

FEATURE ARTICLE

God's Sovereignty, Free Will and Baseball

by Bill Moller

Many people, Christian or not, have wrestled with the seeming disparity between a sovereign God, who is in control of everything, and human free will, which implies people can make autonomous decisions. If we assume God orchestrates every detail of our lives, then we are little more than programmed robots, executing a predetermined set of instructions, void of free will. On the other hand, if we are free to choose our own course of action, does God have control - is He truly sovereign? I suggest that it is possible for God to be in complete control even when people are free to make independent decisions as situations arise.

This is where baseball comes into the picture.

When a batter steps up to the plate he or she has an unlimited number of options from which to choose. However, only a few of them are permitted by the baseball rule book. The batter can swing at the pitch or hit the catcher over the head with the bat. While the first option gives him a chance to get on base, the second gets him thrown out of the game. Does the batter have free will in this situation? Yes! Is he in control, or does the author of the rule book have ultimate control?

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)

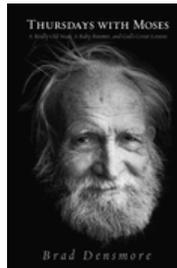
At the same time the batter is waiting to exert his free will, the

pitcher is deciding how to exercise hers. Should she "bring on the heat" with her best fast ball or try to fool the batter with an off speed pitch? The choice is hers. But, there is another factor at play in these circumstances. We are imperfect beings, and occasionally things don't turn out as we intend. When the pitcher chooses to toss a slider and puts a little too much spin on the ball, it may hit the batter or bounce past the catcher. Whether the batter is awarded first base or the count goes to 1-0, the pitcher's free will was exerted and the author of the rule book remains in control.

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BOOK REVIEW

by Bill Moller



Thursdays With Moses

by Brad Densmore

Here's a different way to study Old Testament writings. Take an imaginary journey back in time to 1398 B.C.

with Brad Densmore's novel *Thursdays With Moses*. This book is definitely historical-fiction, but you'll find yourself checking your Bible to see if the accounts in each chapter actually coincide with genuine Scripture. It's a thoroughly enjoyable escape from the usual commentaries and study guides you've had your head buried in all year.

By combining a couple of Hebrew artifacts and some seismic activity,

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CONCERT REVIEW

by Bill Moller

Alvin Slaughter
Concert Ministries



Can you say "SHOUT"?

I'm sure you would understand what I mean by that question, if you had ever attended an Alvin Slaughter concert. As the lyrics of Alvin's hit song go, "*Shout with a voice of triumph / Shout with a voice of praise... / Shout unto God for the victory / Hey! Hey! / Give the Lord a shout of praise.*" And that's exactly what we did, at one of his recent performances.

Oh yes, the seats were hoppin' off the floor of the auditorium as Alvin belted out songs from his new release *On The Inside* as well as old favorites like *Shout!* And, when Alvin's son Sean came out to join him, the whole building started "hip-hoppin'" to some incredible Christian "Rap". I say incredible because I didn't understand a single word he sang. However, Alvin anticipated that cultural divide and asked his son to sing the lyrics a second time at half speed so those of us who are "Rap-speak-challenged" could appreciate the depth of his son's inspired poetry.

With a level of intensity that few performers can achieve, Alvin Slaughter wove a beautiful tapestry of worship by combining delightful songs, personal testimony and preaching of the Word. His message was loud and clear:

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(Sovereignty - cont'd)

*For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.
Romans 7:19 (NIV)*

Let's consider another possibility. The catcher has carefully studied all the opposing batters and knows their weaknesses. He calls for a fast ball, low and inside. The pitcher delivers perfectly. The batter, aware of his vulnerability, has recently practiced for just this scenario. He steps up and connects, sending a line drive over the pitcher's head and through the hole at second. However, he's been eating too many greasy cheeseburgers lately, has gained a few pounds, and isn't as fast as he once was. So, when he rounds first and makes a valiant effort to stretch his hit into a double, he is thrown out easily. In this instance the batter exercised his free will in a seemingly unrelated circumstance. The rule book doesn't mention eating habits or preparation of this kind, but the rules of the game say you have to make it to second before the shortstop tags

you out. No exceptions are made for cheeseburger fatigue. The batter had free will to choose but the control remains in the rule book author's hands.

*The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.
Matt 25:3-4 (NIV)*

As a final example, let's look at an open ended aspect of baseball - the length of the game. There is a specific point at which a game is complete, but there are no limits to how long it will take to reach that point. This may seem to indicate that there is no control over the length of the game. However, in actuality, how long the players can play, even if that duration varies, is addressed by the rules, which allow play to continue until a tie is broken. Again, the author of the rule book remains in control.

*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
Matt 24:36 (NIV)*

I could continue indefinitely with these analogies from "America's favorite pastime", but we all know that comparisons often fall short of reality. Obviously, God's sovereignty and the issue of free will are complex topics, and it may not be possible for mere words to adequately explain the dynamics of the relationship. I'm sure that some of you out there are thinking, "God pre-determined the batter would be out at second by putting all the necessary factors in motion that resulted in his failure to beat the tag." I contend, however, that God remains in control even when He does not manipulate every aspect of our lives. In the game of baseball, no situation falls outside the authority of the rule book, and in life no independent decision on our part can diminish the sovereignty of God.

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(Thursdays - cont'd)

Brad Densmore provides a dreamlike glimpse of Moses as he leads the Israelites during the final weeks of his life. This low-tech time-travel narrative amusingly pokes fun at its own Sci-Fi shortcomings by addressing such questions as why Moses speaks English and how Brad, the lead character, worries about being mistaken for a priest because of the blue jeans he wears (Mr. Strauss' brand).

The core of the novel, however, contains the fascinating discourse between Moses and Brad during their Thursday meetings when they discuss the wanderings of the Israelites, the Law, sacrifices, leadership, forgiveness, faith and

more. Each chapter reminds us of the issues Moses faced and the related Biblical accounts we've all read. The author paints wonderfully clear images of Moses and Joshua as human beings - people similar to you and me in many ways, but chosen by God to fulfill special roles in His divine plan.

In one masterfully detailed passage, Moses relinquishes leadership of the Israelites to Joshua in a scene charged both with visual imagery and emotional tension. The episode is crafted with such clarity that one could easily imagine it displayed cinematically.

Yes, *Thursdays with Moses* is fiction, but don't let that stifle your enthusiasm. The Biblical message is real, the journey back in time is

an amusing escape, and the twist at the end will leave you smiling for days.

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CogentNotion

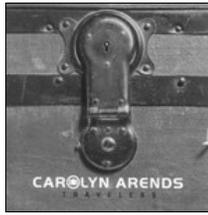
- a thoughtful and compelling article written to motivate Christians to think about what they say, do and believe.

MUSIC REVIEW

by Bill Moller

Travelers

by Carolyn Arends



There are many great recording artists, but only a few manage to celebrate the mystery of life's journey the way Carolyn Arends does with her *Travelers* collection. This Canadian folk singer, best known for her hit song "Seize the Day" (not included in this collection), combines delightful melodies with inspired lyrics - using her unique voice in a manner that pleases the ear, touches the heart and reaches the mind at a level seldom accomplished in today's popular music. This "unplugged" (all acoustic) collection from Ms Arends is available as an import and can be purchased from her website at www.carolynarends.com.

A couple of years ago, Ms Arends was scheduled to perform at a nearby church and a group of friends and I took a chance, bought some tickets, and were truly astounded by her lyrical insights and light-hearted music. She played guitar and keyboards, read passages from her latest book, *Living the Questions* (a sparkling little gem of collective insights on life), and sang her way into our hearts in just one evening.

Travelers is part of the "Living Room Series" and includes intimate renditions of many songs previously released on her earlier collections. The tunes are presented in a way that takes one - by way of imagination - into the studio with Carolyn as she is recording. The vocals are as clear as a Canadian sky, with harmonies that tickle one's ears like falling

snow in the frozen northern Rockies.

The best part of this acoustic masterpiece, however, is the lyrics! Ms Arends follows the storytelling tradition of folk music from beginning to end. In the first track, "Eternity in Our Hearts", which contains the line, "*It's the sense we are meant for a journey / But we don't know where to start*", we are pointed to Ecclesiastes 3:10-11, where we're told that "we cannot fathom what God has done". Then in the very next song, "Travelers",

the title track, we hear, "*But the truth is we're all travelers / Who have not reached our final destination*", a touching reminder that we, as Christians, are "in" this world but not "of" it.

Churches, preachers, and the Bible are often criticized by some as being out of touch with modern society. While some may agree with that conclusion, Carolyn Arends proves that the message of Scripture and God's love can be socially relevant when she sings about

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(Slaughter - cont'd)

"It's not the next book, or the next tape, or the next conference, or the next crusade that's going to make the difference. It's not the Christian-ese you speak, or the money you put in the basket, or the same old Sunday service that's going to make the difference. It's how willing you are to be used of God. That's what will make the difference. If you can sing, sing. If you can preach, preach. If you can listen, find someone who needs a friend and listen to them. Whatever talent you have, let God use it 100%. Even if you don't think you can, or you don't think you're ready, let God use you!"

Adding his touch of musical brilliance to the evening was Alvin Slaughter's accompanist Bobby Soverall. A classically trained pianist of the finest caliber, Mr. Soverall, played a marvelously arranged medley of praise songs and traditional hymns - gracing us with a delightfully gentle voice that danced around Alvin's vocals throughout the concert.

It was a big evening, and I mean

BIG. Alvin is huge, and I don't just mean his persona, I mean his person. And when this "Mt. Zion-sized" man sends his crystal clear voice your way, you cannot help but feel it. The sound system at the concert venue was exceptional, although deafening is insufficient to describe the volume, at times. And, after nearly three hours of clapping my hands and stomping my feet to what can only be described as "spirit moving" gospel music, I decided to call it an evening.

There was plenty of arm-waving and dancing in the aisles as well as two informal altar calls with typical gospel music enthusiasm. That, together with a mountain of a man dancing on stage like "Joe Boxer" (of TV commercial fame), provided a truly great evening of outrageous praise and worship!

I know I was blessed and I suspect God was pleased, as well!

Amen! Hallelujah!

Visit Alvin's website at:
www.alvinlaughter.com
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(Travelers - cont'd)

"Business trips and funerals / And happy honeymoons", from the perspective of a waiting area after a flight delay in "The Airport Song". Then, of course, we hear about the universal desire to escape the pressures of life "On the open road with the windows down / And the radio up and / The wheels going 'round. in "Go Somewhere With You". Add to that her observations on the joys and struggles of faith in an invisible God with "It' s human

and holy in a collision / It' s a decision to / Embrace the mystery fully" in "Loving You", and one has a hat-trick which takes the game of life into overtime, starts the heart pounding, and forces the question, "Why am I here?"

As one vicariously rides the ups and downs of life' s sojourn through the words and music of Carolyn Arends - keep it all in proper perspective and take note of her prayer in the song "Dance Like No

One' sWatching", "I want to chase you like King David / ' Til at last you capture me / And then I' ll sing and shout and laugh about / The way you set me free".

And all God' s people said: Amen!

Visit www.carolynarends.com for Carolyn's latest music, books, concert listings and more.

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