

CogentNotion

Thoughtful Christian Commentary & Review

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Have you heard His word, lately...

by Bill Moller

Every week in churches around the world Scripture is read aloud to patiently listening audiences, but when was the last time you sat quietly and listened to His word at home or in your car. Maybe it's time to add this wonderful devotional experience to your daily routine.

The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans:

"...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ..." Rom 10:17 (NIV)

What is he telling us? Could it be that there is something special about "hearing" the Word of God. Can simply listening transform us?

Experts claim that in this postmodern age storytelling is a highly effective way of communicating ideas. Well, I'd be hard pressed to recommend a source of more "stories" (for lack of a better word) than the Bible. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation we can experience a series of fascinating and practical life "stories" - told in exquisite detail with a list of characters not even Hollywood could have imagined.

For the past seven years I've incorporated listening to Scripture into my devotional time. Each morning my computer plays a 15 minute passage to me and by the

end of the year I've heard the entire Bible. I have to admit my mind drifts during those genealogy passages, and sometimes I miss a word or two when my cereal crunches a little too loudly but I suspect God will forgive me.

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DRAMA REVIEW

by Bill Moller

Marquis Laughlin *Under the Sun*



Imagine a sparse stage; the lights have been slowly dimmed, and the audience sits in excited expectancy, anxious to receive spiritual food. Then, before anyone appears, a distant voice intones the phrase, "*The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:*" and at that moment, you know you're in for a special evening. By now, someone has moved into view, and his presence commands your attention. He smiles, one of those knowing smiles, and suddenly his powerful baritone voice booms out, "*Meaningless! Meaningless! ...Utterly meaningless!*" You recall these words - you've read and heard them before, but somehow this time, there is new depth, new life in them, and you're hanging on each syllable. For nearly an hour you are perched on the edge of your seat, following every gesture, every movement and acknowledging each facial expression, while Marquis Laughlin presents the book of Ecclesiastes as though he were King Solomon himself.

The lead article in this edition of

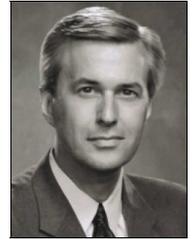
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BOOK REVIEW

by Bill Moller

Grace and Peace Glimpses of Life in the Hands of God, Volumes 1 & 2

M. Craig Barnes



Over the past several years, I have had many opportunities to be blessed by the sermons of the Rev. Craig Barnes. As a regular visitor to our nation's capital, I made it a priority to attend services at the National Presbyterian Church (NPC) whenever possible. By my estimation, Dr. Barnes delivered the Sunday Message approximately 400 times during his decade long tenure as senior pastor of the NPC located on Nebraska Avenue in Washington, DC. He is a powerful preacher and has proven himself an exceptional writer, as well.

M. Craig Barnes, his *nom de plume*, has written a number of popular books which can be found in bookstores and online. Especially noteworthy is a two volume set called *Grace and Peace: Glimpses of Life in the Hands of God* -- a wonderful compilation of the weekly devotional columns penned by Dr. Barnes for the NPC Sunday worship bulletin. Each of these brief "glimpses" is based on a passage of Scripture and provides helpful insights for daily living. Some of the more intriguing titles included in the books are as follows: "Stepping Back to See", "Finding the Mystery in the Routine", and "Preparing to be Transformed". There are many

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Have You Heard...(cont'd)

Many of you have heard someone reading the Bible on the radio or seen performers reciting entire books of Scripture to live audiences. The atmosphere created by these verbal presentations is often indescribable. The words seem to come to life - maybe not quite as powerfully as when they were originally spoken, but in a similar way they motivate and empower the listener.

There are many resources available to help you in this effort. Nearly every book store has the Bible on CD and cassette. A search on www.christianbook.com turned up more than 150 listings. Also, there are numerous Internet sites that offer Bible audio. The web sites Year of the Bible (www.gospelcom.net/yob), Audio Bible (www.audio-bible.com) and Bible Gateway (bible.gospelcom.net/bgaudio) are all excellent free sources.

Of course my favorite is a software package called HeavenWord Audio Bible (www.heavenword.com) which is available in complete versions of the NIV, KJV and NAS as well as the New Testament portion of The Message. This package allows me to play specific chapters and verses or listen to a scheduled reading plan of my choice.

Last but not least is a handy tool called ReadPlease (www.readplease.com) - a software program that lets you import text from your Bible program (or any other program) and reads it back to you. Yes, the voice is a little unusual and some of the names and towns come out sounding more like a series of hiccups than an actual word, but it's hard to complain about free software.

It really doesn't matter which means you use to listen. Whether it's cassettes in the car or streaming audio on the Internet or talking computer programs, the key here is that there is something about hearing God's word that is supernatural. Whether it was someone listening to Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) or a member of the Council hearing Stephen review the Scriptures (Acts 6-7) or Charles Taylor reading to me while I sip my orange juice, the result is the same. Hearing God's word changes lives.

"...and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..." John 1:1 (NIV)

The Word was God! When we listen to recordings of the Bible we're not just listening to someone reading words on a page, we're listening to the Word. God Himself is leaping out of the speakers and into our hearts.

Have you heard His word, lately?

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www.ThinkingChristians.com*

Marquis Laughlin (cont'd)

CogentNotion touches on the mystery associated with hearing God's Word. One truly captivating way to experience this mystery is through a dramatic presentation of Scripture by Marquis Laughlin. This actor has dedicated himself to memorizing entire books of the Bible, and then presenting them, not simply by rote, but in a living, breathing personification of the author and the characters.

When Mr. Laughlin presents the Gospel of John, it is as if the Disciple himself is speaking to you directly. In dramatizing the book of Genesis, Laughlin causes one to realize not only how "very good" creation was after the sixth day, but also to experience vicariously the crushing loneliness and fear Adam and Eve must have felt after tasting the forbidden fruit and finding themselves separated from God. Finally, there is the book of Revelation. The "End Times" never feels so real as when Laughlin is describing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. As we study the Bible we often come to confusing passages that

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MUSIC REVIEW

by Bill Moller

M2K TOUR

Mia Kim

Rumours of Flight

Marianne Kesler

Long Road Home



Contemporary
Christian Music

(CCM) is the fastest growing segment of the music industry, but most of its talented artists aren't making it big playing sold out performances at distinguished concert halls or massive sports arenas. In fact, very few names in Christian music can fill the large venues. The way these committed musi-

cians are expanding the CCM genre is through small record labels, intimate concerts at churches and coffee houses, and by word of mouth. Two such artists are Mia Kim and Marianne Kesler - "M2K".

Having recently had the distinct pleasure of seeing these wonderful singer/songwriters perform at the Kingdom Kafe in Wanaque, NJ, I enthusiastically purchased copies of their latest recordings during intermission. My enjoyment was doubled as I started listening to the studio versions of these eclectic collections of witty, insightful,

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seem to evade understanding; yes we can read and re-read them, following the cross-references in the margins, but there is something special about hearing another person speak the verses. They don't necessarily emphasize the words we would emphasize. Often they don't pause where we would pause. Nevertheless, they usually give the verses a fresh new perspective, one we never may have considered. I believe this is in large part, what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another..." Heb 10:25 (NIV)

Here is how Marquis is described on the Sola Scriptura website:

Marquis Laughlin is an actor whose life's work is enabling his audiences to hear, see, and feel the God of the Bible, through the words of the Bible. His uniquely compelling dramatic solo-scripture presentations include Genesis, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, John's Gospel, and Revelation, and have been presented all over the world. Recent works include Mark's Gospel at the Forum of Trajan in Rome Italy, and John's Gospel at the Hampton Court Mid-Summer Festival in Hereford England. Mr. Laughlin is a distinguished Staley Lecturer and maintains an active touring schedule of theaters, conferences, colleges, and houses of worship. He is the Program Coordinator for Sola Scriptura, a ministry devoted to the accuracy, authenticity, and authority of Scripture, located at the Holy Land Experience, where his one-man performances of the Bible can be seen regularly.

Visit www.solagroup.org for more information.

Grace and Peace (cont'd)

more – approximately 100 titles in each volume.

Here is an excerpt from volume 1 entitled "Pilgrims with Wonder" (Gen. 1:27):

Many of us have been taught to live between the twin agonies of high standards and our nagging self-doubts. We have extraordinarily high goals, and we fail at them all the time. There is nothing for which we need salvation more than our attempt at being our own creators.

When we discover we have a Creator who isn't finished with our lives, but has become involved in our failure and success, our joy and sorrow, we discover our lives are not our own. We are then converted from being the achievers with regret to the pilgrims with wonder.

And, from the piece called "No Ordinary Friend" (Psalm 25:14):

The Creator, who made the heavens and the earth, is so passionate about you that in Christ he went even to the cross to find you. This is no ordinary friend you've got. He's going to be hard to control. He's not going to tell you what you want to hear, show up only when you want him, or be just another ornament in your neatly ordered life. This friend is going to confront you with the truth and go with you to places you don't want him to be. He's going to give you his own passion for things you would rather avoid.

Hardest of all, God will enjoy you even when you're afraid you're not good enough to enjoy either him or yourself.

If these excerpts have prompted a rush to the nearest bookseller in

search of more of Barnes' s wisdom, be prepared for a minor problem. While his other books are easily located, the only source I've found for these two devotional volumes is the bookstore at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC (202-537-0800, ext. 7516). However, if you don't want to make a long distance call to place an order, you can always review other *Grace and Peace* articles by visiting the NPC website and clicking through the "Archives" section to the "Devotionals" portion. In addition to the devotional archives the website contains many audio recordings of Craig Barnes preaching as well as transcripts of his sermons.

Prior to being senior pastor at NPC, Dr. Barnes was senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, Madison, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of The King's College in New York, holds a Masters of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from The Divinity School of the University of Chicago where he studied Church History under Martin E. Marty, a leading scholar of the American Church. In September of 2002 Dr. Barnes left the National Presbyterian Church, due in part to health reasons, to accept a position as Professor of Leadership and Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Most recently he has accepted a pastoral position as Head of Staff at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA.

For more information, visit the following websites:
www.natpresch.org
www.pts.edu/barnesc.html
www.shadysidepres.org

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

Notion - an individual's conception or impression of something known, experienced, or imagined.

Cogent - having power to compel or constrain, appealing forcibly to the mind or reason.

WHAT IS CogentNotion?

Think about your thinking!

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M2K Tour (cont'd)

occasionally raucous and often tender songs.

Mia Kim's *Rumours of Flight* CD is her debut album and includes touching love songs, playful pop tunes and heated rebukes of modern society. Her lyrics are often complex and penetrate deeply into your heart and mind. Ms Kim's hit tune "Life Inc" is a toe-tapping caveat that warns against material excesses while stressing the importance of preparing a heart in which "true treasures" can be stored.

Marianne Kesler's *Long Road Home* CD is a hauntingly exquisite masterpiece. Ms. Kesler described her music well when, during her performance, she talked about being able to bring her "scars, tears and heart to God" knowing she would not be rejected but instead recognizing the acceptance and love God's grace would provide. As the title implies, the CD addresses the struggles of life and includes the song *The Climb* containing the lyrics, "Cause you've been living in the canyon way too long / Lost in the labyrinth of your mind". Nevertheless, Marianne energizes our spirits again with the

song *Goodbye*, and the lines, "Wave a sad goodbye but we'll shed no tears / Sing a lullaby to our darkest fears / We'll entrust our lives to the One who knows / Every step we take and the love that grows".

You can read more about Mia Kim and Marianne Kesler, as well as listen to song clips, or order either CD on their distributor's website.

For song clips, bios and more visit:
www.grassrootsmusic.com
www.miakionline.com
www.coolspirit.net