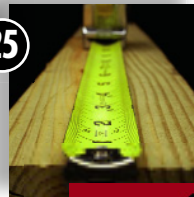


CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

Features

- 10 Joseph's Dream** *Reflections on the birth of Jesus from his earthly father.*
- 12 Christmas in Confinement** *Immanuel is with us—no matter where we are.*
- 19 Living On the Edge** *Isolation and authoritarianism create an illusion of safety.*
- 25 Our Benchmark** *Jesus is the perfectly cut board we must measure up to.*
- 27 What Mary Lou Taught Me** *"Some people are made of stronger stuff than others."*
- 29 Remembering Aunt Ann** *Finding peace in the death of a loved one.*
- 30 Jesus' Family Tree** *Do the genealogies of Jesus contradict each other?*
- 31 People Like You and Me** *Jesus' lineage was filled with people who were all too human.*

25



12



19



29

31



Departments

3 Letters

15 He Asked Me to Remind You *Steve Brown*

5 Christianity Without the Religion

17 Commentary *Greg Albrecht*



6

Cover Story

Three shepherds

describe their experiences when a routine evening tending their flocks is suddenly interrupted by a spectacular blaze of light exploding across the sky.

COVER IMAGE BY DESIGNPICS AND MARV WEGNER—PTM.

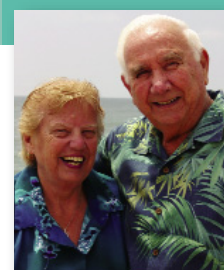
About This Issue

For years *Plain Truth* has published six issues a year—but this year we felt a special Christmas issue would be a wonderful gift for our readers, and also a great way to help our readers ponder the significance of the birth of our Lord and Savior. May this gift enhance your relationship with God and help make this Christmas the best ever! We call special attention to “What Mary Lou Taught Me” by Arn Shein [beginning on page 27]. This article appears posthumously, as Arn passed away earlier this summer.

My relationship with Arn (for over ten years) was based on emails and more formal “snail mail.” Arn and I shared a love of God, journalism and sports. When I found out that Arn was born in Brooklyn—the home of the now L.A. Dodgers, a team I have supported since I was eight years old—I knew we would be buddies. Over the years we published a number of Arn’s bylines, and we were not alone in having this honor. He published some 450 magazine articles, including pieces published (in addition to *Plain Truth*) in *Reader's Digest*, *Guideposts* and *Modern Maturity*. When Arn and his wife Mary Lou retired in San Diego, he taught writing classes, and we were proud to publish a few of his students. I think of Arn in heaven, busy teaching others to communicate. I have it on good authority that he unwinds by reading online newspaper sports pages (as well as *Plain Truth*, of course!)

The *Plain Truth* staff joins a long list of people who knew and loved Arn, headed by his wife of 56 years, Mary Lou, and their daughters Lindy, Stacey and Kelli. Arn is also survived by eight grandchildren and one great-grandson. Our love and best to the entire Shein family. Arn was a special guy, with a love and talent for writing. His loss is felt by many.

—Greg Albrecht, Editor-in-chief



MISSION STATEMENT

Plain Truth Ministries proclaims authentic Christianity without the religion. Our work is Christ-centered, based on God's amazing grace, giving hope to those burned out by legalistic religion.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

For an introductory one-year subscription in the U.S.A. or Canada, call toll free 1-800-309-4466, or visit www.ptm.org. Single copies or back issues: U.S.\$4. Following initial one-year introductory subscriptions, *Plain Truth* is an automatic benefit for PTM contributors.

Subscriptions outside of U.S.A. and Canada are U.S.\$29.95 a year; credit card orders only.

TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

Be sure to notify us immediately of any change in your address by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org/change (please have your old mailing label available for reference) or writing us at *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129 (please include your old mailing label and your new address). U.S. Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write us at Letters to the Editor, *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91129, email us at managing.editor@ptm.org or fax us at Letters to the Editor at 626-358-4846.

The editors reserve the right to print or not print comments so addressed, in whole or in part, as deemed in the public interest, and to print your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We will protect the confidentiality of correspondence that we deem to be of a personal nature. Correspondence published by Plain Truth Ministries does not necessarily reflect the opinions of Plain Truth Ministries.

ADVERTISING

Please direct inquiries about advertising rates to Skip Dunn; Phone: 626-298-8013; Fax: 626-358-4846. Advertising in *Plain Truth* does not imply editorial endorsement or agreement with the beliefs and teachings of Plain Truth Ministries.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg R. Albrecht

MANAGING EDITOR: Monte Wolverton

ART DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION: Marv Wegner

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Laura Urista

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Skip Dunn

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT: Jim Fowler



Global Warming— or Hot Air?

It was refreshing to find an article in a Christian magazine that respectfully addresses care for the environment. Your article in the September/October issue was helpful and liberating for evangelical Christians who want to support environmental efforts but feel awkward because of the comments of evangelical leaders who dismiss environmental issues. Many Christians mistakenly think that fighting moral issues is the same thing as spreading the gospel. This is not necessarily true. Laws by themselves do little to change a person's heart or lead them to faith in Jesus. The church would influence far more people for Christ by exerting common courtesy rather than mocking things they don't understand, such as "all of this global warming hocus-pocus," as Jerry Falwell called it.

Ohio

I was a little disappointed in your inconclusive article on global warming. Most publications, including this article, assume, "everyone agrees the earth is heating up." There may be global warming, but I suggest we are looking at it the wrong way.

Temperature change history is often presented with recent data in selective sites. One interesting approach would be to compare the history between urban (developed) areas and more rural areas. For example, the mean temperature in New York City, over 100 years, has risen over five degrees while decreasing over one degree in Albany, New York.

The elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about is development. Who wants to stem the pouring of concrete and housing growth? We would rather take the politically correct approach of condemning the use of fossil fuels.

There are real reasons for limiting our consumption and waste, but to raise false issues to make a case just isn't right. Why can't the global warming focus be on a more realistic culprit—unbridled development?

Texas



Global Warming—Secular Apocalypse?

Congrats on the September/October issue of *Plain Truth*. I think it is the best issue I have seen to date in terms of honesty, relevance and perspective. I really liked Mike Peterson's article on how the "war on global warming" can be a secularist (read: *God-less*) approach to trying to control (rather than respect) creation—Amen! I also enjoyed Monika Spykerman's take on working moms.

Minnesota



No Curfew: Are You Crazy?

The article by Glen Moyer, "No Curfew: Are You Crazy?" in your September/October issue is misleading to all those who do not have a personal relationship with God in heaven. I do agree that all children should be taught respect for their parents, themselves and their fellow mankind. But how would anyone even know the meaning of respect without God's holy ten commandments? The condition of the world today is frightening, but what would it be like if we had no laws or rules to live by?

Florida

Don't Hurt Your Witness

I am in complete agreement with Greg Albrecht's September/October "Commentary" on witnessing. I, too, firmly believe that we are led by actual and sincere example, trusting all to Christ, as opposed to goose-stepping along to the words of self-appointed "Know Betters" who, out of the public eye, are less than that which they exhort others to be. I am attempting to gain a more secure grasp of my own beliefs and hence a more effective manner of expressing it to those who ask.

Email



The Gathering Storm of Fundamentalism

I was amazed in reading the letters to the editor in the September/October issue from people objecting to the cover story about fundamentalism (from the July/August issue). It seems to me that many fundamentalists believe that any criticism of them is of the devil. I grew up in such circles myself, and since I have moved on, I am amazed at the things that God is doing in the world and rejoice for voices such as yours which call us back to what being a Christian means.

Many fundamentalists, and especially their ministers, are fighting to keep the stone ten commandments before our society. The ten commandments have been done away with in Christ, but fundamentalism insists that the ten commandments are needed to “keep people in line.”

It seems to me that this is living by sight, not by faith. Is our faith as Christians to be based on public prayer in schools, government buildings, property of all types so that people can see us and see how wonderful we are? Jesus had something to say about doing righteous deeds to be seen of men.

Fundamentalism grinds on the idea of getting back to a better time—they would take us back to times when smoking was everywhere, employers exploited employees, children were abused and so were the elderly. Lead was in many of our cars and vehicles, pollution was rampant, red light districts were in many cities, the rich got away with much more than they do now, gangsters controlled much of some major cities, votes were rigged and politicians had to cater to the bosses to be elected. Minorities were abused and exploited.

Yes, we recognize that there are many problems in our world today, but I would still rather live in the now than back then. The fundamentalist idea of wanting to resurrect the old ways, regardless, is not the way of love but of legalism. They propose that our society be structured as ordered —“their way or else.”

Thank you for your magazine which challenges us to think through issues and change in the way that God would have us to.

California

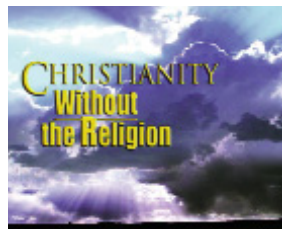


The Power of Praise

The article by Bobby Winters in the July/August 2007 *Plain Truth* should be read by every person in the world. The overall message is positive. What caught my attention the most was the sentence “...because we are all still children.”

I’m a 68-year-old semi-retired journalist who puts a lot of weight on the fact that I’m not only a child of God, but becoming more and more a child as I get older. It is a humbling experience and goes against the grain of all too many (including me) who practice my profession. I don’t see this aspect of our relationship with Jesus Christ talked about or written about all that often, so thank you for publishing this article.

Florida



Christianity Without the Religion

I want to tell you what Jesus has done for me through Plain Truth Ministries. When I thought that there was no hope for me at all, Jesus came to my rescue. Like you, I was once a member of an authoritarian church which was under the yoke of legalism, and I had to choose between selling my soul to the devil or staying with the program. I left that church, believing that I was headed for hell.

But, God has shown his love for me through your online CWR services [*Christianity Without the Religion*]. He has shown me that my salvation comes from his grace and not legalism. Because of this I have a newfound love for my Savior that I never had until now. I now have a relationship with God, that by the Holy Spirit, I never had before. I have enclosed a check to help the true gospel of Jesus go out for the world to hear. May God bless you and bring more people into his kingdom so they can find the love and peace that only the true gospel of Jesus Christ can bring them.

Maine

COPYRIGHT & POSTAL INFORMATION

The Plain Truth is published bimonthly by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2007 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Standard flats postage paid at Pasadena, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Volume 72, Number 7: December 2007. Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. *The Plain Truth* is a U.S. trademark.

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

Worship with us, 24/7, at our church without walls, a church without the religion. A relevant, timely, Christ-centered worship service is available right now at www.ptm.org. *Christianity Without the Religion* is a pending U.S. trademark.

OUR WEBSITE

Visit our website at www.ptm.org to browse *Plain Truth* archives for past articles, to find out more about Plain Truth Ministries and our other resources, to subscribe and to update your address.

SUBMISSIONS

The Plain Truth rarely publishes unsolicited manuscripts. Please review our writers guidelines at our website (www.ptm.org) before submitting queries. Include SASE with query. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

The Plain Truth is published by Plain Truth Ministries (PTM). If you are interested in learning more about PTM, please request a copy of *Plain Truth Ministries...Helping Change Lives Around the World* by calling us at 1-800-309-4466, visiting our website at www.ptm.org or writing us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Plain Truth Ministries gratefully accepts tax deductible contributions to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept contributions in U.S. funds by check or credit card. Call us at 1-800-309-4466, or write us at Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129.

MEMBER  EVANGELICAL PRESS ASSOCIATION


PLAIN TRUTH
MINISTRIES

MEMBER
NRB