

PLAIN TRUTH[®]

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION[®]

by Greg Albrecht



Huddle Up for 2016...and Beyond!

much like a football team does, I invite you to join the huddle as we “call the play” that will set the direction for CWR/PTM as we begin this New Year of 2016. But first, let’s take a quick look at the progress God granted in 2015, our *Year of the Bible*. Articles and interviews from a wide range of authors helped us work through the topic of what the Bible is and what it isn’t—and as many of you know, while this topic was profitable, it wasn’t always an easy exercise! While our *Year of the Bible* might have been a challenge, many report that they gained a Christ-centered perspective about the Bible as we “moved down the field” of 2015. Thanks for “staying

on the field” with us during our *Year of the Bible*.

But now we turn our attention to 2016! While we are amazed and astonished by the past handiwork and workmanship of God (Ephesians 2:10) in and through

I ask every partner on our team to set their sights on the cross of Christ, which for our “football team” is in the end zone, replacing the goal posts normally found there.

this ministry, we are equally excited about what he is now producing in and through us and what he will do in the near future. Thus we look forward to this New Year of 2016 with excitement and thanksgiving.

We anticipate 2016 and perhaps much of, if not all of 2017, to be devoted to the *Jesus Way*. We will use the *Jesus Way* as a catchphrase

to help “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2) by paying careful attention to the content of Jesus’ teachings. And, in addition to *what* Jesus taught, the *Jesus Way* will focus on *how* he ministered and treated others.

So as we huddle up, I ask every partner on our team to set their sights on the cross of Christ, which for our “football team” is

in the end zone, replacing the goal posts normally found there.

The cross of Christ is our goal and our focus. As we devote and centralize our initiatives, energies and resources toward the cross of Christ, we believe the *Jesus Way* will consistently reveal the love and grace of God.

Beginning with this issue of the *Plain Truth* we’ll feature a four-part

Continued on page 3



Dream On With Jesus

Have a Dream—given by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963—is one of the most well known, most studied and most quoted speeches in the history of our nation. In that historic speech Dr. King used the phrase “I have a dream” eight different times as he called for freedom and justice for all people.

Daring to dream can be dangerous—particularly when your dream does not march in lock step with the political and religious establishment.

They killed Martin Luther King Jr. because he dared to dream, but they didn’t kill his dream.

Throughout history dreamers who challenged government and religion have been viewed as non-conformists at best, sometimes as revolutionaries and even as enemies.

Dreamers are often made fun of and persecuted. Dreamers are often marginalized and discriminated against. They lose jobs. They have to move away from hostile neighborhoods, cities and sometimes even countries. Dreamers are often beaten, tortured and killed.

Jesus’ dream threatened the status quo because he invited the downtrodden to an entirely different kind of kingdom. Jesus was not satisfied with the first century world, nor can we, as his followers, be satisfied with the 21st century world.

They killed Jesus but his dream lives on, in and through our lives, and **we are not satisfied** with the status quo!

How can we be satisfied with empty dreams and promises when Christians all over this world are being tortured and killed in what clearly seems to be an ever increasing holy war to wipe out Christ-followers?

How can we be satisfied with short-sighted assurances that all is well in our world, when hundreds of thousands of little children are abused and beaten and sexually trafficked?

How can we be satisfied when our refrigerator and pantry may contain food for our meals today and tomorrow, yet hunger and thirst are the daily reality faced by many around this world?

How can we be satisfied when our world is filled with violence, animosity, hatred, bigotry, warfare, persecution, torture and bloodshed?

The good news, of course, is that our world will not stand forever. The good news is that our dream of the kingdom of heaven will come to pass. So **dream on with Jesus**.

Jesus offers you and me a dream—it’s his dream—it’s a dream of the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that is not from this world, a different kind of a kingdom where the last are first, where the greatest is a servant and where all of the standards and values of our world are turned upside-down.

Jesus never gave up on the dream. He never stopped serving and giving. He cared and took time with those who were considered to be the least and the lost. He loved the poor, the lepers, the unforgiven, the forgotten and the fatherless. And because he loved

others, because he served, and because he rejected the religious establishment, they killed him.

They beat him, they tortured him, they humiliated him, they publicly shamed him and they mercilessly crucified him—heaping on him all their hatred, all their vengeance and all their hostilities.

And he accepted it—he soaked it in—he absorbed it—he ingested, he assimilated and he received all human hostility and all human hatred.

Because for Jesus, the end of violence is not more violence—**the end of violence is the love and grace of God**.

Jesus invited us to receive him and live by God’s grace.

He did not promise those who obeyed all of his dictates their best life now. He offered them—and you and me—a cross which they could pick up and follow him.

If our dreams confirm all that society stands for and supports—if our dreams are satisfied with the vain promises of politicians and empty assurances of religion then our dreams are worthless.

Because of Jesus, we are given a bigger dream—we are given a Christ-centered hope—a dream that places Jesus and his kingdom on center stage. He is our dream—he is our hope—and by God’s grace we are invited to **dream on with Jesus**. □

—Greg Albrecht

Join us for the complete message “Dream On With Jesus” at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of January 17, 2016.



...Christ is our goal and our focus. As we devote and centralize our initiatives, energies and resources toward the cross of Christ, we believe the Jesus Way will consistently reveal the love and grace of God.

Continued from page 1

series on the Beatitudes, the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Later in the year here in the *PT* we plan to share an overview of the parables of Jesus, with keys and pointers about how we might better understand and interpret these fascinating stories he told. And you will find this same emphasis on the *Jesus Way* in the four 2016 issues of *CWRm* magazine.

In 2016 we will continue to provide Christ-centered teaching in our monthly Friends and Partners letter. Many tell us they eagerly anticipate the arrival of this letter and how much they appreciate its grace-based messages. As we have done for so many years, we will keep on offering a special resource each month, but given necessary efforts to be careful and wise stewards of our financial resources, we will save money by exclusively offering these resources on our website.

By exclusively offering extra resources on www.ptm.org we will be able to save money on print and postage without discontinuing services we have traditionally been able to offer those we serve.

If you are unable to use the Internet and print your own copy of those extra resources we offer, perhaps a family member or friend might be able to help. Assuming you are not on the Internet, and assuming no family member or friend can help, and if you live in the U.S. or Canada, please write to us or call us at 1-800-309-4466 and we will do our best to send the resources you request to you.

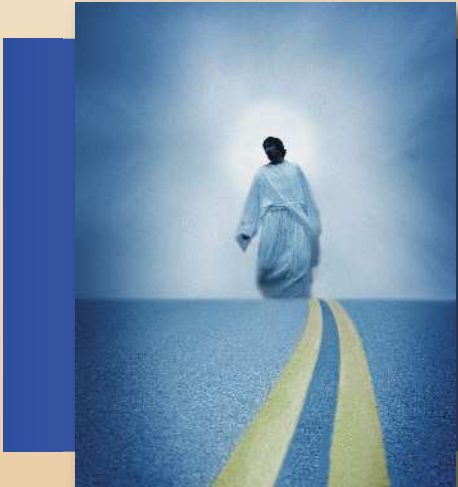
And of course, by God's grace, during 2016 we will continue providing newly recorded weekly sermons at *CWRa*—our audio teaching ministry.

We also anticipate another year of making the electronic resource

of daily *PT Radio* available. *CWRblog* is one of our new ministries, and its popularity is really growing, as we share a wide range of Christ-centered insights and perspectives. Look for another incredible year of *CWRblog*!

2016 is only the second year of electronic publication for our video magazine, *CWRv*, and we look forward to four more uplifting electronic issues. *CWRv* is also beginning to build a receptive audience. Each week of 2016 we plan to mail our weekly E-Update providing the newly edited and refreshed *CWR Bible Survey*. And, all being well, *CWR Press* will publish another book this fall—a new book by Monte Wolverton is in the works!

Get ready for another incredibly exciting year—thanks for being on our team! ☐



**OUR PATH:
THE JESUS WAY**
THE *JESUS WAY*—WHAT JESUS IS ALL ABOUT

Beatitudes

Part 1

For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). But, often with tears in their eyes, they demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And, of course, that's Moses, not Jesus. I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon? Give me a break!

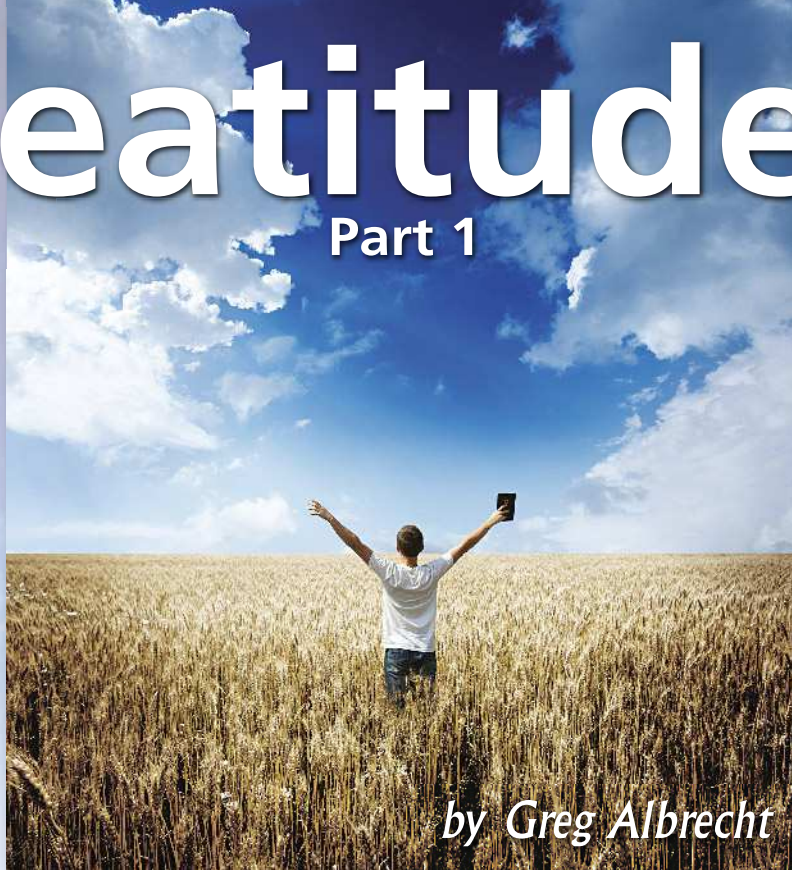
—Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country*

The Sermon on the Mount is damning evidence that what passes for Christianity in our western world is just another religion filled with rules, rituals, routines and regulations. The real religion in our world is predicated on coercion and enforcement, resulting in suppression and oppression—the



...the most vocal Christians among us... often demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings... I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon? Give me a break!

—Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country*



by Greg Albrecht

for his followers than had been the case in the old covenant. But what Jesus is saying is that since no one can be perfect by observing the law, there is a better way, and that way is the gospel.

Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:17-49 records an abbreviated version) amounts to 111 verses within three chapters (Matthew 5-7). However, one needs no more evidence that Christendom at large does not speak for Jesus

polar opposite of the non-violence taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The prescriptions and pills insisted on by Christendom at large are in diametric contrast with this harmonious masterpiece—called a sermon, but no doubt a compilation of teachings Jesus often reiterated.

In the first chapter of the Sermon as recorded by Matthew, Jesus teaches that the law is impossible to fulfill. Many twist the words of Jesus in this chapter so that Jesus seems to be insisting on an even more strict observance of the law

than its introductory 12 verses. The first 12 verses of what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount are called the Beatitudes—these eight beatitudes, encapsulated within a mere tithe of the entire Sermon, provide a startling contrast between Christ and Christianity.

The Beatitudes are counter-cultural to an entrenched Christian culture that since the days of Constantine has been hell bent on “evangelizing” through enforced conformity and ultimately subjugation rather than proclaiming the grace of God and the transformation he freely gives, through Christ, “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). In a world dominated then and now by the lethal, oppressive combination of warfare and violence on the one hand with the tyranny of fear-based religion on the other, the Beatitudes are the revolutionary manifesto of the kingdom of heaven.

The Beatitudes are antithetical to Christ-less religion because they insist that spiritual transformation by God's grace is a gift, received within and then, after an internal change of heart, expressed

The old covenant law was given on a mountain which... was filled with earthquakes and thunder, and the law was given in an atmosphere of fear—do this or else.

externally, by the dynamic, empowering inner life of our risen Lord. Religion (even when it vainly appropriates the name of Christ) and government are the two heads of the beast that oppress all humanity, utilizing its weapons of laws, authority, conformity, intimidation, humiliation, superstition and fear.

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes of Jesus are taught as eight pronouncements/definitions of a supernatural experience, blessings of contentedness and peace, a peace—the *shalom*—of God, given by him rather than achieved or earned by humanity.

But, the Beatitudes, our focus in this four-part series, along with the longer Sermon they introduce, are interpreted by religion at large to be the moral teachings of Jesus. One cannot explain what one has not first internalized and received. Such is the only interpretation possible for an ideology based on laws and rules. When understood merely as the moral teachings of an itinerant Jewish prophet, invariably the Beatitudes are taught and interpreted in such a way humans bear the responsibility for producing these divine attitudes.

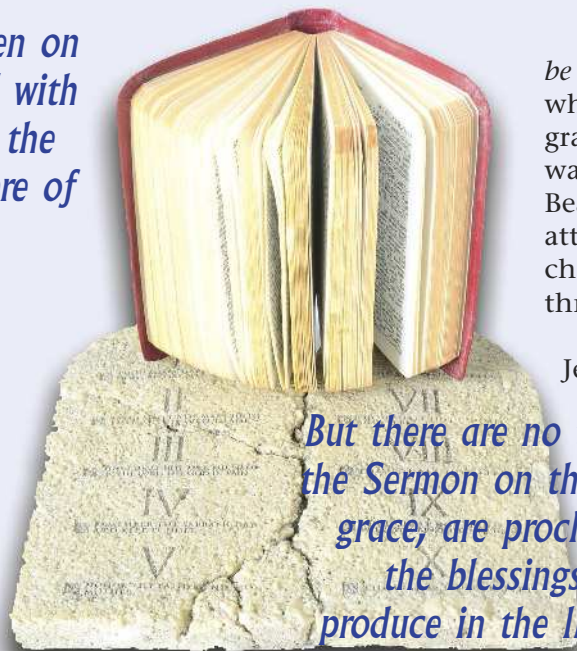
- But these eight *be-attitudes* are attitudes that are foreign to human experience apart from God.

- These eight *be-attitudes* are impossible to gain or produce by human effort alone.

- These eight *be-attitudes* are produced by God in us—they are his handiwork—not our own.

- These eight *be-attitudes* are the very mind of Jesus Christ, who lives his risen life in Christ-followers.

- These eight *be-attitudes* are therefore gifts of God's grace rather than being produced by human religious effort and performance.



But there are no threats or terror contained in the Sermon on the Mount... the gifts of God's grace, are proclaimed by Jesus... promises of the blessings, joy and inner peace he will produce in the lives of those who follow him.

- These eight *spiritual blessings*, these eight *contented and peaceful ways of living* are **gifts of God's grace**—they describe what life in Christ looks like. A Christ-follower who accepts and trusts Jesus alone, who yields to God's grace, can expect these to be evidenced in their life as they mature in him.

A Way of Life

The Greeks used the word *makarios* to describe how a person **felt** when they were happy and contented. In the first of these eight blessings, Jesus said that the poor in spirit are *makarios*—they are happy.

But those who translated *makarios* into English decided that it would sound trite and silly to say that someone who is poor in spirit is happy. So instead they used the word "blessed." Throughout the world of Christendom everyone wants to be "blessed"—since those who read and study the Bible want to be blessed, they understand the implication behind the first beatitude something like this: "If you are poor in spirit, *then* God will bless you." But Jesus didn't say that. Taking the entire gospel into consideration and context, Jesus was saying something like this: "Those who live in me, and I in them, will be happy and content, and they will be poor in spirit."

Jesus did not say we would *have* poverty of spirit, but that we would

be poor in spirit. The Beatitudes are what we are, in Christ, by God's grace—they are a state of being, a way of life—the *Jesus Way*. The Beatitudes are not characteristics or attributes that we gain and thus characteristics we have and possess through our efforts.

Many read the beatitudes as if Jesus is giving instructions about

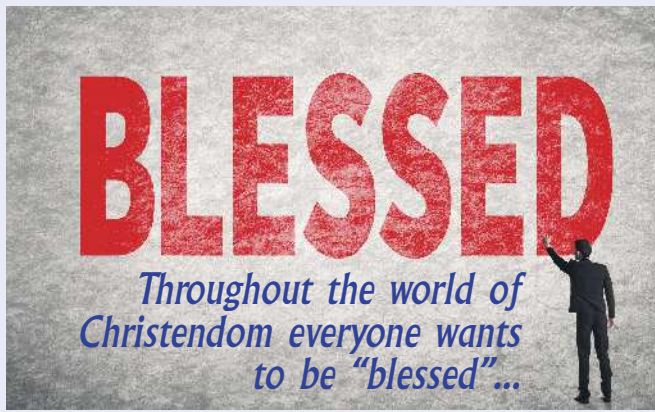
eight characteristics that humans must somehow manufacture and produce using their own will power. But Jesus is not giving a list of self-help rules for better living. Jesus is not giving prescriptions for happy living, rather he is providing descriptions of the blessings given by the *shalom* (peace) of God—a peace that we rest in when Jesus lives within us, as the King of the kingdom of heaven.

These eight blessings describe and illustrate the kind of life and well-being that God gives to those who accept his gracious invitation. These are eight blessings *from* God—these eight blessings are a *gift of God's grace*. These eight blessings are the *fruit of God's Spirit*, eight attributes that are *produced by God within us*.

There are no imperatives in this listing of eight blessings that Jesus gives. Everything that Jesus describes is in the indicative mood. Jesus is describing the kingdom of heaven—both now, and in the future.

So again: **the Beatitudes are not self-help rules for better living.**

- As we study the Beatitudes in this series we'll see that it seems Jesus begins this list of eight blessings with perhaps the most foundational of Christ-centered attitudes—the most fundamental of all of the gifts of God's grace, and then moves progressively to



The Beatitudes are...a state of being, a way of life—the Jesus Way. The Beatitudes are not characteristics or attributes that we gain and thus characteristics we have and possess through our efforts.

condensed and compact description of the *Jesus Way*.

The Beatitudes of Christendom

According to many within Christendom, the Beatitudes actually mean something like this:

Blessed are those who are well off and in need of nothing, they have it all.

Blessed are those who are comfortable, because they can avoid pain and heartache.

Blessed are those who are not troubled with injustices experienced by others, or by the sufferings of those around them—their eyes and ears are shut to the cries of others, and they are not troubled by them.

Blessed are those who can push others around and take advantage of them, for they are able to do unto others before others do unto them.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad—life doesn't get any better than this!

The kingdom of heaven reverses what are seen as optimal, happy and perfect conditions in our world. The poor in spirit are welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, the spiritually hungry are fed, those who mourn are comforted, those who weep rejoice and those who are powerless become powerful.

While we are limiting our focus to the eight Beatitudes, one more comment about the larger Sermon on the Mount. It was a sermon on a mountain, and there is no doubt that this title was meant by Matthew to contrast the old covenant law, which was given on another mountain (Mt. Sinai) with this clear articulation of the new covenant.

The old covenant law was given on a mountain which the Israelites were forbidden to touch, on the pain of death. The mountain was filled with earthquakes and thunder, and the law was given in an

atmosphere of fear—*do this or else*.

But there are no threats or terror contained in the Sermon on the Mount. The foundational principles of the new covenant, the gifts of God's grace, are proclaimed by Jesus, beginning with the beatitudes—promises of the blessings, joy and inner peace he will produce in the lives of those who follow him.

All of these eight Beatitudes are descriptive rather than prescriptive. They describe what a citizen of the kingdom of heaven looks like because of the gifts of God, rather than what a citizen looks like because of their hard work which produced these qualities.

- The Beatitudes reveal what a citizen of the kingdom looks like, what a child of God looks like, once he or she has yielded their life, like a lump of clay, to the Master Potter, who forms and shapes that life into an instrument for his glory.

- The Beatitudes are not Jesus saying, "Live like this and I will then be pleased to call you one of my disciples."

- The Beatitudes are a portrait drawn by Jesus of the life of one who accepts his grace—they are a spiritual mirror that reflects the love and grace of God as it grows and matures in the life of those who follow Jesus Christ. □

Jesus is not giving prescriptions for happy living, rather he is providing descriptions of the blessings given by the shalom (peace) of God—a peace that we rest in when Jesus lives within us...

blessings that build on each other.

So, if this assumption is correct, then each of these blessings progressively leads to the next one, in order as Jesus teaches them.

- Another summary thought—it seems as if these eight blessings are divided in two: the first four seem to focus on our relationship with God while the remaining four are more concerned with our relationship to our fellow humans.

- Another feature or theme we will note as we study these eight blessings, these eight *be-attitudes* (attitudes and blessings that begin to grow and increase in our lives as we mature in Christ) are actually the polar opposite of the values humans normally expect and desire. These eight Beatitudes are perhaps the most compact and comprehensive definition of Jesus' kingdom—the kingdom of heaven, as Matthew calls it.

In these eight blessings Jesus seems to deliberately contrast an exalted attribute, or state of mind or state of living considered to be exalted and supreme in the kingdoms of this world, including the kingdom of religion, and reverses it—he turns the social order and the expected status quo upside down. These eight blessed ways of living and being are a

CWRv video
MAGAZINE

Join us for CWRv—a fascinating video magazine. Several new, thought-provoking videos are posted each quarter. You won't want to miss a single one!

www.ptm.org/cwrv



A Thief or a Messenger?

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).

Though he's a dozen years younger than my husband, the two men have a lot in common. Raised in religious homes, they went on to study music, both earning doctoral degrees in that field and both love what I refer to as monk music (and both also enjoy tipping a glass of expertly brewed craft beer).

Husband John still receives royalties from compositions that date back to his teaching career in the 1990s and earlier, including a piece entitled "Mass for the World Church." Nothing he's written, however, has captured a spot on the billboards, not even the monk billboards.

Not true of the younger musician, Cassian, director of a choir of monks whose "resplendent sound is now on CD, one that's topped the Billboard charts in traditional classical music for several weeks in a row." That, according to an article written in the summer of 2015.

Cassian Folsom was born in Massachusetts, grew up in Connecticut and studied voice at Indiana University's prestigious school of music in Bloomington. Amid his studies he sensed a call to the monastic life and in 1979 became a Benedictine monk at the St. Meinrad Abbey south of Indianapolis where he expected to live in community for the remainder of his life.

But in the decades since there have been many twists and turns in his monastic pilgrimage—a pilgrimage that has taken him to

the small Italian town of Nurcia to reestablish the Benedictine monastery that had been closed for generations, since the monks were evicted in 1810 by harsh laws set in place during Napoleon's reign.

Under Father Cassian's leadership, the reputation of the monastery is built not only on the recitation of prayers, but also on singing for the pure joy of it and on brewing beer for a livelihood.

"We learned the art from the Trappist monks in Belgium," Father Cassian explains. "We renovated an old car garage below the monastery as the brew hall. All the monks take part on bottling days, signing up for an hour slot to feed the bottling machine."

"I would say this: we can look at death as a thief or as a messenger. A thief comes and steals what is most valuable to us, and so we're afraid. A messenger who comes to tell us that our beloved is at the door, we respond much differently, don't we? So that's the kind of choice we have to make. Is it a thief or a messenger?"

But brewing takes a back seat to singing. The monks gather nine times each day to sing Gregorian chants, never imagining that their recorded music-making would be heralded around the world.

Not looking for fame, the monks regard themselves rather as "humble instruments for the necessary New Evangelization of Europe."

How long will they be able to carry on this ministry in the tradition of St. Benedict?

Will the monks continue in the same way when their leader is no longer with them?

That is a serious question that Father Cassian contemplates. Now in his mid-sixties, he has had a recurrence of multiple myeloma. "As anybody who is diagnosed with cancer, it changes your life," he says. "I think it has given me greater patience, greater tolerance, looking at things from a 'not everything matters as much as you might think it does' viewpoint."

Indeed, he is philosophical about his diagnosis: "I would say this: we can look at death as a thief or a messenger. A thief comes and steals what is most valuable to us, and so we're afraid. A messenger who comes to tell us that our beloved is at the door, we respond much differently, don't we? So that's the

kind of choice we have to make. Is it a thief or a messenger?"

For Father Cassian, the messenger comes to him with tender mercies—tender mercies to be passed on to others.

In fact, now when people in the town of Nurcia are diagnosed with cancer they come to him for comfort.

"And so," he says, "in a strange and paradoxical way, it's been extremely positive."

Father Cassian himself has now become a messenger of tender mercies. □

—Ruth Tucker



Quotes & Connections



"Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man."—Thomas Paine

"Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed."
—Benjamin Franklin

"Blessed is he who has learned to laugh at himself for he shall never cease to be entertained." —John Boswell

"If we were to set out to establish a religion in polar opposition to the Beatitudes Jesus taught, it would look strikingly similar to pop Christianity that has taken over the airwaves of North America." —Tony Campolo

"The Beatitudes are no spiritual 'to-do list' to be attempted by eager rule-keeping disciples. It is a spiritual 'done' list of the qualities God brings to bear in the people who follow Jesus." —Ronnie McBrayer, *How Far Is Heaven? Rediscovering God in the Here and Now*

"So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the Gospels in praise of intelligence."
—Bertrand Russell

Newsmakers of 2015

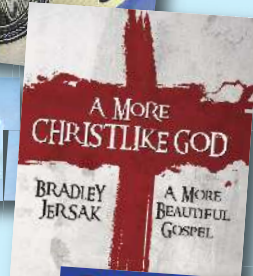
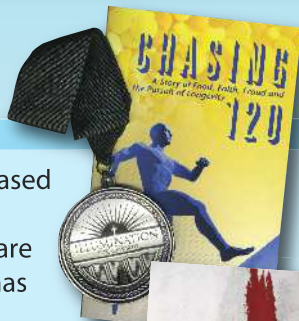
CWR/PTM collaborates with many other grace-based ministries, pastors and teachers—a network of Christ-centered people and organizations. Here are a few of the people/ministries with whom PTM has been privileged to work in 2015.

- Zack Hunt
- Peter Youngren
- Radio North (Ireland)
- Oneplace.com

In 2015 author and CWR/PTM associate editor, Monte Wolverton, won a silver medal from Illumination Book Awards for his first novel, *Chasing 120—A Story of Food, Faith, Fraud and the Pursuit of Longevity*.

In 2015 CWR/PTM also published *A More Christlike God—A More Beautiful Gospel*, by Brad Jersak with our new publishing imprint, CWRpress.

In 2015 we began producing a quarterly *CWR Video Magazine*, which is receiving enthusiastic responses. Watch for more details in the Spring 2016 issue of *CWRm*.



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