

LEONARD SWEET

with contributions and afterword from

MARK CHIRONNA

RINGS OF FIRE

**Walking in Faith
through a
Volcanic Future**



Twenty years ago, I read *SoulTsunami*, and my soul was saturated by Len Sweet's inspiring vision of a future church that could swim in the fluid culture of the twenty-first century. Now, *Rings of Fire* has set my brain ablaze as he describes the spiritual hot zones that await twenty-second-century Christ followers. If you're ready to learn how to fight fire with the Spirit's fire, read this powerful book by my favorite holy arsonist.

TIM LUCAS, founder and lead pastor of Liquid Church, author of *Liquid Church: 6 Powerful Currents to Saturate Your City for Christ*

Too often in contemporary times, "Christian thought" is a practical oxymoron. For some, the exercising of faith is the relinquishing of curiosity and query that is at the center of sound thought process. Thank God for Len Sweet and his eternally curious mind. It is impossible to read Len Sweet and not think about what it means to be a person of faith. In *Rings of Fire*, Sweet guides us through multiple places of present and potential eruption in the world in which we live and profess faith. Many of these places influence and confront us every day, but we have detached them from our sense of being faithful. It is inescapable: We and our faith are definitely "in the world" (John 17:11).

GARY SIMPSON, associate professor of homiletics at Drew Theological School, leading pastor at The Concord Baptist Church of Christ

Len Sweet has once again written a guide for the future by asking questions we all need to answer. *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future* looks at the past, present, and then into the future to challenge the church to choose faith over fear and become all God meant for her to be.

DAVE FERGUSON, visionary for NewThing, coauthor of *Hero Maker*

Leonard Sweet is a prophet of sorts: He speaks of things he sees. We often hold prophets at bay because they challenge us with words describing a future that has yet to arrive. But when you find a prophet who regularly nails it, you pay close attention to what they say since you know that you will likely intersect with that future. Leonard Sweet's voice is so critically important for us to hear and embrace, because what he has seen and spoken will have a great impact on our lives, and he has already begun to identify how we should respond to a future that is rapidly settling on us.

GLENN BURRIS, president of The Foursquare Church

Just as seismic pressure forces magma to rise through the crust of solid rocks, creating a massive volcanic eruption, in *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future*, Dr. Leonard Sweet reveals to us the compounding, cataclysmic, global pressure points that produce a future world on fire. I encourage every Christian leader to read this earthshaking book and learn what it will take to walk in faith through a future world that will soon be upon us. Put down your old ministry maps and pick up *Rings of Fire* today!

DR. JAMES O. DAVIS, cofounder of Global Church Network, founder of Cutting Edge International

The gift of Len Sweet is the compelling way he draws us into current and future spiritual realities with imagery, facts, and bold prophetic vision. This book is his best so far (and they are all good). *Rings of Fire* is the shaking we need as the world shifts beneath us, as we wonder about the future of the church. Sweet not only demonstrates how twelve major social domains will impact the next century but also suggests strategic ways to embrace the fire.

DR. MARYKATE MORSE, mentor and author

What used to be a nice song has turned into a fiery reality. The world of the twenty-second century is a global ring of fire. Len Sweet—semiotician, storyteller, and prophetic seer of the future—masterfully helps us make sense of this new world full of erupting volcanoes. He guides us through the hot zones and hot topics of our day and shows us how to embrace this volcanic culture as followers of Jesus. This brilliant and timely book serves as a first responder's manual to a blazing new landscape. It is the primer for all who desire an eruptive faith, one that keeps up with Jesus while inviting others to God's fire to get warm. This book will assist and enable the church of the future to walk on lava!

STEPHAN JOUBERT, Extraordinary Professor of Contemporary Ecclesiology at University of the Free State, editor of *Ekerk*

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Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future

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Preface

*A talent for following the ways of yesterday is not
sufficient to improve the world of today.*

KING WU-LING OF ZHAO
(NORTHEASTERN CHINA), 307 BC

I LIVE ON A SMALL, HORSESHOE-SHAPED ISLAND called Orcas, which floats precariously on a 25,000-mile horseshoe-shaped arc of volcanoes. That connection of trenches, belts, plates, and subduction zones that encircle the Pacific basin is called the Ring of Fire. It boasts 75 to 80 percent of the world's volcanoes (452 active and dormant). Of the twenty-five largest eruptions in the last 11,700 years, twenty-two are located here.

Moving fault lines on the Ring of Fire generate earthquakes and eruptions multiple times a day. Most are too small to be felt or observed.¹ But sometimes the earth rocks and blows. The volcano that erupted in Hawaii in 2018 created rivers of fire that, when they hit the ocean, provoked dangerous chemical reactions, including a steam cloud of “laze” filled with shards of glass and toxic chemicals. As if the lava, acid rain, volcanic smog, sulfur dioxide, lahar, caldera, explosions, eruption plumes, debris avalanches, and fissures weren't enough, now Hawaii residents had to deal with the laze.

The world is now one global Ring of Fire.

Twenty years ago, I wrote *SoulTsunami* for the church as it entered the twenty-first century. *Rings of Fire* is written for the twenty-second century. Actuarially speaking, a child born after 2000 has a greater than 50 percent chance of living well into the next century, which means that right now our families and churches are forming and norming a twenty-second-century faith.

How are we doing?

Everyone is asking questions like “What is going on out there?” “How in the world did that happen?” “Why are we so polarized?” These are global

questions, symptoms of structural shifts in society that impact the whole world. We are living on the other side of a cultural tsunami.

Truth is a matter of eternity, whether it is truth evaded or truth faced.

PETER KREEFT,
HEAVEN: THE HEART'S DEEPEST LONGING

We live in a world that is constantly, simultaneously, solidifying and liquefying. In spite of our best efforts, the church is unprepared for the future and unpleasant when asked to think about it.

We are like the Haitian family so traumatized by the January 2010 earthquake that they fled to Chile—only to go through an even greater earthquake a month later. Or the Mitsubishi engineer Tsutomu Yamaguchi, who fled the bombing of Hiroshima during World War II, taking refuge in Nagasaki. Society is unraveling, and when you try to escape, turn your back on the unraveling, or join the denial lobby, you go from bad to worse.

I believe God is already present and active in these erupting volcanoes. The Way through and around and over them is already in the midst of them. Jesus calls his disciples to be first responders, those who run toward, not away from, the future.

This book is designed as a kind of first responders manual to help you assess the situation and assist the Spirit as the situation requires. The volcanic metaphor finds its inspiration in perhaps the most astute interpreter of the US in our history: the politician and writer Alexis de Tocqueville. In 1848, he addressed the French National Assembly with these words: “We are sitting on a volcano. Can’t you see that the earth is trembling again?”² The church needs to be more fiery than its culture. Only fire beats fire.

In a volcanic world, hot pockets are ready to blow and erupt at any minute, with constant explosions and sudden power surges. This kind of world needs the tribe of Issachar to re-form and rediscover their role in reading signs and knowing what to do.³

Ready or not, the future shows up. A default future arrives willy-nilly. A desirable future is birthed in blood, sweat, and tears. A faith that finds God in the past boasts roots, but a faith that finds God in the future bears fruits.⁴ It is our prayer that this book will help the church thank God, not just for what has been but also for what is coming as the church ventures

forth into this volcanic culture with a red-hot, eruptive faith, bringing old and new together in innovative, probing, playful, and paradoxical ways.

The Dead by the Side of the Road

When it comes to the future, the church is in the dark—not only unable to see the forest for the trees but also lost in the bark. The church of the future will be impossible to locate on a spectrum of left or right, only forward or backward. It is apostasy not to be in one’s own time, both for the disciple and for the church. The ecclesiastical equivalent of sinning against the Holy Ghost is not to be open to the future.

In this book we take a fresh look at the global megatrends affecting the church of the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries—the “hot zones” worth keeping a watchful eye on, the “hot topics” that we can’t avoid discussing, and the front-burner issues making for a “hot church,” along with some “hot takes” to stimulate further consideration down the road. We approach these megatrends from a faith-based rather than a fear-based posture. We have no interest in “keeping up with the times” but rather in keeping up with Jesus and opening up to God’s presence in the times we’re in. Jesus the Bread of Life is unchanging—the same yesterday, today, and forever—because the Bread is constantly changing, freshly baked for every time and clime.

*Most Americans write hundreds if not thousands more words a day
than they did ten or twenty years ago.*

ANNE TRUBEK,
THE HISTORY AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF HANDWRITING

The church is in the state it’s in partly because it has mistaken the *Zeitgeist* (“spirit of the times”) for the *Heilige Geist* (“Holy Spirit”). Every time-and-technology “sign” opens up a biblical way forward and a “sign of the Spirit.” A church that incarnates the timeless and the timely at the same time yields timefulness.

Mark Chironna made an addendum to an old adage: “When one door closes, another door opens. But the hallway is a hellway.” Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit priest and the founder of Homeboy Industries, reflected that revised adage when he adopted the phrase “line the hallway” as an image statement for Homeboy Industries:

At Homeboy Industries, I tell our senior staff that part of our task is to “line the hallway,” to make that distance stretching between the old and new versions of one’s self a comforting one. We encourage and cajole with a constant tenderness as the tentative soul takes steps toward the fullness of becoming. The hallway can be long and the lure to return to an old, tired, but known and safe version can be compelling. And those who line the hallway haven’t arrived fully either. Our mutual accompaniment with each other along the way pulls us all over the finish line. It’s about the “rehab of the soul,” as one of our senior staff puts it. We all line the hallway on this good journey with only gentleness in our rucksack and our own brokenness within reach.⁵

Rings of Fire shows how a Christian can walk that hallway and line that hallway, all the while looking for doors to open that will let the Kingdom future “in.” As Jesus uses the term, the Kingdom is that desired future where God reigns in justice and in peace.

We call for the cultivation of semiotic awareness and a prophetic role for all disciples, what we might call (in the spirit of Issachar) the “prophethood of all believers.”⁶ If a prophet is one who speaks for the future, we must somehow all be prophets now.

This prophetic role of the laity was recognized by the Second Vatican Council (1962–5). There is a prophetic role, which is a matter of “ends” from a religious perspective; there is a pragmatic role, which is a matter of “means” from a political-economic-social perspective. We need both the prophetic and the pragmatic. Most often there is a tension between the two. Seldom do the prophetic and the pragmatic elide into one calling, or one book.

Reality helps by terrors which transcend the parrot-wisdom of trivial experience.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD,
THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

Hence the concluding call for a new order of Issachar. Even though Ossip Flechtheim coined the term *futureology*, Jesus is its original inventor. Jesus comes to his disciples from the future and pulls us forward more than pushes us from behind. When Jesus taught us to live abundantly, he taught us to live *out of* the past, to live *in* the present (not in the past), and to live *into* the future. You can’t live in the past and go forward. To study Jesus is to study the future.

“I have a thousand and ten thousand things to say to you. My heart is full of futurity,” wrote William Blake to Thomas Butts.⁷ How many of our hearts are “full of futurity”? In this book we will forget about the thousand or ten thousand futurities and will consider a precise set of futurities from the twelve major domains of twenty-first- and twenty-second-century life:

- › politics and power
- › business and economics
- › science
- › technology
- › health and healing
- › environment
- › religion
- › culture (pop and high) and communications
- › arts
- › governance
- › education
- › family and relationships

Based on our research into all twelve domains, we have organized our findings along a fivefold grid: text, textures, tensions, triggers, and trajectories.

- › *Texts* are the primary resources and hard data that tell us in black-and-white what is going on—facts on the ground about the future. But all data has to be interpreted, and data often leads us astray. The words *figure* (number) and *fictitious* come from the same Latin roots: *figura*, meaning “to shape into,” and *figere*, meaning “to mold” or “to dissemble.” You can’t trust the data, but you still need data. Go figure.
- › *Textures* are how the hard data is experienced in emotions and motions. Facts alone are never the whole story—it’s the space between the facts where the story appears.
- › *Tensions* are the fault lines on the front lines. We pluck revelatory threads out from an all-too-uneven cultural fabric.
- › *Triggers* are those wild cards that could explode at any minute.
- › *Trajectories* are the winds blowing in a certain direction and the identification of artifacts from the future.

Rings of Fire continues the approach I've taken in three of my earlier books. They were lonely at the time of their releases, but their observations proved out and set the table for the work of this book.

FaithQuakes (1994) was originally drafted as a manifesto to be released by a multiracial, multid denominational group of twelve US evangelicals after a 1991 Moscow meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev. It argued that the church must prepare for a succession of cultural earthquakes impacting the home, the workplace, our relationships, and our mission.

SoulTsunami (1999) served up ten appetizers of future food the church needed to get used to, including glocalisms and the dechurched movement.

Carpe Mañana (2001) roughed up the church a bit with a series of switches:

- › from manual to digital
- › from linear to loop
- › from word to image
- › from vast to fast
- › from “make sense” to “make sense”
- › from “Who am I?” to “What is to be done?”
- › from sharp to fuzzy
- › from outer space to inner space
- › from clockwork orange to web green

As the world—not just the West—wobbles on its axis and smoking volcanoes flare up all around us, *Rings of Fire* comes as the main course of this now-twenty-year meal: How do we distinguish our state from our fate? The state, as observed by Bill Emmott in his *The Fate of the West*, is “demoralised, decadent, deflating, demographically challenged, divided, disintegrating, dysfunctional, declining.”⁸ In such a world of decivilizing forces, when civilization itself seems to be blowing up, the path to the future must be one that recivilizes life and culture.

We are aware of the colonial baggage that the phrase “civilizing gospel” carries, but our emphasis now is not on the subjectivity of civilizing but on the bedrock strength of gospel, which teaches us all how to be human again, which was at the heart of Jesus’ mission. The colonial mission was one of spreading a Jesus gospel stamped “Western.” We are calling the church to spread a Jesus gospel stamped “Human.”

*Every historical era is . . . multitemporal, simultaneously drawing
from the obsolete, the contemporary, and the futuristic.*

MICHEL SERRES,
CONVERSATIONS ON SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND TIME

God's church will always have a future. It is God's mission, not the church's mission, and God's mission will be carried out, with or without our tribes and traditions. This is made uncomfortably explicit in the story of Hosea, who has three children by Gomer: Jezreel ("God will sow"), Lo-Ruchamah ("No Mercy"), and Lo-Ammi ("Not My People").⁹ Hosea's second and third children were living reminders that God is not captive to our capitulations, not an accomplice to our idolatry.

Sometimes God works not by addition, nor even by multiplication, but by subtraction. The children of God were still the children of God, even after the ten northern tribes were lost. The divine seems to enjoy working through a faithful remnant, the critical mass of "two or three," not a mishmash gabbagool of majority-rules compromise or middle-of-the-road mediocrity.

*The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth
trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it.*

NAHUM 1:5

God's mission now takes place on a landscape where volcanoes are erupting all around us, eruptions that bring in their wake lava flows, magma rock, and vents and fissures that open with unpredictable flurry and fury. You can live on a territory carved out by volcanoes. Just visit Iceland. In Iceland you can even walk on lava.¹⁰ But it's a very different life and walk.

You can survive mega seismic quakes and tsunamis too. Just ask Tokyo, which felt a major seism registering 9.0 on the Richter scale, the biggest in Japan's history and the fourth largest recorded in the history of the planet, that occurred off the Pacific coast of Japan's Tohoku region on March 11, 2011, and rocked central Tokyo for six minutes. Tokyo survived relatively unscathed, but only because they were prepared by decades of strict building codes, shake-proof innovations in construction, broadcast alerts, and evacuation drills.

In this book we don't give models or blueprints or fill-in-the-blanks formulas for moving into the future. What we do give are strategies, schemas, scenarios, story lines, and metaphors. Much of what we say will be sweeping. But some "sweeping" arguments are as necessary as brooms. In a book that is by definition sweeping, we did not feel bound to solve a problem. It's enough to call attention to the breakage and warn people not to step there.

When accosted with new information, the women in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* "fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through."¹¹ When confronted with new technologies or information, the church has fallen mostly into the first two groups. It reflexively believes the worst of it or believes none of it would ever happen. Each ring of fire in the pages that follow is a summons for the Ellas to emerge.

*We have enough scientific knowledge and enough technical means
to ward off the threats that are said to hang over the world;
now all we need is to actually want to ward them off.*

RENÉ GIRARD,
WHEN THESE THINGS BEGIN

The last prayer of the Bible is "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"¹² This prayer is how the first Christians greeted one another—a departure from the conventional Jewish greeting "Shalom" ("Peace"). They knew their times were troubled and tormented and that the only shalom they might find in this life was the peace of the coming Christ.

*Oh, my loving brother,
When the world's on fire,
Don't you want God's bosom
To be your pillow?*

"FIRE SONG" (APPALACHIAN CHORUS)

Wake up! The world's on fire! "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."¹³

Introduction

*The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness
and the greatest enjoyment is to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slope
of Vesuvius! Send your ships into unexplored seas! Live in war
with your equals and with yourselves!*

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,
THE GAY SCIENCE

THE DRAMA OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE is always played out on the stage of culture. Is culture your bosom buddy? Is culture your enemy? Or is culture your inevitable companion on the journey? You can't escape culture, nor would it be good if you could.¹

Having culture as a bosom buddy can lead to collusion (or syncretism). Having culture as an enemy can lead to condemnation.² Having culture as a companion on your journey can lead to its own problems.

We do not get to pick our ambient culture. God has determined our appointed times.³ You and I are part of an arranged marriage, made and chosen "for such a time as this."⁴ The *Zeitgeist* ("spirit of the times") is not the enemy but the context in which the *Heilige Geist* ("Holy Spirit") wants to be released and unleashed. The church spends more time slandering its moment than in savoring and saving its moment. If we loved the world as God so loved the world, we would love it well and love it to life.

On the Side of the Angles

But we live "our times" not as the world lives its time. In a holy triangulation, we are to be "in" the culture but not "of" the culture. The Christian faith interacts with the culture always at an angle to it.⁵ To live incarnationally is not to live out of time or out of place but to live in time and in place in a way that is not in-time or in-place. In this respect Jesus promised to make his disciples "anglers of people."⁶

There has never been a present that has accurately comprehended itself historically, let alone interpreted the present adequately for the future. We

rush in where angels fear to tread. How do we keep the charge (and keep charged) for a lifetime of ministry and mission?

If Darth Vader can be converted, anything is possible. In *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith*, a climactic battle takes place where Anakin (whom we later know as Darth Vader) makes a pact with the devil. The background of this final crossing over to the dark side is a sea of fire, or lava, on a planet filled with nothing but volcanoes. The lava at the end opens into hell.⁷

Look around you in any direction—socially, politically, economically, religiously. Can you see the slow flow of lava? How can you miss the fire fountains swarming the sky? The music industry did not see it in 1999 when it celebrated the most profitable year in its history. When it was pointed out to top executives at a London consultation that something else was going on that could change this in a nanosecond—something digital and streaming—the executives laughed and cut short the consultation as a waste of their time. CDs would rule forever, they said. Consumers would never prefer access to ownership. Within the year, “mp3” overtook “sex” as the Internet’s most popular search term.⁸

Are we living in “the best of times” or “the worst of times”? Is the world hotfooting it to hell in a handbasket? Or is the world ambling to paradise, with the better angels of our nature at the wheel? Is the future a promised land of milk and honey or a hellscape? War, disease, poverty, and despair have always been part of human history. Are they getting worse or better? Will they always be with us?

We must meet the challenge rather than wish it were not before us.

JUSTICE WILLIAM J. BRENNAN JR.,
SPEECH GIVEN AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Some say we are living among the endings, the postludes, the codas of a great tradition. Some say “our times” are an “age of enrichment.” Some say we are living in an “enlightenment age” as the Internet births a whole new civilization and new technologies make possible a whole new human. Others say we are teetering on the edge of Armageddon, an age of lurking catastrophes, with our new vernacular of technology a veritable alphabet of apocalypse, a syllabus of horrors. Will scientific shouts of “Eureka!” be greeted by shouts of praise or shrieks of horror?⁹

Should our response to the future be bounded enthusiasm or stiff-upper-lip

despair? Or maybe our palates should get used to a sweet and sour fricassee of honeyed hopes and braced-to-face realities?

A Die Progress Unit (DPU) is the amount of time it takes human beings to achieve enough progress that the shock of bringing a time traveler to your era would kill them. In hunter-gatherer times, a DPU stretched over hundreds of thousands of years. Post–Agricultural Revolution rates were reduced to about twelve thousand years. The post–Industrial Revolution world has moved so quickly that a person living in 1750 would only need to go forward a few hundred years for the disparity between the world she knows and the world in which she suddenly finds herself to stop her heart.¹⁰

We believe 2050 will be a coming DPU for anyone reading this book. We live in a science-fictional world. Our children may well experience multiple DPUs in their lifetimes, a shock to the psyche never before experienced, much less imagined in human history. The world we used to call home is going up in smoke. Our descendants will have multiple worlds go up in smoke in their lifetimes.

Oh, it needn't come to that!

ALICE TO HUMPTY DUMPTY

Scholars who take the most data-driven, hardheaded, chapter-and-verse demographic probes of where we are today end up in a very optimistic place. Wealth is more evenly distributed than it was two hundred years ago, one of many trends that need to be rescued from their reputations. In the twentieth century, which medieval historian Ian Mortimer believes was the “most-change century” of the last thousand years,¹¹ USAmericans were 92 percent less likely to perish in a fire, 96 percent less likely to die in a car crash, and 95 percent less likely to die on the job.¹² Humanity is also becoming less violent.¹³

People in the world are getting smarter, living longer, getting better educated. Thanks to the trifecta of free markets, free trade, and free enterprise, people of modest means throughout the world can now live better than the rich of the not-so-distant past. The “poor” enjoy luxuries that robber barons such as the Rothschilds and Rockefellers couldn’t imagine.

When you brought your produce to market in the agricultural age and you looked at how the royalty lived in that moated castle, little could you

imagine that in the industrial age people would live the same way. In the industrial age, when you worked on those railroads and looked at how the millionaire robber barons lived in remote mansions, little could you imagine that in the digital age this is how people would live. When you freelance in the digital age and look at how the billionaires live, where things they don't want to do are done for them, little can you imagine that in the future this is how you will live, liberating you for what you find impressive, persuasive, immersive.

Even today, residents of the poorest places on the planet, the favelas in Rio de Janeiro and the squatter camps of Africa, enjoy TVs, air-conditioning, and stereos, with many of the homeless even owning supercomputer phones with apps geared specifically to them. Advances in medicine, including genetic therapy and breaching the blood-brain barrier, open up whole new possibilities for healing some of the most intractable diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and cancer. In the words of the archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, "The greatest expansion of riches, and reduction in poverty, famine and general want, has been under the market economies."¹⁴

There is so much hype about future technology that if it does anything less than make the earth move, it will be deemed a failure. The more responsible and critical antipessimists include Julian Simon (*Hoodwinking the Nation*), Bjørn Lomborg (*Global Crises, Global Solutions:*), Matt Ridley (*The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*), Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler (*Abundance: The Future Is Better than You Think*), and Kevin Kelly (*The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future*). The outlines of their arguments are as follows:

- › Food is more abundant and available.
- › Clean water and good sanitation are increasingly available.
- › Life expectancy is longer.
- › Poverty has fallen dramatically.
- › Global living standards are skyrocketing
- › War and violence blight fewer lives.
- › Increasing wealth has benefited the environment.
- › Literacy is widening and deepening.
- › People are increasingly free of despotic authority.
- › Equality is increasingly experienced and demanded.
- › Advanced agricultural technology such as farmbots will raise crop yields by as much as 70 percent by 2050.¹⁵

- › More than a billion people have been lifted out of poverty in the last fifty years.¹⁶
- › Ethical consumerism is becoming the norm, with some grocery chains carrying only fruits that have a fair trade label.¹⁷
- › Ethical audits of organizations and corporations are now the norm, not the exception, and any nation without an ethical dimension to its foreign policy is scorned and marginalized.
- › Globally, there was a 37 percent decrease in executions from 2015 (1,634) to 2016 (1,032), according to Amnesty International.¹⁸

So far, so optimistic—but not for two authors in particular. Swedish intellectual Johan Norberg and Harvard cognitive scientist Steven Pinker showcase the variety of ways the world has “progressed” over the last three centuries to blunt the scourges facing our ancestors. Pinker’s books are less a paean to progress than a panegyric for reason and the Enlightenment. In his hatred of religion as a regressive force, Pinker fails to realize that his vaunted “Enlightenment values” are mostly a gift to the world from Christianity.¹⁹ He also fails to admit that rationalism in the wrong hands and without the constraints of religion have given us some troubling gifts: Leninism, Maoism, Stalinism, and Nazism.²⁰

*People may say what they like about the decay of Christianity;
the religious system that produced green Chartreuse can never really die.*

H. H. MUNRO,
“REGINALD ON CHRISTMAS PRESENTS”

Because of the nature of media, where good news is no news, no news is bad news, and bad news is good news, daily headlines countermand this glowing picture. Addicted to adrenaline and fueled by TV-cabled anger, we are captive to the “availability heuristic”²¹ and the Zeigarnik effect.

The “availability heuristic” is cognitive science’s way of talking about how the human brain privileges the probability of what is most memorable. What do we remember most? The most horrific and shocking. The longer an incident stays in our thoughts, the more “available” the memory, the more we believe similar incidents happen frequently, and the more blind we are to actual reality. In short, mind mirrors media: It privileges bad news over good news.

The Zeigarnik effect is named after Lithuanian psychologist Bluma

Wulfovna Zeigarnik. She noticed in 1927 how people better remember unresolved, incomplete events than resolved, completed ones. In relational terms, if you want to get over a relationship and move on, you must give it an ending. If it's open and unresolved, like major disasters and uncertain developments, you have trouble putting it to rest.

The world is as healthy, wealthy, and wise as it's ever been. Things have been getting better for Europeans and USAmericans since 1800 and for the rest of the world over the past seventy years. To be sure, hunger, pollution, terrorism, poverty, and sickness are facts of life for many throughout the world. Still, in historical perspective as well as in absolute terms, these ills are on the decline. To be sure, there is huge inequality in the world, but the floor of that inequality is not nearly as low as it has been, even if the upper regions of that inequality are getting bigger. In short, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting less poor, but the rich are getting so much richer that in comparison it seems as if the poor were getting poorer.

So if life keeps on getting better, and we make better magic every day, why do we live in a time of tumbling hopes, despairing fears, and depressive spirits? Why do we keep folding our magic carpets or use them as tapestries? Depression is the mind's waterboarding of the spirit. Depression rates are climbing almost everywhere, as are drug abuse and addictions. An array of addictive and compulsive habits is always on display.

People may be doing better in every way, but they don't feel they are and are depressed about it and looking for ways to escape all the success. Technology has brought us to the edge of utopia and to the edge of psychological and environmental dystopia.²²

It's almost as if Jesus had diagnosed our condition: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"²³ It's almost as if Jesus' warning were coming true: "Watch out . . . life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."²⁴ It's almost as if higher wages won't bring happiness and higher life expectancy won't bring happiness, for only the Bread of Life will satisfy.

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.

JOHN MILTON,
"LYCIDAS"

If you do not listen to the world in stereo, the louder channel is the bad news. And when bad news is all you hear, the handwriting is on the wall:²⁵

- › A world where anti-Semitism is on the rise.
- › A world that has lost half the planet's topsoil in the last fifty years.
- › A world that has heated the atmosphere to dangerous thresholds, even (some say) beyond the point of no return.
- › A world with such acidified oceans that the future of saltwater fish is in question.
- › A world where soon seas will have as much weight in plastic as in fish.
- › A world where humans have ushered in the greatest mass extinction since the wiping out of the dinosaurs.
- › A world that has militarized the public schooling of its children—already in some neighborhoods police officers outnumber guidance counselors or nurses.
- › A world that has criminalized addiction and throws those addicted into jail with set sentences, jails that are hotbeds of high drug activity and addiction.²⁶

An apocalyptic spirit is pervasive: moral panics of ecological collapse, technological dystopia. So many zombies in popular culture you can't keep up with them. More than 60 percent of New Yorkers believe the end of the world is imminent.²⁷

Maybe every age is equidistant from eternity. At the end of every technological advancement, the ones who invented the technology are still human and prone to waywardness.²⁸ Maybe the best is yet to come because the worst is already here. Maybe Umberto Eco was right in his claim that “technology moves like a crayfish, in other words, backwards.”²⁹

Never underestimate nostalgia and its power to idealize the past and demonize the present.³⁰ Headlines capture and catalog the doomsayer's handbasket, filling it with a cornucopia of fears about the worsening of the human condition that make the appetite for nostalgia all the more sweet.

But where nostalgia is a slow buzz, vertigo causes disorienting spells of dizziness and the “spins” that turn apocalyptic anxieties into flare-ups. Vertigo is as much a psychological reaction as a physical one. Why don't you get queasy, light-headed, and dizzy from looking down from a plane window? From a high window or the top of a building, you have to stop

looking down before your head “spins” from the dizzying sense of space below. We measure space by what we can calibrate. If we can’t calibrate it, the space is less threatening. Who’s to say the same isn’t true with time?

Is Your Body of Christ Pregnant?

Reversing the tide of one million youth leaving the church per year is the most significant domestic evangelism challenge in American history.

PINETOPS FOUNDATION,
THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY: THE AMERICAN CHURCH IN 2050

The twenty-first-century church in the West has the two worst illnesses any species can have. The first is a reproduction crisis. We cannot reproduce the faith in our children, our communities, our churches, and our world. When any species can no longer reproduce itself, we classify it as *endangered*.

The only thing worse than having a problem is the failure to be aware of the problem you have. That’s the church’s second illness—anosognosia, or the ignorance of illness.

This is the time for the church to find itself, to learn to be itself, and for new panoramas and pathways to address the world’s most urgent challenges. We can get ahead of social change. We can be a player in the formation of the future. But only those who are the most nimble and fleet-footed in the face of change are positioned to make the greatest contributions for the future.

“Reform!” the Duke of Wellington is said to have complained. “Aren’t things bad enough already?”³¹ Rumbling, erupting, and exploding volcanoes signal the time for volcanic drive and cyclonic energy among us, to carve anew some breath-giving vistas of the future. Bob Dylan’s “The Times They Are A-Changin’” may have worked for the twentieth century, but the soundtrack for the twenty-first century may be Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries.” Or if classical music is not your thing, try Johnny Cash’s “Ring of Fire.”

PART ONE

Hot Zones

1

HOSTILE CULTURE

I created every one of you with a burden of sin—guilty from the moment of birth. Then I loved you so much that I made a woman pregnant so she would give birth to me and I would become my own son so that I can have myself killed as a sacrifice to myself in order to save you evil sinners from the burden of sin that I created you with in the first place.

SALAFIST TRACT HANDED OUT BY SUNNI ISLAM EVANGELISTS
IN 2018 ON THE STREETS OF BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND,
SUMMARIZING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

THE EDITORS OF *GQ* MAGAZINE selected some of their favorite writers to challenge “received wisdom” about classic pieces of literature. The panel was instructed to select twenty-one books they believed were overrated and could be struck “from the canon.” Number twelve on the list of “21 Books You Don’t Have to Read” is the Bible.¹

The *GQ* editors chose to ban the Bible from any required reading lists because “it is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned.” In the Bible’s place the recommended reading is Ágota Kristóf’s novel about a world without empathy, *The Notebook* (1986).

Welcome to our (new) world, church. It’s a world we helped create. We asked for it.

The volcanic twenty-first century will call for the most creative evangelism and shrewd apologetics the church has seen since the first century. If ever the time is ripe for tilling, planting, and watering the soil, it is now. But best not to underestimate the challenge. We may be the least “formed” and worst prepared generation of Jesus disciples in history facing the greatest challenges the church has ever faced.

The life of Christian faith is now lived in an unfriendly environment. But “unfriendly” means different things in different times. For example, parochial schools and private Christian schools are under attack in Great Britain for promoting inequality by their existence. It is not uncommon now for weddings to be officiated by someone with no more than a notary public authority. But this is low-level “unfriendly.” Christians in the West have no idea what it means to suffer for one’s beliefs.

We will. Soon.

“Whom You . . . Denied before the Face of Pilate”

It is not easy to face or outface the “face of Pilate.”² Never has been. How many times have we shrunk back in fear, even repudiated our faith under the pressure of power and the peril of authority. “The face of Pilate” can be religious authority, political authority, or pop culture. But Jesus as Lord often takes a pass, a back seat, or even a sycophant sit-down when faced with the powers of the state.

Not until the fourth century did the early church talk about the “cross” so much. Prior to then, this symbol of torture and death was a daily reality for them. The first Christians loved the symbol of the fish (*ichthus* in Greek, its letters standing for “Jesus Christ Son of God Savior”) and clung close to cheerful, culinary images of Jesus partly because persecution had made life so difficult. Followers of Jesus today don’t seek out crosses to carry, but when you cross the grain of culture and church, you get splinters and splintered, which become our “thorns in the flesh,” and even sometimes, if they become cross-spangled banners, our “crosses to bear.”

Paper cannot wrap up a fire.

CHINESE PROVERB ON HOW TRUTH WILL ALWAYS WIN OUT

Most recent estimates are that one in ten Christians worldwide (200 million+ brothers and sisters) are being persecuted or discriminated against.³ Between February 12 and 15, 2015, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) beheaded twenty-one “people of the cross,” Egyptian Coptic Christians kidnapped in the city of Sirte, Libya. They were slaughtered on the beach opposite Al Mahary Hotel in Sirte. Their last words, spoken by each as their heads were cut off, was “Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do we know any of the names, even one, of the Coptic Christian martyrs? The early church passed on the names of the martyrs and spoke them

out loud as part of the Cloud.⁴ The world needs to hear these names, famous or not. They deserve it. We deserve it. The air deserves it—not just to clear the air but to clean the air.

Words like Asia Bibi are air cleaners for every household. Asia Bibi is the name of a Catholic woman sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. At the same time, we also need to remember those of other faith traditions who have been or are being persecuted for their beliefs, such as the Syrian archaeologist and director of antiquities who was beheaded trying to protect the Palmyra museum from its destroyers. ISIL hung the body of Khaled al-Asaad from a pillar with a placard on it reading, "Director of Idolatry."⁵ Why are we not weekly in worship lifting up prayers for "all persecuted Christians" and referencing some by name?

Some scholars have noticed the sharp contrast between the relative indifference of Christians to the fate of fellow Christians around the world and the care and concern of Muslims to the plight and predicament of fellow Muslims, as Muslims, or Jews, as Jews.⁶

It is time for the church to toughen up in dealing with the world today. Jesus sent his earliest disciples out into a world that killed them. He sends us out to a mocking and maligning world, but most of us are still alive. In the language of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, we must learn to be an Antifragile Church that can embrace vulnerability and weakness and celebrate the positivity of stress.⁷ To be "antifragile" is to trust the order behind the chaos, to flourish from random environments rather than established settings, and not to be afraid of antifragile preaching that can take place outside the normal patterns (systems) of church. YouTube, Facebook, podcasts, and other digital formats (screens) are a few antifragile ways to preach in a hostile culture.

*That feeling of wanting to jump up and down is one of the ways
that scientists measure joy.*

DESIGNER INGRID FETELL LEE,
"WHERE JOY HIDES AND HOW TO FIND IT"

"Blessed are you when people hate you," said Jesus, "when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets."⁸ How many Christians are jumping up and down in the good times, much less in times

of persecution and suffering? Maybe we do not leap and jump for joy because we've forgotten the reward now and the future reward? As we see in the Beatitudes, joy is one of the ways God measures faithfulness.

Different tribes engage in the practice of dog-whistling—sending out signals that only those who know the lingo and liturgy of the subculture will recognize. The twenty-first-century church has its own equivalent to this: the God-whistle.⁹ As the future unfolds, we will need to practice the God-whistle so our distinctives are clear and conformed to what God is whistling over us and for us.

Tears melt God's heart and bind his hand.

PURITAN THOMAS WATSON,
THE BEATITUDES

A medieval fable tells about a young woman who died early in life but was a troublemaker in heaven—so much that she was expelled but told that if she would return with the gift most valued by God, she would be welcomed back.

So she searched the ends of the earth for what God might value most. She brought back drops of blood from a dying patriot. She brought back some coins that a destitute widow had given the poor. She brought back a leaf from the Bible that one of the greatest preachers had used over a lifetime. She brought back some dust from the shoes of a missionary laboring on a remote island. She brought back many things such as these but was always turned away.

One day she saw a small boy playing by a fountain. A man rode up on horseback and dismounted to take a drink. The man saw the child and suddenly remembered his boyhood innocence. Then, looking in the fountain and seeing the reflection of his hardened face, he realized what he had done with his life. And tears of repentance welled up in his eyes and began to trickle down his cheeks. The young woman scooped up one of these tears in a lachrymatory and took it back to heaven . . . and was received with joy and celebration.

Repentance is a word seldom heard or used anymore. But *apologize* (from the weak French word *apologie* and the strong Greek/Latin word *apologia*) may begin to approach the depth of *metanoia*, or “repentance,” which David Bentley Hart consistently translates into English as “change of heart.”¹⁰

By *apologize*, we mean what John the Baptist meant when he began his ministry with the words “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”¹¹ True apology is not escapology but eschatology. This may include the traditional “apology,” as Pope Francis has demonstrated in his willingness to apologize to abuse victims.¹²

Unfortunately, when the church doesn’t want to engage in substantive thought about something, it issues an apology. For example, in 1917, at the four hundredth anniversary celebration of the Protestant Reformation, the primary emphasis of Anglicanism was to claim that the purest heir of the Reformation (although it started in Germany) was the Church of England. In the course of my lifetime, the Church of England has lost 75 percent of its membership.¹³ The five hundredth anniversary in 2017 featured a quasi-apology from Justin Welby (archbishop of Canterbury) and John Sentamu (archbishop of York) for the hubris of the previous celebration.¹⁴ This kind of groveling is almost enough to give *apology* a bad name.

Telling the truth is the only proper way of restoring dignity.

LITHUANIAN POET TOMAS VENCLOVA,
MAGNETIC NORTH

The first work of grace is the first word of grace: *Repent*. Like John the Baptist, Jesus began his ministry with this word: “Repent, and believe in the gospel.”¹⁵ Peter based his most famous sermon around it: “Repent and be baptized.”¹⁶ Paul could not stop reminding the churches that God “commands all people everywhere to repent.”¹⁷ Martin Luther’s first of 95 Theses was the affirmation that when Jesus called on people to repent, it was a call that reached to every corner of life. Beginning in 1775, the Second Continental Congress calendarized specific “National Days of Prayer and Fasting,” which featured calls to “repentance,” a tradition that was periodically observed throughout US history and most memorably reinstated by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

To apologize, in our sense of the word, involves a 3-m response: a metanoia (change of heart), a metamorphosis (change of behavior), and a metastasis (change of being). It is more than a time like Lent, when we confront our shortcomings and celebrate our passions; it is a daily lifestyle of conversion.

Everyone does wrong. The ultimate in doing wrong is failing to recognize you've done wrong and apologize for doing it.
 We've done wrong in placidly occupying our privileged perches in Christendom.
 We've done wrong in going down the rabbit's hole of leadership rather than keeping our eyes on the prize of our high calling as followers of Christ Jesus.¹⁸
 We've done wrong in not trusting the Holy Spirit to speak the vernacular.
 We've done wrong in a lack of humility for the blessings of our birth.
 We've done wrong as trustees of God's creation. Planet Earth is headed toward environmental meltdown. God isn't doing this.
 We are.

The biblical call to repent is the call to come home, to return to where you came from, to turn from waywardness, and to hoist the heart toward paths of homecoming and hope. Augustine said he found out too late in life that God promises forgiveness to those who repent but not repentance to those who sin.¹⁹ Or in the words of Paul, who never abandoned apologetic preaching for kerygmatic preaching, as some suppose, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"²⁰ To believe in repentance is to believe there will be repentant murderers who will meet their victims in paradise, to believe there will be repentant slanderers who will meet those they slandered in heaven, to believe there will be repentant thieves who will meet those they've plundered in heaven.

Even as the heart is mourning its loss, the soul is rejoicing in its find.

SUFI APHORISM

William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 to 1944, said that "to repent is to adopt God's viewpoint in place of your own. . . . In itself, far from being sorrowful, it is the most joyful thing in the world, because when you have done it you have adopted the viewpoint of truth itself, and you are in fellowship with God."²¹

Has there ever been a better definition of repentance than this from C. S. Lewis?

Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realising that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—that is the only way out of our “hole.” This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years.²²

When Jesus called for people to repent, he was calling them to take on the courage of a child: who is open to life, not armored in defenses and weaponized with victimology; who is receptive to risk—the risk of becoming all of who they are, which is the essence of the abundant life promised to all who grow into childhood. Unless, therefore, we become as a child and are willing to repent, we cannot be his disciples or “see” the kingdom of heaven forming all around us.

“There is hope in your future, says the Lord”²³ is the bottom line of repentance.

“These Days, These Days”

A missional people and a missional church don’t get to pick their day and place. Like the prearranged marriages of times past, someone else (God) chooses your love, and you love God’s choice. Anything less is a church out of place, and a displaced church cannot be a doxological church, since nearness to God is at the heart of the value of a place. There is a field of study called *psychogeography*: the effect of place on human emotion and behavior. We need a new branch of study called *theogeography*: the effect of place on faith, community, and mission.

Volcanic eruptions prompt evacuations. Few things are harder in life than moving from settled positions where we feel safe and comfortable to unknown territory where we must find our places and set up new positions. The church now finds itself being evacuated from its established perch in society and must find new homes, all of which are in precarious danger zones. These evacuations taking place are not just cultural but also intellectual.

Question: The number of people on Twitter who follow a religious leader, house of worship, or pastor?

Answer: Two percent.

SEE PINETOPS FOUNDATION,
THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY: THE AMERICAN CHURCH IN 2050

Christianity is the future's go-to honeypot for ridicule and abuse. In the aftermath of volcanic eruptions, the belief that the Bible is a sacred text with salvific solutions for a world gone wrong appears in the same category as the belief in fairies, leprechauns, and unicorns. Already more Brits are convinced of the existence of ghosts than they are of a divine Creator or even of heaven.²⁴

In our lifetimes we've gone from "Please pray for. . ." to "If you're the praying type, you might consider praying for. . ." to "No more thoughts and prayers" or "Your thoughts and prayers are as effective as tots and pears."

The gospel has always gone against the grain, but the grain has been friendly grain until now. From here on out, it's hostile grain.

When North American Christians do anything in the future in public or even semipublic arenas, they can expect fire fountains to erupt from the pent-up anger seething at the bowels of the earth. Any Christian practice will be problematic, from praying in public to making the sign of the cross.

This hostility is extending beyond Christianity to religion in general. One of the most popular answers to the question "What is the one single thing anyone could do to make this world a better place?" has become "End all religion." Indeed, in a recent and disturbing development, advocates for human rights may or may not include "religious freedom" in those "human rights."²⁵

Increasingly, numbers of people are being raised in households where Christians in particular, and religious people in general, are viewed as inferior in every way: morally, intellectually, socially, and culturally.²⁶ This flippant dismissal of people of faith is not unheard of in history. Scottish biographer James Boswell (1740–95) hurried to the deathbed of philosopher David Hume (1711–76) and found him "lean, ghastly and quite of an earthy appearance." Boswell unabashedly asked Hume about his views on the afterlife, and Hume admitted that philosophers John Locke and Samuel Clarke had turned him off to faith. Besides, Hume added, "the Morality of every Religion was bad." When Hume heard someone was religious, he

immediately assumed “that he was a rascal.” Boswell then pushed further and asked if Hume wouldn’t like to see some of his friends who had recently died again. Hume owned that he would but added that none of them “entertained such a foolish, or such an absurd, notion.”²⁷

Catholic schools are under attack in Great Britain for being “socially divisive” and for running “monofaith” establishments. They are now under quota constraints to accept no more Catholic students than would constitute 50 percent of its student body. This “faith cap” is to preserve “social cohesion and respect,” even though this means Catholic schools are being asked to discriminate against Catholics. The Catholic church has agreed to compose its student body of up to 30 percent non-Catholics, but that is not enough for the government.²⁸

We can expect religiously motivated violence to increase and the free exercise of religion to be constrained at every turn. Religious freedom itself will be an increasingly contentious notion. In the 195 countries of the world today, diversity and pluralism are losing out to the imposition of a religious monoculture²⁹ or a ban on religion, which is itself a religious position.

For example, France has banned all “conspicuous religious signs” as a new dress code for members of its parliament. No crosses, no menorahs, no crescents, no symbols showing personal religious beliefs are allowed, and a neutral dress code is enforced.³⁰ Ironically, early Marxists argued against such restrictions of religion, advocating for the freedom of religion because ultimately they believed freedom of religion would free people from religion.³¹

Government is not the major offender in twelve of the twenty-three worst countries for the waning of religious freedom. The primary culprits are “non-state militants,” another name for terror groups and the new Puritanism across all religious traditions. For some, the free exercise of religion is “blasphemy.”³² There are also many nations (Indonesia, for example) who profess tolerance and acceptance of religious diversity, but never a word is spoken publicly against attacks on Christians and other religious minorities.³³ Some Indonesian Christian churches include in their weekly liturgy a “Martyr’s Moment” to remember those in their communities who died or had their houses burned because of their faith.

Being a Christian will “appreciate” in cost, and there are no “trivial” costs. A “cost” can be as high as losing your head, but a cost of loss of friends, rejection by family members, and mockery by society are still real hurts, real costs causing real pain, and you really feel all these losses. This new hostile

environment will lead to “bivocational ministry” (a dangerous term, since there’s only one calling) as the new norm for the church, largely surpassing that of the “professional” paid pastor, although the pastoral role and the culture of church will need to change to accommodate the new realities.

If we were to go ahead with a purge of religious ideas from our account of human worth, human dignity, and basic equality, it is an open question how much that purge would take with it.

NYU PHILOSOPHER JEREMY WALDRON,
ONE ANOTHER’S EQUALS

Pastors as Development Officers

Given this climate of hostility, no longer can the church count on special favors from the state in any arena, especially and including finances. The end of tax-exempt status for religion is within view. This means that pastors and churches must rethink the whole arena of “stewardship” and fund-raising.

Elsewhere we have framed this transition as the shift from “stewardship” and its theology of giving to “trusteeship” and its theology of receiving. In stewardship one gives to God a portion of what one has. In trusteeship one receives for oneself a portion of what is God’s. “Freely you have received; freely give,” Jesus said.³⁴

The Greek word *oikonomos*, from which we derive our word *economy*, is comprised of two Greek words: *oikos*=house; *nomos*=rules or laws. An *oikonomos* is someone who manages the house or *oikos* (property) of the owner according to the *nomos* of the owner. Christians frequently act as if we’re the owners. But it’s not *our* property. It’s not *our* estate. It’s not *our* wealth. It’s theologically incorrect to say “ours” about anything we have, because followers of Jesus own nothing. We are trustees for the true owner. The money may be in our bank accounts; the title may be in our names; but we are only the trustees of what is in the bank or on the deed.

Everything that is not given is lost.

INDIAN PROVERB

No one “gives” to God. We only “give back” to God. “All things come from

You, and of Your own have we given You.”³⁵ The implications for the future of traditional churches are revolutionary:

- › Every pastor is now a fund-raiser and is never not involved in a capital campaign.
- › Every church needs a cash cow and every pastor a second occupation.
- › Every church needs to digitize their giving as much as possible and use offering plates only symbolically.
- › Every church needs to get used to paying taxes.
- › Every house of worship needs to be prepared to be a “housing project”—providing space for marginalized people such as immigrants, the homeless, the sick and dying, and the elderly.

The very ability of the editors of *GQ* magazine to take on an established canon and replace it with their own divinations is a gift of Christianity to the world. Toleration and liberality come of a Protestant concern for the individual’s unmediated access to the divine. The rejection of public power to enforce religious orthodoxy has its historical origins in European Protestant traditions. Even atheists who claim to live a “moral life” are living a morality shaped and “haunted”³⁶ by centuries of Jewish-Christian teaching. As Matthew Parris wrote, “Whether or not we ourselves believe in God, we’ve all soaked up the ethical teachings.”³⁷

One of the most hapless figures in church history is Michael Servetus, the Spanish theologian, physician, and Renaissance humanist. In fleeing the Catholic Inquisition in 1553, he made the mistake of hiding out in John Calvin’s sanctuary—Geneva, Switzerland. Servetus’s views on the Trinity made him as despised by the Protestants as by the Catholics. When Calvin found out he was hiding in Geneva, he had him hunted down and imprisoned and then personally masterminded his prosecution as a heretic. Servetus was burned at the stake ten weeks later.

Other wings of the Reformation movement were aghast at what Calvin had wrought. One of the outraged was French Protestant preacher Sebastian Castellio (1515–63), a onetime apprentice of Calvin who fell out with his mentor when he was the only clergyman who remained in Geneva to care for the sick and the dying after an outbreak of the plague in 1643. Castellio responded to Calvin’s denial of freedom of religion with a statement that strikes at the heart of all human freedoms: “To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine. It is to kill a man.”³⁸

Escape or Engage?

The temptation of the church of the future will be to escape, not engage, such an unsafe culture. Or if it engages, to let the world set the terms for weapons. But as Castellio himself wrote, “When Servetus fought with reasons and writings, he should have been repulsed by reasons and writings.”³⁹ We must learn to use some new weapons in the future (weapons we actually should have been using in the past) if we are to engage the culture.

Besides, we are not given a choice of only going into those nations and cultures where the soil is open and receptive to the gospel. The great omission is a command to “go into all the world,”⁴⁰ not just places where the soil is already tilled and the climate is conducive. All soils have one thing in common: They need to be seeded by the Good News. But every soil differs in color, topography, living organisms, and mineral content. The point of Jesus’ story about the four soils⁴¹ is not that we shouldn’t plant in problem soils but that we need to know what we’re up against. The church of the future will need more R & D than ever before if it is to keep its divine appointments.

*There are times when fear is good. It must keep its
watchful place at the heart's controls.*

AESCHYLUS,
THE ORESTEIA

Volcanic soil is some of the richest soil on the planet. Lava burns the ground at first but then enriches the soil with fertilizing elements such as iron, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, and the blood of the martyrs. A slow process called *chemical weathering* turns a destructive eruption into an enlivening enrichment, a luxuriant lava soil in which things like coffee, tea, and chocolate thrive. Hawaii’s Kona coffee is prized worldwide because soils that began as pumice from volcanic eruptions produce better coffee than soils that began as sediments deposited by rivers.

There are privileges that come when the church has a limited and liminal role or is lambasted and flamed—the privileges of suffering, sacrifice, constant misunderstanding, and forgiveness.⁴²

One of our heroes is Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959), the Norwegian Lutheran bishop who resisted the Nazi occupation of Norway and refused to cooperate when he was instructed to change the liturgy to reflect

the politics of National Socialism. When threatened by his Gestapo interrogators—“We will have you shot”—the bishop calmly replied, “Go ahead. Shoot me. And what will you do then?” That kind of confidence only comes from Christ.⁴³

> WALKING IN FAITH

1. Western Christianity is beginning to face some “Pilates,” whether in the form of religious authority, pop culture, the court of public opinion, or the power of the state. As we navigate these pressures, in what ways are we denying Christ and pushing his lordship to the back seat of our lives and faith communities?
2. A volcanic culture is best approached not with the force of a fist, but with the force of a fable. In her work entitled *Wired for Story*, Lisa Cron says, “We think in story, which allows us to envision the future.”⁴⁴ The story that breathes life through the church is *his* story. Which stories within his story empower you to envision the future?
3. The essence of the abundant life is being receptive to the risk of becoming who you are. Part of the risk is in repentance, which is Jesus’ call for us to take on the courage and openness of a child. In what specific ways or instances has repentance allowed you to “see” the Kingdom of heaven forming all around you?

HOT TAKE

PEDAGOGICAL AND ANDROPOLOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

*[Children] should be taught not the little virtues but the great ones.
Not thrift but generosity and an indifference to money; not caution but
courage and a contempt for danger; nor shrewdness but frankness and a love
of truth; not tact but love for one's neighbour and self-denial; not
a desire for success but a desire to be and to know.*

NATALIA GINZBURG,
THE LITTLE VIRTUES

HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY is poised right where the Roman Catholic church was on the eve of the Reformation, where the British Empire was on the eve of the American Revolution, and where Humpty Dumpty was on the wall just before his great fall: elitist and removed from the hoi polloi and the future in a culture that values equality above elitism.

Two-thirds of US students start some sort of tertiary education after high school, choosing from some four thousand institutions of higher education. Both numbers will only drop precipitously, partly because the digital revolution and financial realities no longer require the leave-home rite of passage to become a “wandering scholar.”

Factory-model, industrial-style, fill-in-the-blanks learning has never been replaced by models of learning that fuel and fill up the mind and enchant the human spirit. VR (virtual reality) has not lived up to its promise of transforming education. But it will.

The proof is in the pudding. The words *rich* and *well educated* no longer go together, as Vietnam, one of the poorest countries in the world,

does better than the US in math, science, and reading. The 10 percent of Vietnamese kids who are most disadvantaged do better than the average USAmerican child on tests in these three subjects.¹

Open a school, close a prison.

ATTRIBUTED TO VICTOR HUGO

Our methods of education are part of our culture and its practices. As cultures shift, methods of education need to adapt or risk becoming irrelevant, uninteresting, and/or ineffective, at least when it comes to engaging and impacting the community at large. If science, music, and other art forms evolve across time and cultures, why not education? When you can spend \$180 a year at masterclass.com to get twenty-four sessions on writing with Malcolm Gladwell, or on filmmaking with Martin Scorsese, or jazz with Herbie Hancock, or architecture with Frank Gehry, or the art of performance with Usher, or singing with Christina Aguilera, or cooking with Gordon Ramsay, or writing for television with Shonda Rhimes, how much longer do you think someone will pay \$80,000 a year to study at one of our colleges or universities?

Here are some commanding themes that will be key components of any responsible educational models for the remainder of the twenty-first century. In place of “education,” we are calling it “enchantment learning.”

10 Commandments of Enchantment Learning

1. Thou shalt have no other subject higher than the student. Corollary: Kill the learning box misnamed “the classroom.”² The real classroom for learning is the world.
2. Thou shalt not make for yourself graven images of any technology, nor bow down to any tablet, whether print or digital, nor worship any culture, whether Gutenberg or Google. Thou shalt learn to speak and communicate in the vernacular of the culture you are in.³
3. Thou shalt not take the name of your profession in vain. Corollary: Don’t “teach.” Design and organize learning instead.⁴

4. Thou shalt remember the sandbox, where learning is fun. Keep the playground holy.⁵
5. Honor the Cloud, the gifts of your ancestors, so that you may live long into the future by not confusing relevancy with recency.
6. Thou shalt not forget Moore's law, which is breathing new life, thanks to AI chip making. Half-lives of knowledge are getting shorter and shorter.⁶
7. Thou shalt defy Illich's law at every opportunity, which predicts that it's only a matter of time until any bureaucracy will create the very condition it was organized to prevent.
8. Thou shalt not commit an MOOC (Massive Open Online Course).⁷ In the future, students will be allowed to specialize earlier and earlier (like athletes do today). There will be fewer generalized diplomas, only certificates of competencies or credentialing in skills that are required by the marketplace. The name of the education game is individualized, customized, tailored learning experiences. Learning systems must be based on new academic paradigms that shift from passive learning modes to active learning modes, especially ones where students learn habits of mind and habits of the soul at their own rates and in their own areas of special interest.
9. Thou shalt not play it safe but instead take risks and dance the failure shuffle. ("Shake the dust off your feet," said Jesus.⁸) All learning requires unlearning, which requires tremendous courage.
10. Thou shalt not commit a factory-model, cookie-cutter pedagogy. Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's YouTube, nor his Facebook, nor his Instagram, nor his zip code. Thou shalt be an original, a one-off, and cultivate one-off originals.

Only well-educated and technically competent persons can destroy civilization. . . . Education is not enough. Educated men staffed the atomic plants and designed the Buchenwald furnaces.

JUSTICE ROBERT HOUGHWOUT JACKSON,
CHIEF US PROSECUTOR AT THE NUREMBERG TRIALS

> WALKING IN FAITH

1. If preoccupations with microaggressions, cultural appropriation, and no-platforming are making true education impossible, what adjustments can restore education—and our expectations of education—to effectiveness and relevancy?
2. How might embracing a theology of failure (see chapter 17) free educators and students to embrace risk within the learning process?