



billy graham center centerline

Spring 2008

News from the **Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College**, Wheaton, Ill.

The Unfolding Drama: A Discussion of Imagination and the Gospel

Laurie Fortunak

It's the most powerful story ever told. But it's more than that. It's the continuous drama of God that has yet to be completed. For many Christian scholars, it is the God-given drama that has five acts: (1) creation; (2) God's election, rejection, and restoration of Israel; (3) the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; (4) the Spirit and the Church; and (5) the consummation of all things. It is the gospel. Scripture, from start to finish, is packed with the imaginative mind of God and his plan for his people.

Nearly one hundred Christian scholars and practitioners came together to discuss this very issue at the 5th Evangelism Roundtable, sponsored by the Billy Graham Center and the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College. The theme, "Imagination & the Gospel," was designed to bring "global academics and thinking practitioners" together to find ways to allow imagination to take its place alongside reason and thought to inspire the

Church. About this, Rick Richardson, director of the Roundtable, says, "Culturally, we must sing the song of the gospel and not just explain the topic of the gospel."

For three days, professors, pastors, evangelists, and artists sought to find the balance between the academic side of the imagination and evangelism (e.g., church history; the history of imagination and the gospel; and the role of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Inklings) and the practical side (e.g., the use of media today; sto-

rytelling and preaching; and mythmaking to engage culture). Nearly all of the fourteen sessions included lecture, discussion, and Q&A time. "Because of the nature of the topic, it was necessary that both the head and the heart got engaged," Richardson explains. "There was a lot of dialogue and discussion."

As pastor of Ecclesia, the Sunday night service for young adults at Wheaton Bible Church in Wheaton, Illinois, Ted Coniaris, found the subject matter extremely relevant to the postmodern generation: "The younger generation is more receptive to storytelling and the use of metaphors. There is a big difference between knowing about something and experiencing and becoming engaged in something."

The conference—and the topic—included two parts: (1) understanding the foundation of *why* the imagination is important and (2) understanding *how* we can use it in our culture to proclaim the gospel message.



South Korean missionary to Japan, Chuck Lee, discusses the importance of using parables in sermons at the 5th Evangelism Roundtable.

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Cross/Purpose

The Billy Graham Center Museum is proud to present *Cross/Purpose*, an exhibit from the collection of Edward and Diane Knippers, provided in conjunction with Christians in the Visual Arts. *Cross/Purpose* features a large sampling of the ways in which the great symbol of the Christian faith, the cross, has been displayed in art over the centuries. The exhibit includes images of the cross, ranging from a sixth-century AD coin to works by both contemporary and well-known artists. Freestanding crosses used in religious ceremonies in places like Ethiopia, France, and Guatemala are also on display. *Cross/Purpose* ultimately seeks to reclaim the torturous, yet redemptive nature of Christ's death on the cross from the cheap fashion statement that many have made of it today. *Cross/Purpose* runs from May 29 through August 10, 2008.

Museum Hours: Monday-Saturday, 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. • Sunday, 1:00-5:00 p.m.
For more information, call the Museum at 630.752.5909

www.billygrahamcenter.org/museum

at the museum



Through
August 10, 2008



director's devotional

Lon Allison

New Windows, Stunning Views

Last week, my wife, Marie, and I had our windows washed after a long, snowy winter.

With spring finally here, and with clean windows, the scenic views outside our home are delightful. Deep, lush lawns and blossoming trees of white, red, and green are everywhere.

Looking at this beauty, I am reminded how I recently viewed two other remarkable scenes of God's kingdom at work. In Birmingham, Alabama, I spent a weekend with Rev. Angulus Wilson and his family and church. Angulus is one of our "Star mentoring fellows." He leads a church plant of more than two hundred primarily African American people. They meet in a former all-white Southern Baptist church. Anyone who knows the history of the Baptist movement in the American south knows something of the history of segregation and racism. But God's kingdom is at work. The declining white church gave their buildings and property (worth well over one million dollars) to Angulus' fast-growing, black church. That in itself is a powerful portrait of reconciliation. The worship was moving, the people beautiful. Music with a choir, organ, and band;

prayer; anointing with oil; and the high respect for the spoken Word all contributed to a magnetic experience. The congregation even seemed pleased with this "white" preacher from the north. (I did wear my fanciest suit!) Following the worship service, the whole church gathered for a "southern feast" in the fellowship hall, courtesy of the church mothers. My greatest memory of the weekend is a picture of Angulus kneeling next to a headstone in the small cemetery on the church grounds. The grave is that of a confederate soldier from the American Civil War. Truly, God is at work in this Spirit-filled church.

Two weeks later, I was with evangelist and pastor Dr. Wesley Paul, also one of the "Star mentoring fellows," in his new church in Lexington, Kentucky. "Church for all Nations" meets in a small storefront across from a major mall. Wesley is an Indian man raised in Canada. He preaches Christ in Pakistan, India, and parts of Africa throughout the year. He sensed God's leading to not only go to the nations to preach Christ, but to reach the "nations" already here. His associate pastor, Patrick, is from Nigeria. The new church reflects his heart and the heart of God. Only one year old, the church has between one

hundred and two hundred people weekly. But more, it reflects the whole world. As I stood to preach, I saw Asians, Africans, South Americans, and North Americans. We represented at least ten nations and I was a distinct minority. A simultaneous translation in an African tongue assisted those not yet fluent in the English language. Nearly all the congregants were first generation immigrants to the United States. As refugees, some fled their countries where ethnic or religious wars scarred families. Their love for Jesus was evidenced by whole body and soul engaging in worship. I preached and played tambourine!

The world has come to our neighborhoods. The Apostle Paul foresaw these windows when he said, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom.10:12-13). God be praised.

Lon Allison

P.S. Thank you for your prayers and support that allow me and many of our staff to view and tell stories like those above. We are most grateful. If you are considering making a financial gift, our fiscal year ends June 30th. We are praying for the last \$44,000 to be fully supported for the year.

BGC 2008 Graduates



From its inception in 1976, the BGC Scholarship Program has awarded 203 international scholars awards to attend Wheaton College Graduate School. At any given time, there are between ten and fifteen international students studying at

Wheaton. We pray God would use the five scholars graduating in the 2008 academic year in big ways for his kingdom:

Stephen Christopher (India, MA in intercultural studies) is returning to India to take over the leadership of Tamil Village Gospel Mission. The focus of TVGM is evangelistic outreach, discipleship, and offering aid to those in need.

Ana Lucia Cornejo (Peru, MA in clinical psychology) is returning to Peru to help the underserved in her church and community.

Aklilu Damtew (Ethiopia, MA in biblical exegesis) is returning to Ethiopia to begin a higher education school for ministry leaders. He anticipates earning his doctorate before returning to Ethiopia.

Chi Meei Ngo (Malaysia, MA in Christian formation and ministry) is returning as pastor of children and youth at the Klang Chinese Methodist Church. She will use the new curriculum she devised as her creative project while at Wheaton.

Olga Suhareva (Russia, MA in intercultural studies and TESOL) has returned to Russia and is teaching at the Russian American Christian University and serving as director of the Intensive English Program at the university.

The Billy Graham Center Coalition Connection: Partnering to Spread the Gospel to All People, from All Walks of Life

7 Coalitions Connecting the BGC to World Evangelism

Coalition of Ministries to Muslims in [North] America (COMMA)

Mission Statement: To increase networking among nearly thirty evangelizing ministries in North America; facilitate and equip ministries and individuals in their witness to Muslims; and follow the Muslim agenda for North America, providing a voice concerning it

BGC's Role: Provides leadership, develops resources, and maintains a database for COMMA

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Offers a place to: (1) think missionally about Islam in the North American and Muslim minority setting and (2) share common experiences and resources in Muslim evangelism

Ethnic Ministries

Mission Statement: To equip God's people, through the local church, to share Christ's love with their ethnic neighbors. These leadership efforts are performed on behalf of the Ethnic America Network (EAN), a coalition of more than sixty denominations and para-church organizations.

BGC's Role: Provides administrative support for: (1) coordination and preparation for a strategic 3-day planning retreat; (2) facilitation and coordination of the annual Ethnic Workers' Summit; and (3) recruitment and training of researchers and development of the PeopleGroups.info ethnic database

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Connects and encourages people with a commitment to: (1) evangelizing immigrants to America and (2) developing mission strategies to meet the spiritual and physical needs of immigrants to America

Internet Evangelism Coalition (IEC)

Mission Statement: To stimulate and accelerate web evangelism by providing training and by catalyzing strategic relationships and partnerships with churches, ministries, and individuals utilizing Internet technology for evangelism

BGC's Role: Provides a foundation for the operation of the IEC and the infrastructure, experience, and encouragement for making such a coalition possible

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Makes sure that the Body of Christ is prepared to share the gospel online. The IEC, which includes dozens of major ministry partners, offers training for potential evangelists to interact with spiritual seekers online.

Proclamation Evangelism Network (PEN)

Mission Statement: To proclaim Christ publicly by: (1) training hundreds of emerging and active proclamation evangelists; (2) promoting proclamation missions across America; and (3) persuading the Church that proclamation evangelism is an effective form of evangelism

BGC's Role: Operates as senior partner in PEN, convening leaders annually from the most active evangelistic organization across the United States

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Exists to present the gospel to the more than 190 million people in America who have never heard an adequate presentation of the gospel.

Operation Starting Line (OSL)

Mission Statement: To seek the transformation of prisoners and their reconciliation to God, family, and community. OSL operates as a collaborative network of ministries

BGC's Role: Provides evangelism training for inmates

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Provides (1) opportunities to partner with other prison ministries and (2) evangelism training to inmates

Mission America Coalition

Mission Statement: The whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole nation—and to the world

BGC's Role: Hosted the inaugural conference, which launched the official movement in 1995. BGC director, Lon Allison, serves on the executive committee. The coalition is made up of over eighty denominations and 350 para-church organizations.

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Utilizes the "prayer, care, and share" strategy of personal and public evangelism so that every person in America might have an opportunity to know Jesus Christ

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

Mission Statement: The whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world. Lausanne began in 1974, when Billy Graham called for a global gathering of evangelicals committed to world evangelization.

BGC's Role: Co-publishes Lausanne World Pulse. BGC director, Lon Allison, is a member of the executive program committee for the Lausanne 2010 Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, where four thousand Christian leaders will gather.

Importance to "Stimulating Global Evangelism": Brings the global evangelical community together to seek worldwide evangelization and provides context for missional and evangelism thinking, strategizing, and networking

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Step 1: Theodrama and Imagination

Although using the imagination is vital to sharing the gospel in a postmodern, secular culture, scholars at the Roundtable noted that we cannot effectively do that without first having an understanding of why the imagination is important in God's economy and how it helps us relate to him. Kevin Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, explained it in terms of having the framework of the "theodrama" (what God has done in history and in Christ): "The theodrama is the imaginative framework that lies at the heart of scripture and thus ties everything together. It is the framework for living the Christian life. Just as metaphors allow scientists to view the natural world in new ways and so make discoveries, so the Bible's metaphors and narratives allow us to see the natural world as creation, and history as the theater of God's glory. The drama enacted in the Bible and retold as narrative is no parochial play, but the play or story of the whole world. It is the summons to turn away from other stories falsely called knowledge and to embrace the drama of the Christ."

Step 2: Culture and Proclamation

Only after we understand that we are in God's drama and we have a part to play can we creatively engage the culture around us to experience God. After all, according to Chris Mitchell, director of the Marion E. Wade Center, "There is simply no way to avoid using the imagination. The enlargement of our beings have resulted because of authors, musicians, artists, filmmakers, etc."

During his presentation, filmmaker Craig Deitweiler suggested using movies as a way to come alongside people in their spiritual walk. After researching the top-listed films of the Internet Movie Database, he discovered that all fall into one of three thematic groups which closely pattern biblical truths. The first set deals with evil and our own self-destructive tendencies. They address God's first question to humanity: "Why are you hiding?" The second set deals with community and how

utterly depraved humanity can be. They address God's second question to humanity (when God confronted Cain): "Where is your brother?" The third set deals with fantasies. These have traces of the gospel and give the message that although there is ugliness in the world, we are desperate to get back to the garden, before the fall. According to Deitweiler, most films today are descriptive, rather than prescriptive, meaning they describe our problems, our brokenness, and our need, but do not necessarily provide answers.

Thang Pil Mung, who works with World E-Missions, an Internet-based mission agency that sends, trains, and supports e-missionaries globally, appreciated this idea: "We need to have fresh ways to do evangelism. Storytelling—both in the culture and in our own witness—is very important and very effective."

Applications for Christians Today

Richardson suggests four steps Christians seeking to integrate the imagination with gospel understanding and proclamation can take:

1. Learn what non-evangelical traditions can teach us about using the imagination in worship and proclamation.
2. Look at how biblical truth can be found in pop culture. Find the gospel strand.
3. Understand that the more we engage people in the whole theodrama of God's work in history, the more they will see themselves as part of that drama.
4. Communicate the story of the gospel, not just the logic of it. Use emotion, expression, and love when telling the ongoing drama of Christ.

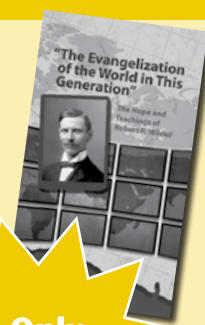
Chuck Lee, a South Korean missionary to Japan, understands the truth of these last few suggestions. He is hoping to plant an international church when he returns to Tokyo and has big plans to integrate storytelling and the use of metaphors into his sermons. "Jesus' sermons were parable-style," he explains. "We are supposed to preach the same style. The sermon loses its power when we don't use parables and storytelling. These elements bring emotion and depth."

NEW EVANGELISM CLASSIC!

"The Evangelization of the World in This Generation":
The Hope and Teachings of Robert P. Wilder
Edited with an introduction by Laurie A. Fortunak

The late 1800s and the early 1900s saw a massive outpouring of God's North American workers on the global mission field. Each had the common vision of "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Robert P. Wilder stands out in his commitment to this task and to the formation of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM). Read Wilder's own thoughts on topics such as: the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, personal contact with Jesus, the call to world missions, and more.

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The Billy Graham Center stimulates global evangelism, partnering with Christian leaders to develop strategies and skills for communicating the gospel. The Center serves the church in evangelism and missions through leadership training, research, networking, and strategic planning.

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