

■ Sound Bite Theology

Nine out of ten American adults own at least one Bible and eight out of ten consider themselves to be Christian, but you might not know it from the smorgasbord of religious beliefs professed by most people. Nationwide surveys conducted by the Barna Research Group indicate that a large share of the people who attend Protestant or Catholic churches have adopted beliefs that conflict with the teachings of the Bible and their church.

In the surveys, a majority of U.S. Christians said that:

- Truth is not absolute but based on feeling, experience and circumstance.
- The Holy Spirit is merely a symbol.
- Original sin is not valid; people can choose freely to sin or not sin.
- Peace with God can be earned through good works.
- Jesus committed sins during his time on earth.
- Forty four percent said that the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon all teach the same truths.

Why this disconnect between popular beliefs and Biblical truths? “In a sound bite society you get sound bite theology,” responds researcher George Barna, “Americans are more likely to buy simple sayings than a system of truth that takes time and concentration to grasp.” In this environment, the task of Theological Horizons is all the more urgent: to reclaim authentic Christian truths for the church in the world.

An Amazing and Perilous Time

“This is an amazing—and perilous—time to be a Christian scholar. The modern intellectual world is adrift, unwilling to allow any claim of certainty by which judgements are made. Dominant forces work toward fragmentation, limiting reason and breaking down fundamental truths. Secular pluralism, long prevalent on university campuses, is nearly as pervasive in everyday life. Furious debates over values engage the common folk in Peoria and Spokane, not just the intellectuals of Cambridge or New Haven. Faced with these challenges, may evangelicals be responding with fear, searching for simplistic answers, and retreating from serious academic engagement.”

—Nathan Hatch, Provost, University of Notre Dame

As a scholar who is committed to addressing the critical questions of our day with honesty, careful study and Christian conviction, I, too, worry about the integrity of our witness.

Christians must reclaim their identity as, first and foremost, disciples of Jesus Christ. We are a peculiar people. We believe that God has redeemed a fallen world in the reconciling work of Christ. We believe that God has called us to be witnesses to the good news in our world and in our time—in the midst of the world’s anguish and beauty, its tragedies and glories.

Not every idea we vigorously defend as true and noble is consistent with Christian discipleship. We must be willing to measure our ideas and our lives by the one standard of truth, that is, by God’s truth revealed in Jesus Christ in his life, teachings and redemptive work. If we are not willing to do this, then we must do like the rich young man who was not willing to give away his possessions for the sake of the Kingdom; saddened but certain that we are not ready to give all.

There are many voices in our culture presuming to speak on behalf of God. During this Advent season, let us remind ourselves—and recommit ourselves to the world-transforming truth—that it is Jesus Christ alone who speaks authoritatively of the Father, who reveals the Kingdom of God. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Let our engagement with the world be honest and responsible and yet in every way shaped by the discipline and costs of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord over all creation. This is an amazing and perilous time to be a Christian. Thy Kingdom Come!

Charles Marsh

Do You Know a Promising Student?

Then tell them about the Louise and Richard Goodwin Writing Prize in Theology which is given in recognition of essays that demonstrate creative theological thinking, excellence in scholarship and faithful witness to the Christian tradition. The writing prize is in the amount of \$1,000.00. Essays must be postmarked by June 1 and all undergrads, including those graduating during May, are eligible. For more information, go to www.theologicalhorizons.org

HORIZONS PROFILES

FAITH BEYOND THE SURFACE

"In a University environment where outward goals are to do more with physical appearance and social status rather than spiritual maturity, the Bonhoeffer House has been a safe haven to people seeking Christian community. Karen and Charles open their house to students daily, and we in turn are blessed with the conversations and community fostered there.



As an art student, my faith influences my art, but I attempt to portray this influence in a non-superficial way. In the artistic community here, faith-based expression is not always valued, but with the support of the community of faith here, I know that I am not alone. I cannot imagine my college experience without the surrogate family and Christian environment that the Marshes so graciously offer up and reach out with time after time. They are a desperately needed source of wisdom and comfort as people of faith who have passed through the experiences college students face today."

Susannah Ware is a fourth year undergraduate student at the University of Virginia majoring in Art History with a minor in Studio Art.

AFTER THE SHOCK WAVE



I came to UVA feeling fairly adequate in my knowledge of the Gospel and apologetics. I came from a large, evangelical Church that prided itself on its teaching and discipleship. I guessed my years at University were going to challenge my faith, but I assumed I had the tools to deal with tough questions (little did I know these went well past the creation and evolution debate).

The first shock wave came my first year, taking a History of Christianity class. This class rocked my fundamental beliefs and quickly made me realize that I was inadequately prepared for delving into serious theological discussions.

The three most important and faith shaping classes that I took at UVA were taught by professing orthodox Christians. Profs. Chuck Mathewes, John Milbank, and Charles Marsh each opened up their homes, practicing the peculiar Christian practice of hospitality, so foreign to others in the academy.

It was Charles' investment in my academic and personal life that pushed me to a pursuit of graduate studies. His willingness to invest while at UVA and his friendship after my graduation has encouraged me to engage the academy and commit myself to shepherding other students through University in order to affect cultural renewal. His example has also shown me that along with the academy, it is essential that theologians remain in service to the Church, providing the body of Christ strong teaching.

Peter Andres is a Fellow at the Trinity Forum Academy doing research on an Augustinian conception of Empire.

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This newsletter provides information about the efforts of Theological Horizons, Inc., to foster Christian reflection & responsibility in the church, the community & the academy. It is distributed free to interested parties. Address questions & comments to Karen Wright Marsh.

Leslie Doughty, Cloud Nine Design
Newsletter Design

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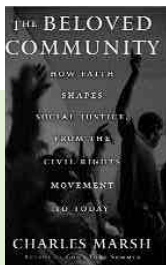
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The new Horizons website is the place to go to:

- Be part of the Horizons weblog, exchanging ideas, questions and conversations
- Submit an essay for the Louise & Richard Goodwin Writing Prize
- Make a contribution to Horizons
- Learn more about Jürgen Moltmann's lecture & read past Capps Lectures
- Discover resources and make connections with other like-minded ministries

Bringing Out *The Beloved Community*

The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today is the new



book by Horizons director Charles Marsh, published in December 2004 by Basic Books (www.perseusbooksgroup.com), a press known for "serious nonfiction by leading intellectuals, academics and journalists."

Advance Praise from Alan Jacobs

"Charles Marsh is one of our best theologians, one of our best historians, one of our best storytellers...Marsh articulates a vision for renewal, a way that the larger community of faith can recover its passion for true social justice. This is a vital book by a major American thinker."

Alan Jacobs, author of *Shaming the Devil*

Advance Praise from Philip Yancey

"Half a century ago an underground army rallied around a vision in order to change the moral landscape of America. Part historian, part raconteur, and part preacher, Charles Marsh calls us to keep alive that vision and to fulfill its promise. I found myself both moved to nostalgia and stirred to action as I read his gripping account."

Philip Yancey, author of *What's So Amazing About Grace*

Purchasing the Book

If you would like to purchase a personalized autographed copy for yourself or as a gift, write to us at info@theologicalhorizons.org and we'll work it out with you. Or make an online tax deductible donation to Horizons of \$100 or more and you'll receive a free copy! Go to "Giving" at www.theologicalhorizons.org. The book will also be widely available in local bookstores and online stores. Amazon.com is currently offering the book at 34% off.

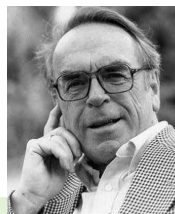
Beloved Community Book Tour: Readings, Signings & Lectures

- Baltimore: Enoch Pratt Central Library on January 15
- Atlanta: Borders in Buckhead on January 16
- Chattanooga: Covenant College on January 17 & 18
- Atlanta: Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church & Martin Street Church of God, March 5 & 6
- Oxford: Square Books on March 7
- Jackson: Lemuria Bookstore on March 8
- New Orleans: Beaucoup Books on March 8

Check for updates at www.theologicalhorizons.org



Rev. Charles Sherrod and Randy Battle visit a family in rural southwest Georgia in 1963. Sherrod's work in Christian community building is one of the many inspiring stories told in *The Beloved Community*.



Jürgen Moltmann

A Powerful Witness in the University

World renowned theologian Jürgen Moltmann will present the next Capps Lecture in Christian Theology on April 27, 2005 in the Dome Room of Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda at the University of Virginia. The lecture, entitled "Control and Trust: On Freedom and Security in the Free World," is open to all members of the University and the larger community.

Jürgen Moltmann is well known for his writing on the theme of hope: hope for the future based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hope for the coming Kingdom of God. To read more, go to www.theologicalhorizons.org.

Spring Institute on Lived Theology

The Capps Lecture will serve as the springboard for three days of study and conversation among thirty theologians, pastors and community builders led by Jürgen Moltmann and Rev. Mark Gornik. The Institute will bring together scholars and pastors/practitioners for a forum of exchange that moves beyond insular academic debates and embraces theological life as a form of public discipleship.

The Grace to Go Nowhere

Come to Wyoming with us from July 3-15, 2005, for an incredible time of spiritual and intellectual growth as well as horseback riding, hiking, fly fishing and bird watching in a unique Rocky Mountain environment. Ring Lake Ranch is a Christian renewal center for all ages just east of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

Charles Marsh will teach evening seminars throughout our two weeks together. His seminar on "The Grace To Go Nowhere" will explore the Christian disciplines of holy silence and stillness; disciplines which are often neglected but which bring balance and perspective to the active life. Explore the Ring Lake Ranch website and you'll be hooked: www.ringlake.org



"Wyoming Will" Marsh

GIFTS TO HORIZONS

A gift has been given to Theological Horizons in loving memory of Dr. Catherine Sims Boman by Mrs. Catherine Capps

A gift has been given to Theological Horizons in loving memory of Margaret Toler by Louis P. Toler

GIVING TO HORIZONS

Your Part in the Vision

If you share the vision of renewed Christian thinking and discipleship, know that Theological Horizons work is possible only through the generosity of friends. We put all resources into real programs and real people. Your gifts expand the boundaries of Horizons' ministry. We are charting the scholarships and programs for the coming year; this is a wonderful time to express your partnership in Horizons' ministry.

Please support Theological Horizons with your generous donation...and pray for us! All contributions are tax deductible. Theological Horizons is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, EIN #581594037.



Peter and Libby Slade. Pete is writing his dissertation in theology at the University of Virginia.

The Debut of Online Giving

Now you can make your contribution in minutes and never have to hunt for a stamp. Theological Horizons uses PayPal to accept online donations on the new Horizons website, www.theologicalhorizons.org. PayPal is the leading online payment solution on the Internet and has won numerous awards for trust and technical excellence.

Give and Receive!

Make an online gift of \$100 or more by January 15 and receive a personalized, signed copy of Charles Marsh's book, *The Beloved Community*. Make your contribution at www.theologicalhorizons.org. We will receive notification of your gift and contact you by email to make arrangements for the speedy delivery of your book.

The Old Fashioned Way

Contributions by checks made payable to "Theological Horizons" may be sent by mail to: Theological Horizons, 1841 University Circle, Charlottesville, VA 22903

Tax Smart Support

Giving shares of stock to Horizons is an easy way to enjoy an immediate tax deduction and pay no capital gains tax. Just email us at donate@theologicalhorizons.org or call us at 434.244.2839 and we'll give you the simple information you need.

ADVENT: THE COMING OF JESUS IN OUR MIDST

God wants to always be with us, wherever we may be – in our sin, in our suffering and death. We are no longer alone; God is with us. We are no longer homeless; a bit of the eternal home itself has moved unto us. Therefore we adults can rejoice deeply within our hearts under the Christmas tree, perhaps much more than the children are able. We know that God's goodness will once again draw near. We think of all of God's goodness that came our way last year and sense something of this marvelous home. Jesus comes in judgment and grace: "Behold I stand at the door...Open wide the gates!" (Ps. 24:7)...

– DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

For the full text of Bonhoeffer's Advent message, write to us at info@theologicalhorizons.org

TheologicalHorizons
Christians Engaged In Ideas and Action

OUR MISSION

To renew Christian thinking and discipleship.

OUR VISION

Church

Theological Horizons seeks to bring the rich resources of the Christian faith to bear in the church's distinctive identity and its engagement with culture.

Academy

Theological Horizons seeks to witness in the forums of intellectual life, communicating the good news that all truth belongs to God.

Community

Theological Horizons seeks to demonstrate the power of the Christian faith to heal and transform society.



Will, Nan and Henry greet guests (2002)