

Connect

Strengthening the IN Relationship

INSPIRING OUR READERS TO GIVE THEMSELVES FULLY TO GOD



ONE
BODY

SO IN CHRIST WE WHO ARE MANY FORM ONE BODY,
AND EACH MEMBER BELONGS TO ALL THE OTHERS. ROMANS 12:5

What Kind of "CHRISTIAN"

Am I?

Don McLaughlin



When the first European missionaries arrived in the south-west African region of the kingdoms of the Angola and Ndongo, they found highly advanced cultures. Far from the myths that often swirled in European books and plays, these kingdoms were characterized by multilayered governments, crop rotation, urban and suburban growth plans for their towns, and the use of iron for both farming and weapons. In fact, the name "Angola" comes from the word, "ngola" which means blacksmith.

But as is true even in our culture today, something was missing. Even with their advanced understanding of cattle farming, trade, and a budding international trade, they still were hungering for something more. Tim Hashaw, one of the foremost historians in the world on this era of African

history, notes that thousands and thousands of the Bantu and other African ethnic groups that made up the kingdom of Angola were baptized voluntarily. That last word is important. These were not the forced baptisms that we cringe over that characterized various inquisitions or crusades. These were not the tragic forced baptisms that were carried out just before these precious humans were crammed into the holds of ships and sold as slaves on both sides of the Atlantic. No, these were just people like us who wanted that connection with God that seemed to be missing.

As the church began to thrive in Angola, the leaders initiated correspondence to Christians in and around Europe. Angolans traveled to Europe to attend various schools of theology to strengthen their ability to lead their churches back home. But after the missionaries came the colonists and conquerors. Throughout the next four

centuries, countless stories of horror and betrayal began to unfold. The betrayal came in the most devastating form: the new colonizers and conquerors came under the same flag as the missionaries, carried the same Bible, and made their claims in the name of the same God.

Hashaw notes that the Angolan church leaders actually appealed to the church leaders in Europe to help them. Surely they could not sanction what was happening. Surely they just didn't realize the cruelties and brutalities of these colonizers. The backbreaker came when some of the colonizers from Portugal actually baptized some of Imbangala, a roaming army of ruthless African mercenaries who were "guns for hire." Everyone feared these fierce fighters who would steal, kill, and destroy for anyone that paid them their price. So in order to employ their services in the advancement of the colonies, the Portuguese governor had two of the Imbangala generals baptized.

This horrible injustice and blasphemous misuse of baptism stunned the Angolan Christians. But when they appealed to Europe for help, none was found. And so then came the ominous and imminent break in their trust and ultimately their fellowship. They began to ask, according to Hashaw, "What kind of Christians are showing up in the next ship? Will it be ones like those who came to share Jesus and the love of God with us, or will it be the kind that come to steal our resources, sell our people, and destroy our culture?"

What a sad question... "What kind of Christians are coming this time?"

Connection is a powerful message in our fasted pace world. Acceptance, respect, and mutual care are powerful witnesses for the presence of God. In our fast pace world people are still hungering for God and the kind of life He brings to our world. You and I long for that also. Jesus taught us to pray that His kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. But in our workplaces, schools, neighborhoods and homes, many people are living in fear. They wonder, "Who is going to show up in my life today? Will it be the kind of person I could trust? Will it be someone who wants me to make it? Will it be someone who sees value in me? Will it be someone who wants a relationship with me?"

The church as God intends it is a place where we are committed to becoming that kind of person. In Revelation 7:9-17, we see God's vision for the church. It is a place where every nation, tribe, people, and language can gather TOGETHER around the throne of God in praise, safety, joy, and acceptance. It is a place where all of our tribulations are bathed in the peace and glory of God. This is how it will be forever in heaven, and God wants us to practice this kind of living and loving here on earth. This is the connection God desires. Let's commit to this kind of life, so that people will not have to wonder when they see us coming. "What kind of Christian is this?" ☺

ROMANS

∞ 12:3-5
NIV

FOR BY THE GRACE given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

REVELATION

∞ 7:9-17
NIV

AFTER THIS I LOOKED and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“SALVATION BELONGS TO our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

ALL THE ANGELS WERE standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

THEN ONE OF THE ELDERS asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

I ANSWERED, “Sir, you know.”

AND HE SAID, “THESE are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

NEVER AGAIN WILL THEY hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

FOR THE LAMB AT THE CENTER of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.

AND GOD WILL WIPE AWAY every tear from their eyes.”

BONDED TOGETHER

Twila Paris CCLI 184877a

Like a tightly woven garment
Like a metal alloy
We are put together in the strongest way
With a common bond to join us
That they cannot destroy
We are held together in the longest way

And we could not be pulled apart
Without it tearing out a heart

Bonded Together
You are my Father forever (forever)
You will never leave me (never, never)
We are bonded together

There is never space between us for
a separation
We are put together in the tightest way
And the Holy fusion causes this amalgamation
Woh, we are held together in the
brightest way

And we could not be pulled apart
Without it tearing out a heart

Bonded together
I am your servant forever (forever)
I will never leave you (never, never)
We are bonded together

You cling to me
I cling to You
You cling to me
I am clinging too (I am clinging too)

STORIES OF FAITH



Douglas and Vanessa Ribeiro

WE ARE FROM BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL, a few thousand miles away from here. It isn't easy to move to another country where they speak another language, have different

customs or different ways of relating. But here we have found a place where, despite our past, we are deeply connected. We sense that our cultural heritage is acknowledged and we feel accepted for who we are.

When we invite our Latino friends to come here with us, they say they feel welcome too. They may speak a different language, but they understand that they are appreciated.

In the midst of all our differences we have also found we have a lot in common. We have all been somehow touched by Jesus' love and we strive to be connected to the same Source. We have found something among you that goes far beyond our differences—and we feel that we really belong here! ☺



Steven and Colleen Jackson

COLLEEN: I grew up on the island of Tobago. I attended Catholic school and had aspirations of becoming a nun until I met an American Missionary, Bob Brown, and became a disciple of Jesus at age 15 and eventually coming to the U.S.

STEVEN: I had been a Muslim for eight years and had just denounced Islam two months before meeting Colleen. I was on a search for Jesus, having met some faithful

disciples at the East Cobb Church of Christ but I had not fully accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. After going to church a few months I began to experience a sense of belonging – a feeling I had never known in my life. In my earlier life I had chosen a destructive path that led to addiction – and death – spiritually, emotionally, financially, and, very nearly, physically.

COLLEEN: When I first met Steven and was still confident in my own righteousness and had very little grace toward his lifestyle choice. But, as I got to know him, I also got to know myself better. It wasn't long before God opened my eyes to show me that I needed the same grace and mercy and forgiveness that Steven needed.

Together, we went through a path of challenges that led to sin and resulted in dark moments in our lives. Moments which eventually led to a realization of our need

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From CONTROL to CONNECTION

Sandra Mackey

For thousands of years, humanity's relationship with horses was one of domination. Horses had to be "broken" before they could be ridden. You had to "show them who's boss." Beatings were a common part of the process, which might take days or weeks. In the Robert Redford movie, *The Horse Whisperer*, the man championed by the movie was shown to revolutionize this process. The real life horse whisperer is Monty Roberts.

"It all dates from those summers alone in the high desert, me lying on my belly and watching wild horses with my binoculars for hours at a time. Straining to see in the moonlight, striving to fathom mustang ways, I knew instinctively I had chanced upon something important but could not know that it would shape my life. In 1948 I was a boy of thirteen learning the language of horses. . . ." (Monty Roberts in *The Man Who Listens to Horses*.)

Even as a child in the horse world, Monty Roberts was uncomfortable with the conventional method of breaking, or training, a horse. He competed in rodeos for 22 years, all the while searching for

a better way. Eventually, he learned it from the horses themselves. By watching wild mustangs, Roberts was able to identify some of their body language and apply it himself. His mission: to get the wild horse to accept a saddle and rider within the space of a few days—without force. Of course, he is successful. But knowing the outcome doesn't diminish the exhilaration of watching the dance between wild animal and gentle conqueror. Roberts used some of the same principles in raising his 3 children and more than 40 foster children and now teaches his method to corporate management groups. (Excerpt from a synopsis of *The Man Who Listens to Horses* by Kimberly Heinrichs, as reviewed on Amazon.com.)

Domination or control for the most part, has not only been between humans and animals. It has been and continues to be an integral part of our society among humans. Rich have tried to dominate poor; men have tried to dominate women; cultures have tried to dominate



other cultures, which has ended in wars and continuing dissension.

It was like that when James, (probably the brother of Jesus) wrote to a situation that included a typical dissension. In one paragraph James addresses the haughty, privileged people of wealth, and in the next paragraph he turns to poor people undergoing severe trials. (Note the shift between 5:1 and 5:7.) The two groups had different problems. The wealthy were selfish. They showed insensitivity and snobbishness to the poor. For their part, the poor responded with envy and grumbling. They blamed God for their poverty. James gave advice on the specific problems of each group, but he also implied they have much in common. For both rich and poor the most important struggle is not external, but rather internal. All of us experience the inner conflict of being pulled by powerful contrary forces.

Competition is not all bad; and differences are not bad at all. In fact differences add a delightful bit of spice to what would be an otherwise boring and bland society. The split occurs

when coercion and domination take precedence over kindness and respect for another person.

Systems of education and training and work based on coercion persist because people don't know any alternative that will get the job done, and they can't imagine that any alternative could possibly be as simple as kindness, gentleness, and patience.

The sharp increase in the pace of technological change, the sudden increase in the speed and breadth of global communications, the increasing awareness of our common dependence on the health of the planet we inhabit together, and the decreasing utility of war is changing us from a domination culture into a connection culture.

The whole world is fraught with change to a connection culture. We are not there yet, but we will get there more quickly as we recognize that the diversity of a culture is blessed and connected by a Common Denominator who is our Helper, our Comforter, our Counselor.....the Holy Spirit. It is He who teaches us kindness, gentleness, patience and grace for all. ☺

Steve & Colleen – continued from page 5

for God's grace, to repentance, forgiveness and to the Faith Journey we now work together.

STEVEN: Colleen was and is an important part of my spiritual growth. In our first year of marriage we had Bible studies often, almost daily. Today we still share and with our son we pray together daily. We try to continually encourage one another in our walk with Christ. I know that it is only by God's grace that I am able to belong to His family of believers and live a life of meaning and purpose.

COLLEEN: Thank God for grace and mercy! My family at North Atlanta teaches me the grace of God every day. Whether we have experienced addiction or sexual sin or criminal

convictions, or pride, we all need His grace and we stand together in love regardless of color, race, class, or background.

STEVEN: God's grace has rescued me from my "living hell" and shown me how to live with a feeling of true contentment. I never want to return to my former way of life again. Having a strong network of believers and personally spending time alone with God helps me to stay connected, so that one day I can hear the words from My Father I have longed for since I was a boy. "Welcome Home My Son."

COLLEEN: I thank God daily for the sense of family we have at North Atlanta and I feel honored to know that our son will grow up with this family. Thanks be to God! ☺

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PROJECT MANAGERS: Julie Stanley, Missy Taylor

EDITOR: Sandra Mackey

DESIGN: Fritz Miller Studios, Inc. [www.fritzmillers.com]

CONTRIBUTORS: Don McLaughlin

TRANSLATION: Douglas and Vanessa Ribeiro

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