

Building Relationships With Those Who Disagree | Recognizing and Responding to the Many Faces of Heresy | The Need For Doctrine | Building the Foundation |

# Western



**CONTENDING  
FOR THE FAITH  
WITHOUT BEING  
CONTENTIOUS**



Spring 2013 Western Seminary Magazine

# Letter from the President

This issue of Western Magazine is devoted to the theme of “contending for the faith without becoming contentious.” As I seek to demonstrate in my article, contending for biblical truth is both an obligation and a virtue, but being contentious is seen in that same Bible as a vice to be avoided. So doing the former while avoiding the latter can feel much like walking a tightrope where it is far too easy to fall off one side or the other. We pray that this issue will help you maintain your balance!



Marc Cortez, Western’s academic dean, contributes a study of the nature of “heresy” (a term often used more frequently than justified) and offers his own suggestions on how to oppose it in a godly manner.

Western graduate and adjunct faculty member Dan Kimball shares his burden to help young people in particular appreciate the importance of sound doctrine. This is especially critical since many voices in the so-called “emerging” church that is so attractive to the young tend to disparage having theological convictions that reflect historic Christian orthodoxy.

Contending for biblical truth is not limited to dealing only with theological errors within the professing Christian community. It also involves challenging non-Christian world views whose truth claims compete for allegiance within our culture. To that end, Western theology professor Gerry Breshears shares about his interactions with a group of secular humanists in the Portland area. Traditional family values are another area under contemporary social pressure, so we interviewed Western alumni Rob Schwarzwald and Kermit Rainman, who have been deeply involved in formulating a faithful and winsome Christian response to these challenges.

We also offer a brief list of resources (pg. 19) that may be of interest as you dig deeper into the topic of defending God’s truth in a God-honoring way.

It is our hope that this issue of Western Magazine will resonate with, and inform you, as you live out your life with both conviction and love.

Yours for contending without being contentious,

*Randal Roberts*

Randal Roberts

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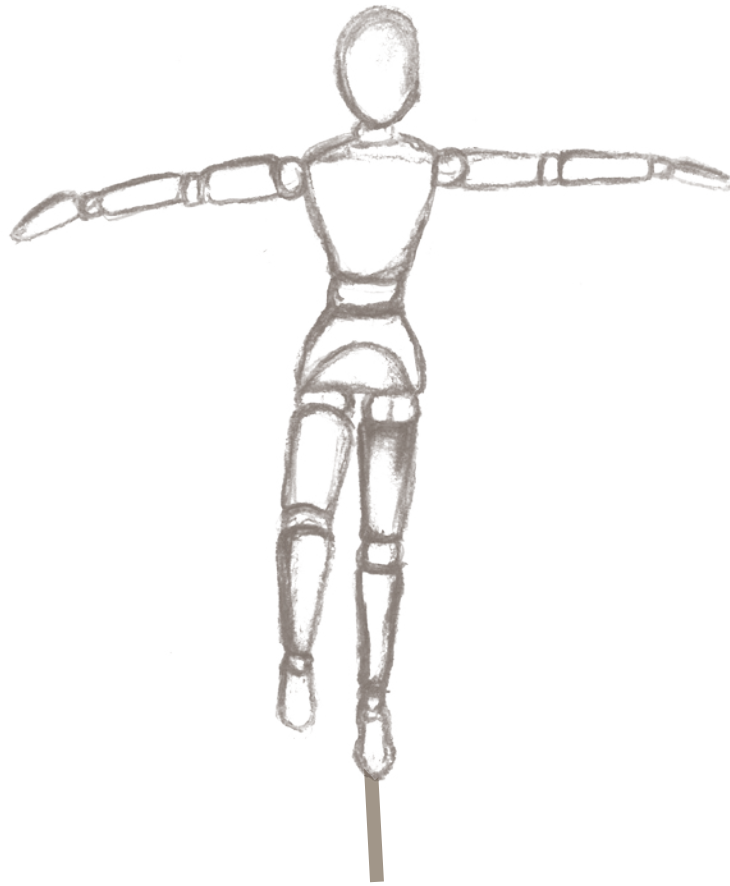
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# CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH



# WITHOUT BEING CONTENTIOUS

By Dr. Randal Roberts  
*President  
Professor of Spiritual Formation*

**MAINTAINING BIBLICAL BALANCE** in both what we believe and how we live our lives is obviously essential for a faithful and fruitful Christian life. Some today, however, proclaim that Christianity is just about “deeds, not creeds.” They argue that concern about doctrine divides and deadens, and thus is counter-productive to a life of loving service and tolerance.

Most do not recognize, however, that this slogan is not new. It originated among theological liberals a century ago who abandoned belief in a life to come and instead focused their ministry on improving life in this age alone through social activism. Furthermore, pitting deeds against creeds contradicts the biblical teaching that good deeds are the fruit of good theology and ultimately depend upon that foundation of sound doctrine (at least if they are to be distinctively Christian in both “what” and “why”). By making what should be a both/and into an either/or, the slogan demonstrates what logicians call a false dichotomy.

Liberalism reflects a decided tendency to de-emphasize contending for the historic Christian faith. Some do this from a comparatively noble motivation, believing that classic theology doesn’t play well to modern ears. They will thus seek to re-engineer doctrine to make it more acceptable to contemporary tastes, but in so doing typically end up distorting that doctrine. In fact, J. Gresham Machen, a leading figure in the early 20th century conflict between theological conservatives and modernists, argued that liberal Christianity is more a different religion than a merely defective version

of biblical faith. This modification isn’t always easy to detect, for some of the same theological vocabulary may be used but with significantly different definitions employed. Thus, an understandable desire to lower a perceived barrier to conversion can end up producing converts to a different religion! We see this illustrated in Scripture in multiple examples where the apostolic faith was already being modified to accommodate the philosophical and spiritual beliefs of that age in a misguided attempt to enhance its appeal.

Others have more crass motivations for espousing liberalism. The same way that atheists frequently deny the existence of a god to whom they are morally accountable because that accountability makes them uncomfortable, some liberals maintain belief in a supreme being but adjust the morality he/she/it requires to reflect cultural or individual preferences. Put simply, one strategy to justify a sinful lifestyle is to argue that the supreme being endorses it.

Theological conservatives can err on the other end of the spectrum. A well-intentioned pursuit of doctrinal purity can go astray when secondary doctrines are elevated to primary status, resulting in an unnecessarily fragmented church that blurs the spiritual unity that holds all genuine believers together in the eyes of God (but far too infrequently in the eyes of humanity). Furthermore, this

pursuit of theological purity can also be fueled by less-than-sanctified motivations (e.g., self-righteousness, pugnaciousness, and even as a fundraising technique by suggesting everyone else is wrong and thus undeserving of support).

Western is seeking to avoid both sets of errors by contending for the faith (contra liberals) but without becoming contentious (contra some forms of fundamentalism). We do so by keeping the following values and principles in mind.

**Contending for the Christian faith is essential because truth exists and matters**

The classic passage underscoring this principle is Jude 3. Jude apparently intended to send a more positive letter to his readers (v. 3a), but had to alter this plan because of the false teachers in their midst. Sound

## JUDE 3

**Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.**

doctrine was being contradicted by them in both precept and practice, and hence Jude begins by urging his readers to “contend for the faith.”



“The faith” is further described as that which was “once for all delivered to the saints.” This is Jude’s way of describing the body of truth revealed by God and now found in our Bible. It is called “the faith” because it is this truth that we are to believe and to which we submit as we live out that belief. It is true because it corresponds to reality as defined authoritatively by the One who created all things. Because it was once delivered to all the saints, we shouldn’t expect it to change; Christian convictions

novelty, for any doctrine that is new is likely to be wrong (it is hard to imagine how other believers could have missed it for centuries). Those who aspire to be seen as avant-garde or cutting edge must be especially wary on this front.

The Apostle Paul uses similar vocabulary. In I Tim. 1:3, he speaks of “different teaching” that Timothy is to curtail (cf. I Tim. 6:3). This clearly indicates that there is a norm of doctrine from which the false teachers had deviated. This norm is designated in the Pasto-

torically known as orthodoxy, and doctrine that contradicts that truth is called heterodoxy.

So if God has given us this truth and isn’t going to replace it or update it in our lifetime, then we must view it as precious and seek to preserve it, propagate it, and protect it whenever it is threatened or compromised.

This truth matters because it reveals the basis of God’s judgment, which Jude urges his readers to keep in mind so as to not fall under the influence of those who “pervert the grace of our God into sensuality...” and who will thus be condemned (v. 4). Paul similarly underscores the importance of sound teaching when he tells Timothy to “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching...for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (I Tim. 4:16). This is not salvation by works, but rather salvation that is experienced by a persistent embracing of gospel truth (cf. II Tim. 1:5-14). Furthermore, people are

**So if God has given us this truth and isn’t going to replace it or update it in our lifetime, then we must view it as precious and seek to preserve it, propagate it, and protect it whenever it is threatened or compromised.**

should be recognizable in any age or geographical setting, for they are intended to mark the people of God universally. Thus we should immediately be suspicious of theological

rals not only as the faith, but also as the truth, the gospel, sound doctrine, the teaching, and the good deposit. This body of truth is his-

always better off whenever they live in light of genuine reality instead of in a world view that reflects only wishful thinking; such is the essence of biblical wisdom.

Paul's instructions to Timothy also reveal another important principle to keep in mind that runs counter to contemporary beliefs.

### Contending is not inconsistent with love

Confronting theological errors is often viewed today as reflecting an unloving and disrespectful intolerance. Part of this attitude likely stems from the postmodern inclination to reject any notion of universal objective truth, viewing such claims as arrogant attempts to impose our subjective reality upon others for self-serving gain. Paul, however, takes a markedly different position. Right in the middle of his exhortation to Timothy to forbid certain people from teaching false doctrine,

Paul inserts a reminder that “the goal of our instruction is love” (I Tim. 1:5). Whether “instruction” here has in mind just this particular exhortation or the overall aim of Paul's ministry (commentators disagree) matters little, for clearly the apostle sees no inconsistency between love and forbidding the propagation of error. Given what we said in the preceding section, this link should not surprise us. For if doctrinal error is harmful and can all too easily lead to serious consequences, then it is unloving to ignore it and to allow others to be hurt by it. Paul puts this positively in I Tim. 4, where he commends the nourishing effects of sound doctrine, in stark contrast to the various effects of error described in that chapter (and throughout both the Pastorals and his other epistles).

Not all error is equally harmful, however, nor equally clear. So we turn our attention to prudence in choosing our battles and the intensity with which they are waged.

### While truth matters, not all truth matters equally

Common sense would suggest that the more serious and transparent the error, the more concern should be generated in response to it. Perhaps the relative nutritional (or anti-nutritional) impact of food provides an analogy. Despite the vacillating opinions of science reflected in headlines, there appears to be at least some consensus that certain foods are good for you (such as fruit and vegetables), others definitely harmful (e.g., those with trans fats), and the rest somewhere in between.

Theologians use a similar continuum in assessing the importance of doctrines. One scheme employs various “levels.”

First-level truths are those widely deemed to be essential to the Christian faith. Here we typically find the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the deity, incarnation and atoning work



Rob Schwarzwaldler  
*Senior Vice President*  
Family Research Council

Rob Schwarzwaldler (“83) is a Western graduate who is contending for the faith through his position as Senior Vice President of Family Research Council (FRC). Strategically located in Washington D.C., FRC was established in 1983 to advance faith, family, and freedom in public policy and the culture from a Christian worldview. FRC’s team of seasoned experts promotes these core values through policy research, public education on Capitol Hill and in the media, and grassroots mobilization.

Schwarzwaldler’s position puts him at the center of public policy as he manages the Policy Department directly while also overseeing the communications and church ministries teams. Passionate about connecting children to a biblical view of the traditional family, Rob feels strongly that enacting this belief must start small and locally. The positive impact that we as Christians have on the communities we live in can show Jesus to a fallen world. When asked about what he sees as the most pressing policy issue we are facing in the future, Rob didn’t hesitate in responding that he believes it to be abortion and the sanctity of life.

To engage this topic with conviction, but not contentiousness, Rob highlights the need for “choosing language that doesn’t jump down [their] throats ....We need to be able to accept criticism when it comes and base our response on the truth found in the Bible.” This means not only speaking from conviction, but also working to create and change policy and supporting organizations that provide alternatives, such as the Bethany Christian Services and CareNet. Advocating for the family in a way that imitates Christ’s truth and grace means speaking with conviction and acting with grace in practical ways that can collectively make a difference.

of Christ along with His bodily resurrection and second coming, justification by faith alone, etc.

Second-level truths allow some disagreement between genuine believers and are deemed important enough to create some demarcating boundaries between them (whether into denominations or theological camps). Many would place here things like mode of baptism, appropriateness of certain spiritual gifts for today, etc.

Third-level doctrines are those over which believers may disagree but still belong to the same church, as they do not have to disrupt serving and worshipping together. Often things like certain views of eschatology or whether or not one must be a total abstainer vis-à-vis alcohol are placed here.

A somewhat similar approach is used by Western faculty member Gerry Breshears. He recommends using the following schematic to distinguish the essential from the merely controversial. Ranked in descending order of importance, there are things he would: 1. die for (*similar to first level*), 2. divide for (*same as second level*), 3. debate for, or 4. merely decide for. The latter two categories are his sub-division of third level issues, with “decide for” speaking of those issues of adiaphora (viz., “things morally indifferent”; cf. Rom. 14-15) where believers are told not to judge others’ verdicts of conscience.

Regardless of the schematic used, and while recognizing that not everyone will always place a given doctrine in the same category, the point is that some doctrines are both more important than others and taught more clearly in Scripture than others.



The combination of importance and clarity should inform both when, and how, we engage those with different opinions. Contentious and divisive individuals tend to make everything a major issue and hence typically over-react when they encounter those who disagree.

### When contending, play fair

When we do engage others, we should always be fair and charitable. This is the application of the so-called Golden Rule (“treat others as you would want to be treated”) to theological polemics, but a rule often better known than practiced. What might this look like?

First, before criticizing a position make sure you have described it in an acceptable way to someone who holds it. In other words, don’t set up “straw men” or ascribe beliefs to someone which they would deny if asked.

Similarly, be careful with ad hominem arguments (where a person is attacked, not his/her beliefs). This is frequently practiced in contemporary politics and often is used to disguise a weak argument.

Third, honor I Cor. 13 by giving the benefit of the doubt rather than ascribing the worst possible interpretation to someone else’s words. The latter is very tempting to do when discussing the views of key opponents. It also includes taking statements out of context and then subjecting those to public critique (another unfortunate staple of modern political discourse).

Fourth, it isn’t always wrong to “name names” when discussing theological error. Paul does it on

occasion, typically when an error is public, influential, and especially problematic (cf. I Tim. 1:20, Gal. 2:11-14). But in such cases it is especially important that special care is taken to practice the three guidelines mentioned above.

Fifth, remember your own shortcomings and proneness to error. I am struck by how Paul places remembrances of past blindness (e.g., in Ephesians 2 of believers in general and in I Tim. 1 autobiographically) in the immediate context of dealing with others’ current blindness to spiritual truth. This seems to be a deliberate way of enjoining proper humility on the part of those who now see more clearly, lest they/we be haughty towards those who now are as we once were. Such a reminder cannot help but shape a more compassionate tone, even when firm words of correction are necessary.

### When correcting others, remember Paul’s words to Timothy

2 Tim 2:24-26 provides a helpful summary of the principles to keep in mind when dealing with the theological errors of others. First, those errors were to be corrected, not ignored. Those connected with the errors were causing serious problems, and would continue to do so since they are described as having been ensnared by the devil. Second, Christian virtues were to be manifested throughout the corrective process. Kindness, patience, and gentleness are mentioned explicitly and contrasted with a quarrelsome or contentious spirit. Third, knowl-

edge of sound doctrine is assumed in the reference “able to teach” and underscores the need to know biblical

# 1 Tim. 1:5

**The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**

truth. Fourth, Paul reminds us here that such correction is motivated by the hope of repentance and ultimately dependent upon the grace of God. It is interesting to compare these verses with Jude 20-23. There we also find instructions aimed at equipping us to deliver those captured by theological error, while referencing some of the same sanctified attitudes enjoined by Paul.

In conclusion, for the evangelical church to experience optimal spiritual vitality and missional impact, we must regain the ability to contend for the faith without becoming contentious. **W**

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WHO DISAGREE: *Speak Softly and Don't Carry A Big Stick*

By Dr. Gerry Breshears  
Professor of Systematic Theology  
Chair, Division of Biblical and Theological Studies



Unbelief is a fast growing “religion” in the USA, one we must engage wisely. While North Americans continue to say religion (58%) and prayer (76%) are important in their lives, the “Nones” (those that report no religious affiliation of any kind) are growing steadily. One third of American younger Millennials (born between 1990 and 1994) classify themselves in this group.

Recently a group of secular humanists invited me to a conversation where I would respond to their questions and reasons for dismissing Christianity. It was an intimidating prospect to go to their meeting and tell them to “bring it”; why should I accept such a risky invitation? Ongoing friendship with some members of the group, common interests, and pleasure in their company were all reasons that brought me there. The previous conversations we’d had about issues of faith had been personal and respectful, if sometimes intense.

Most were former Christians whose reasons for leaving the Church had far more to do with being hurt by Christians than with any kind of intellectual issues. In preparation, I prayed that the Spirit would work love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in me. That’s a big prayer since I am so intense and competitive. So with each question I would tell myself “be gentle, kind, respectful. Enjoy.”

My goal was to be as gentle and positive as possible as I sat in front of them. Thirty-five years of teaching Bible and theology have given me a good foundation to

engage in discourse, but that did not make it any easier to answer their questions. This meant listening with full attention and often responding to their question with a question of clarification. Respectful engagement goes a long way to developing meaningful conversation.

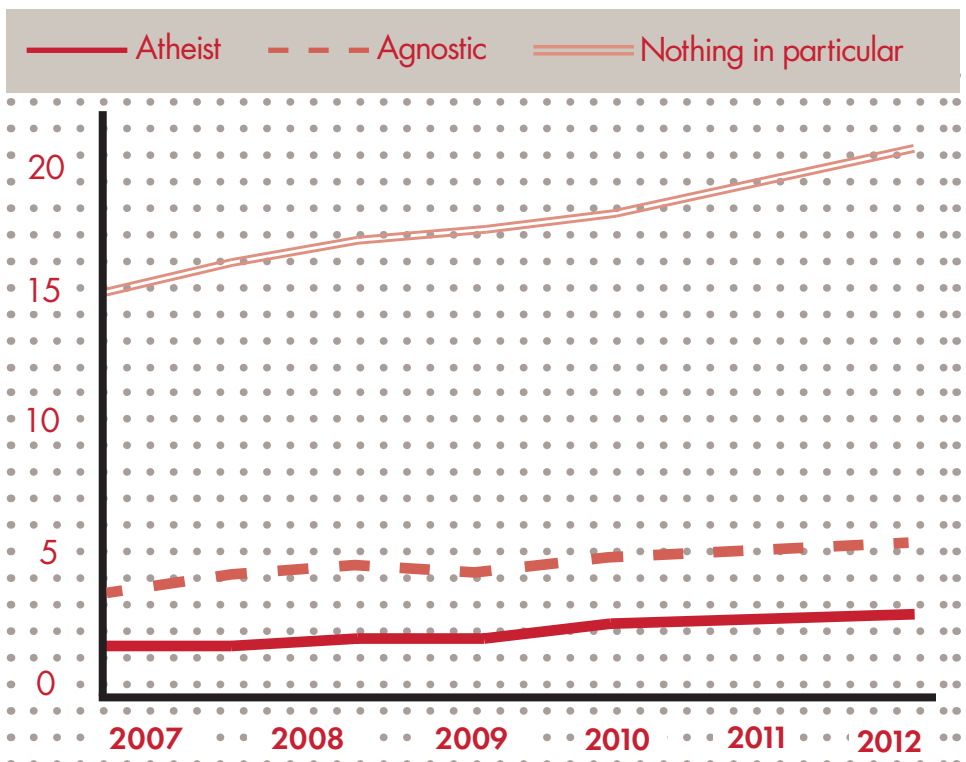
Scripture tells us to prophesy (Acts 2:17–18; 1 Cor. 14:1–4, 24–25, 39), to speak the Word with Spirit empowerment in the moment. Since many questions came from misunderstandings of the Bible, I explained Scripture, asking the Spirit to put His power into my soft-spoken words. I looked directly at the questioner (Acts 3:4), to connect our spirits and help them see what the Bible actually

said. As the Spirit worked in my words, I found many times an angry tone on the part of the questioner would relax into a more thoughtful follow up question.

### Understanding Before Speaking

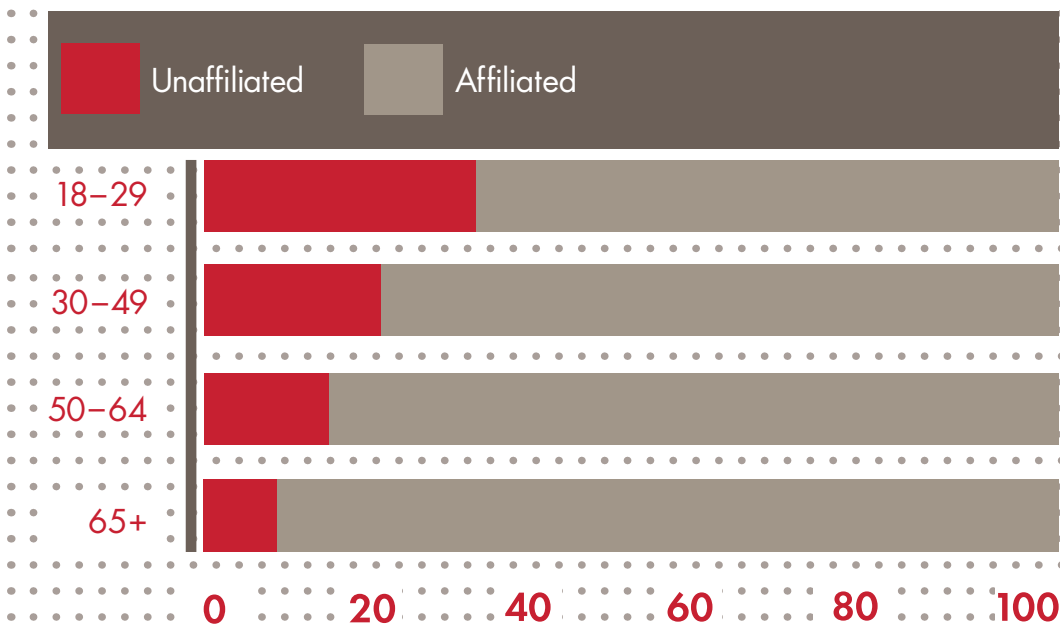
It is worthwhile to invest in understanding the fundamental points of unbelief and atheism. Often I find that my acquaintances with atheistic beliefs simply do not find any good reason to believe there is a God. Asking open-ended questions when possible is helpful to find out what an individual really believes, so you can avoid making the silly mistake of telling someone what they really believe based on misconceptions you may carry.

### GROWTH OF THE RELIGIOUSLY UNAFFILIATED



Source: Aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2007–July 2012. PEW Research Center.

## RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BY AGE



Source: Aggregated data from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. January-July 2012. Less than two percent responded “Don’t know/Refused.” PEW Research Center.

Taking time to familiarize yourself with the common arguments demonstrates love for your atheist neighbor. It ruins conversation when an unbeliever hears the tired old assertions that have been refuted many times. For example, the observation that it takes just as much faith to be an atheist as it does to be a Christian only infuriates atheists who pride themselves on being reasonable.

It is absolutely critical to discard all science-based arguments against biological evolution that are more than a few years old: the sciences of genetics and genomics have revolutionized the field. Appealing to older arguments will only discredit you in conversation. Similarly, people like me who have no training in biology or genetics probably need to stay out of that arena.

Certain words, such as science, reason, faith, and especially evolution, carry huge emotional weight, so don’t use them carelessly. Take for instance, the word science. Science technically means “the intellectual and practical

activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.” In this sense, everyone embraces it. But for many naturalists, the word is connected with a philosophy where everything can be explained by the random application of presently operating natural law. In this philosophy, any appeal to God is, by definition, bad science, but only in the second (the naturalistic, philosophical) sense. You must first know how the word is being used, then object when experimental science morphs into naturalism.

Evolution is the most explosive word. Again, the word may be connoted with many meanings, from the variation in species over time, to descent from a common ancestor, to the above mentioned scientific naturalism. Much confusion comes when these meanings are all lumped into the one word. All believe in evolution in the first sense, while no Christian will agree with the third.


### The Heart of Things

When engaging with a friend who disagrees, remember that many can’t believe Christianity because they haven’t really seen or heard it presented faithfully. Tell the story of Jesus often and with empowerment of the Spirit (John 16:8-11; Acts 4:8, 32). Speak of Emmanuel, God with us, in His birth and His exemplary life. Speak of that One who was born in rejection, lived in abject poverty, endured severe political oppression, and suffered abuse of every kind. Speak of He who took all of our guilt and shame to the Cross as He died as the substitute for our sins, so that we could be justified. He was raised bodily to new life, which He gives to us in regeneration. He was exalted above every hostile power and poured out the Spirit, so we could form a community of justice.

Speak of the canon-wide perspective of righteousness and justice, which is a community attribute where every relationship, with God, others, self, and all creation, is well ordered, flourishing, and filled with delight

as God designed it to be. Call people to the beauty, justice, community, and relationship with the compassionate gracious God who is slow to anger; abounding in love and faithfulness; forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; but does not leave the guilty unpunished. The central point is Jesus and His way of life. Speak that in deed and word.

For more information on how to speak on evolution and scientific naturalism, read *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* by Alvin Plantinga, and atheistic philosopher Thomas Nagel's critique of scientific naturalism, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*.

"Nones" may dismiss Christianity because they understand God as genocidal and homophobic. Christopher Wright's *The God I Don't Understand* or Randy Newman's *Questioning Evangelism* will help you solidify your own faith as well as prepare for the objections. 

Kermit Rainman  
*Director of Research  
and Operation*  
Faith Driven Consumer

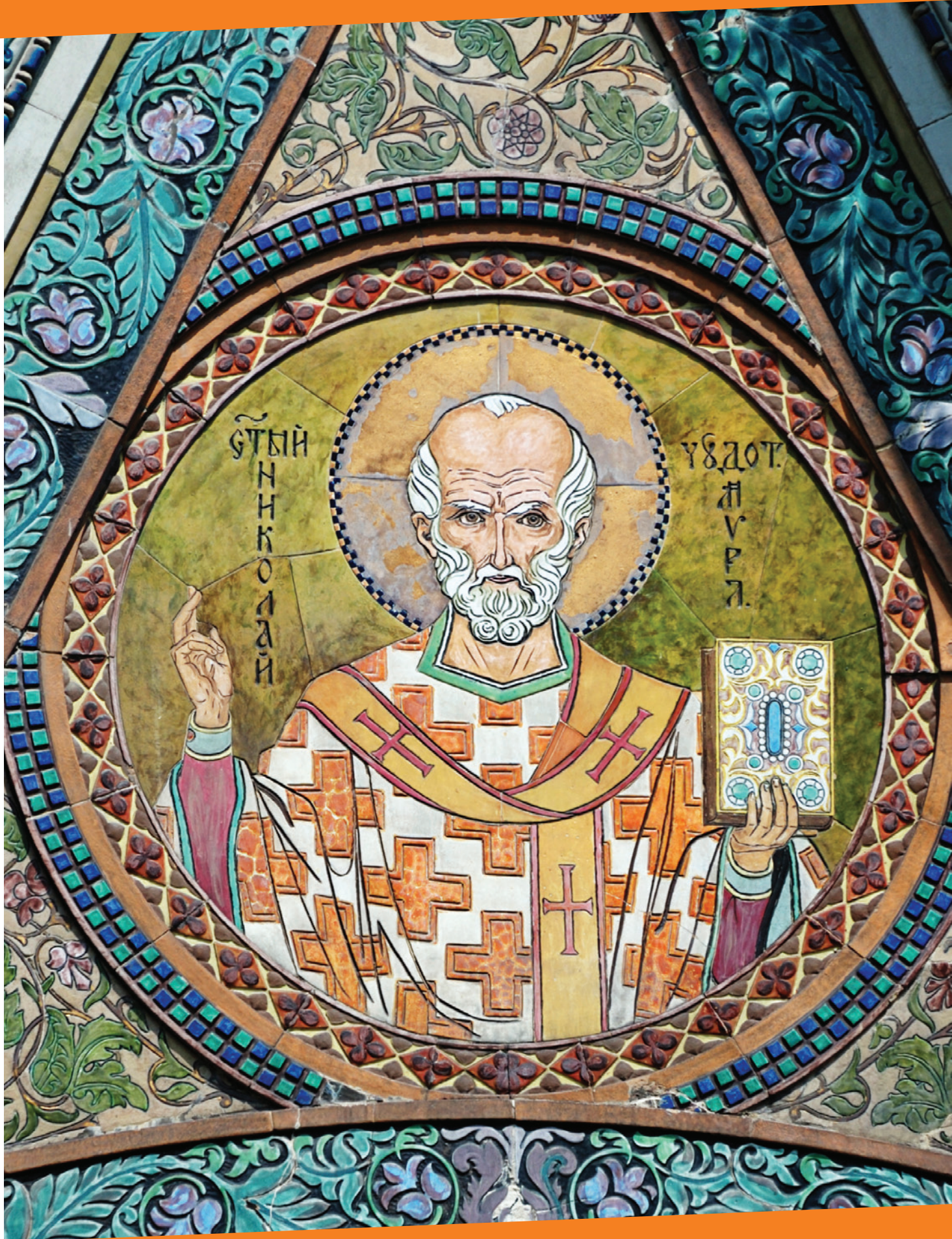
*Previously*  
*Social Policy Analyst*  
CitizenLink



Kermit Rainman ('04) is another Western graduate actively involved in the public arena. Currently serving as the director of research and operations at Faith Driven Consumer in North Carolina, Rainman reviews the production process and policies of companies that dominate our market. Prior to accepting his role at Faith Driven Consumer, he worked as a social policy analyst at CitizenLink, an affiliate of Focus on the Family, whose mission is to inspire men and women to live out their biblical citizenship.

Moving from a position where he created avenues to contend for the faith by establishing principles, guidelines, and legislation relating to the sanctity of marriage, sexuality, and the family, Kermit now works in a different public arena as he strives to close the gap between consumers and corporations. He and the rest of the Faith Driven Consumer team work to unify consumers holding a Christian worldview and to provide an opportunity for corporations to engage such consumers based upon their needs, wants, and preferences - just as they (the corporations)-do for consumers with other worldviews. Working in both public policy and advocacy arenas, Kermit has faced opposition.

When considering the question of what we, as evangelicals, can learn from those who oppose us on issues, he said, "Many issues are being driven to the forefront of conversation and policy by small but unrelenting groups. If small Christian groups would take this same relentless passion to our conversations, we too would see change." Kermit continued by saying that in many cases, churches and seminaries are not teaching believers how to confront these issues and, as a result, the body is not equipped to cause change. "We shouldn't be afraid to communicate what we know to be true in a graceful, compassionate, and winsome way," he states.



СВЯТЫЙ  
НИКОЛАЙ

УДАТО.  
ДУРА.



# Recognizing and Responding to the Many Faces of Heresy

By Dr. Marc Cortez

Associate Professor of Theology  
Academic Dean

Conjuring up images of the Spanish Inquisition, torture chambers, self-righteous judges, thought police, and innocent suffering, the word heresy harkens back to an age of darkness and fear, not to be used in this world of enlightened thought and free expression.

Along with those historical connotations, people typically associate heresy with self-righteous and abusive judgmentalism. Any attempt to label another view as heretical necessarily involves pride, proscription, and power: the pride of believing that you alone hold the key to truth, the act of proscribing the belief and the people who teach it, and the power to enforce the proscription. For many today, that combination of hubris and judgmental authority is precisely what is wrong with most forms of organized religion. Heresy itself is a study in why some people have chosen to be “spiritual but not religious.”

In addition to castigating those who would declare something heretical, the modern view of heresy also tends to idealize the heretics themselves. The heretics are the free-thinkers, those who reject oppressive

authority and explore new and creative possibilities, the underdogs willing to stand up for what they believe against the stale structures of institutionalized religion. Indeed, this is precisely how Pelagius, one of the more famous ancient heretics, was portrayed in the 2004 version of *King Arthur*: independent, creative, compassionate, and free. Who wouldn't want to be like that?

That combination of ideas makes it very difficult to take a clear stance against heresy today. Who wants to be one of the self-righteous judges crushing the free-spirited innovators who are just humbly exploring new ideas? Not me.

## What Is Heresy?

One reason why it is so difficult to talk about heresy today is a confused notion of what constitutes heresy. Some maintain that heresy is any belief that goes against the established norm, suggesting that the church would view any new idea as heretical. To be fair, the church has sometimes reacted to new ideas as though novelty alone constituted heresy. The essence of heresy, though, runs much deeper.

Others suggest that anything short of absolute, perfect truth should be

called heresy. However, since we are all finite and flawed beings, unable to attain such lofty heights, some degree of heresy resides in each of us. Nonetheless, the church has always recognized the difference between the flaws that necessarily characterize even the best-intentioned theology and those beliefs that step beyond our innate flaws into the realm of patently false beliefs about the nature and character of God.

Finally, the challenge of defining heresy sometimes comes from those who still like the term. Indeed, they like it so much that they seem to apply it to almost any belief that they do not like or agree with. Heresy is a powerful term, one that the church has historically reserved for those beliefs that undermined the gospel itself. Because many of the ancient heresies revolved around a particular view of the Trinity or the person of Christ, the fact that these disparate views held implications for how we understood our own salvation is what caused the early church to respond with such concern.

It might be best to understand heresy as any form of Christianity (in belief or practice) that undermines the gospel (explicitly or implicitly) and is determined to be such by God's people. That still leaves plenty of room for debate on what qualifies as heresy, but it at least orients the discussion around the right issue: the gospel itself.

## SIX TIPS FOR HANDLING HERESY

With that understanding of heresy in place, how should we respond to heretical ideas in a world where any attempt to declare something heretical will be viewed with extreme prejudice? Here are just a few suggestions:

### 1 BE CAREFUL WITH THE HERESY BUCKET

Imagine that you're mopping a really messy floor, transferring all the dirt and grime from the floor to a bucket next to you. You'll want to be very careful with that bucket; fill it too full and your bucket will overflow, making a mess of the floor all over again. The same is true with heresy. When we label too many things as heresy, the label loses its meaning, causing people to ignore the idea of heresy altogether. Once that happens, everything in the heresy bucket comes pouring out again, including what belonged there in the first place.

### 2 BEWARE THE HERESY HUNTER

Some people seem to pride themselves on their ability to identify heresy, potential heresy, and even the precursors of potential heresy in another person's theology. It's that kind of theological pride that causes so much suspicion toward heresy today. We do need to be mindful of beliefs that undermine the gospel, but there is a difference between respectful watchfulness and suspicious spying. The attitude makes all the difference.

### 3 EMPHASIZE HUMILITY

One lesson we must learn from the modern view of heresy is the need for theological humility. We have been wrong in the past, we will be wrong in the future, we might be wrong in the present. If we're not careful, that kind of humility can lead to a tragic theological paralysis, preventing us from ever saying anything with conviction. Humility ought to cause us to think twice before we speak; it shouldn't prevent us from speaking.

### 4 LEAVE ROOM FOR THE PROPHETIC VOICE

If history has taught us anything, it's that the church in every age needs correction. Every generation has its blind spots and shortcomings. In His grace, God consistently provides prophetic voices to call his people back to faithfulness; unfortunately, his people often respond to those voices quickly and judgmentally. One thing we must always be on guard against is our own tendency to label the prophetic as heretical. True theological discernment allows for the possibility that a new voice is a needed voice.

### 5 HANDLE HERESY HISTORICALLY

God's people have always had to deal with the question of heresy, even before they began using that particular label to describe the challenge. That's a lot of accumulated wisdom. We would be well advised to hear what our predecessors have to say, understanding why they thought a particular idea undermined the gospel, and thinking twice, even thrice, before applying the label to anything they did not see as heresy.

### 6 SPEAK BOLDLY WHEN NECESSARY

In today's world, where silence in the face of heresy in almost a virtue, we must affirm the need to speak. If, after respectfully hearing another voice and humbly assessing our own position, we see something that rejects, negates, or undermines the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must not remain silent. **W**





# The Need For Doctrine

Dr. Dan Kimball  
Western Alumnus, M.A. 1999  
Pastor at Vintage Faith Church

I have been immersed in ministry to youth, college-age and twenty-somethings for over two decades. I can honestly say that I have never experienced a season more critical than now with respect to the need for teaching sound doctrine and theology to younger generations. That is not meant to sound overly sensationalistic; I really believe it to be true. One reason is that I don't think I have ever experienced a broader lack of understanding of both the biblical narrative and Christianity in general as I have among these generations today. Many have grown up without any sense of knowing what is in the Bible. For some of them, even if they grew up in churches, they are not grounded in the historic doctrines of the faith. Often the churches of which they were a part did not teach them doctrine and theology but generally taught them over-simplified Bible stories and focused on felt-need topics such as dating and relationships (which are important to learn about, of course). But we now are seeing the aftermath of not teaching doctrine earlier, as they reach adulthood with very little understanding of doctrine and theology. As culture shifts and a more culturally-aligned and appealing "Christianity" is taught by those who are in the more progressive and liberal streams of Christianity, younger generations today are not grounded enough to discern doctrine as well as patterns in church history to see what is behind these current teachings and arguments.

Another reason we need to teach sound doctrine and theology is due to the instant access online to all types of various beliefs about the Bible. Very quickly you can find websites and comments on blogs where plenty of Bible verses are used, but so often those verses are pulled out of context to try and disprove a certain theological belief or Christianity itself. I was on a local college campus recently and several atheist students were quoting the Bible. They used some Old Testament stories of alleged genocide to paint God to be cruel and vicious. It was fascinating hearing non-Christian college students quoting the Bible to make their arguments.

I actually appreciate these websites and the neo-atheist challenges as they keep me sharp and aware of various contemporary challenges to the faith. Fearing strong challenges to our faith likely means we aren't confident in what we believe. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that for someone lacking in knowledge of basic doctrine and church history, it is not as easy.

The good news is that, in the midst of these challenges, I have also seen an increasing hunger to learn doctrine and theology from these same generations. They want credible answers to arguments being made against the faith. They also want to know God and study Scripture and theology. Not all are resistant to doctrine and theology; I believe many are hungry for it. So when I hear that all young people aren't interested in doctrine and theology, I couldn't disagree more. We recently taught a 13-week series on systematic theology at our church, and our attendance grew (including both Christians and non-Christians). Someone sent me an email letting me

**We do need to teach theology that shows how doctrines fit within the biblical narrative...I believe there is readiness and hunger for it!**

know that several non-Christian college students were coming every week because of their interest in learning Christian theology. Rather than avoiding theology, I believe it should be readily

taught, so that we might frame the biblical narrative for this next generation. We do need to teach theology that shows how doctrines fit within the biblical narrative, and what a great time to be teaching as I believe there is a readiness and hunger for it!

It is without bias (I was not asked to include this endorsement) that I express my thanks to Western and other seminaries that have remained true to the historical truths and doctrines of the faith. I have personally talked to students attending some other seminaries where doctrine has been compromised; they have shared with me that they have lost their faith in the Scriptures as a result. As I study at a national level the churches that are growing by younger generations, planting new churches, and making new disciples, I find that their pastors and leaders have remained faithful to the historical truths of Christianity. Seminary is important to train church leaders and this is why we chose to send all our interns to Western Seminary (several of our staff have also gone there).

It is a thrilling time to see younger generations come to faith in Jesus and respond to the teaching of theology and doctrine. May we seize this wonderful opportunity to see so many young lives change, lives that will lead to a lifetime of exponential impact for Jesus in this world. **W**

# Building the Foundation

Greg Moon  
*Vice President of Advancement*



As you can see, the leaders featured in this issue of Western Magazine are deeply committed to contending for our faith. They are all Western graduates with the exception of Gerry Breshears, who has been teaching this historic orthodoxy at Western for more than 30 years. It is my hope that you are encouraged by what you've read and believe that seminary training is both relevant and critical to the health of the church.

Western Seminary has never had a season of theological liberalism. For that we are grateful to the Lord, as too often ministry training schools lead their constituency into doctrine and ethics that contradict biblical truth. You can see various denominations splitting as large numbers of their membership abandon historic commitments to orthodoxy (see which schools are training their leadership and connect the dots), and so Western is re-doubling its commitment to trustworthy training. Each generation will need its own set of faithful ministers until the Lord returns, and your investment in them today will help to ensure their presence to shepherd your children in the days to come.

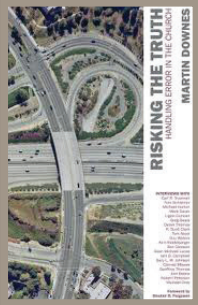
If you believe in that commitment, your prayers and financial support are much needed and appreciated. The average Western student receives \$800 of scholarship help annually (that's \$67 monthly) and your gifts make their education possible. Please consider a gift today. Contact Greg Moon V.P. of Advancement at 503-517-1880/[gmoon@westernseminary.edu](mailto:gmoon@westernseminary.edu) or go to [www.westernseminary.edu](http://www.westernseminary.edu) to make a gift online.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Moon". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Greg Moon

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## ON CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH



**Risking the Truth: Handling Error in the Church** by Martin Downes  
(Christian Focus, 2009)

This is a fascinating collection of interviews conducted by a Welsh pastor with various Christian leaders seeking their advice as to how best to handle errors in theology that pop up in congregations. Not only do you get that good advice along with some case studies, but some interviewees even disclose errors that they themselves once held. Highly recommended by people like Sinclair Ferguson, Michael Haykin, Kevin DeYoung and others.

While you may already be aware of Western faculty books on this theme, we still want to remind you of works such as:

### Todd Miles

*A God of Many Understandings?  
The Gospel and Theology of Religions*  
(B&H Academic, 2010)

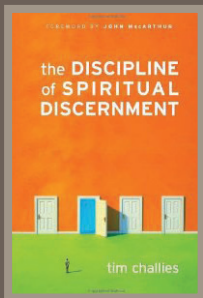
### Gerry Breshears

(co-authored with Mark Driscoll)

*Doctrine: What Christians  
Should Believe* (Crossway, 2011)

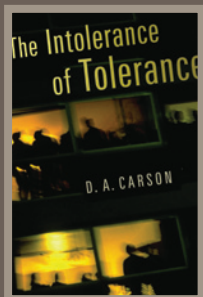
### James DeYoung

*Burning Down "The Shack": How  
the "Christian" Bestseller is  
Deceiving Millions* (WND, 2010)



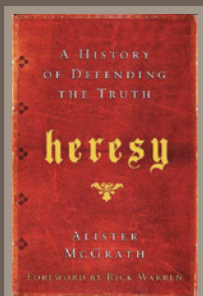
**The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment** by Tim Challies  
(Crossway, 2007)

Challies, a well-known Canadian blogger, provides here a fine introduction for the need for discernment in distinguishing truth from error, right from wrong, etc. Challies focuses on giving the tools and principles needed for cultivating such discernment so the reader is better equipped to make biblically-sound judgments.



**The Intolerance of Tolerance** by D. A. Carson  
(Eerdmans, 2012)

This prolific author and New Testament scholar offers a provocative analysis of how the notion of tolerance has shifted from defending the rights of others to hold contrary beliefs to the affirmation of all beliefs as being equally valid (leading to the intolerance of those who hold that their beliefs are true and others false).



**Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth** by Alister McGrath  
(HarperOne, 2010)

A provocative treatment by a highly regarded theologian and historian describing how heresy has been understood (and treated) throughout church history. McGrath is not afraid to challenge what he views as popular misconceptions, and also seeks to explore the appeal of heresy to the human mind.



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## Upcoming Events

### Alumni Connect San Jose

*March 28, 2013: 6:30–9:00 p.m.*

Alumni in the San Jose area are invited to hear authors Dr. Steve Korch and Dr. Judith Needham-Penrose share about the thrills and challenges of writing. Join us for an interactive conversation about the process one goes through in publishing material. Korch's newest book, *Coming to your Senses*, and Needham's article in *The Humanistic Psychologist* will be covered.

### The Spurgeon Fellowship

*April 9, 2013: 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.*

Join us at the Portland campus to hear Dr. Art Azurdia, speak on "Preaching the New Creation: An Exposition of Revelation 21." Dr. Azurdia is Associate Professor of Pastoral and Church Ministry at Western Seminary.

### IGNITE! With the Creativity of the Gospel

*April 20, 2013: 9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.*

Annual spring conference at Imago Dei Community Church in Portland with keynote speaker Sarah Thebarger and lab sessions.

For registration and location information, please visit the Women's Center for Ministry webpage at [www.westernseminary.edu/women](http://www.westernseminary.edu/women).

### Sacramento Campus Connection

*May 21, 2013: 7:00–9:00 p.m.*

M.A. in Marital and Family Therapy program

*May 23, 2013: 7:00–9:00 p.m.*

Ministry programs (M.Div., MABTS, MAML, GSD, GSC, CTC)

Are you interested in enrolling in the Fall 2013 semester? Do you know someone who is? Visit us at our Sacramento campus to find out more.