice, not revenge. ►

The congregation included President Bush and former Presidents Bill Clinton, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. 'No matter how hard we try, words simply cannot express the horror, the shock and the repulsion of what took place,' said Graham. 'Today we come together in this service to confess our need of God.'

## CHURCHES SWAMPED

According to *Time* magazine, churches were 'swamped' after September 11th, but the influx 'raised almost as many questions as the atrocity – about both God and American faith'.

Newspapers across the country reported on packed churches the weekend after the attacks, and bookstores also told of a jump in the sales of books and Bibles – the latter said to be up 27 per cent. But the Gallup Poll group said recently there was little evidence that there had been a 'new awakening of spirituality'.

Millions of Americans turned to churches to seek answers and refuge in the wake of the tragedy, *The New York Times* reported just days after the attack. People lined up outside churches hours before services began, National Public Radio reported. ►

New York skyline as it was, now changed forever





# Prayer rises from the ashes

No – it was impossible to continue on the basis that ‘things soon got back together after the Gulf War’. This was different. Were sleeper cells still in the USA, London and other Continental European cities?

People did not want to pay huge sums to be entertained. So they sat at home watching the news. Back to A A Gill: ‘It is as if the whole of culture has been slapped and shown itself in the mirror to see what a ridiculous and painful little trollop it has become’.

## UNBRIDLED PASSION

Centuries rarely start on time. The 21st century started on September 11th. I expect you remember where you were when you first heard the news.

We are dealing with an enemy with no borders. This enemy purposefully and mercilessly crushed, burned and vaporised 5,500 people, orphaned 10,000 children and devastated thousands of husbands, wives, flatmates and friends who laid a table that night for the evening meal – but whose loved ones never came home and never would. They came from 70 nations, something the killers may have underestimated to their own terror.

**‘It is as if the whole of culture has been slapped and shown itself in the mirror to see what a ridiculous and painful little trollop it has become’**

**A A Gill, journalist**



Whatever the reason behind it, terrorism is completely contrary to the teachings of Jesus: ‘bless your enemies’; ‘do good to those who persecute you’; ‘love is faithful – kind – does not hold grudges – does not repay evil for evil’.

Even the old ‘eye for an eye’ argument is often misunderstood. When a wife or child is killed, gathering friends for revenge was so easy. So the dictum provided justice – ‘an eye for an eye’ – and not an eye or limb more, never mind the killing of other innocent people.

It was restraint, a guard and a rein on unbridled passion. That is why we utterly disown the medieval crusades against the Muslim community and the unspeakably appalling cruelty that went with them.

And it was encouraging to hear of women out on the streets of Manchester – Muslim women rejecting violence and terrorism. The majority of Muslims across the western world denounced the attacks on New York and Washington.

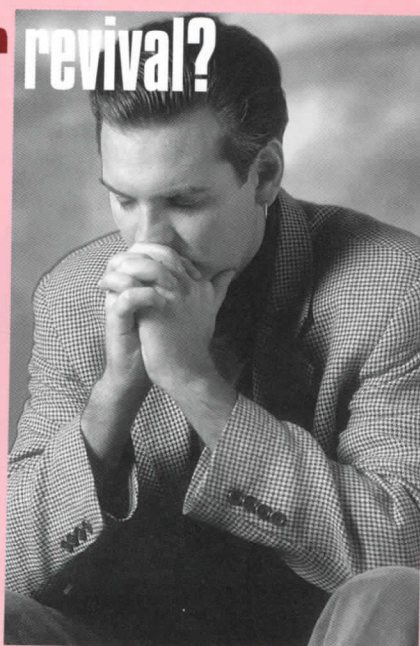
Sadly, Islamic terrorists are committed to the idea that poverty and death are

## Is the stage set for revival?

On a day when the projected death toll topped 5,000 and President Bush referred to the war on terrorism as a ‘crusade’, many who were not churchgoers flocked to houses of worship from coast-to-coast to grapple with the emotional wounds left by the attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

At Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York there was standing room only at the church’s four services. Pastor Jim Cymbala named some of the church members still missing from the tragedy and two who survived gave their testimonies in the evening service.

During the four services, the church gathered 700 decision cards from people who went forward to give their lives to Christ.



Associate pastor Al Toledo said there was ‘an unusual tenderness’ in the church, noting that ‘people were very tender – this whole situation has humbled our city and our nation’.

At Christ Church in Oak Brook, Illinois, mourners gathered at Christ Church of Oak Brook to watch and listen to pastor Jeffery Mladenik’s final Bible class on videotape, *The Chicago Sun-Times* reported. Mladenik, 43, was killed onboard American Airlines Flight 11, one of two planes that crashed into the WTC.

## INNOCENT PEOPLE

In his teaching, Mladenik said the words that church members believe came from divine providence. Speaking of the Bible, he said: ‘If I died right in front of it, it’s like giving somebody the most precious thing you can possibly give them...I’m really free for the first time in my life. I’m really free’.

Elsewhere, the suspected mastermind of the terrorist attacks was spotlighted in some services. Al Meredith, senior minister at Wedgwood Baptist





morally superior to a life of pleasure. They do not want what we have – they want to destroy it. They see it as corrupting and degraded. However, as Christians we have an absolute moral duty to alleviate poverty and starvation and so we shall.

Perhaps there's one thing that has seriously been questioned, and has suffered since September 11th. What is it? Tolerance. We have tolerated the intolerable – and it will be a long time before we do so again. What will take its place? Racism, masquerading as protectionism? Pride masquerading as

resolve? Prejudice masquerading as shrewdness?

The terrorists, we are told, were instructed in their final moments to straighten their clothes as they prepared to meet God by killing thousands of innocents and taking the nations to war.

John the Baptist teaches us to straighten our crooked, evil and impure ways because of the one who was about to come. And when he came, his teaching on life stood apart from all others who have been called 'gods'.

*'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God'* (Matthew 5:8,9).

**'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God'**

**Jesus Christ**

## DEEP ANXIETY

I was privileged to join about 25 other senior church leaders, with Archbishop George Carey, at Lambeth Palace at 10am on Tuesday 2nd October. This was to launch an 'invitation for prayer' across the prayer networks – including 24/7 – denominations and streams.

It was decided not to go with a day of prayer. The seriousness of the situation is going to demand believers coming together to pray regularly for peace in the world, wisdom for our leaders and opportunities for the gospel in the light of the fear, uncertainty and very deep anxiety that is affecting millions of people at this time.

The call for prayer was carried on ITN lunchtime news and in the evening bulletins – as it was in the quality press. The rest of the media virtually ignored the call. But I

have no doubt, as the situation unfolds, that there will be further opportunities for the Archbishop and many of us, to speak about the need for prayer, and particularly Christians and people of goodwill coming together to ask for God's help.

After prayer leader Pete Greig and I consulted, 24/7 e-mailed 5,000 people with news of the day and are carrying material on their web pages. Lambeth Palace have their own web page as well.

It is through the prayer networks, and by word of mouth, that people have been gathering to intercede. Our

hope is that prayer will continue across denominations and streams for as long as necessary.

Several people have said to me that they are really glad the issue has gone away. But that is not the reality we are facing – either in Afghanistan or indeed in London and other parts of the world.

Whatever we do, we cannot carry on 'business as usual'. I would strongly encourage us to build prayer into our regular Sunday/weekend gatherings.

● **Gerald Coates is Editor of Compass and leader of the Pioneer team.**

## Useful websites

Web page for George Carey:  
[www.invitationtoprayer.org.uk](http://www.invitationtoprayer.org.uk)

Web page for 24/7: [www.24-7prayer.com](http://www.24-7prayer.com)

## "US church leaders believe America's spiritual landscape has been changed as markedly as the New York skyline by the terrorist attacks"

Meredith acknowledged the crowd's hesitancy to accept that God cares for bin Laden, but he said: 'We have to find a way to rise above revenge, because when that happens, innocent people get hurt'. Two years ago, the church suffered its own tragedy, when a man opened fire in the sanctuary, killing seven and wounding seven others before killing himself.

From schools and local governments to Congress and the White House, Americans had joined in public prayer within a week after the terrorist attacks – and the usual protestors remained silent. The attacks prompted a 'remarkable convergence' of patriotism and spirituality, reported *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Church in Fort Worth, Texas, led his congregation in singing the familiar *He's Got The Whole World In His Hands*. According to *The Dallas Morning News*, he then asked parishioners to join him in a variation of the tune: 'He's got Osama bin Laden in his hands'.

The newspaper said the congregation sang hesitantly at first, but most quickly joined in.

In addition, Americans have turned to God in small and large prayer gatherings – even in some unlikely places. In several Atlanta high schools, officials sanctioned impromptu prayer services by students.

'Our first reaction was to pray,' said Patti Wells, a 17-year-old senior. 'A lot of us are brought up with Christian morals and values, and we realise that needs to be back in our school and back in our lives.'

US church leaders believe America's spiritual landscape has been changed as markedly as the New York skyline by the terrorist attacks. They reckon people will be looking for answers for some time to come.

Although a dramatic rise in church attendance reported immediately after the attacks seemed to have dropped, pastors and ministry heads believe the greater openness to God will remain.

'We're not soon going to forget what we've been through, and it's forever changed us,' said Lyndon Harris, pastor of St Paul's Chapel near to the WTC. He believed the time of crisis would cause many people to reclaim their faith, *The New York Times* reported.

'It's a natural pillar of their existence. My sense is perhaps it could be long term, not just a flash-in-the-pan experience.'

**(Compiled from reports by Charisma News Service)**



**Many people were moved when the Queen ordered her guards band to play the US national anthem at Buckingham Palace, in the wake of September 11th. Guy Malone believes the act was deeply significant for Britain and America's shared past**

**F**or the second time in a week, I again watched CNN with my mouth hanging wide open. Amid the tragic history made recently, one event took place whose unimaginable significance was unfortunately lost to most Americans.

In England, with hundreds or perhaps thousands of mourners pressing the gate, Buckingham Palace played our national anthem instead of the time-honoured tunes for the Changing Of The Guard.

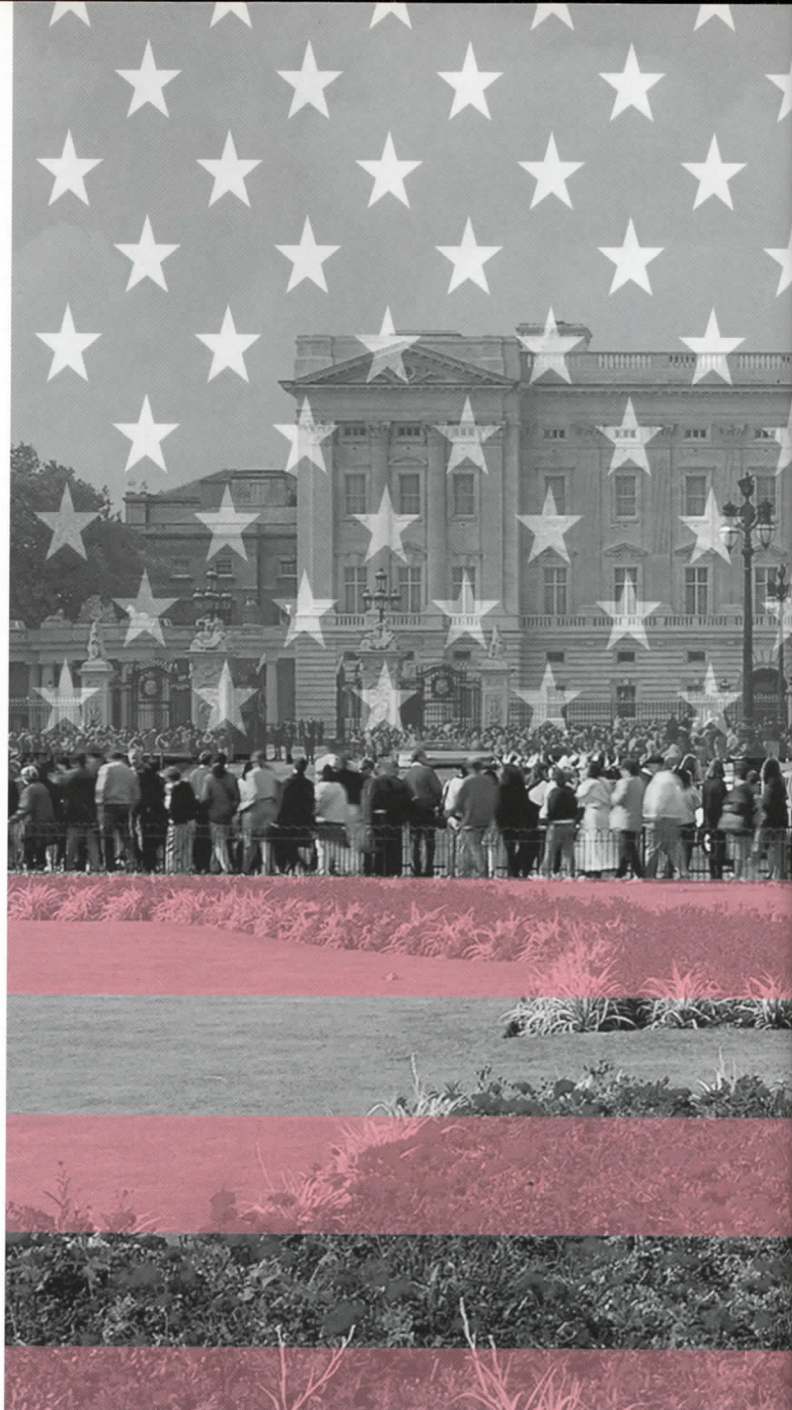
*God Bless America* would have honoured us greatly. *America The Beautiful* would have been more than enough. But England somehow chose the one song written while our two countries were at war.



PHOTO: ERIC DRAPER

**'America will never forget the sounds of our national anthem playing at Buckingham Palace'**

**George W Bush,  
US President**



# They played

Most of us have forgotten, but the very night Francis Scott Key penned *The Star Spangled Banner*, British blood was being poured out on American soil. '*The bombs bursting in air*' we so proudly sing of were in fact being fired at Redcoats.

Nonetheless, this is the song England upended her own tradition with to dedicate to us while we mourned. In so doing, I believe

England unknowingly pierced well beyond the veil of international politics, and that this single act has healed a supernatural wound that has festered for over two centuries.

## **BROKE AWAY**

To explain, consider the Jewish 'bar mitzvah'. When a boy comes of age, his family conducts a holy service in which he receives his father's blessing. He is thus received into

manhood, spiritually empowered to go out into the world bearing the family name, and expected to have great success.

Similarly, when ordaining a minister or sending out a missionary, Christians 'lay hands' on the head of a new leader, imparting the spiritual authority of the Church, and to signify their blessing upon the emerging ministry. That's not





enough (although less than 100 years passed before we fell into terrible war with ourselves, which to be honest still isn't over). Worse, we became obnoxiously drunk with our quick success.

As England lost her territories over the decades, America conquered the world. Of course trade routes quickly reopened between us, and we've had a great economic relationship for most of the time since. Our governments have successfully worked together as well – you'd even call us allies.

But facing facts – the actual people of our countries have barely maintained a civil savagery in our attitudes toward one another. To the English, Americans are snotty brats, spoiled beyond redemption by our money, power and conveniences. Meanwhile, we disdain the English concept of royalty and tradition, and in fact, think you're rude and stuffy.

The Fourth of July, garishly celebrated as our 'Independence Day', is today commonly referred to in English slang as 'good riddance day'. You've always viewed us as the prodigal son who ran off with the inheritance.

We've considered you the jealous brother who got irate because the father blessed us anyway. Sure, things couldn't be better on the ►

# our song

what happened when America 'left home', however. We broke away in rebellion to England's authority: We actually took up arms against the 'parents' who birthed us.

Yes, yes, our cause was certainly just. History has never begrudged us that. It might even be rightly argued that God was on our side. We certainly became successful





economic and political fronts, but deep down...we've never really particularly cared for one another.

Am I being unfair here? Of course, we're the best of friends. After all, wasn't it America that came to England's aid in not one, but two world wars? No America, we did not. And how dare we be so pretentious to even think that? We protected our interests, and that is all.

### DARKEST HOUR

Churchill and Roosevelt worked together for years to enlist America's aid against Hitler, to no avail. It took Pearl Harbour to get us involved. Yes, we bled and died on England's soil this time, but not for the English, for us. Certainly not because she needed us in her darkest hour.

And now we face probably our darkest hour. But we didn't even call, and England has already answered.

They could have sent us flowers. They could have offered an eloquent speech of condolence, or perhaps sent someone over to stand in front of the cameras with one of our leaders – the usual international stuff.

Instead, the great and proud England elegantly humbled herself, abandoning a tradition more sacred than baseball, apple pie and even Mum herself will ever be to us. They took that tradition and placed it on an altar of forgiveness, which in our arrogance, we never thought even once to ask for. Then they willingly burned it – in our honour – for all the world to see. They played our song.

For all intents and purposes, England bar-mitzvahed us. She has received us as all grown up now, and has moved to make us a family again. Heaven will record this as the day that the rift caused by our violent separation was finally closed. Only it was not slick American 'ingenuity', but England, with her superior character, who won this victory before God and man.

Thank you, England. My only regret is that we were too slow – too in shock, and frankly, too unaware of what this truly meant – to grasp the significance of your sacrifice or even to respond in a proper manner.

I wish the news and all the



**We are equals,  
and right now  
we will need  
to cling to  
each other  
desperately if  
we are to  
survive the  
challenges of  
this war**

world had  
seen our President  
standing at attention,  
saluting you across the sea, but  
it just didn't happen like that.  
We're stupid that way England,  
and for that, we are so very sorry.

### SACRIFICIAL LOVE

But I salute you. I pray that all America will also. You've been so patient with us, waiting for us to grow up into mature, decent adults – the kind you'd actually want to be friends with.

However, so much time has passed that we now stand shoulder







mutually co-operating world powers. Now, your act of sacrificial love has made us brothers. May we forever mourn together when the other is mourning. May we forever rejoice as the other rejoices. And may we now and forever always leap to the other's aid in future times of crisis, even though it may cost us dearly. You have already led us in this, not by power or might, but by example.

Thank you, England. We appreciate you, and we love you. And just in case you've never heard the words spoken from an upstart American – 'Long Live The Queen'.

And may God bless Great Britain.

to shoulder, in a way that parents and children simply cannot. We are equals, and right now we will need to cling to each other desperately if we are to survive the challenges of this war.

Thank you, England. Weeks ago, we were merely

**Guy Malone is a counter-cult researcher residing in Roswell, New Mexico, USA ([alienresistance.org](http://alienresistance.org), [www.guymalone.com](http://www.guymalone.com)). His article has been forwarded to the Prime Minister's office.**

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# Home is where the art is

**Steve Turner calls for a revolution in the arts — led by passionate and righteous Christians**

**A** lot of our art making is instinctive. What compels us to create is something inside that needs to get out. That's why the quality of our interior life is so important.

If we are living righteously and God's laws are constantly before us, then the imaginations of our heart will reflect that. If we are constantly learning from Scripture, even our unconscious will be being purified, and our dreams will be different from the dreams of the unregenerate person.

It's only when our thoughts and our behaviour are brought in line with God's will that we can fulfill T S Eliot's hope of an art that is 'unconsciously Christian'. If we care little about Christian obedience and then endeavour to create art that reflects a Christian perspective, then we have lost our integrity (defined by the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as 'the state of being whole. The condition of being unified or sound in construction'). We are acting a role.

## CREATING FIRE

I have found that some of my clearest and most apparently 'spiritual' writing has come when I've abandoned the big task of trying to say something profound and am just fooling around with words. This is because I then unconsciously draw on the reserves accumulated over years of knowing God. I'm more likely to come up with great insights while writing about a coffee mug or a cereal packet than if I contemplate *la condition humaine*.

I think this is what Bono was getting at when he talked about the U2 track *Where The Streets Have No Name*, which started off as a phrase from his experience of Ethiopian refugee camps and ended up being about wanderlust and heaven.

'It has one of the most banal couplets in the history of pop music,' he said, 'but it also contains some of the biggest ideas. In a curious way, that seems to work. If you get too heavy about these things, you don't communicate. But if you're flip or throwaway about it, then you do. That's one of the paradoxes I've had to come to terms with.'

I know that it is what the poet Luci Shaw meant when she examined her poem *Saved By Optics*, about an experiment to create fire by using a lens of ice, and

**Our dreams will be different from the dreams of the unregenerate person**

**I'm more likely to come up with great insights while writing about a coffee mug**

found reflections of faith. 'I had felt no compelling theological motivation to write this poem,' she said, 'simply a fascination with an intriguing physical phenomenon. But much later, as I reread the completed poem with a more critical eye...I became aware of some correspondences that had until then escaped my attention.'

We can probably all think of examples of people whose lives became corrupted but who continued to put forward Christian truths in their work. There is the gospel singer who cheated on his wife, the filmmaker who was caught up in a web of 'financial irregularities', the writer who cynically churned out what he knew the market wanted while indulging in secret vices.

Young missionary Jim Elliot, famed for his death in 1956 at the hands of the Aucas Indians he was attempting to reach, wrote in his diary in February 1950: 'I see tonight that in spiritual work, if nowhere else, the character of the worker decides the quality of the work. Shelley and Byron may be moral freelancers and still write good poetry. Wagner may be lecherous as a man, and still produce fine music, but it cannot be so in any work for God'.

Paul could refer to his own character and manner of living for proof of what he was saying to the Thessalonians. Nine times over in the first epistle he says, 'You know,' referring to the Thessalonians' first-hand observation of Paul's private as well as public life. Paul went to Salonica and lived a life that more than illustrated what he preached — it went beyond illustration to convincing proof. No wonder so much work in the Kingdom today is shoddy — look at the moral character of the worker.

People who are Christians can still succeed in the arts while living sub-Christian lives. But the witness will eventually disappear from their work. They won't be contributing to the big debate. They will begin to remain silent about controversial issues because they no longer want to risk being persecuted. Fame, money and critical respect have a subtle way of cooling spiritual ardor.

In 1994 I interviewed a musician in New York who had been very open about his Christian faith in the secular press. He told me about his conversion through reading the gospels at the age of 23 and the help given him by a youth pastor. Typically for an artist he was not attracted to the institutional aspects of Christianity — but to the dynamism of Christ.





I was excited that someone who was so successful in his particular genre of music was so unapologetic about his beliefs. But I was also aware of those signs that often herald a weakening.

He was cautious about calling himself a Christian, preferring the description 'lover of Christ.' He was also out of fellowship. 'I haven't found a church, but I've been looking,' he said, going on to say that he wanted something 'like the way the apostles met. Just a few people getting together.'

### INAPPROPRIATE SEX

In 2000 I saw him quoted in one magazine as saying, 'I don't really call myself a Christian in a traditional sense, nor do I feel connected to any specific religious dogma'. In another source he said, 'Indulgence can lead to epiphanies more times than abstinence. Getting drunk and having inappropriate sex with someone, you learn about yourself. It thrusts you into the commonality of things.'

Instead of resisting the predominant view he bought into it. I think his mistake came when he dissociated himself from the Church. It sounds wonderfully pure to declare that you are a 'lover of Jesus,' but if you truly love Jesus you will love his Church (including that part of it now in heaven) and his teachings.

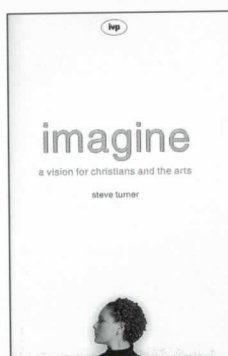
The original title for my book (on the arts) was, *Being There*. This was, of course, suggested by the Jerzy Kosinski novel and the later film starring

**'If you get too heavy about these things, you don't communicate'**

**Bono**

**'I think really, that as in all other fields, we must be Christian'**

**Muggeridge**



Peter Sellers. I chose it because, reduced to a single phrase, that was what I felt I was calling Christians in the arts to do.

I was calling them not to a particular strategy and definitely not to a special subculture, but to simply 'be there' where it counts and create something different and challenging by staying faithful and allowing that faith to invade their vision.

I was privileged to know the British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge. He was an early role model for me in my journalism because he had a wide knowledge of the world picked up over years working as a foreign correspondent, broadcaster and magazine editor. But he had also developed an acute spiritual insight after a conversion fairly late in life.

One day when talking to him at his home in the Sussex countryside I asked him what a Christian in the arts or media should be doing today. I thought that because of his well-known iconoclasm and love of satire he would suggest some clever way in which we could topple the false gods of our society. I waited to hear his plan. But what he said surprised me, because he was more concerned with our personal faithfulness than our grand plans:

'I think really, that as in all other fields, we must be Christian. That is essentially what a Christian has to do. There are some Christians who I have met in the media and their influence has been out of proportion to what it might seem to be, just because they were Christians and were known to be Christians.'

'I don't think that a Christian has to be a particular type of Christian to be a diplomat, or a particular sort of Christian to be a doctor, or a particular sort of Christian to be a labourer. He has, in all circumstances, to be a Christian.'

If we want to see art that challenges the prevailing secularism we need artists who are not only skillful but also theologically well equipped, grounded in a fellowship and living obedient lives.

Christianity is not a mere philosophy. It is a spiritual relationship that results in changed thoughts and actions, and it will only rub off on our work if it has first of all permeated our lives. As the late political activist Jerry Rubin once wrote, 'Revolution is only as high as the people that make it.'

**Steve Turner is a poet, journalist and author. His article is taken from his latest book *Imagine: A Vision For Christians And The Arts*, published by IVP and available through Pioneer Direct.**



**T**he Harry Potter phenomenon has undoubtedly made a huge impact on popular culture, and has rewritten the records on book sales and box office takings. But not everyone is in agreement over whether the influence of J K Rowling's fictional hero is a positive one.

The themes of magic and wizards have divided opinion among Christian commentators on both sides of the Atlantic.

Christian journalist Caryl Matrisciana warns that under the guise of harmless children's fantasy literature, the Harry Potter craze is a massive effort to draw children around the world to the occult which threatens to undermine Christianity.

John Buckeridge, Editor of British magazine *Youthwork*, also warns of the dangers of the Potter influence. 'The growing number of books and TV shows like *Harry Potter* and *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* encourage an interest in magic as harmless fun,' he said.

'However, for some young people it could fuel a fascination that leads to dangerous dabbling with occult powers. So what starts out as spooks and spells can lead to psychological and spiritual damage.'

Many commentators however, point to the positive potential of the Hogwarts pupil's impact. Some argue that one of the salutary effects of fantasy writing is to remove us from the everyday world and prompt us to look at the ordinary in fresh ways.

G K Chesterton claimed that his own journey to Christian faith began with his childhood absorption in fairy tales. From such tales he learned that the world is precious but puzzling, coherent but mysterious, full of unseen

**'I was eager to get to Hogwarts first because I like what they learned there and I want to be a witch.'**

**Gioia, age ten.**

connections and decisive truths. C S Lewis also made a similar claim.

Other writers point to what they see as double standards in how the Christian community interprets such phenomena. US media presenter Ken Meyers compares *Star Trek* technology with Potter's magic yet suggests it is treated differently by Christians, even though the two have similar ends.

'If we imagine somebody stepping on to a little circle and

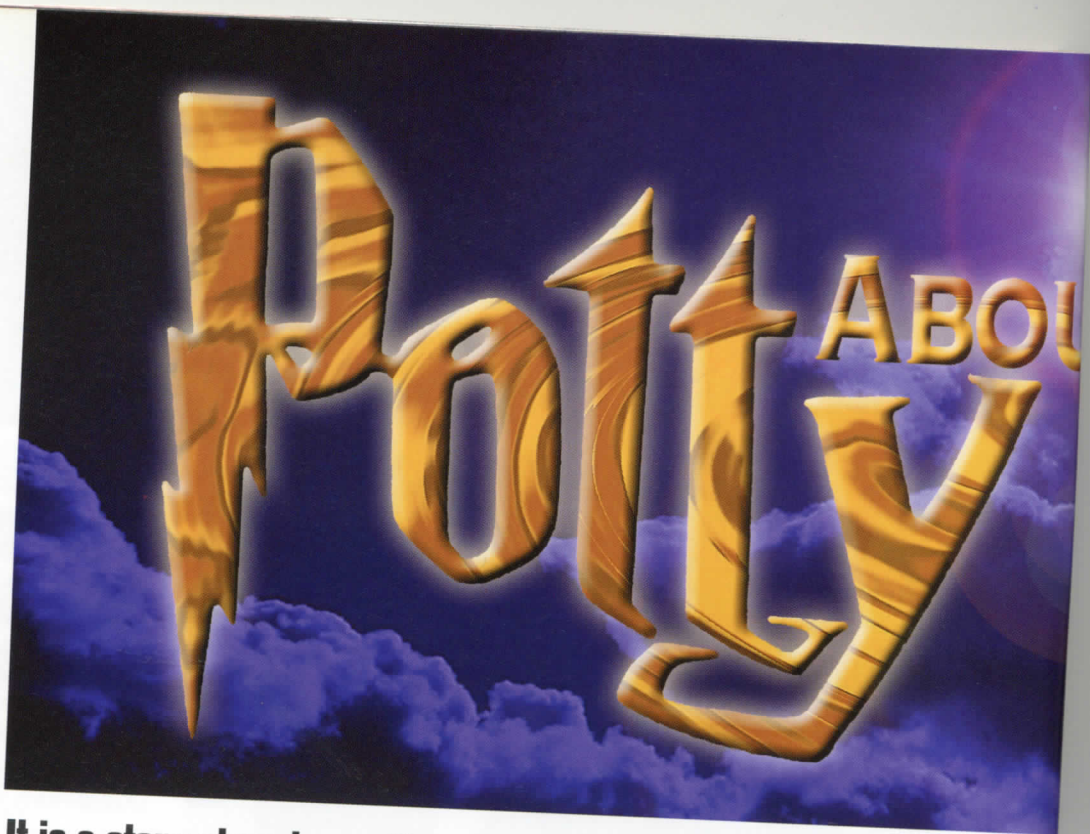
then suddenly dissolving, and then reappearing instantly somewhere else, and we call this a transporter, and we're told that it is a device that is created by technology, then we go "ooh, that's cool";' he said. 'But if we imagine someone waving a wand and then disappearing and reappearing somewhere else, we're much less comfortable.'

### **ARCHETYPAL FEARS: Harry Potter gets a shrink**

Child psychotherapist Margaret Rustin has attempted to explain exactly how J K Rowling produced Potter mania. Rustin, a distinguished expert at London's Tavistock Clinic, has isolated the factors in Rowling's work that ensure its appeal for adults and children.

This story of wizards, potions and broomsticks, it turns out, in fact deals with archetypal fears of loss and separation and, as such, is copying a formula set down by other great works of children's literature, such as C S Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*.

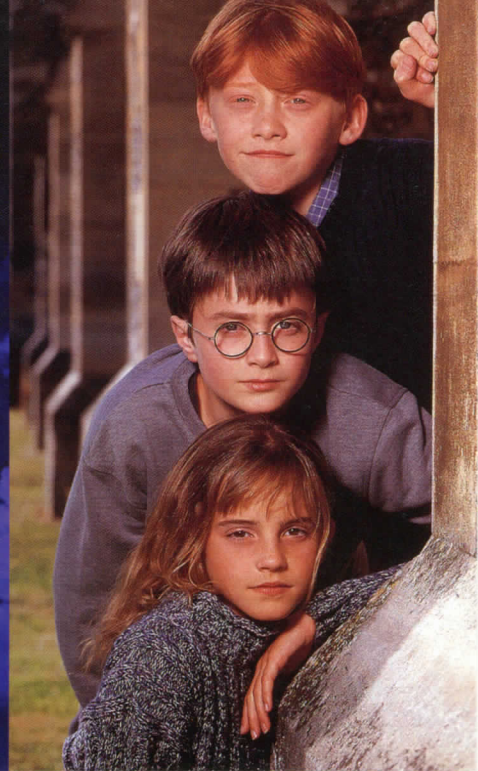
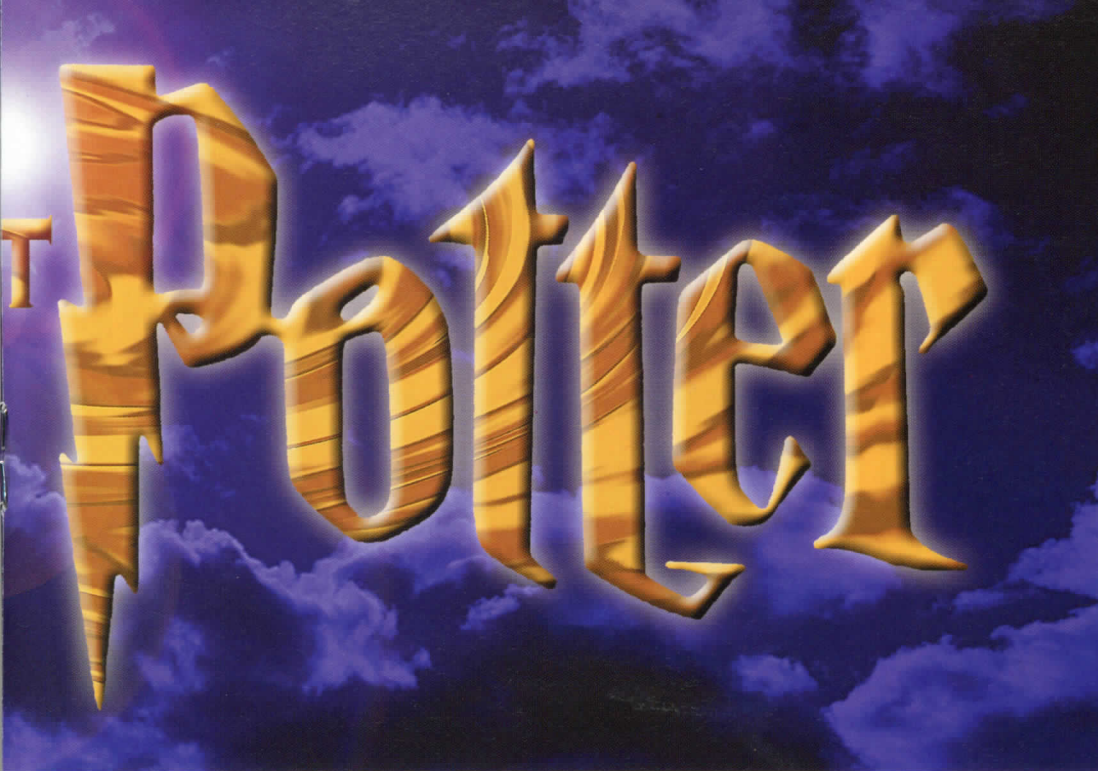
'What struck me very strongly,' said Rustin, 'is that Rowling starts



**It is a story already worth more than \$100 million of investment to film-makers at Warner Brothers — with much more to come. It has made its once impoverished author a millionaire many times over, while its enormous popularity in 200 countries and 47 languages is self-evident. But is Harry Potter friend or foe? Gary Pritchard reports**







with a child who has lost his parents. All her stories, from *The Philosopher's Stone* onwards, are to do with the emotional rediscovery of his parents, in his own mind, even if not in reality.'

Rustin, who studied Rowling's work with her sociologist husband Michael, has worked with children at the Tavistock Clinic – featured in the BBC2 documentary *Talking Cure* – since 1971, and she believes that literature can reach out to children.

'If you think of other stories, such as *Charlotte's Web* by E B White or *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*, they take place in the context of parents being absent. This is how the child learns to cope with separation and loss.'

PHOTOS: TERRY O'NEILL/WARNER BROTHERS PICTURES



**'I like the third book because he (Harry) meets his godfather and Professor Lupin, a really cool guy (This really "cool guy" is a shape-shifter who turns into a werewolf)...'**

**Harry, age seven.**

In the Harry Potter stories, Rustin believes that the teachers at Hogwarts School each represent a different aspect of parenthood. 'Dumbledore is in some ways the ideal father figure, while Minerva McGonagall stands for the ideal mother,' she said.

The Rustins' analysis of the Potter stories is to appear in a paperback re-issue of their 1987 Verso study of children's literature, *Narratives Of Love And Loss*, published by Karnac Books.

#### **PROFOUND THEMES: Potter points to Christian truth**

Harry Potter, demonised by some for glamorising the occult, is in reality a paragon of Christian virtues, according to a new book by a ►



leading Church of England theologian.

Although the boy wizard may appear to have more to do with broomsticks than baptisms, his battle with the evil Lord Voldemort reflects profound themes such as redemption and atonement, argues Rev Dr Francis Bridger.

However, that's not typical of the Christian response. The books by J K Rowling, which have sold more than 90 million worldwide, have been attacked by many believers in Britain and America as a dangerous influence on children.

Carol Rookwood, the headmistress of St Mary's Church of England primary school in Chatham, Kent, banned them from the school library last year. She said the Bible taught 'that wizards, devils and demons exist and are real and dangerous, and God's people are told to have nothing to do with them'.

**'I get letters from children addressed to Professor Dumbledore (headmaster at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the books' setting), and it's not a joke, begging to be let into Hogwarts, and some of them are really sad. Because they want it to be true so badly they've convinced themselves it's true.'**

J K Rowling

**'Apart from the benefit of wise adult guidance in reading these books, it is best to leave Harry Potter on the shelf.'**

Lindy Beam, *Focus On The Family*



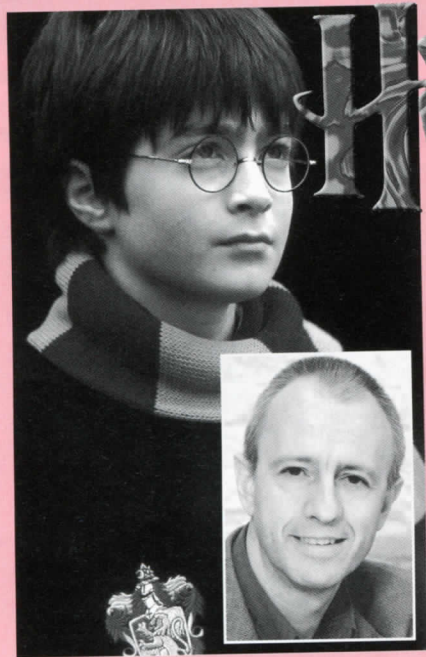
Dr Bridger, the principal of Trinity College, Bristol and a member of the General Synod, argues that such denunciations reflect a misunderstanding of the books, which he compares to Christian allegories such as C S Lewis' *Narnia* series. In *A Charmed Life: The Spirituality Of Harry Potter*, to be published this month to coincide with the release of the film, he says the stories should be welcomed as a new way to 'open the door' to the gospels.

'The wizardry and witchcraft of Potterworld is a fictional device, quite different in its tone and content from the wizardry and witchcraft that stand in conflict with Christianity,' said Dr Bridger. 'Rowling may never have expressed any Christian beliefs but, like Lewis, she is an intensely moral writer'.

He added, 'Harry's moral awakening through the series has received considerably less attention in the media than his hormonal awakening, but in many ways it is more important.'

Moreover, although there is no mention of God, the books are replete with theological themes such as self-sacrifice, mercy and the redemptive power of love. Even the wizard jail Azkaban could be seen as a reflection of the Christian idea of hell. The apostle Paul used the stories of Zeus to help to convert people to Christianity, and Christians today can regard Harry Potter in the same positive way, he said.

'Far from amounting to a denial of the gospel, the Potter series – through its morality, implicit theology and metaphysics – opens



## Harry is a Hero

**Is there a link between Harry Potter and Jeff Lucas? Neil Edbrooke wonders...**

If I let my imagination go, I foretell that Harry Potter will grow up to be a bit like Jeff Lucas. After all, Jeff did wander round the country for quite some time with a stick that looked remarkably suitable for Quidditch. He

frequently told stories that involved flying with it, too.

But more subtly, Jeff has championed the cause of the weak overcoming the mighty. He has written movingly and amusingly on behalf of the Gideons of this world – vulnerable, often overlooked people who face up to evil.

Well, whatever else we say about the Harry Potter stories (and so much has been said already), they present most kids with a hero they can identify with – someone who is refreshingly unsure of himself and yet wonderfully imaginative: human and humorous, normal yet magical.

Given the mind-sapping virtual grip of Sony Playstations or the avalanche of bizarre monsters like Pokemon, we can all be grateful to J K Rowling. She has created a sparkling series of magical adventure stories,



a way to encourage children and adults alike to move beyond the literary creation of Potterworld to ask questions about truth and reality in a way that would have been taboo a generation ago. If this is not opening the door to the gospels, I don't know what is.'

Oxford diocesan spokesman Rev Richard Thomas said that Oxford Cathedral had been used for some of the Potter film. 'The occult is dangerous,' he said, 'and Harry Potter does give children a gentle introduction to that world.'

'But in the Potter books, evil is always defeated by the personal sacrifices of the characters as they

follow the higher power of good. Sacrifice and redemption are strong themes, and Harry Potter can open our eyes to the spirituality in all of us.'

### **YOUTHFUL DISRESPECT: Parents push for wizard-free zone**

Johanna Landreneau was shocked when her son's third-grade class started reading *Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone* (the American title for the story) last autumn. Nine-year-old Jean-Paul attends the private St Luke's Episcopal Day School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. 'I felt they shared the same values I did,' said Landreneau.

She is among Christian parents in the USA arguing that classrooms are no place for Harry Potter, whose supernatural adventures make him one of the hottest characters ever in children's literature – even among other Christians.

Focus on the Family also cites problems such as 'foul' language and youthful disrespect. Cult watcher Brian Waldrep agrees and would limit books to older readers. Focus urges parental involvement.

Challenges to Harry Potter readings in the classroom, already reported in at least eight states, may grow as the author ages Harry one year per book. 'She has said the books are going to get darker,' said Waldrep, 'so it'll be very interesting to watch.'

● **Gary Pritchard is Editorial Manager of Compass magazine.**

## Moses Revisited?



**Gary Pritchard reviews the Potter movie**

Like the book, the film is a mishmash of myths ancient and modern, mimicking a type of Moses storyline. Harry is the anointed one, the babe saved from destruction for a high purpose. In swaddling clothes at the beginning, he's attended by three worshipful old wizards standing in for the Magi after he's been rescued from the Lucifer-figure, Voldemort, a wizard gone to the bad.

Very seductively, we learn of a parallel fairy world that the privileged can enter and which is beyond the imaginings of Muggles (ie ordinary folk without supernatural gifts).

Harry gets kitted out and goes off to catch a steam train to Hogwarts – the training school for wizards. Hogwarts is a magical place, but it's here that the movie takes a darker, more impressive turn when Harry and his two new friends – the high-spirited Ron (Rupert Grint) and the smart, sensible Hermione (Emma Watson) – embark on a rite-of-passage quest to defeat the evil but unidentified Voldemort. The film is an account of their journey to see good triumph over such evil.

As a film observer recently suggested, *The Wizard Of Oz* offered comfort to American children during the late years of the Depression, and to their English counterparts in the early war years. Harry Potter affords hope of 'magical powers' available to the brave, the decent and the resourceful in our own anxious times. Go see for yourself.

classic conflicts between good and evil – plus an educational spin-off – reading! Most pleasing of all, Rowling has given children an increasingly uncommon, positive theme: it's cool to be good.

I found Harry Potter in a chaotic little bookshop in Cornwall. Called *The Strand*, it's my favourite haunt when the foghorn is blowing and a summer holiday disappears into wellies and wetness.

I'd heard of the spectacular popularity of the first book. The second was due any day. Before the kids got hold of it, like a good parent and responsible church leader, I thought I'd give it a whirl. Is it 'subversive'? Do these books encourage an unhealthy interest in the occult? Do they promote the spirituality of life without reference to the author of life? Etc.

I have come away (and so have my younger children) with the view that, so far,

these books provide a lot of fun and excitement in a refreshingly clear moral framework. Would that other children or adult books which hit the bestseller lists were so committed to the side of light fighting the dark powers.

There is always a risk that preoccupation with magic could lead to an unhealthy engagement with the demonic itself. But I don't think the magic of J K Rowling is any more likely to lead that way than Tolkien.

Far more important is the environment in which children grow up – their friends, their family and most crucially during the primary years, the validity and credibility of their parents' spirituality. That's what enables them to interpret what they hear from their peer group, read in a book or see on TV.

It could be argued that the morally subversive effect of *Eastenders* and *Grange Hill*, pumped

into impressionable minds on a daily basis, is far more a cause for concern.

A couple of years ago, I came across a review of Harry Potter in a *Christianity Today* editorial which examined this debate. It concluded: 'Rowling's series is a Book of Virtues with a preadolescent funny bone. Amid the laugh-out-loud scenes are wonderful examples of compassion, loyalty, courage, friendship and even self-sacrifice. No wonder young readers want to be like these believable characters'.

Let's hope, pray, and even write and encourage J K Rowling to maintain these qualities. We're now seeing how faithful the film industry has been to her spirit. But it'll be ages before I know whether Harry turns out like Jeff.

● **Neil Edbrooke is leader of Bristol Christian Fellowship.**



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A song of ascents.

My eyes to the hills—  
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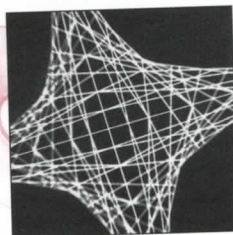
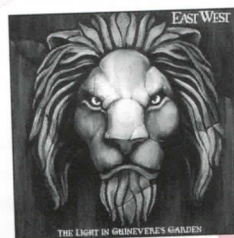
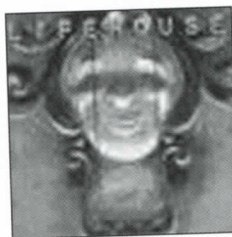
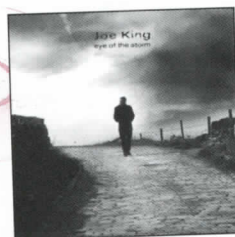
## SATELLITE

P.O.D (ATLANTIC)

A heavy wall of guitars, rap-style vocals and gale force drums introduce us to the sound of P.O.D as they chant, 'Rise, let your spirit fly; Rise, hold your head up high'. *Satellite* charts a course and never strays from it – even though they take a brief excursion into a ragga-meets-metal zone!

This San Diego foursome have received a great response from MTV. All very good for a band who compose and sing anthems for warriors worldwide. Their best known single to date – *Alive* – talks about how a relationship with God has made them 'thankful for every breath'. *Youth Of The Nation* challenges the youth to 'reach out for more' and not settle. In *The Messiah* they scream they 'are not ashamed of the Most High'!

Their music will reach those previously untouched by God truths. It may 'assault' the ears, but whoever said the gospel should be wrapped in a sugar sweet coating? Head and soul banging! **SR**



## NO NAME FACE

LIFEHOUSE (DREAMWORKS)

Energy and melody combine to produce a great 'collection of disarmingly open, innocently-questing, melodic rock songs filled with drama and alternative edges'. Los Angeles band Lifehouse have gone from playing a few college shows to sharing the road with Pearl Jam and Matchbox Twenty.

The album kicks into gear with their popular single *Hanging By A Moment* that immediately reveals a gift to write commercial songs that vibe with poetry and musical dimension.

They sing about shame, they sing about grace; but in a way that even though they do not mention the name of Jesus, they do sing about the person and the pilgrimage. In *Trying* they address the struggle of living in a world where 'honesty is a hard attribute to find'.

*Quasimodo* succeeds in fusing a sensitive melody with guitar energy and attractive instrumentation while the closing track *Everything* is a vulnerable prayer: 'Find me here, Speak to me, You are all I want, You are everything'. Pure worship. As one magazine said, 'Lifehouse infuses adrenaline fuelled anthems with life-affirming mantras'. ([www.lifehousemusic.com](http://www.lifehousemusic.com)). **SR**

## VOLUME 3 FURTHER IN TIME

AFROCELTS (REAL WORLD)

This musical journey of merging African and Celtic sound and rhythm began a few years ago. It's proved so popular, the potential is still being explored.

The 'Real World' label has really picked up the prophetic call for people and tribes to harmonise together in order to celebrate one other's distinctiveness, and yet, be humble enough to mix it all up and co-create something entirely new.

Peter Gabriel – the heart behind the 'Real World' label – makes a guest vocal appearance. However, this volume relies more upon dance/techno beats than the others. The Celtic jigs are as enjoyable as ever, though!

Volume 3 provides an excellent soundscape of instruments and voices, a fusion that enlarges your capacity to enjoy music that exudes passion and energy. **SR**

## EYE OF THE STORM

JOE KING

Gathering together various strands of his work, Joe reveals the struggles of life where God 'allows us to go through storms so that we come out stronger' and the promise of a life that can experience healing in Jesus' name. Joe sings of revival while musically reflecting his own Celtic/Irish roots.

His songs are so obviously personal and seem very rooted in first-hand experience. At times 'Beatle-esque', the overall mood is one of easy listening. We simply gain more insight into the yearnings of Joe's heart to follow Jesus and allow God's presence to fill his life ([joekinguk@aol.com](mailto:joekinguk@aol.com)). **SR**

## NEW IRISH HYMNS

MARGARET BECKER, MAIRE BRENNAN AND JOANNE HOGG (KINGSWAY)

Three distinctive voices collaborate to create an album of modern hymns for the Church. There have been many recordings riding on the popular genre of 'Celtic' or 'Irish'. However, this one does sound and feel authentic.

Composer Keith Getty is obviously committed to his craft, as he produces and orchestrates an album that is both lilting and meditative – one that will feed the soul as well as be pleasing to the ear. Standout track is *Hear All Creation*, sung by the wonderful emotive voice of Margaret Becker followed by, *My Hope* sung by Joanne Hogg. **SR**

## THE LIGHT IN GUINEVERE'S GARDEN

EAST WEST (WORD)

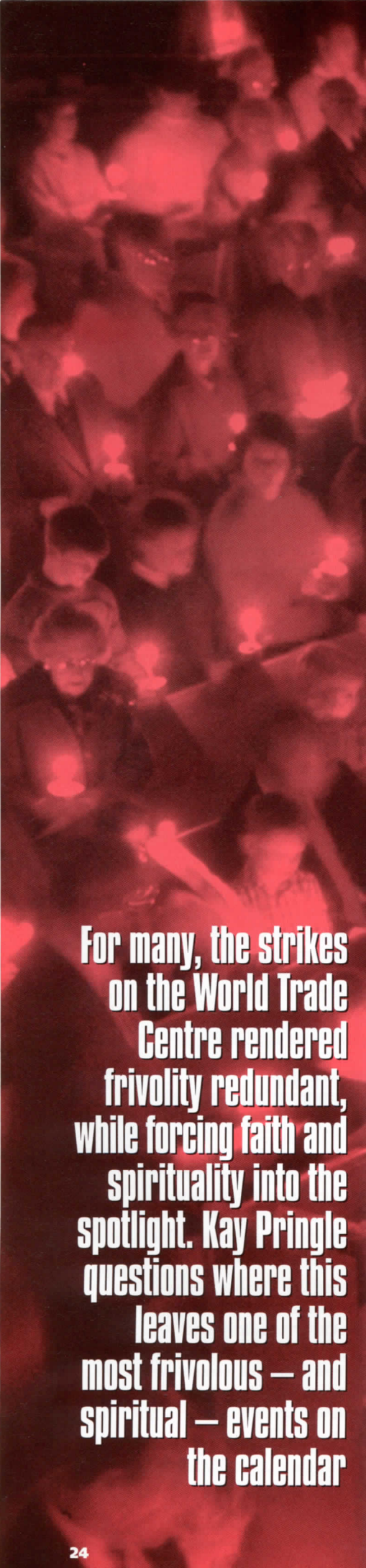
I took my 13-year-old son to his first gig – Linkin Park at Docklands Arena. Once we survived the warm-hearted bottle-throwing and police cordon, we were treated to a solid granite wall of sound. I hadn't encountered such a 'hard rock' atmosphere since seeing The Clash at Manchester in the 70s, then U2 at Brighton in the 80s.

Then I received this 'Christian' album. Even my son wondered if Christians could get this heavy and still be OK! Southern California quartet East West follow a similar pattern to bands like Linkin Park, Rage Against The Machine and Limp Bizkit – aggressive rock with some hooks and plenty of hollering – but this time with spiritual lyrics.

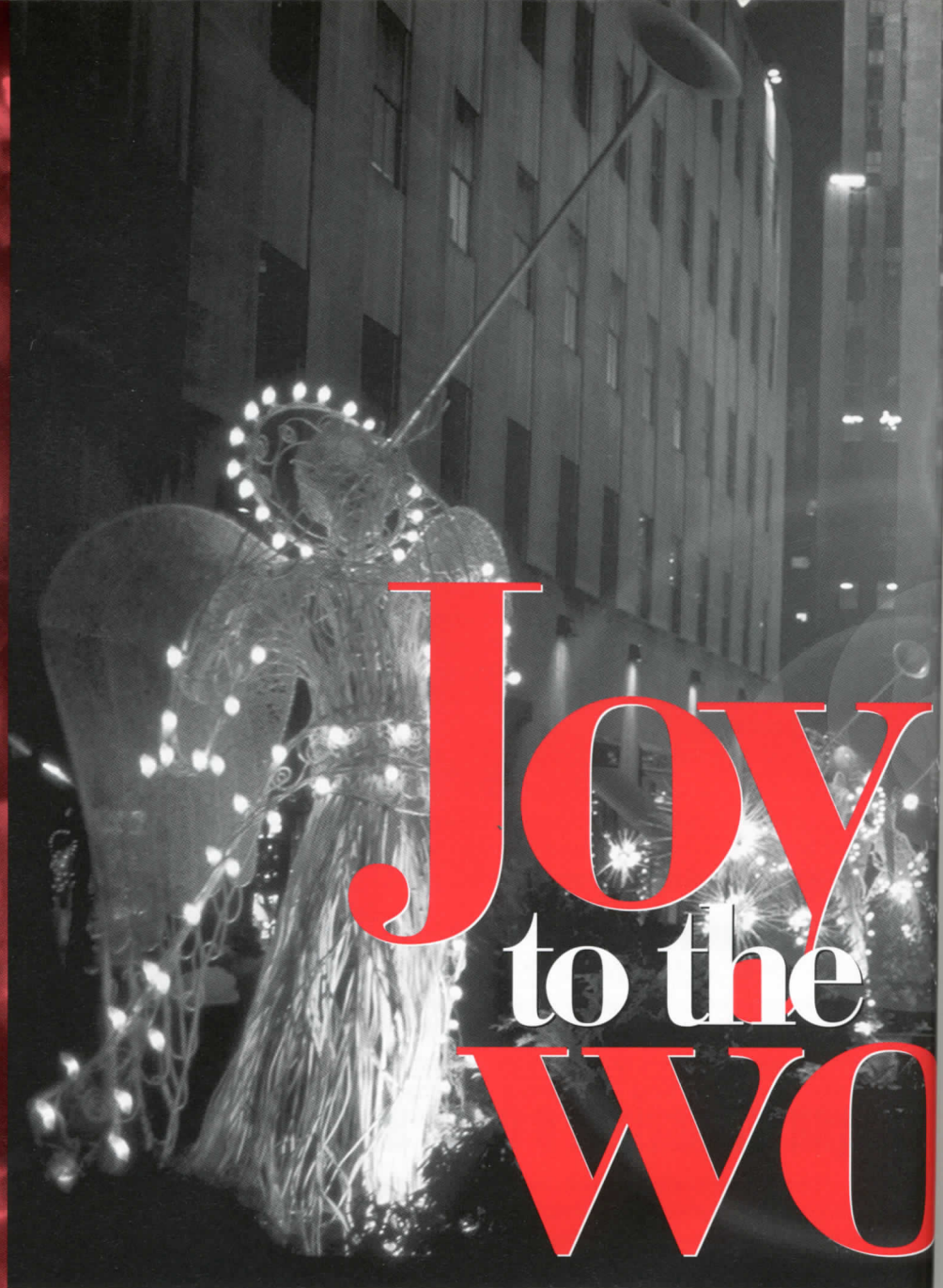
If you like such mainstream bands (or your kids do!), then this will interest you. As they say on the street, it rocks. **CP**

● Music reviewers:  
Sue Rinaldi and  
Clive Price





**For many, the strikes on the World Trade Centre rendered frivolity redundant, while forcing faith and spirituality into the spotlight. Kay Pringle questions where this leaves one of the most frivolous — and spiritual — events on the calendar**



# Joy to the World

**C**hristmas time, mistletoe and wine, children singing Christian rhymes. Logs on the fire, gifts by the tree, a time to rejoice in the good that we see. Cliff's popular Yuletide anthem paints a familiar ideal, but such chocolate box sentiments of gentility can't provide the soundtrack to the end of a year that has seen buildings, nations and lives crumble like never before.

The celebration of Christmas is one of the only times of year when Christianity gets a real public outing. We saints might even indulge a smug sense of ownership over it (while over indulging in the turkey and pudding).

In these unpredictable times Christmas is a sure thing: it's about the coming of our Saviour, it's about family, it's about sharing time and gifts — and it's a chance to get the most spiritually ambivalent into church, even if it is just to watch little Lucy cradle a Tiny Tears Christ.

Yet September 11th is being billed as the day that changed everything, and 'everything' has to include December 25th. In the face of fear and uncertainty we are going to celebrate an occasion of peace and hope, and this year we are going to have to bring joy to the world, even as it weeps. But how?

Steve Chalke, Mr Christmas Cracker himself, is a firm believer in practical Christianity. 'I've been involved in a number of initiatives over the years,' he said, 'including Christmas Cracker which Oasis set up to get young people from both inside and outside the Church involved in giving instead of just receiving. We didn't preach at anyone. We just gave people the chance to work alongside other young people who were following Jesus.'

'The amazing thing is that years later I still bump into people who tell me, "I found a relationship with Jesus after being involved with Christmas Cracker", or "I grew in my faith because of Christmas Cracker".'





'I believe this is what the Church needs to take on board. The greatest sermons that Jesus preached, he preached without moving his lips. Jesus' life was about doing things.'

### HUGE OPPORTUNITIES

In the face of recent events many of us feel helpless. Any efforts to be good news locally might seem insignificant against the determination of international, fundamentalist terrorism. We read about the thousands of lives lost across a huge ocean and feel paralysed by the distance and amount of need. Steve Chalke is however convinced that our relationships with people provide us with huge opportunities.

'If you work at being generous with people, if you work at demonstrating signs of God's liberation, it will amaze you how many people will be drawn to you and want to talk to you about Jesus,' he explained, 'especially now because of the current climate of fear.'

'And Christmas time sets the Church up with a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate the generosity that God showed to us – the sending of a Saviour, the bringing of good news. This Christmas the way people feel about the future and their safety, that sense of spiritual awareness and searching for something that works, presents us with a bigger opportunity than ever.'

'Jesus was a teacher – but in what sense? We assume teachers give lectures, but our way of presenting the good news through sermons and teaching from a pulpit is not the only way – Jesus taught through doing things, he told stories and got people asking questions, which is just what people are doing now.'

Some of those questions can be awkward. 'Why does God allow such suffering?' is an even hotter potato now than ever, and it can be difficult to reconcile the meek and mild Jesus of the nativity with a Saviour who has the power to bring true peace to destroyed lives. ▶

**In the face of fear  
and uncertainty we  
are going to celebrate  
an occasion of peace  
and hope**



'People want to know how a good God can let this happen?' said Diana Priest, a Christian counsellor with expertise in grief counselling. 'As Christians we need to acknowledge, as John 14:27 acknowledges, that this is not a peaceful world but that Christ came that we could know inner peace.'

How do we answer those awkward questions sensitively, though? Well, perhaps we don't. 'Sometimes it's more important to listen than it is to answer, especially with grief,' Priest explained. 'Something like Princess Diana's death triggers off memories of loss and fear, and the collective experience – encouraged by the media – gives them permission to express those emotions.'

'Recent events are slightly different. There's the loss of many lives, the loss of established order, loss of familiarity with the world, and here we see people go through the initial shock of grief, then there's the fight to make sense of it and deal with the fear. When it's collective the grief can be compounded, but it's also potentially supportive because people feel more able to share their fears. It's up to us to listen.'

### AWKWARD QUESTIONS

When we find ourselves engaged in conversation about our faith, Diana Priest believes it is important to let people ask the awkward questions about suffering – to hear their pain. 'We may be the only contact that person has with Christ,' she pointed out.

'We can admit that we don't have all the answers, and we need to be honest that

**'The greatest sermons Jesus preached, he preached without moving his lips'**

(Steve Chalke)

there is evil in the world, bad things happen and people are the perpetrators of those things. Where is God in the middle of that mess? How is Jesus able to connect with people in the middle of their pain? Let them ask those questions and talk about it. Then show them your faith and let them sense your security in Christ.'

So, we need to accept that most of us can't do anything about the bigger picture, but we can come alongside people who

**'This is not a peaceful world but Christ came that we could know inner peace'**

Diana Priest

are hurting and allow God to open up the opportunities. But how do we celebrate Christmas in this atmosphere? How can we celebrate sensitively and with relevance?

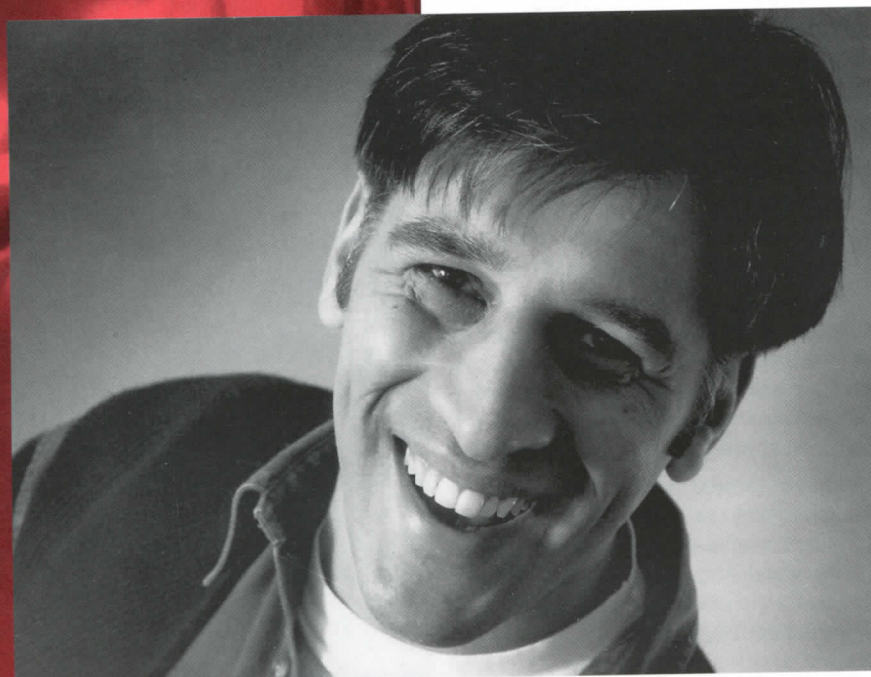
Gerald Coates isn't sure that the Christmas message needs to change at all. 'People are feeling insecure and are reflecting on the purpose for their life more now, and Christmas is a good platform for allowing people to reflect,' he said. 'But I don't think we have to present the Christmas message differently this year – I just think we have to get over the difficulty of presenting it at all.'

Let's face it, New churches have been less successful at making themselves visible than traditional, denominational churches – especially at Christmas and Easter. This might be why most of the people who are looking for answers from the Church today are finding themselves in local parish churches and even cathedrals. Since September 11th some Anglican Sunday services that usually have 200 in attendance have swelled to more than 600.

'New churches have been very good at the spontaneous,' said Coates, 'feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, providing events for young people. But we shouldn't confuse social action with the gospel. There's a danger in emphasising the spontaneous over the strategic. Paul and Jesus were strategic in their ministries and attending the synagogues.'

'I think there are three ways of sharing the gospel with people at Christmas and at any time. The spontaneous, personal, relational aspect is important. It's about the people we work with, live with, socialise with. At this time we need to be sensitive to their fear and pain, to allow them to express it, and we shouldn't be afraid to make genuine offers of prayer.'

'Second, we need to take the initiative – we shouldn't be afraid to invite people to events. There's this nonsense about not appearing religious. But that's ridiculous. Do we want







these people to know a relationship with Jesus or not? We need to take the initiative – to invite them to a corporate event, or to a house group, and not be afraid to give them a Christian book or CD for Christmas.

**'Do we want people to know a relationship with Jesus or not? We need to take the initiative'**

**Gerald Coates**

'Then on the strategic level we need to make ourselves visible. I really believe that every church should have someone who communicates through local media channels, telling their community that there's a Christmas service at 10.30 on Sunday, or that there's a special event coming up. Traditional churches still do this much better.'

In his 1999 Christmas Day Sermon Archbishop of Canterbury Dr George Carey told the worshippers at Canterbury Cathedral, 'You and I share the journey into the future. What we shall find there we cannot know. But the Christmas message of the shepherds, with its transformation of fear into belief and then into wonderment and praise, points the way for us'.

The story of Christ's birth is marked by the repeated message from God through angels and dreams, saying, 'Fear not. Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people'. That's the message of Christmas.

**Kay Pringle is a writer and editor working with CWR.**

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Most Christians live in the world of popular theology, not of academic theology. In popular theology, biblical doctrine becomes fused with elements of popular culture to form diverse expressions of the Christian faith. It's easy for these to be despised as a lower form of theological life, without asking what popular religion has to teach us about how the Christian life should be lived.

Lay people need teaching in all aspects of theology in order to understand their faith more deeply and to learn more about God's purposes for their lives. Within these contexts there is a lot of life, commitment and wisdom from which we can learn.

That's not to say that we do not sometimes get it wrong and find ourselves in partnership with cultural forces that compromise the Christian faith. It is also possible to get too enmeshed in the language and practice of the therapeutic society.



# FAST FOOD THEOLOGY

**'Evangelicals embrace bad taste for the sake of the gospel'**

If we succumb to these without reflection, we distort the faith. But that's not the same as looking down on popular expressions of faith and despising them because they are not to one's own taste.

Richard Holloway, then Bishop of Edinburgh, once said that evangelical culture had tended towards 'fast food rather than haute cuisine'. But he admitted that the evangelical approach could be useful when it came to mission:

'More people go to discos than to high opera, and one of the courageous things about evangelicals is their ability to embrace bad taste for the sake of the gospel'.

## CULTURAL FORMATION

Theologian Richard Mouw advises us to approach popular culture

with a 'hermeneutic of charity' rather than a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. When people express their faith in unconventional ways — such as the young Christian executive who said he thought of God as the ultimate CEO — we should be willing to accept these unless they prove unhelpful.

'I hold to a 'transformationalist' view of Christ and culture,' said Mouw. 'We cannot accept sinful culture as it is. But neither can we simply reject it as altogether evil. Cultural formation is part of the good creation. Contemporary culture, including contemporary popular culture, is a distorted version of something God meant to be good.

'So we must 'un-distort' it. We must look at such things as the current fascination with therapeutic techniques and managerial methods



and ask how they might be transformed into instruments of obedience to the will of God. And we must be careful that, in opposing popular culture, we are not doing so out of an uncritical commitment to a "high" culture that is itself in need of Christian transformation.

'It may be that the trends in popular culture, whatever their own distortions, are legitimate reactions against the kind of distortions to which intellectuals are especially prone.'

Pronouncements from on high are all very well, but they are next to useless if they do not take root in the lives of ordinary believers. We live our lives in the concrete and the complex.

Many Christians will openly say that a sermon by a high-flyer went right over their heads. One of the characteristics that make such preachers poor communicators is that they do not take the time to speak into the context in which their hearers find themselves.

### THINKING BIBLICALLY

For instance, many men and women who are in full-time employment find sermons irrelevant because they do not address the world of work. These people probably see more of their colleagues than of their families. They face their greatest ethical dilemmas at work, as well as their greatest opportunities to live as Christians.

Lay people have a great deal of wisdom about how to apply the Christian faith in the world. This fact means that we must examine popular culture not only to reach out to it but also to gain theological insights from it. It is important to acknowledge that wisdom comes in many different forms and may be distinct from formal knowledge.

As Richard Mouw comments, since only God's grace can save us, educated people are no more able to find God than the uneducated, and theologians have no better access to God than farmers or waitresses.

That doesn't mean lay people can be left to their own

theological devices. They need help from academic theologians and from wise pastors and teachers. But they generate theological understanding as well as receive it.

Currently there is a 'dumbing down' of all kinds of culture, not least in the media, and disastrously this is also prevalent in the Church. Many people are giving up on the discipline of 'thinking biblically', partly because entertainment is replacing engagement with society.

This is not what Mouw means by 'people's theology'. Rather, he means that theology is a community act. It is done by all of the people all of the time. If the theologians do not talk to the people, they talk only to other theologians. If the people are not willing to grow into theological maturity, then the Church will be stunted in its growth and ineffectual in the world. Theology can be made only in community.

At this point there are problems with the attractiveness of magic in a technological society. We Christians want to fuse the reality of life today with our rich and long theological tradition in order to be able to speak to the concrete problems affecting the lives of ordinary people.

Yet we must do so without succumbing to magic (so close to spirituality) and without adapting the life of prayer to an exercise in problem-solving. In short, we must avoid anything that would force God to do our will because of the pressures on us to demonstrate his efficacy and relevance.

It is the search for a way of dealing with this 'middle ground' that has led to the development, over the last 40 years, of the idea of the 'Christian mind'. This approach links theology and contemporary life – not only personal issues, but politics, economics, gender, technology, race and indeed all those issues with which we are struggling in our culture.

**Theology can be made only in community**

**There has been a renewal of interest in Christianity as a story**

The idea combines contemporary relevance with biblical authority. Although a great deal has already been written on this theme, the approach is in many ways still in its infancy.

Even when we have made links between our theology and our situation, we still have to take personal responsibility for what we do. The fact is that the development of a people's theology requires us to fuse theology as doctrine with theology as story.

### PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Human beings have always told one another stories – many of which draw on the great themes of life, death, courage, betrayal, sacrifice and love among others. We are surrounded by story.

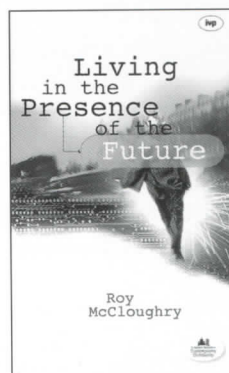
Recently, there has been a renewal of interest in Christianity as a story – not only because linear analysis may not reach somebody whose attention span is about three minutes – but also because Christianity is story.

The characterisation of Christianity as narrative theology rather than as systematic theology does not reject the latter as an expression of eternal truth, or even challenge its relevance.

The problem is not in the systematic theology. In fact analytical approaches to theology are not a problem at all. It is simply that they are not accessible to many people in a postmodern world, though they are still extremely important wherever they are appropriate forms of communication.

But in a world where the soap opera is more powerful than the documentary, or where the documentary has to be presented in the form of a story so that people don't switch off, Christians also have the option of telling the gospel as story without departing in any way from its roots.

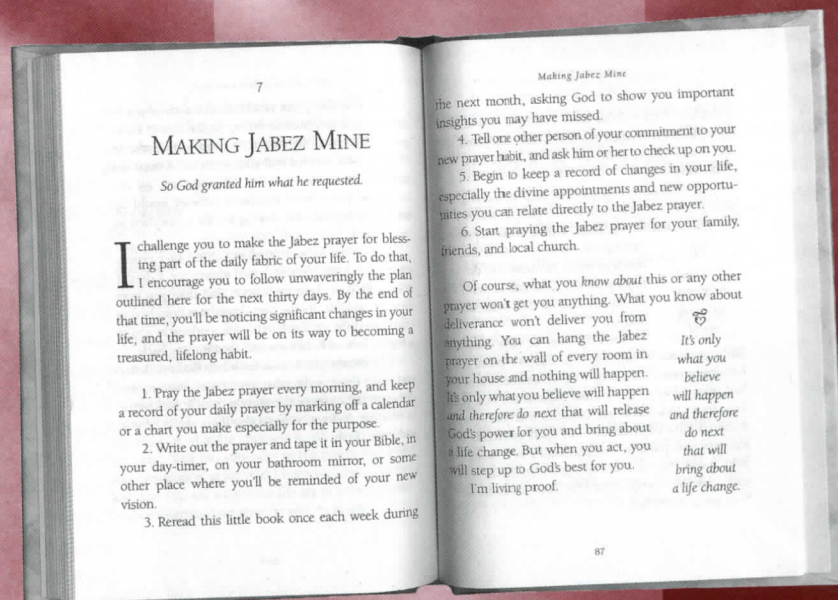
**Roy McCloughry is Director of the Kingdom Trust and speaks widely on issues to churches and Christian groups. He was formerly Director of the Shaftesbury Project. Roy has written a number of books, and this article is taken from one of his latest, *Living In The Presence Of The Future*, published by IVP and used with permission.**





# SECOND BLESSING

Everyone's  
talking about it. It's  
a little book with  
a big message.  
But what are the  
real implications  
of saying  
The Prayer Of  
Jabez?  
Clive Price  
analyses  
the trend



## MAKING JABEZ MINE

*So God granted him what he requested.*

I challenge you to make the Jabez prayer for blessing part of the daily fabric of your life. To do that, I encourage you to follow unwaveringly the plan outlined here for the next thirty days. By the end of that time, you'll be noticing significant changes in your life, and the prayer will be on its way to becoming a treasured, lifelong habit.

1. Pray the Jabez prayer every morning, and keep a record of your daily prayer by marking off a calendar or a chart you make especially for the purpose.
2. Write out the prayer and tape it in your Bible, in your day-timer, on your bathroom mirror, or some other place where you'll be reminded of your new vision.
3. Reread this little book once each week during

## Making Jabez Mine

the next month, asking God to show you important insights you may have missed.

4. Tell one other person of your commitment to your new prayer habit, and ask him or her to check up on you.
5. Begin to keep a record of changes in your life, especially the divine appointments and new opportunities you can relate directly to the Jabez prayer.
6. Start praying the Jabez prayer for your family, friends, and local church.

Of course, what you *know about* this or any other prayer won't get you anything. What you know about deliverance won't deliver you from anything. You can hang the Jabez prayer on the wall of every room in your house and nothing will happen. It's only what you believe will happen and therefore do next that will release God's power for you and bring about a life change. But when you act, you will step up to God's best for you. I'm living proof.

It's only  
what you  
believe  
will happen  
and therefore  
do next  
that will  
bring about  
a life change.



**A**re you ready to pray the *Prayer Of Jabez*? Many already have done – and they've gone public with the resulting benefits. Their stories have been posted on the internet – from people enjoying increased business and ministry opportunities to marriages being saved, infertile couples being helped and even a man surviving a fall from a 12-storey building.

It's a 21st century publishing phenomenon. For this humble book – just 96 pages and small enough to fit into your glove compartment, briefcase or handbag – has 'crossed over' from Christian to general market and scooped top position on the *New York Times* 'Advice' list. A staggering eight-and-a-half million copies had been sold by the end of September 2001.

So what's all the fuss about? How did the massive wave of interest begin in this little book?

Well, the story goes that Bible teacher Dr Bruce Wilkinson had been speaking for close on 30 years about Jabez – a little-known Old Testament character who asked God to bless him. US family expert James Dobson and his wife Shirley listened to one of Dr Wilkinson's tapes and wondered if he would talk on Jabez at America's National Day Of Prayer event.

Dobson and Christian publisher Multnomah thought it would be a good idea to produce an accompanying booklet in time for the May 2000 meeting. Although Wilkinson was reportedly reluctant to return to book writing, the publication was ready 'just in time' for the event. 'We had no idea what God had in store,' said Senior Publicist Joel Kneedler.

'Looking back, it really was a grassroots type of thing,' he told *Compass* in a transatlantic telephone interview. 'Word of mouth is what spread the book. You can relate that directly to God working in the hearts of the people that read it.' The initial print run was for 15,000 copies. 'We thought if it can sell 30,000, that would be a successful book,' said Kneedler. Of course, it sold more. Much more.

## RUNAWAY SUCCESS

They cleared the lot within the first month or two. That summer it continued to sell well, but at a slower rate. Then in autumn 2000 Multnomah started to see sales of more than 300,000 in one month. 'And that caught our eye,' Kneedler admitted. Sales of religious books in America can be very high – but this was unusual for a non-fiction title.

'It really spiked after the Christmas holiday. We came back and we were looking at the possibility of doing a one million print run – which in fact we did in February.' The numbers get even more impressive. 'Then in March we printed two million. We saw the sales really peak in May and June of this year. That's when the national coverage began.'

Spring saw Jabez leap to number one slot of the *New York Times* list. *Time* magazine did an article on it, suggesting some reasons for the title's runaway success. 'Evangelical life abounds in thou shalt nots and stresses humility before God,' it said. 'By contrast,

Jabez's demand that the deity "bless me indeed" seems buoyant and liberating.'

The endorsement of James Dobson – a near-legendary father-figure in evangelical circles – undoubtedly helped spread the word. And Wilkinson's own 30 years of preaching Jabez at rallies may have created a ready-made groundswell of interest in the printed version. Even so, as Kneedler told us, 'All of us were looking at each other in amazement'.

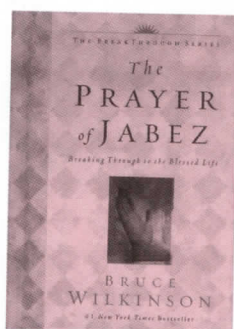
Wilkinson's own wife Darlene had been a Jabez believer from the start. Before the boom-time set in, she believed God was going to cause the book to sell over a million copies. 'She was the one who had the mustard seed of faith in the beginning – that this book would do well,' said Kneedler. So how did the publishers respond to the impact?

'First of all, to give glory to God – because clearly it was an act of God. It was nothing we did as a company to promote the book. We also wanted to make sure that the main point and content of the book were not being distorted, as there were many news reports. In some cases folks had not read the book and they doing interviews.'

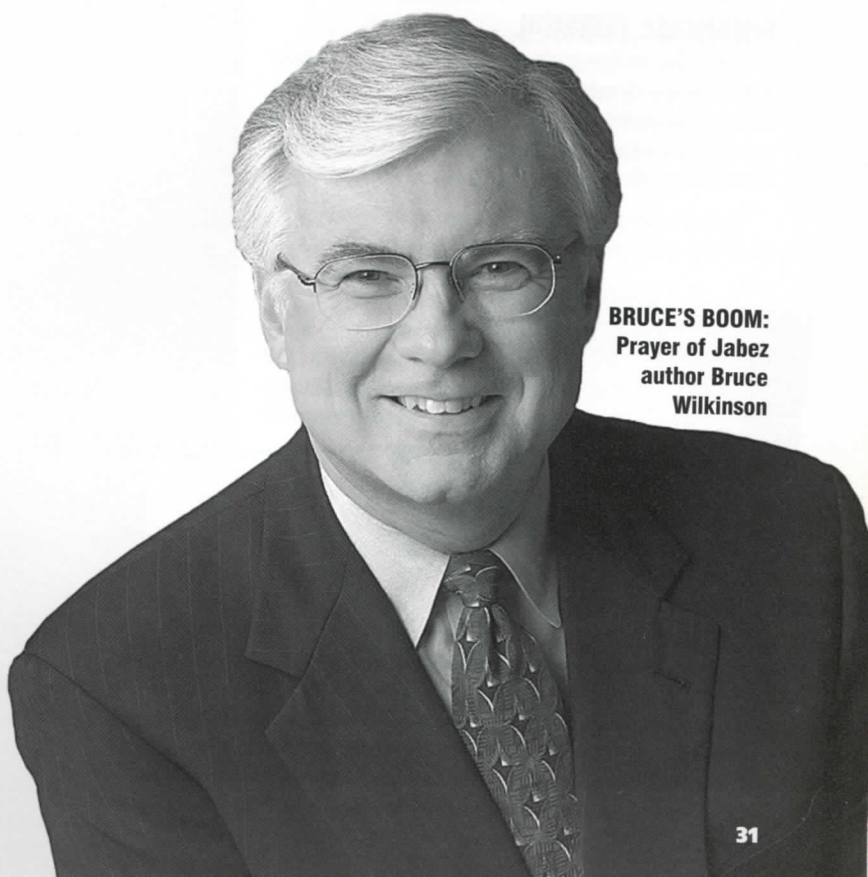
During the course of one particular radio interview, it became clear to Wilkinson that his interviewers not even looked at the Jabez title. When the appointment ended, Wilkinson asked the reporter if they'd read his publication. There was silence at the other end of the phone. They were clearly embarrassed at being found out.

There were also charges of promoting prosperity doctrine because of the prayer's emphasis on 'that you would bless me indeed' and 'that you would enlarge my territory'. Wilkinson, a mainstream evangelical, was reportedly shocked at the accusation. 'You could ►

## It's a 21st century publishing phenomenon



## 'It really was a grassroots type of thing'



**BRUCE'S BOOM:**  
Prayer of Jabez  
author Bruce  
Wilkinson



have knocked me over with a feather' was more or less his response.

Kneedler said encouraging prosperity was not the intention behind Jabez. 'Dr Wilkinson would say that blessing is up to the Lord – Jabez didn't tell him how. You can either have a blessing or a curse. Jabez already felt cursed. He asked for it to be turned around.'

If journalists had cared to look, they would have found that Wilkinson spells out his stance on such issues in the book itself: '...radical trust in God's good intentions toward us has nothing in common with the popular gospel that you should ask God for a Cadillac, a six-figure income, or some other material sign'.

The author adds that 'the Jabez blessing focuses like a laser on our wanting for ourselves nothing more and nothing less than what God wants for us'. However, he does promise a 'guaranteed by-product' of blessing – 'your life will become marked by miracles'. Some may have thought that was leading to a health-and-wealth message.

But Wilkinson is not offering a soft option for the 'bless me' club. If you go on to read his follow-up *Secrets Of The Vine*, you will find a solemn warning: 'Are you praying for God's superabundant blessings...? If your answer is yes, then you are asking for the shears. Pruning is how God answers your prayers that your life will please him more and have a greater impact for eternity'.

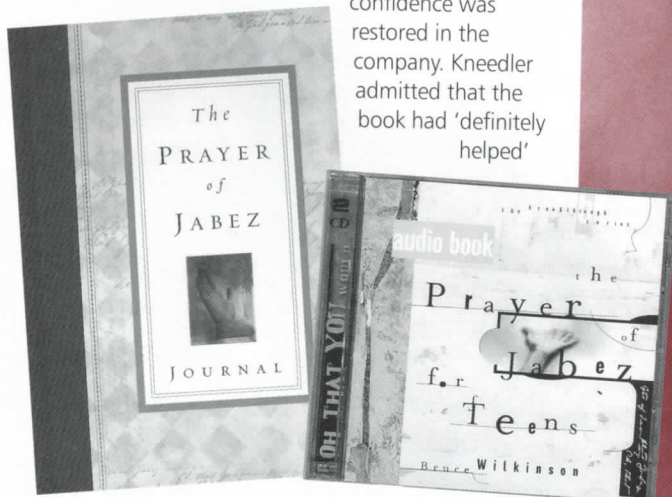
So we've sorted that one out. Wilkinson isn't a prosperity preacher, and his book isn't quite a get-rich-quick guide. But certainly for his publishers, the huge success of Jabez has been literally a Godsend.

'The company went through a humbling period the year before,' explained Joel Kneedler. 'They had lay-offs in the company and were struggling financially. There was a lot of soul-searching and a lot of prayer.'

## FINANCIAL TURMOIL

Interestingly, Multnomah called on Wilkinson to offer some spiritual direction at this challenging time in their history. 'He spoke at a conference for the company and it was a very serious, solemn time of reflection and repentance,' Kneedler added. 'It was a hurting time.'

It was soon after that Jabez began to take off. Multnomah's financial turmoil was resolved, and confidence was restored in the company. Kneedler admitted that the book had 'definitely helped'



## SECOND BLESSING

'Word of mouth is what spread the book'

The idea of a flood of Jabez junk is not welcome

and has been 'a self-fulfilling prayer' for them. But he was realistic about the future and added, 'How long is this going to last? We don't know. We had one great year, and what's going to happen over the next year?'

Multnomah have taken note of the massive welcome for a book as compact as Jabez – and have already acted on it for other titles. 'You can read it in a lunch break,' said Kneedler. 'It's a decent price. You can buy a gift for your family or to give away. As a result, it's told us something about the marketplace.'

'Our society is moving at such a rapid rate, perhaps they do want something more digestible. This is bite-sized, and if people want more, they can study more.' So Multnomah have applied a similar formula to other, meatier books by writers John Piper and Randy Alcorn, and made them available in a 'Life Change' series in a similar format to Jabez.

'These are just basic Christian principles, doctrines distilled down,' Kneedler explained. He confessed that initially he wasn't taken with the idea: 'I thought we're just doing some marketing scheme to sell more books, but when I read the content, it was very powerful.'

They say that parody is a form of flattery. Well, Jabez has already been lampooned and there's a spoof version on the US market. Kneedler and his colleagues saw a copy at a Christian booksellers conference in Atlanta. What was their reaction? 'We thought it was kind of funny, actually,' said Kneedler.

Tragically, there's also a range of merchandise available as serious add-ons to the book. You can get *Prayer Of Jabez* jewellery, pens and coffee mugs. What next? A 'salt and light (pepper)' cruet set for the dining table? Action figures with moveable praying hands? For the publishers, the idea of a flood of Jabez junk is not welcome.

'It kind of disheartens you a bit – that it might water down the message,' said Kneedler. 'But we hope that the core message about prayer and the encouragement that the author shares in the original book is what people will look to.'

Even so, Multnomah decided to do something about the boom in the ancillary products. 'We decided as a company, this is going to happen regardless. We contacted a licensing agent and she agreed to seek out a handful of companies that would handle these types of products – in a way that was respectful and not too inflammatory or exaggerated.' All the proceeds from sales of related merchandise will go to Walk Thru The Bible Ministries, the Bible teaching organisation that Wilkinson founded.

## JEWISH PRAYER

What inexperienced Christians think they can use *The Prayer Of Jabez* as a mantra or incantation? Kneedler felt that posing such a question would be 'underselling' the reader. 'What is that saying about the people who read books?' he asked.

'The book has appealed to non-Christians in some way, and we believe that the Lord can use it as a tool to draw people closer to him. It may not be an out-and-out Christian prayer just by reading it – in fact, it's a



Jewish prayer – but there are principles involved in the prayer that are consistent with Christianity.

'I believe if someone is seeking the Lord and they pray the prayer, God is capable of leading them to himself.'

An alternative view on Jabez is offered by Mike Yaconelli, former editor of *The Door*, a magazine that lampoons Christian foibles. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Yaconelli believes the book symbolises much of what is wrong with modern Christianity.

'Americans have perfected the art of reducing complicated truths into formulas and products,' said Yaconelli, who also leads a tiny church in Yreka and owns Youth Specialties, an El Cajon-based company that trains youth ministers. 'We're desperate for instant, visible, measurable ways of knowing God, instead of trusting that it's complicated and a mystery.'

Yaconelli doesn't think Wilkinson is promoting greed – but he sees a larger problem. 'He's not promising Cadillacs and a million dollars, but he is promising that great big, incredible things are going to happen if you pray this prayer. It almost minimises the power of the small and the little and the tiny, even though that's what Jesus was all about.'

'I think he's distorting what "bless" means. Go to the Beatitudes (in the New Testament) – "blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry" – that's what "blessed" means. But these are not the kind of blessings Wilkinson is talking about.'

Yaconelli has not only provided us with a different angle on the Jabez phenomenon, but has also opened up a wider debate. And this is where the book may yet be a real help to the Church at large – to make us all think what we really mean by asking God for 'more'. How do we define 'blessing'?

It's not wrong to pray for blessing – for ourselves and particularly for others. There is a strong heritage in the history of Britain and Ireland of believers using prayers of blessing on their families, their flocks and even their firesides.

The great collections of Hebridean and Irish prayers made by Alexander Carmichael and Douglas Hyde – which reflect a tradition stretching back to the early church on these islands – are full of blessings on the menial everyday tasks of life.

'Nothing is too trivial to be sanctified by prayer and blessing,' writes theology and church history expert Ian Bradley, 'whether it be dressing for the day's work, milking the cow or damping down the fire at night.'

In his book *The Celtic Way* (Darton Longman and Todd), Bradley points out that such ancient Gaelic prayers and poems didn't normally ask Jesus for this or that. Instead, the mode of prayer is almost always indirect and invocational, 'calling down the blessings and protection of God in the manner of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets'.

## MAKING JABEZ MINE

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**With greater blessing surely comes greater responsibility**

Perhaps the Jabez principle should be applied to the whole of life, baptising ourselves, our families and our communities in a spirit of prayer. Rather than constantly ranting at God for 'breakthrough', perhaps it's more a case of allowing the mist of heaven to gently soak the land.

## CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

A word of caution about blessings. Before we ask for 'more' shouldn't we count the ones we already

enjoy? The mere fact that we have been born in the affluent West means that we are literally among the wealthiest people on earth.

We have a Christian heritage that may have hindered us with some unhelpful historical baggage, but that has also endowed us with incredible riches that are now part of our spiritual DNA. We have unprecedented freedom to pray, to worship and to show compassion to our neighbours. We've been given an environment for revival.

What are we doing now with the blessings that have already fallen into our laps – most probably as a result of the prayers of past generations of faithful intercessors? Are we running at our full potential with the resources already at our disposal?

A warning for those who sit on their blessings is in the parable of the rich fool. Having built bigger barns to contain his grain mountain, the man decided to take life easy. But God demanded that life from him. 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God,' said Jesus (Luke 12). Christ was referring to material possessions. How would he feel if we kept the whole range of his blessings to ourselves?

Even after self-examination, we may feel we are ready to ask for 'more'. At that point we should remember that with greater blessing surely comes greater responsibility. The *Prayer Of Jabez* may be a pocket-sized book at a pocket-sized price, but praying it could cost us more than we realise.

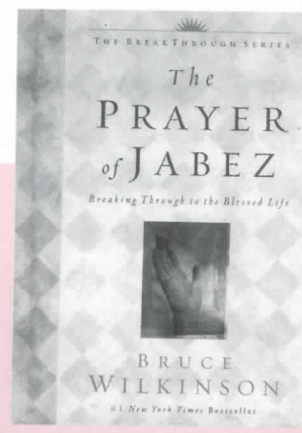
Back to Joel Kneidler for the last word. 'There comes a point when you stop praying the prayer,' he said, 'because you have so many things on your plate.'

**Clive Price is Consultant Editor of Compass magazine.**

## The Prayer Of Jabez

'And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain". So God granted him what he requested.'

(1 Chronicles 4:10, Revised Authorised Version)





# Divine made dull

**T**he bishop chortled with a broad smile: 'I intend to give you all a jolly good ashing'. Mild panic settled over us all – especially those who had misheard him and thought that he had announced a desire to give us all a good thrashing.

Undeterred by our nervous titters, the bishop produced a cork, a box of matches, and a prayer book. Only when he had set fire to the cork, his smiling eyes reflected in the flames like a religious arsonist, did some of us realise that he was talking about ashing.

It was, of course, Ash Wednesday. So Bishop Pete led us in a liturgy that celebrated the grace of God for a humanity that is, in a sense, nothing more than ash – and then wandered around the room, praying for us, that we in our raw nothingness would discover the outrage of grace, the reality of the King lifting up the beggar. Tears of gratitude and repentance flowed. It was rich.

Since then I've been using the Anglican prayer book as a basis for my prayers, sometimes first thing in the morning, and

I've done that, along with many others, in the realm of non-religiosity. I've looked at what I saw as a religious style – (pews/clerical dress/altars/candles/icons/liturgy and a host of other practices) and have thrown them all into a large dumpster called 'religion'. That dumpster is a fat, squat testament to my own arrogance – and also a huge amount of self deception.

In rejecting the traditions of others as being religious, I therefore set up my own habits and expressions of faith as being alternative, radical, and non-religious – and engage in one of the primary attitudes of the truly religious heart – pride – in the process.

Ironically, having filled the dumpster, we have then had to scabble around to find alternatives to what we have dumped. So why, for example, do we have flags? Simple. We don't have any stained glass windows. The colour and storytelling of religious architecture offers us some revelatory sunshine on an otherwise dreary day. When we look at a window or a symbol, the story comes alive for us.

But we put the windows in the dumpster, and installed our own boring UPVC New Church-style worship that rejected any kind of colour and symbol with a

neo-Puritan fervency. We jiggled up and down in our draughty, tedious rented school halls, and got hugely bored. There was no smell of incense for us, just the faint odour of stale milk from the kitchens.

And then, tired of our sterile, clinical religion, we made some flags – a bit of colour on canvas. I'm glad we did. We were trying in a small way to break out of the scandal that is the Divine made dull.

We reacted, and congratulated ourselves that we were radical in the process. Perhaps there's a humility coming to us these days, a genuine sense that we really can enjoy the traditions of others.



● **Jeff Lucas is an author and speaker, regular contributor to Compass, and has key roles in the Evangelical Alliance and Spring Harvest. He is part of the leadership team of a church in Colorado, USA. He and wife Kay live in Chichester and Colorado.**

**We chucked out the stained glass and installed boring UPVC New Church-style worship that rejected any kind of colour with a neo-Puritan fervency. Jeff Lucas urges to wake up and smell the incense**

But even there, there's another danger. It's possible that we might over-react and take just about anything on board in the desperate desire to see something – anything – happen.

I'll come out of the closet. I've never been comfortable with the 'revivalism' characterised by Pensacola. I'm not attacking it. I'm not rejecting it superficially because the preachers wear suits or the choir wears robes. Those facts are irrelevant. I do however, have some deeper concerns about a hellfire propagation of intense legalism.

I've walked that way before. I don't want to go there again. It seems to me that a tolerance towards legalism is the very last thing that we need. Paul's thunderous denunciations of the Judaizers in his scribbles to the Galatians, and elsewhere, should warn us away from this kind of religion.

That doesn't mean I'm suggesting that God is not 'showing up' in Florida. The somewhat exasperating ability of God to come running wherever he finds a hungry people is frustrating to those of us who just want to know 'whether it's right – or wrong' is confusing until we remind ourselves that he operates the same policy towards fallen us.

But his blessing and activity in no way mandates or confirms his approval of everything that is done there. He calls us to ask gracious, mature questions, rather than to swallow wholesale everything that is done in his name.

So let's neither react and consign other people's practices in the garbage, or just put our brains on hold in a never-mind-the-quality-feel-the-width approach to revival. Reflection, rather than reaction, will produce light rather than heat.

I have to go now. I've got a big dumpster I'm currently rifling through.

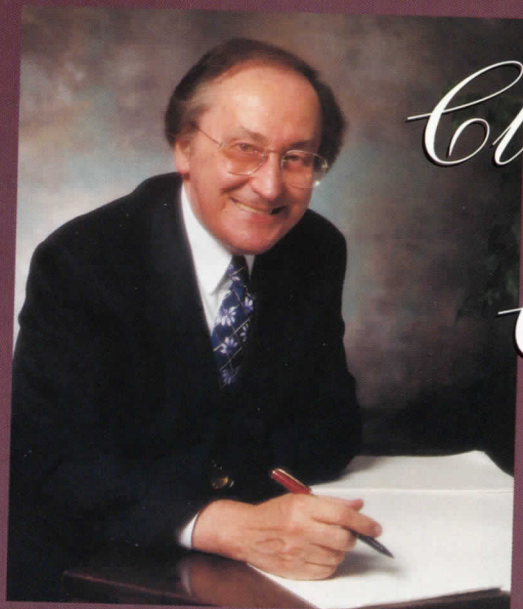
## What's going on? Am I becoming an undercover Anglican?

sometimes in the closing moments before sleep. In encountering the power of liturgy, I made the simple discovery that I don't pray more than I do because I simply can't think of anything useful to say.

To take the carefully thought through words of another, words that leap and dance with biblical truth, words that have been the comfort of believers through the centuries, has added another dimension to my spirituality. So what's going on? Am I becoming an undercover Anglican?

I think that, more to the point, I'm finding out that a lot of my pursuit of non-religious Christianity has been based on unhealthy reaction. It is brain-numbingly easy to define your Christianity in terms of what you don't do. So legalistic believers have a tendency to announce their pedigree as a result of having a list of things that they abstain from, thereby marking them as authentic.





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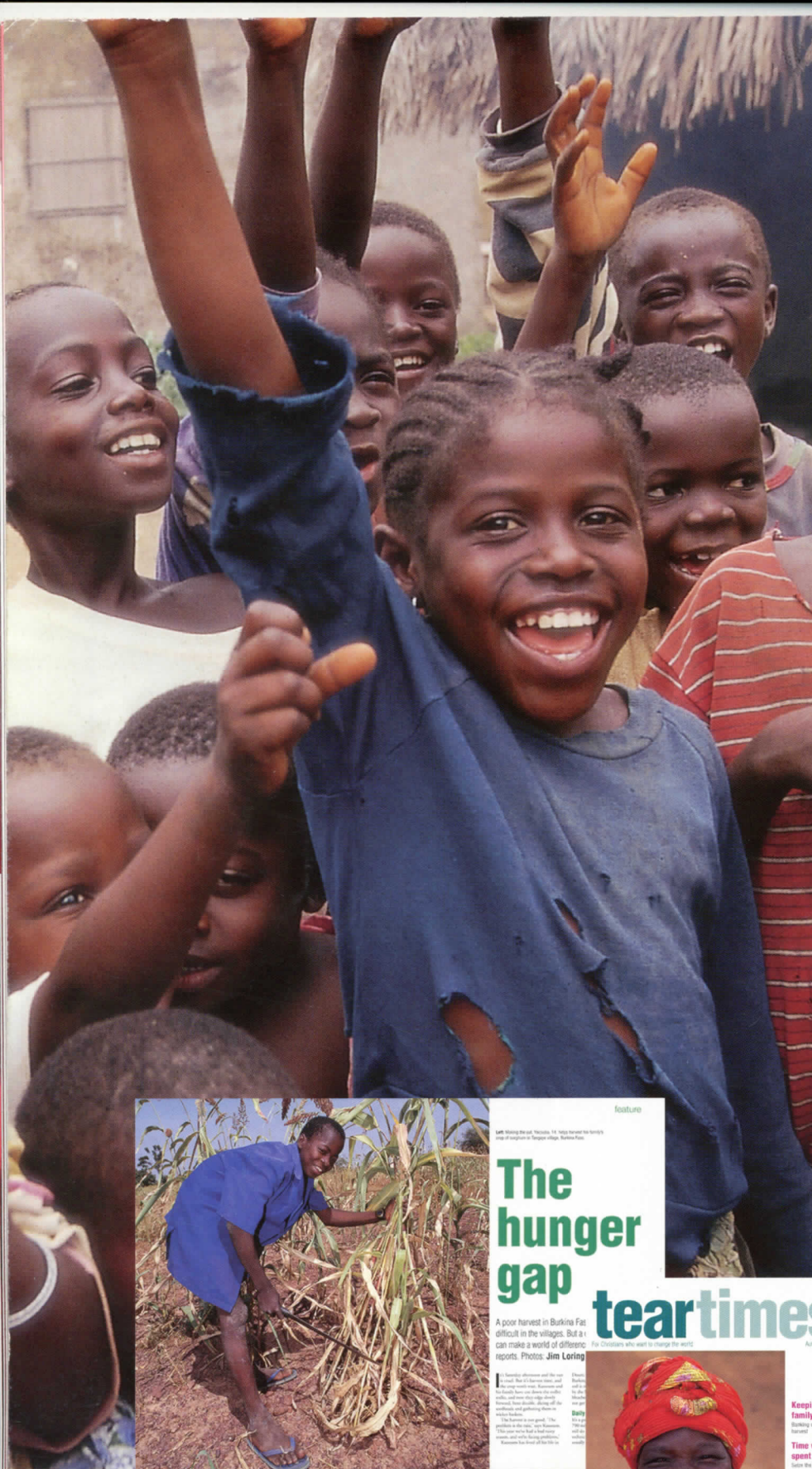
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