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Sunset - Puri, India by Tashimelampo

The Sins of the Fathers – Part I

The Economist

I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me – Exodus 20:5

by Tadhg Lynch

One of my worst faults is a penchant for reading *The Economist* whenever I happen upon one. This past week I allowed myself to fall particularly heavily when I managed to capture a copy of it just before a week's holiday in North Carolina. Imagine my shame and remorse when seven days later I woke up to discover that I had read the whole thing. Let me confess first off that I have never been guilty of this particular sin of economy before, nor do I think this will become a recurring habit, but something caught my eye as I browsed through it. A review of a new history book by Tom Holland, *The Forge of Christendom: The End of Days and the Epic Rise of the West*. The review stated the author's thesis thus: that Christians have a history of interpreting "troubling geopolitical events...in apocalyptic terms. This mood creates a favourable background for zealous forms of religion – the sort of religion that thrives when people see little virtue in marrying, breeding, or building up private property."¹ I was caught by the sentence – to use a movie cliché – it was so right yet so wrong.

One of the main reasons I had for doubting the veracity of *The Economist's* analysis was the privilege I had to visit India recently. A side note here. The man from the "developed" World writes about the East at his peril. I hope that my friends from India and other places not saddled with the dubious title of "Western" will allow me a few observations in the understanding that there will likely surface in these reflections a couple of prejudices and gaffes – for which I even now beg your indulgence.

India was rather hot for an Irishman. Given that the skin of my race begins to blister in the presence of a 60 watt bulb, I was pleasantly surprised that I seemed to cope with the sun without too much discomfort. I managed to walk up and down an enormous gorge (with 100 other people) during the noonday heat. I also ate many delicious meals, pungent with spices (which had been specially toned down for my delicate palate) unknown even in the best whole-

food shops of Lansing, Michigan. Some of my favourite hours were spent with the orphans we visited as part of our mission trip. They were too young to know that *The Economist* existed. They didn't understand the exchange of place and country – being as interested in the 91 mosquito bites I was sporting upon my face, arms and hands as they were in where my country could be found on the map of the world. Although the biggest exercise in democracy was marching past their door, they didn't notice, they wanted to show me their new dance. I was reminded of playing with my brothers and sisters when they were young – vaguely aware that time was passing and that I should be doing something else, I would while away hours playing “eagles” with my little sisters or kicking a ball in the front garden with my brother Eoin till eleven o'clock at night while the light faded from the long Irish evening. Going to India was a participation in “geopolitical events” on a grand – perhaps the grandest – scale, but it was also just playing ring-a-rosies, eating dinner with new-found friends and climbing a local mountain. This was not *The Economist's* “background for zealous forms of religion.”

And yet, it was. During the first week of our stay the team of which I was a part participated in a camp for the youth of the Sword of the Spirit communities. The camp was impressively well run, in a beautiful location with fantastic views and nice food. There were no “troubling geopolitical events” which would give people an excuse for “zealous forms of religion” – but it was there anyway. One hundred and five young people assembled from four different Sword of the Spirit Communities for the first regional Kairos Summer Camp. Many sacrificed a week of work, a lot of time and a lot of wages to gather together. One group made a 23 hour train journey from Bangalore. One of the organisers – a university student from Pune – came to the camp for 2 days, travelled home to do an exam and came back for the final day to help us all pack up and head off home. I met people who don't have a car, who aren't interested in building up private property – yet are interested in marrying, building a family and foregoing the property for the sake of their children and their family life. I was privileged to be allowed into the lives of people whom I would never have met but for covenant community. Had I gone to India as a tourist or a business man, I am confident that I could not have had a better experience of the country, because I wouldn't have been able to meet its people. I would not have had a chance to meet with them on *The Economist's* “apocalyptic” terms.

Apocalypse, in the terminology of early Jewish and Christian literature, is a revelation of hidden things – revealed by God to a chosen prophet or apostle. From the second century onwards the word has vastly changed its meaning to come to signify, vaguely; the end of the world, the destruction of everything, and the finality of all things. We are an apocalyptic people. We are a people to whom God has revealed certain things – the plan of covenant community, the gift of a life not dependent upon material possessions, worldly preoccupations, or even relationships. We relate to each other as those who believe in, and long for, the apocalypse. We call each other brother and sister – though no blood relationship exists. We treat one another as family across eight thousand miles of distance because we don't think this world is the one we are finally created for. We don't need troubling geopolitical events to make us zealous in our religion because as Christians we strive to be “steadfast in faith, knowing that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same trials” (1 Peter 5:9).

I suppose there is some merit in being able to look to the skies and discern the way the wind is blowing and ramping up or down one's “zealousness” relative to it. I think there is more to value, however, in remaining zealous for one's belief when the world attacks and mocks you for it, when it seems cold to it or perhaps worst of all, when it seems indifferent to it. Some people have told me that “this is a very good time for reaching out to others. With the economic crisis happening around the world, people are ready to hear about other things – they will turn to religion.” I do not agree with this view. Original sin is all around us – it affects our lives from first breath to last. We do not rely on God because now is a good time to do so, as everything else is not working. We rely on him because we need him always. We should proclaim the gospel in season and out of season, living as though every day would be our last, hoping that it might be so. We do not need troubling geopolitical events around the world to look to Christ. Original sin already does that job all too well for us.

¹“The Rise of Christianity: The Millenium Bug”, in, *The Economist*, May 15th-19th 2009.



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One of Tadhg's highlights in India was his visit with orphans.

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Scripture: Taking the Word to Heart

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103)

by Steve Clark

Our society is fascinated by what’s new – the now, the happening, the popular, and the different. For this reason scripture study, in which our main goal is to see something new about a verse or passage, is often more appealing to us than scripture meditation, in which we seek to better grasp a scripture text we already understand.

When we study God’s word, we think it through in order to understand it. When we meditate, we go over a passage we already understand in order to grasp it more fully, to imprint it more deeply on our minds and spirits. We may see something new as we meditate, but that is a by-product. The goal is to appreciate what we already know or to remember it more firmly. Because of this, it is often better to meditate on something we have already studied than it is to meditate on a scripture passage we are unfamiliar with or do not understand.

Imagine yourself building a piece of furniture or setting a table for guests. Then imagine yourself standing back to take it all in and see how it strikes you. The act of building a table or setting a table is like scripture study. The second step is more like meditation, especially if you have done the first part well and are pleased with what you see. Or imagine yourself eating some especially well-prepared food and deciding to chew it more slowly in order to savor it. This too is like meditation. Meditating on scripture is pondering God’s word prayerfully, delighting in it, appreciating it.

God’s word itself gives us a good description of meditation. In Ephesians, chapter 1, St. Paul prays, that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of

him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power” (1:17-19).

The relationship of this passage to meditation becomes clearer if we examine the meaning of certain words. The word “spirit” refers to our spirit, with which we make direct contact with God. The word “knowledge” means experiential knowledge, which involves being connected or related to another. Thus, St. Paul is praying that our spirits might be given wisdom and revelation as we enter into relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

By that relationship we are changed and enabled to know spiritual realities. Paul calls this “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.” The word “heart” here does not mean the seat of our emotions, but the mind, the decision-making center of our being out of which we know and respond to God. So Paul is actually praying that we might be given light to see and know the truth with our minds. He is concerned that our spirits come into contact with the fundamental truths of God revealed to us in Christ. Paul is not praying that we learn certain facts, but that we have an experiential knowledge of the “hope to which he has called you,” “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,” and “the immeasurable greatness of his power.” This happens as we meditate on God’s word.

John 6:63 is another verse that gives us a scriptural understanding of meditation: “it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Looking at this scripture in the context of John chapter 6, we discover that we receive spiritual life when we abide with Christ, personally believe and commit ourselves to obedience to his words, and allow them to impart greater spirit and life to us. Meditation allows us to take in the words of Christ and all of scripture and to receive from them the spirit and life that they have to give.

Many of the psalms, and Psalm 119 in particular, give us further insights into meditation. “I have laid up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your words” (verses 11-16). In this section there are a number of words and phrases connected with meditation: delighting, fixing my eyes upon, not forgetting, declaring.

Further on in the same psalm we read: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it... Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me” (verses 33-35, 97-98). These verses make it obvious that it is the Lord who leads us and gives us understanding. They also make it evident that meditation is supposed to be continual. We should center our minds on the teachings of the Lord and thereby become truly spiritual, living in the knowledge of him in true wisdom and true revelation.

As these scripture passages indicate, there are many methods of meditating on scripture. You might want to try all of the ways listed below, to find those that are most helpful to you. Here are some different ways to meditate on scripture:

- meditating on a verse in scripture – usually involves memorizing verse and repeating it to yourself
- meditating on a lengthier passage like a psalm – could involve memorizing the passage, but it should at least involve restating it to yourself in your own words
- meditating on a passage in scripture describing an event – involves imagining the event as vividly as you can and appreciating the significance of it
- meditatively reading the scripture – involves reading a section or a book of scripture slowly and stopping to meditate or pray as it gives you light or inspiration.

As you attempt these forms of meditation, keep the following in mind:

1. Do not set a goal for how much scripture you plan to cover. It is fine to meditate on only a few words.
2. Memorization of a scripture passage is one of the best ways to meditate. Just by memorizing it you will meditate on it, and you can return to the passage later on "hands free" if you have it memorized.
3. Meditation is succeeding if you simply imprint the scripture or what is being said in scripture on your mind. Meditation can also, however, give you greater light on spiritual truths, revelation of spiritual understanding, or desire to do what God says. Sometimes it can lead to a decision or resolution to act. If you experience these things happening, you should cooperate with them.
4. Be active when you meditate, especially if the meditation is not going easily. Speak your meditation out loud, write it down, or memorize a section of scripture and repeat it.
5. Meditation can lead to a desire to pray or worship. When that happens, stop and pray or worship. Often, meditation can be spoken to God as a prayer or even as a conversation.
6. If God seems to be leading you in your meditation, follow his lead. Do not feel bound to follow a prearranged plan, although plans can be useful too.
7. Meditations will vary according to the material. With an event, we want to imagine what happened and appreciate its significance. With truths or doctrine, we want to realize what they mean and respond to them. With instructions in Christian living, we want to follow them and make resolutions.

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm119:103).



[Steve Clark](#) is former president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). This article was originally published in *New Covenant Magazine*.

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When we read the Scriptures God is speaking to us

Quotes from the early church fathers on reading and meditating on Scripture

Isidore of Seville said:

Anyone who wants to be always united to God must pray often and read the Bible often. For in prayer it is we who are speaking to God, but in the readings it is God speaking to us.

All spiritual progress is based on reading and meditation. What we do not know, we learn in the reading; what we have learned, we preserve by meditation.

Reading the Bible provides us with a two-fold advantage. It instructs our minds, and introduces us to the love of God by taking our attention off vanities.

None can understand the meaning of the Bible if they do not acquire familiarity with it through the habit of Bible reading.'

(Isidore lived between 560-636 AD.)

John of Damascus said:

"Like a tree planted by streams of water," (Psalm 1:3) the soul is irrigated by the Bible and acquires vigor, produces tasty fruit, namely, true faith, and is beautified with a thousand green leaves, namely, actions that please God. The Bible, in fact, leads us towards pure holiness and holy actions. In it we find encouragement to all the virtues and the warning to flee from evil.

The Bible is a scented garden, delightful, beautiful. It enchants our ears with birdsong in a sweet, divine and spiritual harmony, it touches our heart, comforts us in sorrow, soothes us in a moment of anger, and fills us with eternal joy. Let us knock at its gate with diligence and with perseverance. Let us not be discouraged from knocking. The latch will be opened. If we have read a page of the Bible two or three times and have not understood it, let us not be tired of re-reading it and meditating on it.

Let us seek in the fountain of this garden `a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' (John 4:14) We shall taste a joy that will never dry up, because the grace of the Bible garden is inexhaustible.

- from *On the Orthodox Faith* (John of Damascus lived between 676 and 749 AD. See fuller [biography](#).)

Augustine of Hippo said:

Nourish your soul with Bible reading. It will prepare a spiritual feast for you.

(Augustine lived between 354-430 AD. See fuller [biography](#).)

Jerome said:

Anyone who is assiduous in reading the Word of God becomes weary while reading, but afterwards is happy because the bitter seeds of the reading produce sweet fruits in the soul.

Let us study while we are on earth that Reality which will stay in our minds also when we are in heaven.

(Jerome lived between 347-420 AD.)

[[ranslation by Thomas Spidlik, [Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary](#), Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI - Spencer, MASS, 1994]

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Women Sent on Mission

Highlights from the International Women's Conference in
Plymouth, Michigan, USA – May 3-7, 2009

special report by Debbie Putnam, Jan Munk, Jeanne Kun
photos by Bobbie Tedesco

More than 115 senior women leaders, pastoral workers, and Kairos mission leaders gathered May 3-7 in Plymouth, Michigan, USA, for the Sword of the Spirit's International Women's Conference. We represented 42 communities and 22 countries. We were graciously hosted in families and households of the Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor, and transported by community members to the lovely St. John's Retreat Center in nearby Plymouth.



St. John's Retreat Center

The conference was entitled "A Woman Sent on Mission." The Scripture verse from Isaiah 6 chosen as the conference theme helped us focus our hearts and minds on better understanding God's call to us and responding to it:

"I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'" (Isaiah 6:8).

Reflections from participants



One Call, One Mission, One Voice

On the first morning of the conference my personal daily reading and meditation was on the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-10). The line that struck me from this verse was "the sheep follow him for they know his voice." I sensed the Lord asking me, "Do you know my voice? Amidst all the hustle and bustle of the day, amidst all the voices you hear, do you know my voice? You are a woman sent on mission, but more importantly, do you know the voice that sends you on that mission? You are on a mission for my purposes. You do not send yourselves on that mission; the agenda is not yours. You are sent on a mission for my purposes, heed my voice."

As the week went on there were words that stood out from the different sessions; words like: "move!" "for a time like this," "open doors," "take the risk," "this is a time of grace," "only for a season," "the harvest is plentiful," "you are a part and not the whole." These words imply not only immediacy but urgency in what the Lord wants us to do for him.

I believe the Lord called the women leaders in the Sword of the Spirit to this gathering to equip, enrich, and empower us to further his plans.

He equipped us by strengthening our character through the reflections that allowed us to look into ourselves and see areas that we need to grow in and to surrender to him; areas that may be hindrances to his working more fully in our lives and making us worthy vessels

We are here because we are missionaries

During the conference, words from the Lord came in many forms. Even at the first session, Jean Barbara, the newly-installed President of the Sword of the Spirit, offered what amounted to prophetic comments which set the tone for the conference. "In these difficult economic times, it costs a lot of money to bring all the women leaders together. Some would view such a conference as a luxury; we are not here because it is a luxury. We are here because we are missionaries." He spoke of the importance of gathering together in order to advance the purposes of God and our mission in the Sword of the Spirit. "The Lord has called you; the Lord will equip you to go back and serve in your communities. He will pour out grace upon you."

As we entered into our first time of worship together, Najwa Shebaya, a member of the International Women's Coordinating Committee, encouraged the women to set aside their fears and their concerns about how they appeared to one another, what others might think, and fully enter into freedom in worship together before our God who loves each of us.

It can be difficult for women to relate easily in large groups and with many others that they don't know. With differences in cultures factored in, one could expect an even greater challenge. Yet this was not the case. There was a special grace upon our relationships which allowed for an ease of love, openness, and trust among us.

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for him.

He equipped us through the talks. They enlightened us about where he has been leading and directing us in the past, today, and where he seems to be leading us in the days to come. The talks helped us understand how we should respond in our personal lives and in community.

He enriched us through the sisterhood that developed at the conference, through encouragement we received, and through the sharing of our lives with those we already knew or had just come to know.

He empowered us through prophetic words, prayers, and worship sessions that recharged us with his Holy Spirit.

These past days I felt that the Lord worked in our lives to bring us to a clearer focus of where he is calling us; reminding us that we are one in his international community of communities. He gathered his women this week and what I saw was

Many nations, cultures, and languages,

yet, just one people, one common way of life, one universal language of love,

in response to one call, one mission, one voice, the Lord's own.

Doris Coloso, City on a Hill,
Los Angeles, California, USA

More participants reflections > [here](#)

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Women Sent on Mission, continued

Freedom for a purpose

At the podium for the conference was a large candle engraved with the Scripture verse from 2 Corinthians 3:17, a text Martin Steinbereithner, Mission Director for the European and Middle East Region, had received while praying for the conference last November:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

This Scripture and various prophetic words emphasized God's desire to bring freedom to his women – freedom for a purpose. "... I am here; I have come to bring you freedom from all the fear, anguish, and illness upon your hearts. I need you to be free so you can accomplish my will in this world. I give you power and grace and authority so you can accomplish in my name what I am asking you to..." In particular, time was spent in worship sessions praying to be free from fear in order to more deeply embrace the mission that God has placed before us, both individually and corporately, as women leaders in the Sword of the Spirit. Part of moving forward with God involves leaving behind the past, as reflected in a word about leaving behind "your father's house."



A Scripture brought up frequently during the conference was 1 John 4:7-11,

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God,

Reflections from participants



The International Women's Conference (IWC) has been a time of a wonderful grace. The Lord has increased my love and passion for this work. He has given my heart rest and filled me with joy to continue working for our beloved Sword of the Spirit. I was also privileged to get to know so many women in different parts of the world who have given the best years of their lives for this calling – an incalculable gift of bravery and fidelity...

Pilar Galván
Inciense de Dios, Jalapa, Mexico

The International Womens Conference (IWC) was a good opportunity for the women leaders from different countries to share the way in which God is working and acting in our communities: the challenges and difficulties that we face. The conference also enabled us to listen to God's voice about where he is moving, so we can make the most of this time of grace.

Araceli de Alfaro
Dios Refugio y Fortaleza, Guatemala

During the IWC the Lord renewed my strength, widened my vision, and enriched me in a personal way. Sharing with my sisters allowed me to love them more. Their life witness edified me. The sisters' joy and good humor at the IWC was a witness of love for everybody.

but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Love moves the mission

As Bruce Yocum stated in his talk, *In This is Love*, “If we have a mission from God, it is love that moves the mission. We are first of all a community and we can only be a community on mission if we love one another.”

This theme continued during worship with prophetic words about the importance of our sisterhood as women in the Sword of the Spirit and how we are to value and protect this gift. It was further emphasized as one sister led us to draw together with our arms around one another and gave the prophetic word that, “You are not alone! I am with you and your sisters are with you. Each of you is part of the bulwark. Your sisters are your companions. I have given you a gift of sisterhood.” We were reminded that even the act of praying for one another drew us together and allowed us to draw strength from the gift of our sisterhood. “You are a part and not the whole. You have need of one another.”

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Martha de Velosa,
Emmanuel, Cali, Colombia

In this encounter, as always, the Lord surprised me. To experience his love once more, in a personal and tangible way, was without doubt an oasis in the middle of the desert, a springtime in our community life. Being able to share with sisters from so many different places, with different cultures, but with experiences so similar to ours, brought to life the motto: "So far, and yet so close." Our time together was a confirmation that the culture of this people, the Sword of the Spirit, is something we hold in common – we are indeed a community of communities.

El Señorío de Jesús, Vitoria, Spain

This conference confirmed my calling and encouraged me to continue on despite obstacles and sufferings. It has filled me with hope seeing sisters from so many places united in one Lord, one faith and one mission. And the time filled me with greater zeal and the desire to be radical, to be faithful to the Lord in everything.

María Josefina Corrales
Ciudad de Dios, Nicaragua

More participants reflections > [here](#)

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Women Sent on Mission, continued

Promise of empowerment and gifting

Our God was generous and gracious to us in his promise to pour out renewal power and greater gifting of the Holy Spirit upon us. These are words which in recent years have been heard frequently across the Sword of the Spirit. And this renewal power and gifting is not for the young people alone. It is a promise for those who have already labored long to build the Sword of the Spirit, as well as for our children and our children's children. We were promised that God has come to us to create miracles, not just do ordinary things in our lives. "...I have come in a powerful way; I am about great things in your lives!"

The Lord made clear to us that as we endeavor to accomplish our mission, his faithfulness can be counted upon. "I want to give you everything you need to fulfill the mission. Those who come after you will see the fruit of your labors. The work is difficult but I am with you. Count on my grace. You are not alone. Count on my power. Count on my love."

We sensed the Lord saying that those of all ages are called to take risks – as we walk in faith we will see the glory of God. All have been called by name, in this time and place, to be skilled laborers for the Lord, to build his work. Each is a part and not the whole; we need one another in order to accomplish the purposes God has set before us. All are to pray and toil and work together.



Our wells will not run dry

As our last worship session drew to a close, the Lord told us to value what we had received during the week and to take it back with us to our various communities. Such a gift of sisterhood and tangible experience of freedom in one another's presence and before the Lord is not for us alone: "Be sober about the gift I've

Reflections from participants



Since hearing about the International Coordinators meeting in Santa Domingo last year and the words the Lord spoke there touched me profoundly with God's love and grace, my main thought and prayer about attending the IWC this year was: surely the Lord will speak significantly to His daughters as well. And I was particularly expectant for God's prophetic word among us as we met as an international group of women leaders in the Sword of the Spirit. I was not disappointed!

The presence and grace of God was very evident. The Lord spoke strongly and profoundly about His love for us and for all His people. He has called us for such a time as this, and again He spoke of difficult times, but that He wanted to free us from fear and give us grace to serve Him and His people. We heard about God's love and experienced it as we prayed, but also through each other.

It was wonderful to attend with my sisters from Antioch Community and also with my sisters from our region, and it made me see how much the Lord has built among us in recent years as sisters across Europe. But it was also very special to share with sisters from other regions and make new friendships. My one regret: there were not quite enough days to have the chance to share with all the sisters who were there (and how I wish I could speak Spanish!)

Clare Bick, Antioch, London, UK

Two impressions especially emerged for

given to you this week. Be sober about the treasure you have received. Nurture it. Take care of it. Hold it in your heart; break it open and share it with all the other sisters at home.” We can freely come and drink of Christ’s living water and give of it freely to others – one by one – and we are assured that our wells will not run dry. Christ is faithful; he will forever fill his well of living water in a way which cannot run dry as we give and give of his precious life to others.

All the activities of the conference – including times of worship and seeking the Lord, teachings, workshops, and small group discussions – encouraged and equipped us to better carry on the call entrusted to us by the Lord as “disciples on mission” and perform our various leadership responsibilities within the Sword of the Spirit communities. The activities strengthened our unity and personal relationships with one another as sisters together serving the Lord and his people.

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me during the conference. The first was a sense of deep unity with sisters from many different countries, cultures, languages, and traditions. Even when I couldn’t really communicate with a sister because of language differences, smiles, hugs, and worshipping together united us.

The second was the sense of mission. While some of the women gathered there were younger, most of the sisters present were seasoned veterans of many years of serving the Lord. Many of us have endured trials and struggles over the years. Yet, there was a sense of excitement and zeal for the call the Lord has given us. We want to make room for the next generation so they can serve in the mission with us, not so that we can retire and relax at the beach.

Jan Munk, The Work of Christ,
Lansing, Michigan, USA

Through the talks, the Lord reminded us to go back to the basics: to love one another because our covenant is founded on that, to move urgently into the mission with a spirit of sacrifice and self-giving, but always in the joy of the Lord. The best was listening to the Lord speak to us as women of this people, asking us to remain together. Thank you Lord, for giving us your living water!

Paty de Sotelo
Betania, Acapulco, Mexico

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Women Sent on Mission, continued



Teaching sessions

The teaching sessions we had each day were divided into three tracks, the first focusing on spiritual growth, the second on vision and the third on community leadership.

In the spiritual growth sessions, we heard presentations about great Christian women whose lives modeled for us faith, courage, generosity, and wholehearted surrender to the Lord and trust in him.

The vision and community leadership tracks and the daily workshops offered spiritual insight and concrete pastoral wisdom. They addressed such topics as what the Lord is saying to the Sword of the Spirit, pastoral care for married women, being transgenerational communities, caring for aging parents, and strengthening Christian family life.

Reflections from participants

God's love was really flowing amongst us, and everyone was very welcoming and willing to share. Through the talks and meditations and during the prayer times the Lord really challenged us to have a deeper relationship with him and to surrender our lives more fully to him so that he could use us more fully in the building of the kingdom. At the same time he showered us with his love and we so enjoyed being in his presence that the main prayer meeting on Wednesday night kept on going and going because we really didn't want to stop praising him and being with him in his presence.

Paola Turner, Antioch, London, UK



Najwa Shebaya from Lebanon addresses the conference



International Women's Coordinating Committee
(Left to right) Deena Birk, Najwa Shebaya, Maria del Carmen de Matute, Beth Melchor

Our closing day

On the final day we joined in various outings that included a trolley tour of Ann Arbor highlighting key sites in the history and development of the local Word of Life Community as well as opportunities for shopping in nearby malls.

Our five days together were brought to a close with an evening of fellowship and relaxation, also attended by women of the Word of Life Community. During the evening there was lively – and very colorful – cultural and ethnic entertainment provided by our sisters from Nicaragua, the Philippines, New Zealand, Santa Domingo, and Lebanon.

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Women from Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor led music for the conference



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So Long Live This

by James Munk

A few years back, the city of Ann Arbor sponsored a program to set-up large, concrete planters for flowers and trees along the main streets of its downtown. They were subsidized by various people, some of whom marked their planters with plaques commemorating family, friends, and sometimes even themselves.

From an urban planning point of view, it was a great idea. They certainly added a lot of interest to the streetscape – and serve as great benches in a pinch. But I had trouble with an idea that appears on a few of them – best summarized by one of the planters: in memoriam it boldly proclaimed the Shakespearean refrain:

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

The premise of the sonnet runs like this: my poem speaks about a person; the poem is good enough that it will be read by others for a long time to come; when the poem is recited years from now, the person in the poem will also be talked about and remembered, thereby continuing to have life.

It can be presumed that the sponsor of the planter hoped, in the same way, that the deceased would in a way continue to live on as long as passing pedestrians read and remembered the above phrase: somehow tying the deceased's afterlife to human memory and the longevity of the planter.

The pessimistic side of me puts my money on the planter – I have more confidence in the permanence of concrete than I do in people's ability to remember. But even if we were to possess perfect memories (or make better cement) this notion – eternal life through our cultural and remembering progeny – would still fail in at least two ways. In one way now (in this current life), and again in the future.

Treating the future failure first: though this philosophy projects the optimism of the infinite, it is in fact a deadend proposition. Certainly, such an ideology cleverly camouflages itself as immortality: well crafted poems and powerful memories do indeed transcend the age of their creation. But ultimately, calling them a source of eternal life is an attempt to gain immortality by mortal means. The “life-giving” sonnets of Shakespeare and the memories of future

generations are dependent for existence on the very thing they claim to give: life – human life. Their power is self-referencing, and ultimately bound within this universe – a universe that has an expiration date.

I think the singer John Mayer sums up best (though probably unintentionally) this lack of logic in his song No Such Thing. What he says about himself can easily be used to describe the real nature of eternal life given through mankind's memory:

I am invincible!
I am invincible!
I am invincible!
As long as I'm alive!

The “invincible” life sustained by remembrance is not immortality, just delayed oblivion.

The second shortcoming of this school of thought, the one concerning the here and now, was clearly illustrated to me while talking to a university student who had rejected his Christian faith. Though he denied the possibility of an after life, his current life was consumed with the business of being remembered. He had given up friends, family, and the possibility of marriage in sacrifice to his own legacy.

And for what? Why should anyone be concerned with how those we will never know considered us? To a dead man, obscurity and celebrity feel awfully similar. And, after all, a life dedicated to occupying the memories of others is an investment in a ticking-time-bomb – the final curtain is just a matter of time.

It is in this second failure of the “remembrance ideology” that our two problems unite for an even greater catastrophe. As this philosophy derives immortality from remembrance, it encourages those who adhere to it to spend their lives dominating the memory of others. But having done this, its faithful are trapped by the ultimate and unavoidable demise of this universe and everything in it – man's memory included.

Thus, memory as the source of immortality demands the endless pursuit of fame during this life, but gives limited hope for the next. It makes us gluttons now, paupers later; overtime with no retirement.

I am exceedingly glad that this solution does not enjoy a monopoly. Jesus Christ offers another.

In response to the failings above, we are offered two opposite alternatives. First, the life Jesus asks us to live – that of a Christian – is not subject to the economy of memory: we are not penalized by less life later if we achieve less fame now. In fact, quite the opposite: we are told that the first shall be last, and that greatness is achieved by service. In Christ, our lives can be put to better use than getting others to notice us.

Second, our hope for eternal life comes to us by way of life in Christ: the very Jesus who is “begotten before all ages” and located unassailably outside time and its finality. He is immune to the ending of his creation – our universe and all it encompasses. Hope in Jesus Christ is truly a more reliable proposition than an appeal to man's memory – or even to concrete planters, for that matter.

Praise be to our risen Lord who gives true life, and life truly everlasting.



James Munk graduated from the University of Michigan School of Architectural Design in May, 2007. He is a mission leader for [Kairos North America](#) and a member of the [Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing, Michigan.

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Youth group from Vasai, India

Wave of the Spirit Among Young People in India

report by Brian Shell

I was deeply encouraged to see how is God at work among young people in India today. I got a first-hand glimpse when I visited India for two weeks last April. The Sword of the Spirit communities in India organized their first-ever regional camp for young people. I was part of a Kairos mission team, composed of two women and three men from Ireland. Six YWAM mission workers from Delhi also joined us for the two week mission.

During the first week we helped run a camp for young people in Khandala which was hosted by the Krist Kiran Parivar Community from Pune. For the first time ever, youth from all four Sword of the Spirit communities in India came together for a time of teaching and fellowship. Nearly 100 young people gathered from Pune, Mumbai, Bangalore and Vasai for the four days.

Reflections from participants

On fire for God

Well, since I grew up in the community with my family, I had attended a number of retreats and youth camps (most of them were grudgingly attended), but none were quite like this one... I mean at this camp God shook me up. I had a very personal experience. It was like he called me by name and asked me in front of the whole assembly if I was willingly to commit myself to him.

All the sessions were surprisingly relevant to me. The highlight for me would have to be the prayer session to ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit. It was the most awesome experience. And for not just me. Ever since the camp our entire youth group in Mumbai has become surprisingly united. We are all on fire for God. We're now planing an outreach at the end of this year to get more people from our neighborhood to meet the Lord. Lets see what the Lord has in store for us. (It's super exciting!) Please keep us in your prayers.

Ralph Mascarenhas
Mumbai

The Sword of the Spirit Youth Camp in Khandala was truly a time of grace for all those involved. It was undertaken as part of the Joint Mission Trip conducted by the SOS and YWAM teams from Ireland and one could sense from the outset that something great was going to happen. And indeed, the Spirit of the Lord did some marvelous things among the youth during these days and has continued since then.

It was the first time there was a coming together of all the communities in India and through all the differences, it was



Community youth playing under a waterfall after a long trek

“The Sword of the Spirit youth camp held in Khandala was truly a time of grace for all those involved” explained Nicholas D’Cruz from Pune, one of the main organizers of the camp. “This was the first time there was a coming together of all the communities in India, and through all the differences it was heartening to see the bonding and building of relationships between the youth.”

Our team led a number of sessions with the Indian youth during the camp, covering topics ranging from God’s love to radical discipleship to being men and women on mission and culminating in a prayer session for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. There was a tremendous response from the youth when they were prayed with to receive the Holy Spirit. During the prayer session “the youth were challenged to 'cross the line' and give their lives over to God, and about 80 young men and women responded to the call and committed themselves to live as radical disciples,” Nicholas recalled.

When asked how some of the sessions affected him, Raoul Fernandes, from Mumbai, reflected, “I was reading the scripture and 1 Corinthians 12 jumped out at me about all being members of one body, but it didn’t make sense. Then Jen gave her testimony and used the same passage, encouraging us to give more of ourselves to community and service; from then on I knew that I had to dedicate myself to this. It has changed my whole perspective. For me the camp was a stepping stone for growing spiritually.” Raoul only joined the community in Mumbai a couple months before the camp and is now active in the community’ youth group planning an outreach for the end of this year to help people from his neighbourhood meet the Lord.

The camp was a significant time spiritually for the youth in India, but almost as significant were the relationships built across the communities there and a connection with the Sword of the Spirit internationally. Keith Silveira, a masters student in Pune, told the

heartening to see the bonding and building of relationships between the youth. The youth were challenged to 'cross the line' and give their lives over to God and many responded to the call and have chosen to live their lives as 'radical' disciples of Christ.

Through the sessions led by the Sword of the Spirit and YWAM teams, and their testimonies, the youth here have been strengthened in their faith and have become enthusiastic for the Lord and that enthusiasm is leading them to share their faith with each other and help each other grow in Christ.

Personally, this experience has challenged me to keep Christ at the center of all my decisions and actions, as well as to deepen my relationship with him, and to answer his call to go out and serve others.

This camp has brought about an amazing transformation among the youth here and we pray that the good work He has started will be brought to completion and that the name of Jesus be lifted higher! Praise the Lord!

Nicholas D’Cruz
Pune

What really touched me during the camp was listening to Jake Yap, [one of the speakers who is from Manila, Philippines], talking about the woman mentioned in the Gospel who had come to anoint Jesus. When she met Jesus, she broke her alabaster jar and emptied the very expensive perfumed ointment on Jesus.

Hearing this story made me realize that I hadn’t really broken my alabaster jar and emptied out all the contents yet. Fortunately, this camp was, by God’s grace, one more step along the way.

The other key thing I heard during the camp was the Lord’s call to be radical

team that “meeting you was a real encouragement to many of us as we realized that youth all over the world are committing themselves to Christ and are facing many of the same struggles as us.”

“It was a time of grace, fun, adventure and a realization of my commitment towards all my brothers and sisters,” added Priyanka Roche from Mumbai. “I realized that we are each called to be disciples of Christ and to live like him. There was strong sense of belonging to each other and of fellowship in Christ.”

It truly was a time of special grace from God within this season of grace that we are experiencing in the Sword of the Spirit.



Kairos Mission Team from Ireland perform a song for the camp
From left: Sarah Quinn, Brian Shell, Dave Quintana, Claire Robinson,
and Tadhg Lynch

Brian Shell is an affiliate of the [Servants of the Word](#). He lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

disciples for him. A lot of us follow Jesus, as nominal Christians, and basically feel we are living good lives. But, I know that Jesus is calling us to take the next step in the relationship and move from knowing ‘about’ him, to knowing him personally by developing an ongoing relationship with him.

The camp was a good opportunity for youth from the different communities in India to meet each other and to meet the team members who came from Ireland. Meeting you’ll was an a real encouragement to many of us as we got to know that youth all over the world are committing themselves to Christ, and are having to deal with many of the same struggles and temptations. Besides, we also realized that following Jesus can be a lot of fun too.

Keith Silveira
Pune

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"The Fellowship" scouts out a scenic spot in the Appalachian mountains for lunch

Appalachian Rendezvous: "The Fellowship"

And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ – 1 John 1:3

By John Karagoulis

Last summer a rag-tag group of [Kairos](#) youth workers organized a team of five middle school guys and set out into the deep wilderness of southwestern Virginia. Armed only with what they could carry on their backs, this was the launch of the first ever Appalachian Rendezvous trip. Who in their right mind would go willingly into the wild with such a potentially volatile group of young people? Only the toughest youth workers would do! George Firn and I joined with Stan Mathay, our trip organizer, to lead the charge.



after a day of hiking the young men enjoy an overlook view

Why is it necessary to launch yet another youth program in the SOS-NAR, aimed at middle-schoolers no less? Well, we have strong programs for youth in elementary school, like summer camp and children's gatherings. And at the high school level they can serve on mission trips, and attend the YES retreat. But what do they do for those years when they're too old for camp, but too young for the high school program? There is a need to help our youth in those 'tween years to grow in their charismatic spirituality, to challenge them to live the life of discipleship, and to help them develop cross-community relationships with other people their own age. These experiences, in turn, will help to further their relationship with the Lord, and to gain a broader vision for the work of the Sword of the Spirit. Backpacking is a perfect way to achieve all of this and more.



we passed through narrow gaps

Why backpacking? It gets the boys out of their normal lives and into a challenging environment where they can take nothing for granted. If it rains, we get wet. If it's cold, we can't just turn up the heat. If we're hungry, there isn't a dollar menu within twenty miles. And those aren't just made-up hardships used for teaching effect. On our trip we experienced all three of those trials, and while they were not fun to bear, they strengthened us in the end.



hikers encounter some friendly wild ponies

Despite the challenges to our comfort, backpacking can teach that some of the best things in life are experienced when we seem to have nothing – at least nothing that the world values. The boys found that climbing rocks, playing golf with pebbles and sticks, and merely looking off into the distance at a beautiful vista, can be far more entertaining than anything produced by MTV. They also learned that a person can't appreciate the savory aroma of fried spam until he's been on the trail for three days. In short, backpacking gives these boys an opportunity to find that they can not only live without all the things the world tells them are necessary for survival (i-pods, ESPN, baconators, hamburgers, etc.), they can actually find fulfillment in the absence of these distractions. And in this environment, real spiritual growth can take place.



the last day of hiking and final group photo

Although the trip was called Appalachian Rendezvous, our group quickly adopted the name "The Fellowship." Why The Fellowship? We chose it because we wanted to emphasize the importance of brotherhood and community with boys this age. We wanted them to be a part of something special, something that takes guts, something that some people wouldn't understand. Sounds like being a Christian.

For the five young men who took part in this adventure it was a transforming experience. Now we look forward to offering more trips like this in the future.



John Karagoulis is the administrator for [Kairos in North America](#).
Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school,
university and post university aged people.

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Greener Grasses

by Sean O'Neill

So heed me now, though all my quondam whimpers rise
 From darkneses and little deaths You did despise,
 Or seemed to. Your tremendous volte-face preyed each year
 Upon my gullibility to bend Your ear
 And racked this ruined soul with frames of phantom guilt.
 Your accidental turning broke the barns I built
 To store unrealised the mildewed fruit I bore.
 I listened and ran bleating to Your closing door.
 But when you turned I never saw your fabled smile
 But wept upon Your thorny brow, to lose my guile
 Where rivulets of blood do still obscure Your eyes
 And gather where my hopes and weathered dreaming dies.
 But here I lie, and ever did I, catlike, do.
 For once, I now remember, where the olives grew
 With mists between the small hills and dawn on the felled
 Ancient castellations of the Marches, You held
 My eyes and opened them on glimpses of Your face.
 And have You changed? Is this now why there is no trace?
 But now I think I mind a moonlit path I walked
 Where all the trees were dancing with your voice and talked
 Between themselves and lifted their long-fingered praise.
 And You stopped me like a traveller with your gaze
 And bade me lift this old, old burden from my back.

You have not changed. But surely I must learn my lack.
Then other places where Your love drew near, precious
And strong, or weeping and long, like milestones, concious
Of me, spread along these dusts. I pine in my sleep,
Now. Now Your mercies crowd upon me from some deep
And dead forgotten cavern of my wayward heart.
I am the lost sheep. But no sooner do we start
Back on the pasture than I stray among the rocks
Or bandy words with here a wolf or there a fox.
Brand my hide with Your blood-red love, sacred shepherd.
Teach me the strong timbre of your speech that, once heard,
Will ever be obeyed; and lead me, lead me now
To grasses greener, sweeter than the heart knows how.

[Sean O'Neill is originally from Glasgow, Scotland, and currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. His poems range from the sacred to the mundane and sometimes, inadvertently, both at the same time. This poem first appeared in [First Things](#), June/July, 2004.

Photo by Don Schwager, entitled *Wayfarer*, Ardmore Island, Connemara, County Galway, Ireland.]

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The Rabbi Who Ascends to Heaven Every Friday Morning

An early 20th century Eastern European short story by I.L. Peretz
adapted by Don Schwager

This story is true. So the Russian villagers of Nemirov swear. Every Friday morning he vanished! The rabbi that is. He was nowhere to be found. Not in the synagogue, not in the library, nor in the park. Nobody in the village worried however. They say: "The Rabbi, blessed be God, ascends to heaven every Friday morning where he talks with God."

"Ascends to heaven?" scoffed a skeptical Litvak who visited the village on occasion. "Nonsense! I will solve this mystery once and for all." So the disbelieving Litvak devised a scheme to trap the Rabbi. Sorry to disrupt the story here. You do not know what a Litvak is? A Litvak who knows his Talmud well will tell you plainly that nobody ascends to heaven. Not even Moses ascended to heaven during his lifetime.

Well, the Litvak hid behind the Rabbi's house one Friday morning. And waited to see what this Rabbi would do. As usual, the Rabbi rose, said his prayers very devoutly, washed his face, combed his lengthy beard, and then slid into his dark black boots. Before he left the house he grabbed an axe and a thick piece of rope. And off he went away from the village.

The Litvak drew a deep breath and then began to follow the Rabbi. Secretly of course. He didn't want the Rabbi to know that he was spying on him! The Rabbi headed into a thick woods and began to chop down a tree. He cut the limbs into numerous pieces and made a large bundle with his rope. Strapping the axe to his belt, he hoisted the large bundle of wood onto his back and headed towards the end of the woods. Near the edge of the village stood a little house, barely room enough for two. Inside dwelt an old feeble woman and her sick son. The Rabbi left the wood near the door. The bundle was just enough for a whole week's supply of fuel. As he left the widow's house the Litvak could hear him mumble some prayers, no doubt for the widow and her son.

Well, the Litvak became the Rabbi's friend and even his disciple! He went to his synagogue every Friday evening

before dinner and came to his house weekly so he could learn more about God and his holy word. Now, whenever any of the villagers say that "our Rabbi ascends all the way to heaven on Friday mornings," the Litvak quietly adds, "If not higher!"

Isaac Leib Peretz, best known as I.L. Peretz, (May 18, 1852 - 3 April, 1915) grew up in Poland in an Orthodox Jewish family. He wrote a number of Yiddish language short stories and plays.

Don Schwager is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#) and author of [Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations](#).

Photo of Morning Mist, Bois Blanc Island, Michigan, USA by Greg Schwager

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