


4-2023

Space Preacher and the Horror of ISIS (A Film)

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

SPACE PREACHER AND THE HORROR OF ISIS (A FILM)



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

APRIL 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Joanna Wirtz

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 9, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics, Church, and Culture.

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Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder workshops, and an iterative development process, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

There is a profound misunderstanding among religious “nones” in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in various media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.

I have researched where “nones” and these misunderstandings have come from, Christian perspectives on creativity, and Christians who felt called to create media content for secular audiences. As a preacher, writer, and actor, I feel called to share God’s truth through telling stories. Stories transform how people see the world. I chose to make a film as a story-telling vehicle for this project—a western in space adventure called “Space Preacher and the Horror of Isis”.

Introduction

With the rise of hyper-individualism came a distrust of established authorities such as organized religion—Christianity in particular. Basic Christian and biblical principles have been increasingly absent or outright misrepresented in the media (such as music, news, films, TV, books, etc.). Today many people in the United States declare themselves to be religious “nones” instead of following a particular religion. Some of them grew up in Christian homes and later walked away from their childhood religion. Some of them have been raised without religious influence at all. Many of these “nones” are not exposed to good examples of Christian beliefs, lives, or behavior, neither in real life nor in various media (books, TV, music, news, movies, social media, etc.).

I have researched Christian perspectives on creativity and Christians who felt called to create media content for secular audiences. Stories transform how people see the world. Film is a great way to demonstrate what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ or to share a Christian perspective of the world through how a story is told. Science fiction allows us to separate ourselves from modern day religious and political baggage and offer commentary on such things from a safe distance. Missionary stories are often heroic, despite featuring flawed heroes, and filled with drama, gospel, struggle, and sacrifice. I chose to make a science fiction film about a missionary to demonstrate a flawed hero attempting to live an authentic Christian life and expressing Christian beliefs and principles. I gave this missionary an atheist companion to express the doubt and perspective of the intended audience (“nones”). My hope is that better understanding will lead to more interest in the Gospel.

I began this journey with the following hypothesis: “A genuine Christian/biblical perspective is nearly absent in popular culture. There is a profound misunderstanding about what it means to follow Christ, which is caused by lack of exposure to this biblical concept. If solved, it would mean better representation of the Christian perspective in the public square.” I did a couple discovery workshops with local acquaintances, making the circle as wide and diverse as possible, in order to explore this idea and try to find issues with it. Then I conducted interviews with people who have experience studying or creating media. The major issues I encountered were diverse opinions on the meaning of “popular culture” and that there is no singular Christian/biblical perspective. Many Christians have a hostile view of “popular culture” and do not understand the perspective of religious “nones”. It became obvious I needed to switch to the term “media” instead of “popular culture” and be careful to define the term. I also needed to explicitly recognize my audience is religious “nones”. Then I had to recognize there are multiple Christian perspectives and I should not assume that I speak for or represent *the* Christian or biblical perspective, as if there were only one possible perspective.

Everyone creates content (everyday conversations, media, social media, art, architecture, music, film, literature) and culture is both created by and is a reflection of society’s content. From a theological perspective, Christians do not need to fear a changing world as reflected in popular culture. God himself is in charge of history, and God is already involved in changing the world and has been at this work for thousands of years. God has created content with the intent of

transforming the world through it. For example, all Scripture is content, produced by God and used by him to give us wisdom, teach us, convict us, correct us, lead us to salvation, and train us in righteousness.¹ This content informs and transforms the lives of believers and has been used toward that end for millennia. Nature is also God's content, telling all people of his glory.² God's content forms, informs, and transforms cultures around the world. Christians can trust that God is already and currently involved in transforming the world for his good purposes.

Christians who create content participate in God's culture creating and transforming activity. This participation is natural and expected, since Jesus compared us to salt and light, which naturally affect the world around them. Content does not have to be "effective" or "useful"; however, it should be "worthy" of sharing. Quality content is an authentic outpouring of who a person is. A believer who loves God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength, who loves her neighbor as herself, and commits herself to following Jesus will authentically create worthy content.

No matter how secular or "wrong" a culture appears to be, God embeds truth in all cultures in order to point them to him. We should ask what the culture gets right. Just like missionaries generally have to learn a new language in order to share the gospel, we should learn and use the language, the motifs, the philosophy, the metaphors, and other signs of culture in order to communicate God's truth in a way they understand. However, before we take ourselves too seriously as content creators, we must remember it is not the content creator's role to change the world—that is God's role. Content creators are merely participants in God's process.

Most Christian filmmakers outside the "Christian film" industry that make films for general or secular audiences create horror films, because the existence of the supernatural is assumed and accepted in that genre. I looked for examples of successful Christian media creators who operated outside the horror genre, and decided to focus on Fred Rogers, a Presbyterian minister who produced a television series for children for several decades, and Tyler Perry, who creates secular dramatic and comedic films from a Christian-Black-Southern perspective and owns the largest privately owned studio in the United States.

I also researched the social forces behind the rise of religious "nones" and examined both Christian and scientific understandings of creativity. We are distrustful of traditional sources of authority due in large part because it is the fruit of hyper-individualism, which is in turn a natural consequence of modernism. In examining the nature of creativity itself, it appears human beings are inherently creative. Christians believe we are creative because God is creative and he made us in his image. God's creative energy can flow into and through each of us.

I recruited young people to assist me in the design phase of this project. They got excited envisioning the various possibilities, such as community events, music festivals, podcasts, and

¹ Cf 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

² Cf Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-20; 10:18.

television shows. However, one of their favorites (and mine) was making a film that showcased a realistic Christian life—in both its ups and downs, its successes and failures.

The primary indicator of “success” for a Hollywood film is revenue, which is directly tied to the number of people who purchased tickets. Therefore, the number one benchmark for this film—like any secular film—is that it should be *entertaining*. Otherwise, “nones” will probably not watch it, and my efforts may be wasted. I also hope to spark discussion online through followers and shares on social media as well as receive online reviews. These things indicate people who see the film are thinking about what they saw and that it probably affected them.

In developing a prototype for this project, I received considerable assistance from a friend who has written and produced a number of shorts and independent films. I also sought input from fellow writers and actors, both Christian and religious “nones”, and incorporated their feedback into the script. I intend to hire religious “nones” as cast and crew as I complete this film and continue to pay attention to their input.

One thing I have learned is that producing a film is difficult. It takes a lot of effort to take an idea, develop it into a story/script, and get all the people, equipment, and various pieces together to film it. Picking the brains of others is helpful, not only when getting stuck but also when attempting to get started.

A second thing, that should have been obvious from the beginning, is that how we generate content is as important as the content itself. In the secular world, audiences are often viewed as objects to be manipulated and mere sources of revenue. Christian content creators should treat their audiences as people worthy of respect. Creating a film is a community effort, and as a Christian content creator, I will seek to cultivate a culture of mutual love and respect among the cast and crew. For “nones” working on the film, this type of work culture may be a positive, powerful, and transformative experience in and of itself that goes on to transform other film crews—and the movie-making business in general.

One film will not change everything, but like salt it can be worked into the dough of culture (and filmmaking culture) and affect its flavor in a positive way. My long term goal is to make more films for secular audiences and pay close care to the content as well as to how the films are made and how audience, cast, and crew are all viewed and treated. I also want to craft guidelines for other Christian filmmakers who seek to incorporate Christian principles into *how* they craft films as well as what those films attempt to *show* or *say*.

The Project

Introduction

In an attempt to reintroduce genuine Christian perspectives into the public square, I am making a secular film written from a Christian perspective intended for viewing by those who do not adhere to a particular religion, i.e., religious “nones”. I am showcasing this project by submitting some production notes, sample marketing materials, an original theme song, example recording of a scene, and two scripts: one for a short film (about fifteen minutes in length) and the other for a full-length film (included as an appendix). Both of the scripts are in standard script format. I will produce the short film and use it to build interest for producing the full-length film. This process is often used for independent films.

My acting name is Jonah McGuire, which is why it appears on some of the materials.

About the Film

The film is inspired by real-life adventures of circuit preachers on the American frontier in the 1800s and western in space shows like *Firefly* and *The Mandalorian*.

Genre: A western in space, with some horror elements

Logline: “It’s tough saving the galaxy when you’re on the menu.”

Themes: grace, violence, social justice, Christian service

Abstract: 300 years in the future, a circuit preacher and an atheist ex-military pilot join forces to engage in trade on a frontier planet reminiscent of the American Old West. They face the harsh realities of life on the frontier, including bandits and wild animals, and encounter aliens that eat people. The circuit preacher shoots someone and may be recalled from the field.

Main Characters

- **Rev. Esther “Terry” Stewart:** A former missionary kid seeking to fill her dead parents’ shoes. Socially awkward but confident. Can be reckless. Passionate about justice and the Gospel.
- **Seth Rothenberg:** Jewish atheist. Often a little salty. Loves open space. Bears a grudge against Loki Mining Corp (LMC) for its mistreatment of people, especially his family. Also hates Isis aliens, but he hates LMC more.
- **Dr. Isaiah White:** President of the Interplanetary Missions Society (IMS). Respected Rev. Stewart’s parents and wants to give her a chance, but he also feels he has to rein her in a bit.

- **Priest:** An Isis alien who ate a missionary and absorbed a lot of this missionary's knowledge and passions. This experience sparks a crisis and transformation in him which spreads to his people.
- **Velez:** A seemingly unimportant side character with a hidden ability to create objects and control the weather on Mama Pancha.

The Universe


Travel between systems is via system gates. Travel through a gate is instantaneous. When not going through a gate, spaceships travel slower than light speed.

- **Sunna system:** Laufey is Earth-like, while Loki and Munin mostly feel barren in a meteorite/moon-like way
- **Ra system:** Isis is a desert planet, human habitation limited to a handful of outposts
- **Corps system:** Very high-tech and high-culture with a distinct difference between high class and low class
- **Inti system:** Mama Pancha feels Earth-like with lots of forest and farmland, strange wildlife and weather, low tech, located outside of other jurisdictions so it's a haven for outlaws
- **Sol system:** Mid-tech, no longer the center of human culture, viewed as a "has been"
- **Gun Ana system:** Umay is wild and uncultivated, largely barren but partly green with potential for farming and ranching. Very remote.

Instantaneous communication is not possible across far reaches of space, so communication between systems is mostly via pre-recorded holographic messages.

Marketing Materials

Facebook survey



February 23, 2022 · 🌐

Two questions:

1) If it was a movie/show, would you watch it?

2) Which artist should do the soundtrack?


It's a Western in space.


300 years in the future, a preacher and an atheist start up an interplanetary shipping business, facing off against ruthless corporations, man-eating aliens, and outlaws looking for trouble.

The preacher has a ship, a horse, and a gun.



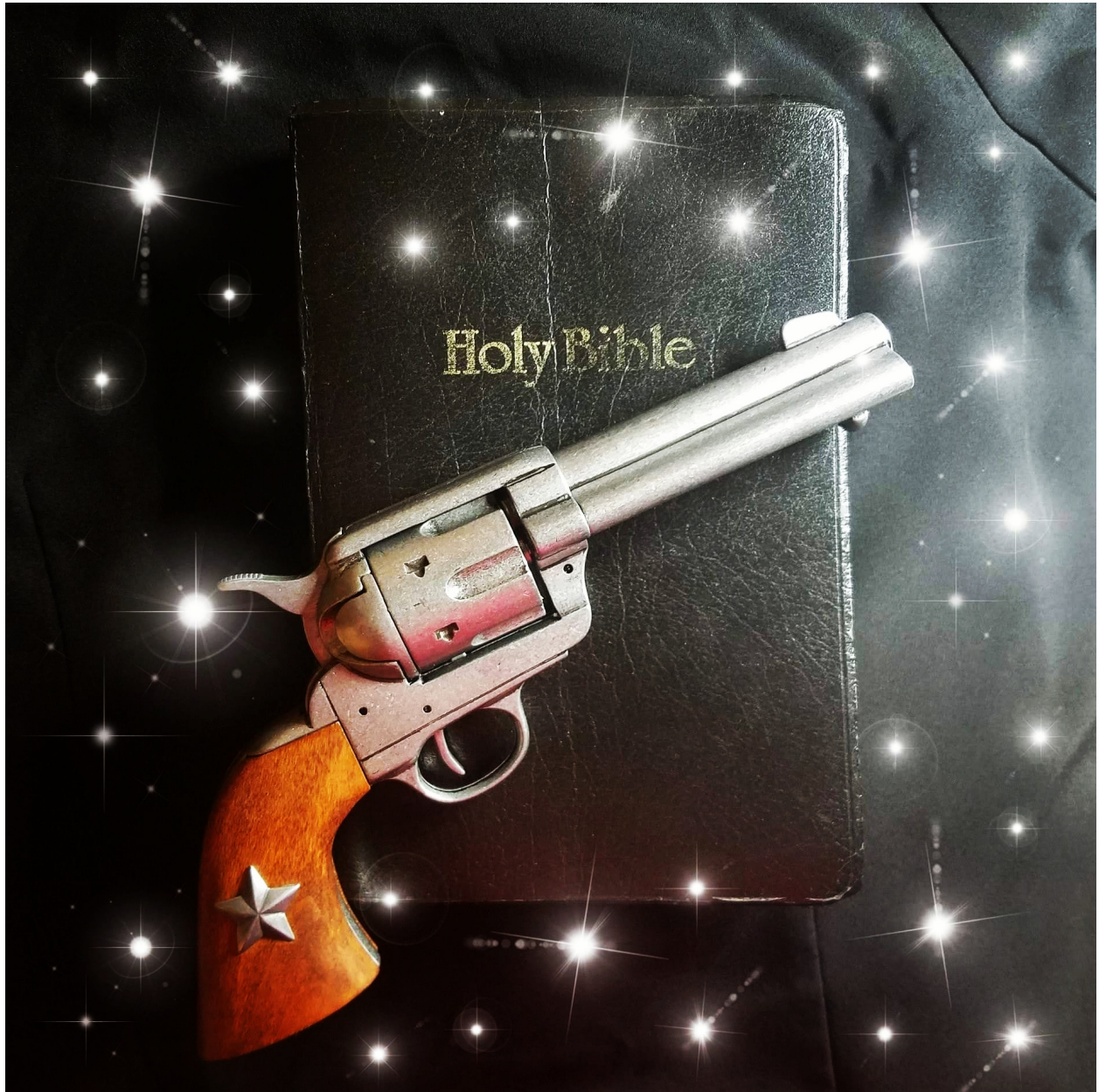
16 comments

 Like

 Comment

 Send

Instagram graphic



Promotional Poster



There's a Land of Bright Tomorrow

(short version)

Version B

Words and Music by Jonah McGuire

Chords: F sus F B^b F B^b F B^b C

Voice

There's a land _____ of bright to - mor - row Where there'll be _____ no tears or

Chords: F C F sus F B^b F B^b F B^b C

4 sor - row in the sky. There's a bet - ter world a - wait - in'; There's no fight - in' or

Chords: F F sus F B^b F B^b C F

9 hat - in'. There's a land _____ of bright to - mor - row in the sky!

Example Scene from Full Script with Theme Music



<https://youtu.be/HXe-HFd16zk>

Example Scene from Full Script with Actors



<https://youtu.be/4RIES1cwwgA>

Short Script (approx. 15 minutes runtime)

The opening title & credits appear on the screen, followed by empty space. [Note: Every change in system/planet is accompanied by text announcing system and planet.]

ISIS
Ra System

EXT. SPACE NEAR ISIS

The desert planet Isis comes into view.

The Space Corps ship EXCELSIOR flies toward Isis.

COLONEL (V.O.)
Welcome to Isis. If there's such a
thing as a bright, shiny center of
the Thirteen Systems, you've
reached the system it's the
farthest from.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY

Two Spacers, COLONEL and SPACEMAN, are walking down the hall. They both wear Space Corps uniforms. As they walk, they pass by researchers in lab coats.

COLONEL

(continuing)

There's not much going on here. The nearest doctor is in the Inti system, so don't get sick or injured.

SPACEMAN

I don't intend to, sir.

COLONEL

The Loki Mining Corp has purchased rights to this system, so most of the few humans around here are LMC researchers reviewing this world's resources. There are also a couple religious nuts who insist we treat the natives with respect. The natives themselves are quite primitive, cannibalistic, and definitely sub-human. They mostly keep to themselves. The Space Corps is only here to make sure the space port and the system gate stay up and running. Lt. Rogers wanted to go on leave, which is why you're here.

SPACEMAN

I'll do the best I can, sir.

COLONEL

Don't get excited, Spaceman. The hardest part of this job is staying awake. Nothing interesting happens here.

EXT. NIGHT, ISIS DESERT

A group of Isis aliens gather in a circle, gesturing to one another. Their faces are lit by torches.

The aliens break into groups that attack and overrun human outposts.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY

Isis aliens are attacking people. The place appears to be on fire. Humans are screaming.

ISIS CAPTAIN looms over SPACEMAN on his knees. The ISIS CAPTAIN holds back SPACEMAN's head by his hair and leans into his upturned face. SPACEMAN is obviously terrified.

ISIS CAPTAIN

Die, filthy foreigner, and share with me what you know.

MAMA
PANCHA
Inti System

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCH

Mama Pancha, an Earth-like planet, is visible in the distance. The small ship BANDIT flies into view, apparently coming from the L4 system gate.

INT. BANDIT SHIP COCKPIT

Two humans are aboard. They both look scruffy.

PILOT
See? There's Mama Pancha up ahead.
I told you we'd make it.

CO-PILOT
I don't know, man. I still got the
creeps about this trip. A lot of
ships have gone missing around here
lately.

PILOT
Will you quit it with the
conspiracy and ghost stories? There
are no monsters on Mawu or ghosts
on Mama Pancha or man-eating aliens
in space. There aren't even any
pirates around here.

CO-PILOT
You don't know that.

PILOT
Oh, yes I do.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCH

The Space Corps vessel EXCELSIOR hides behind an asteroid. While the crew of the BANDIT are arguing and their ship is passing by, the EXCELSIOR pulls behind them.

INT. EXCELSIOR COCKPIT

The EXCELSIOR is completely manned by Isis aliens, including ISIS CAPTAIN and PRIEST.

ISIS CAPTAIN
Destroy it.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCH

The EXCELSIOR fires at the BANDIT and it explodes in a single shot.

The EXCELSIOR returns to hide behind the asteroid again.

CORPS

Rebirth Research Corp Core System

**EXT. ARGO IN SPACE, APPROACHING GATE L4 OF THE REBIRTH
RESEARCH CORP CORE SYSTEM**

System Gate L4 is like a beautiful metal donut in space with colorful lights swirling inside of it. The ARGO is headed toward the gate. The ARGO is a rocket-style ship with "ARGO" and "MTXXVIII.19" imprinted on its side.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

SETH wears a Space Corps jacket. REV is reading a Bible. Throughout this conversation, SETH is reading instruments and periodically glances above him at the window in the ceiling. Colored lights from the gate play across the cockpit.

SETH

We're approaching the gate.

REV looks up.

REV

I remember the first time I
traveled through a gate. I was
about six years old and I was
filled with this great wonder n'
awe. I knew God had to be a
powerful artist to create somethin'
so beautiful.

SETH

The Mahuikans created the gates.

REV

True, but God created the physics
that allow gates to exist.

SETH

...The first time I traveled
through a gate I shat my pants.

REV

Everyone responds to the divine in
their own special way.

The ARGO flies into the hole in the middle of the gate. The ship seems to disappear into it.

MAMA
PANCHA
Inti System

EXT. GATE L4 OF THE INTI SYSTEM

The ARGO exits the L4 system gate.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

SETH
Welcome to the Inti system... Well,
that's weird.

REV
What?

SETH
There's a lot of debris up ahead.
You'd expect that with Earth, but
not out in the boonies like this.

REV
Is that a problem?

SETH
No. It's just... unexpected. I'll
have to ask the local Spacers about
it.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHHA

The ARGO flies by the asteroid hiding the EXCELSIOR.

INT. EXCELSIOR COCKPIT

ISIS CAPTAIN
On my mark.

PRIEST notices the markings on the side of the ARGO.

PRIEST
No, wait. Leave that one alone.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHHA

Mama Pancha looms large ahead.

The ARGO flies toward Mama Pancha.

The EXCELSIOR follows the ARGO.

INT. HOTEL, PORT CITY, MAMA PANCHHA

The lights are off in REV's room. A shadow moves in the darkness.

REV enters the room. She doesn't bother turning on the light. She takes off her gun belt and hat, hanging both on the coat rack. She goes the holo device to record a message. She takes a big breath and releases it slowly before pressing record.

REV

Howdy, sis. They say the only thing that travels faster 'n light is bad news. Y'all probably heard already about what happened at First Baptist in Port City. The IMS is investigating what happened. My first solo mission and I'm already being recalled. If I ever needed prayer, it's now--hold on.

REV hears a noise behind her. She pauses the recording and turns around, peering into the darkness.

REV

Uh, hello? Anybody there?

PRIEST steps into the light. He is between REV and the door. REV is basically trapped.

REV recognizes PRIEST as a potential threat. She reaches toward her hip, then glances at her gun hanging on the coat rack by the door--far out of reach.

PRIEST

Reverend Stewart, we need your help.

REV

...What the what?

PRIEST

I recognized your sign and convinced my comrades you might be willing to help us.

REV

My... sign?

PRIEST

On your ship. Matthew 28:19, "Go and disciple all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

REV

I didn't know Isis aliens could quote Scripture.

PRIEST

Most of us can't. We have no interest in human religion--or didn't before the uprising. But I ate a missionary and everything changed.

REV

Come again?

Scenes from the uprising from the PRIEST's point of view appear onscreen as he speaks. A group of ISIS ALIENS, including PRIEST, attack a missionary outpost.

PRIEST (V.O.)

We planned to hit every human outpost at once, suddenly and without warning, to get rid of you all before you could resist us. My family was assigned to attack the missionary outpost. All they had wanted was to make sure Loki Mining Corp didn't take advantage of us and to share the love of their God with us. But they were foreigners and had to go.

PRIEST stands before FATHER JOHN (a human priest), who is on his knees.

PRIEST (V.O.)

I found a priest and before I ripped him open I said,

PRIEST

(to FATHER JOHN)

Die, filthy foreigner, and share with me what you know.

FATHER JOHN looks up at PRIEST with compassion and resolve rather than fear.

FATHER JOHN

Take it.

The flashback scenes end.

REV

And you ate him?! What's... What's wrong with y'all?

PRIEST

My people eat our own dead to preserve the wisdom and passions of our loved ones, so they are never fully gone. We thought we could weaponize this ability and use it

to gain your human knowledge. But I received more than I bargained for.

REV

You don't want to eat me. My head is mostly full of useless stuff like Greek and Hebrew.

PRIEST

You're safe. I know all that now, plus Latin. But I received far more than I anticipated. Some power has gripped me and is transforming me. I know what he knew and love what he loved and I am completely changed.

There is a moment of silence while REV absorbs this information.

REV

Was he someone I know?

PRIEST

John Sasaki

REV

Father John?! You ate Father John?! My parents knew him. He was such a great guy.

PRIEST

And he knew you. Which is why I thought you could help us.

REV

Come again?

PRIEST

Two things. First, in consuming human flesh, we also inadvertently opened ourselves to human diseases that we have no defense against. We need medical supplies and assistance. Second, we stole equipment from LMC and the Space Corps to come through the systems gate, but due to our lack of practical knowledge, we damaged the gate.

In a flashback, the Space Corps ship hits the side of the system gate as it flies through it. Lights on the gate flicker and shut off.

PRIEST

Our people are dying and we cannot

go home. Devoid of hope, my people thought they would continue waging war against humanity, but I convinced them otherwise when I saw your ship. If anyone would help us, surely it would be a missionary like you.

REV
I reckon you don't know me as well as you think. This is my first missionary assignment on my own and I done screwed it up big time.

PRIEST
If you are anything like James and Marie Stewart--

REV
Son of a Baptist preacher. You're playin' the parents card?

PRIEST waits patiently while REV struggles with herself.

REV
(resigned)
I'll see what I can do.

INT. SALOON, PORT CITY

REV sees SETH in the corner, playing cards. She heads over there and sits by him.

REV
Tell me, Pard. Do you know how to repair system gates?

SETH
It depends on what's wrong with them. I worked on them all the time in the Space Corps. Is there something wrong with the L4 gate?

REV
Nope. The L5 gate.

SETH
That's probably a good thing. That would keep the Isis aliens out.

REV
What if we needed it fixed?

SETH
It's the Space Corps's job to keep them up and running.

REV

You know better 'n I do they'll
call it a "low priority" item.

SETH

And for good reason.

REV

So could you do it?

SETH

Maybe, but the Space Corps would
frown on non-Spacers or ex-Spacers
touching their equipment. I could
get in a lot of trouble, and taking
that risk would cost you a lot more
than you were raking in on those
"love offerings".

REV

(deep breath)

What if I told you there was
someone on the other side who knows
all the inner workings and shady
dealings of LMC and has proof of it
all and would be willing to share
it all with you if we'd, uh, rescue
him?

SETH

Rescue him? Where the hell is he?

REV

Isis

SETH

Govno! Woman, you're crazy. I'm not
going to Isis.

REV

We don't have to go to Isis. We
just have to fix the gate.

SETH

Govno

REV

Is that a yay or nay?

SETH

It's my favorite new word. But it
doesn't matter. We're stuck here
until it rains, remember? Go pray
for rain. If your imaginary friend
helps you, then we'll talk.

INT. HOTEL, PORT CITY

REV is watching a holo message from her sister TABBY. TABBY is holding a baby and playing with it.

TABBY
 Howdy, sis. We heard about what
 happened, and I thought you needed
 a baby pick-me-up.
 (to baby)
 Can we say hi to Auntie Terry?
 (speaking for the baby)
 Hi, Auntie Terry!

REV smiles and waves back.

TABBY
 (in her own voice)
 Remember we're always praying for
 you and we always got your back.
 God is good...

There's a crack of thunder. Surprised, REV leaps up to pause the holo and looks out the window. It's raining. REV breathes a sigh of relief and smiles.

REV
 ...all the time.

INT. SALOON, PORT CITY

REV enters the saloon by walking down the stairs. The saloon PATRONS are gathered by the window, gawking at the rain.

PATRON 1
 I ain't ever seen it like this.

PATRON 2
 (in Ukrainian)
 Ya nikoly ne bachyv takoho doshchu.

REV walks up behind SETH, who is peering out the window.

REV
 I talked to my invisible-but-not-
 imaginary friend today.

SETH
 (looking at the rain)
 I see that.

REV
 Interested in helping my buddy?

SETH
 Which buddy?

REV

The one with dirt on the LMC.

SETH

Assuming the rain means we can leave this rock, I can look into it. But no promises.

REV

I'll take what I can get.

SETH

Tell me about this guy we're trying to rescue.

REV

He's, uh, devoured everything there is to know about LMC. He got the inside scoop from the vice president they sent to oversee their interests on Isis. And he has access to all their data.

SETH

How did he get it?

REV grimaces, but this goes unnoticed by SETH who keeps his attention on the rain outside.

REV

I heard he dug deep, but I wasn't interested in hearin' the details.

SETH

How did you hear about this guy?

REV

He's a friend of a friend.

SETH

One of your missionary friends?

REV

Something like that.

SETH turns around to look at REV.

SETH

It's not like you to be evasive.

REV

Did you know when Isis aliens eat people they gain their knowledge?

SETH

You have a missionary friend who knows an alien who ate an LMC exec?

REV

Yes.

SETH

I think I'd like to shake that alien's hand. Assuming he won't eat it.

REV

I think you're safe, Pard. They've had their fill of Spacers. All their Spacer pockets are full.

SETH

They've been eating Spacers?

REV

That's how they got through the gate--and how they broke it.

SETH

They've been eating Spacers?

REV

You said that already.

SETH

Good guys don't eat Spacers! So they got through the gate... Are they here on Mama Pancha??

REV

That's how I met them. One snuck into my room upstairs.

SETH

Holy sh... govno.

REV

So, are you ready to send them back where they came from, or would you rather they hole up here for a while?

SETH

Govno.

REV

I'm hopin' that's a yes.

SETH

If they have incriminating dirt on LMC, it might be worth sending them back where they came from.

REV
That's the spirit!

EXT. GATE L5 OF THE INTI SYSTEM

SETH, wearing a spacesuit, is working on the system gate.

SETH
(grunting & cursing to
himself)
Damn stupid man-eating aliens...
Damn greedy Loki Mining Corp...
Damn crazy space preachers...

INT. EXCELSIOR MEDICAL BAY

REV hands a datapad to PRIEST. ISIS CAPTAIN stands nearby.

REV
That's everythin' y'all need to
know about the medical supplies and
how to use 'em.

REV and PRIEST shake hands.

PRIEST
Thank you for your help.

REV
Happy to be of service.

ISIS CAPTAIN offers a datapad to REV.

ISIS CAPTAIN
I also want to thank you for your
help. I believe this is the payment
you requested.

REV
I don't need nothin'. But my pard
Seth would appreciate it.

ISIS CAPTAIN exits, leaving REV and PRIEST alone.

PRIEST
Thank you again for your help. I
know this has been awkward for you
and your pilot.

REV
It certainly has, but honestly I
needed the opportunity to do good
for somebody before I head back to
Earth.

PRIEST

...Tell me, Rev. Stewart, do you think I'm a monster? Since I ate your friend, I often wonder if that's the case.

REV

I don't believe in monsters. We're all redeemable. To claim otherwise is to say that God ain't in charge no more. I have to believe in grace; otherwise nothing I do is worth the trouble... You know, I have to stand before a Interplanetary Missions Society committee that will judge me to see if I'm still worthy to represent them on the field.

PRIEST

You will be in my prayers, Rev. Stewart. You have proven yourself worthy in my eyes.

REV

Thank you, uh... What do I call you? "Father"?

PRIEST

My people have started calling me "Priest".

REV

Well. God bless you and your people, Priest.

PRIEST

Thank you. And God bless you as well. If you ever need assistance from us in the future, we would be honored to be your allies.

INT. EXCELSIOR HALLWAY

SETH is hanging up his spacesuit near the airlock. ISIS CAPTAIN approaches him.

SETH eyes him warily.

ISIS CAPTAIN

Friend--

SETH

I'm not your friend.

ISIS CAPTAIN offers SETH the datapad.

ISIS CAPTAIN
Spaceman Rothenberg, I believe you
wanted this. We cannot thank you
enough for your help.

SETH takes the datapad. SETH scrolls through the information
and lets out a low whistle.

SETH
Wow. This is amazing. I knew they
were shitty but even I didn't know
they were this plain evil. And it's
so thorough. This information could
ruin them.

SETH
(to ISIS CAPTAIN)
Thank you for the data, but the
best thanks is if you go home and
don't come back.

ISIS CAPTAIN
Understood.

REV walks down the corridor.

REV
(to SETH)
Ready to go, Pard?

SETH
Damn straight. Let's get out of
here.

ISIS
Ra System

EXT. SPACE NEAR ISIS

The planet Isis fills the screen.

INT. MISSIONARY OUTPOST ON ISIS

A group of Isis aliens are seated in a circle. PRIEST holds
up flatbread.

PRIEST
While they were eating, Jesus took
bread. After he had given thanks,
he broke it and gave it to his
disciples, saying, "Take it. This
is my body."

PRIEST rips the bread and hands the pieces to those around him. The Isis aliens in the circle solemnly continue to rip the bread and share it with their neighbors. Everyone eats a piece of the bread.

After eating the bread, one of the Isis aliens sheds a tear.

END CREDITS

Assessment

Considering this project is a film, I have chosen critical success indicators that are similar to those used by the film entertainment industry. Specifically, the success indicators I have chosen are: input from “nones” (the intended audience), number of views, relationship to existing projects people already know and like, marketing that capitalizes on that relationship, and affecting discourse in the public sphere.

Input from “nones”: Since the specific audience I am attempting to reach are the ever-increasing number of religious “nones” in America, seeking and responding to their input is definitely critical to this project’s success (and others like it). I have already sought and received feedback from acquaintances who identify as “nones” in the writing process. Several have indicated interest in the final product. I am seeking more input later this month. I am recruiting “nones” as actors and crew members. After the short film is completed, I will conduct online surveys to see how “nones” specifically respond to it. I will ask responders A) if they enjoyed it, and B) what appealed to them, and C) would they recommend it to a friend, and D) their religious affiliation (if any). This will be useful information for further projects. I will also host a viewing at a local theater and ask similar questions of the audience.

Number of views: Hollywood films are judged as successful based on their revenue, which is directly related to the number of people who have purchased tickets to see the film. I am seeking influence rather than revenue, but this type of metric means the success of my project should be judged by how many people watch it. Therefore hard numbers will be crucial. If the film is shown at a festival or in theaters or via streaming, the number of viewers will be provided to me. If it’s primarily shown online, via website or YouTube, I will also have those numbers. My goal is 100,000 viewers. However, those will be general audience numbers, rather than specifically “nones”.

Relationship to existing projects: This project is related to cult favorite western in space shows such as *Firefly* and *The Mandalorian*. I have studied these shows to understand which elements people like about them and I have included similar elements in this project.

Marketing based on recognized elements: The marketing materials being used online attempt to capitalize on this film’s links to existing shows in the western in space genre. Additional marketing materials will also keep this relationship in mind so that fans of these existing shows will consider watching *Space Preacher*.

Affecting discourse in the public square: Social media and online news sources are digital representations of the public square. My goal is to acquire 2,000 followers, likes, and shares total on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Currently this project has 260, despite the film and website not being available for viewing yet. I am monitoring how often online posts related to the film are viewed and shared. The film may be reviewed following an appearance at a festival, and that would be another appearance in the public square.

Project Launch Plan

Project Description

My NPO is “There is a profound misunderstanding among religious ‘nones’ in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in various media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.” My project is to create a film that presents a Christian perspective and would be of interest to religious “nones”.

Audience

The intended audience of this project is religious “nones”. Religious “nones” will be included in creating the film, and social media will be used in attempting to engage with other religious “nones” in the launch of the film and after the film is shown in festivals or theaters or home streaming.

Development Plan

Currently I have a short script, a full script, original theme music, and a mock poster. Due to my recent physical issues and financial restraints, I intend to produce the short script first and use it to raise money for the full script. (Many independent films start out as shorts that are later developed into full theatrical-length films, for example, *Napoleon Dynamite*.) I will have to take the following steps twice—once for the short script and then again for the full script.

I recently completed an example scene from the film, which I can use in marketing and fundraising. I am currently working with a professional filmmaker/producer on improving the script. The next steps for me will be hiring a professional artist to create marketing materials and breaking down the script scene by scene to create a full list of sets, wardrobe, equipment, etc. that are needed for the short film.

Steps to make the film:

1. Pre-pre-production (Short Script: Complete by April 1)
 - a. The script should be reviewed by a handful of professional and non-professional script readers, at least half of whom should be “nones”, and rewrites made in light of their input.
 - b. A professional artist should be tapped to make a professional poster and art that can be used in marketing the film.
2. Pre-production (Short Script: Complete by May 1)

- a. Script breakdown: The script needs to be broken down scene by scene for what locations and sets need to be built and requirements for cast, crew, makeup, wardrobe, special effects, equipment, music, vehicles, animals, etc.
 - b. Locations must be scouted.
 - c. Necessary props must be built or acquired.
 - d. Cast/crew must be recruited. Actors must be auditioned and hired.
 - e. Costumes must be designed and fitted.
- 3. Production (Short Script: Complete by June 1)
 - a. Scenes need to be broken down, shot by shot, and a shooting schedule must be created based on scene needs, including actor, crew, and location availability.
 - b. Film will be shot according to the shooting schedule.
 - c. Space scenes involving models will be shot separately from the rest of the film. (May be done concurrently).
- 4. Post-production (Short Script: Complete by July 1)
 - a. Shots must be ordered in the correct sequence and edited.
 - b. Sound effects and incidental music will be recorded and mixed into the soundtrack.
 - c. A trailer to advertise the film will be created.
 - d. Opening/ending titles will be added to the film.
- 5. Marketing/Release/Feedback & Discussion (Short Script: Complete by August 1)
 - a. Film will be submitted to various film festivals. (This can be done prior to the film being completely finished.)
 - b. A website dedicated to the film will be completed and available.
 - c. Trailers and scenes will be released online for feedback from "nones" and to encourage discussion about ideas in the film. Bonus videos with actors and crew may also be released online for this purpose.

Development Process

The success of a film is primarily judged by how many people watch it; therefore, hard numbers will be crucial. If the film is shown at a festival or in theaters or via streaming, the number of viewers will be provided to me. If it's primarily shown online, via website or YouTube, I will also have those numbers. My goal is 100,000 viewers. However, those will be general audience numbers, rather than specifically "nones". I will conduct online surveys to see how "nones" specifically respond to it. I will ask responders A) if they enjoyed it, and B) what appealed to them, and C) would they recommend it to a friend, and D) their religious affiliation (if any). This will be useful information for further projects. I will also host a viewing at a local theater and ask similar questions of the audience. I will monitor how often online posts related to the film are viewed and shared, since online posts are figuratively a public square. If the film is reviewed, that is another appearance in the public square.

Appendix A: The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

In my research I will intentionally listen to a diverse array of voices and carefully consider their perspective.

NPO Statement

There is a profound misunderstanding among religious “nones” in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused by misrepresentation from the media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.

NPO Scope And Constraints

Because mass media and popular culture are massive topics with many influences and manifested differently worldwide, I will concentrate my focus on American film and television and how they affect Americans, particularly religious “nones”. By the end of this doctorate program, I will draft guidelines to assist Christian content creators in positively affecting culture. I will also produce a film script (and hopefully a film) to demonstrate proof of concept. A film-ready script would cost around \$120 to create. The cost of producing a film would vary. Because Texas is a right to work state (i.e., no union affiliation required), I can utilize deferred pay contracts or payment waivers to pay cast and crew willing to work on spec (or friends willing to work for free). Producing an independent film here can reasonably be done for around \$60,000 plus deferred pay contracts and there are a variety of ways available to raise funds for such a project.

NPO Context

My ministry context is Americans who both watch films or TV and participate in media or social media, regardless of education, race, or religion. This demographic skews toward young adults in their 20s and 30s and toward those who have at least some college education. Race and religion do not appear to be major factors. The goal is to encourage honest conversations about the Christian faith among “nones” and believers in public forums.

Root Causes

Authentic Christian/biblical perspectives are rare in popular culture, particularly in American television and film. Christians themselves may contribute to this problem. Some Christian leaders deliberately misrepresent their religion because they seek to grow the number

of their followers. The Christian faith gets watered down because discipleship is difficult and unpopular. Christian media content tends toward inauthenticity, presenting Christian characters that are too perfect or storylines that are derivative, overly-simplistic, or obviously preachy/manipulative. Popular culture may also contribute to the problem, as Christian worldviews are no longer valued and pop culture tends toward narcissism. Finally, there are those who are hostile to Christianity and intentionally spread misinformation about its beliefs and practices.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my discovery workshops included a musician/high school teacher, a seminary student, a small business owner, a former military serviceman, a child nutritionist, a musician/audio engineer, a musician/realtor, and an actor. All of them are local to the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Age, race, and religion vary, but the majority are active Christian churchgoers who engage “nones” on a regular basis. Half of them are involved in producing or sharing media/social media content.

One-On-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviewees included a musician/podcaster (who self-identifies as a “none”), a film scholar, and a film actor/director.

3-5 Key Biblical Texts

Paul in Athens: Listening and Interacting with Those of Other Beliefs (Acts 17:16-34); Samuel’s Farewell Speech: Transparent Leadership & Its Responsibilities (1 Samuel 12:1-5, 23); The Authentic Christian Life + Our Redemption Story (Colossians 1:3-13); The Great Commission: Going Out & About with a Purpose (Matthew 28:18-20); Believers as Salt & Light in the World (Matthew 5:13-16)

Academic Resources

For a theological perspective, H. Richard Niebuhr’s “Christ and Culture” is an obvious starting point, while D. A. Carson’s “Christ and Culture Revisited” is a useful revision and adaptation. It would be a good idea to consider the work of a handful of American filmmakers who employ religious themes in their films for general audiences, notably Scott Derrickson, Terrence Malick, and Martin Scorsese. Investigating the field of film semiotics would be useful in interpreting imagery in existing films and in effectively conveying meaning in my own film. Also helpful would be consulting the work of critics and commentators who approach film and popular culture from a Christian perspective, for example Alissa Wilkinson and Jeffrey Overstreet. Think Christian (thinkchristian.reframemedia.com) and Christ and Pop Culture

(christandpopculture.com) are websites offering articles and podcasts from various contributors viewing popular culture from a Christian perspective.

Appendix A-A

Discovery Workshop Description

Due to last minute scheduling issues with my stakeholders, I held two workshops on two consecutive days: Saturday and Sunday, October 24 & 25, 2020. We met in person in the back room of Italiano's, a local restaurant, from 11am-1pm on Saturday and 5-7pm on Sunday. I invited stakeholders of various ages, races, and religious backgrounds with an emphasis on those involved in popular culture or media and social media content creation and sharing. The stakeholders who attended my discovery workshops included a musician/high school teacher, a seminary student, a small business owner, a former military serviceman, a child nutritionist, a musician/audio engineer, a musician/realtor, and an actor. Two attended on Saturday and six on Sunday. We ate a meal together and used my Discovery Workshop Participant Guide to guide our sessions.

Discovery Statement

The first workshop developed this NPO: We've discovered there's conflicting information about Christianity caused by misinformation and not knowing what's true. If solved, we will see changed lives and perspectives reflected in popular culture.

The second workshop generally agreed with the NPO of the first workshop, but wanted to clarify misinformation as being sometimes by accident and sometimes deliberate. Christians themselves do not present an authentic portrayal of Christian beliefs, so we shouldn't expect to see an authentic portrayal in popular culture. Then there are people antagonistic toward Christianity who might present Christian beliefs in a negative light or intentionally spread misinformation. There were wavering opinions on whether the problem could (or should) be addressed and whether there could be any objective measure of success.

Critical Insights From Discovery Workshop

- "Popular culture" is a vague term that means different things to different people.
- Religious "nones" and Christians share quite a bit in terms of day-to-day life and life goals.
- We live in a culture where it is difficult to determine what is "real" or "true".
- Affecting popular culture may be difficult or impossible.
- "Success" is best described as changed lives.

One-On-One Interview Discoveries

"Nones" want to see how the Christian faith changes people, not representations of idealized, perfect Christians. They need to see Christians practice what they preach rather than hear them preach.

Technically, there is a difference between popular culture and mass culture. Popular culture is bottom-up, created by regular people who like something or invent something. It tends to be organic and natural. Mass culture is imposed from above by an organization and is agenda-driven—typically to make money. It is generally contrived and manufactured. Creating content, by necessity, tends to be this second type.

There is no singular genuine Christian perspective. It is better to think in terms of Christian perspectives. However, there needs to be boundaries to separate “true” Christian perspectives from false ones.

Many Christian groups face popular culture with a fight or flight mentality, as if popular culture were the enemy, or seek to control it. These mindsets create a divide between Christians and non-Christians. Instead, Christians should be present in the world (i.e., salt), less judgmental and divisive, open to communication, and consciously self-evaluating to make sure they are on the correct path. However, Christians still need to be mindful that various worldly and spiritual forces may actively fight against them in their pursuit to be “salt” and influencers of culture.

Culture represents the collective self-identity and desires of a group of people. The best way to change culture may be to change the hearts of people.

Synthesis

Various forces are at work to make intentional change or influence on popular culture difficult to achieve. Some of these forces come from Christians themselves, while others are created by outsiders resistant to Christian influence. Christians need to be mindful of the roadblocks they themselves have created. Authenticity and honesty on the part of Christians are required, both in what they say and in what they do, in order to speak convincingly to “nones”. Intentional and respectful dialogue between Christians and non-Christians are a vital step in influencing popular culture in a positive way. Changing popular culture and changing lives complement one another—change culture and you will change lives and vice versa. Seeking to dominate popular culture is the wrong approach; instead, Christians should focus on being a godly influence.

Next Steps

Popular culture is such a massive topic that I must narrow my focus. Instead of popular culture in general I will specifically focus on American film and television as a vehicle for change and social media as a place to look for evidence of change. Here are some future avenues of research: How do people decide what is true? How does media influence the thoughts and behavior of people? How should we separate genuine Christian perspectives from false ones? How are Christians currently (and effectively) being “salt”?

Discovery Workshop Documentation

A copy of the 4-page Discovery Workshop Participant Guide begins on the next page, followed by notes from each workshop.



Discovery Workshop

Oct. 24, 2020

Discovery Workshop Purpose & Goals:

- Articulate the boundaries of the primary audience
- Gain a better understanding of the Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) affecting the primary audience
- Identify potential root causes of the NPO
- Determine how a solution may impact the audience

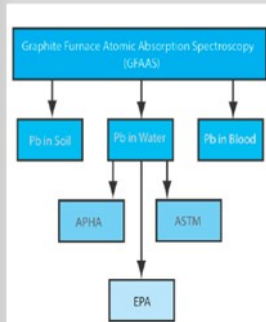
Lead by Joanna Wirtz as part of the DMin program at Portland Seminary at George Fox University

Discovery Workshop Ground Rules

Thank you for joining me in my discovery workshop! Once we get started, please follow these ground rules:

- Put away the cell phones. Let's avoid distractions if we can.
- Avoid side conversations. Let's all be part of the conversation.
- Participate! You have a lot of valuable things to say based on your personal experience and knowledge. Your opinion matters. Speak up!
- Be respectful. Let other people speak. They have valuable things to say, too.
- Agree to disagree. We're exploring an issue, not trying to argue. Tolerate other people's ideas without being judgmental.
- Don't take this discussion personally. We are discussing and judging ideas, not people.





“Nones” include a wide range of people with a wide variety of religious or spiritual beliefs and experiences. Examples of “nones”:

- An atheist;
- A formerly religious or spiritual person;
- A person who believes in God but not in organized religion;
- A religious or spiritual person who doesn’t attend a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque.

Part I: Atomize

What is popular culture?

Part II: The Pains & Gains of Nones

A “none” is someone who doesn’t consider himself/herself part of a particular religious tradition. Put yourself in the mental space of a “none” and ask yourself the following questions:

- What does a bad day look like for you?
- What are you afraid of?
- What concerns or thoughts keep you up at night?
- What stands in your way of a successful life?
- What are your rules?
- What are your beliefs?
- What are your assumptions?
- What do you want and aspire to?
- How do you measure success?
- How would you benefit from knowing what Christianity/ the Bible actually teaches? How would you benefit from knowing what it means to follow Christ?
- What benefits could organized religion offer you?

Part III: NPO Definition

An NPO is a Need, Problem, or Opportunity that we want to address. A Need represents a lack of something. A Problem represents an existing hurtful situation or issue. An Opportunity represents the possibility to create something new or make an improvement in an existing situation.

Today we are going to examine the following NPO statement, looking for ways to improve, reframe, or re-write it in order to make it accurate and helpful.

“A genuine Christian/biblical perspective is nearly absent in popular culture. There is a profound misunderstanding about what it means to follow Christ, which is caused by lack of exposure to this biblical concept. If solved, it would mean better representation of the Christian perspective in the public square.”

A good NPO statement generally looks like this:

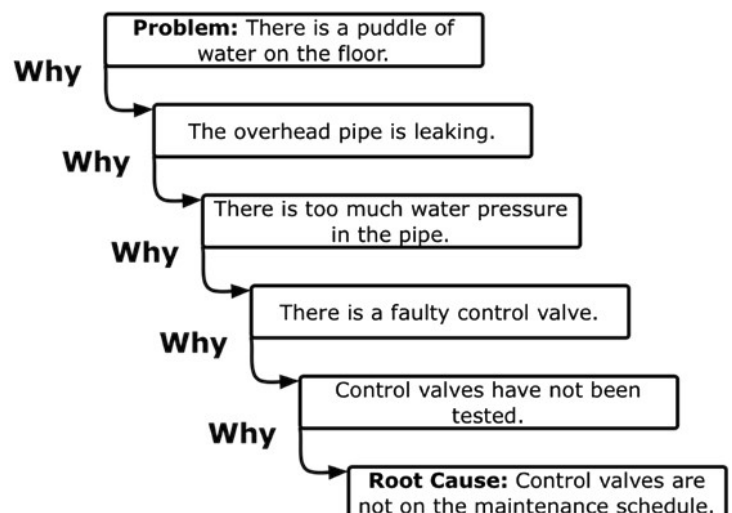
“Considering <audience>, we’ve discovered <NPO>, which is caused by <root cause>. If solved/ addressed / taken advantage of, it would mean <outcome>.”

Questions to answer regarding this proposed NPO:

- What is the key issue we are trying to address? Why is it important?
- Who is this NPO for? (Who does it help or who needs to do the work to solve it?)
- What social or cultural factors affect this NPO?
- What evidence do we have that indicates solving this NPO is worth the effort?
- Can we consider the Need, Problem, or Opportunity in a different way?
Can we understand or restate the key issue in a different way?

Part IV: 5 Whys

1. Review the NPO and ask yourself why this is a Need, Problem, or Opportunity. Write your answer on a sticky note.
2. Look at your answer and ask yourself “Why is _____ true?” Write your answer on a sticky note.
3. Repeat step 2 three more times to get your “root cause”.



Part V: Atomize Review

How would various aspects popular culture be affected if our NPO is successfully addressed or solved?

Part VI: Think / Say / Feel / Do

Pretend that we are in the future and we successfully addressed or solved our NPO. On sticky notes, answer the following questions:

- What are Nones thinking?
- What are Nones saying?
- What are Nones feeling?
- What are Nones doing?

Add these to the flip chart and discuss these responses. Then discuss the following question:

- Why wouldn't they think / say / feel / do that now?

Conclusion

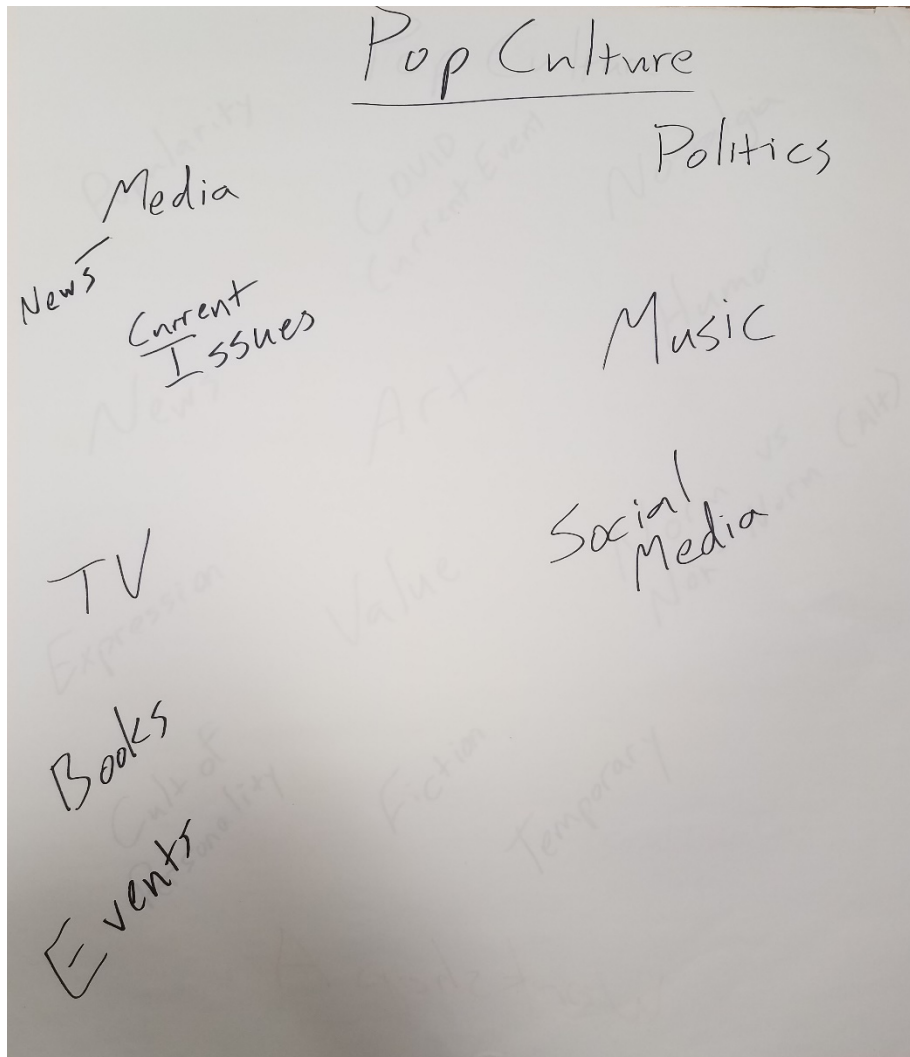
Questions to consider:

- As I consider researching this NPO, what should I be sure to examine?
- As I consider researching this NPO, what are potential blind spots that I best explore?
- As I consider researching this NPO, what are potential pitfalls that I best avoid?

Thank you for participating in this workshop.

I will create a one-page summary of this workshop and send it to everyone. Please respond with any further thoughts or ideas you might have.

Notes From The First Workshop:



Key Issues for Nones:

- Need Jesus
- Need new perspective/attitude/worldview
- Need clear understanding of God/Jesus
- Misunderstanding/misconstrued pictures of God
- Self-centered
- Need facts like history, science
- Christianity hidden, "Who do I trust?"
- "Realness" of Christianity
- Main problem: Conflicting information. "What's real?"

Nones

Pains

Gains

Bad Day?

- Wake up late
- Wake/forget to turn off
- Car won't start
- Traffic so the way to work
- No job
- Kids/school issues
- Too much stuff at the end of your day

A Bad Day Means I live a lot of anger and Depression.

Afraid of?

- Failure
- Health
- Family
- Depression
- Lack of success
- Money

I'm afraid of ²

losing my family and being alone

Can't keep up with?

- Family
- Health
- Friends
- Self
- Work

Getting through life and sustaining my goals.

3

Shall I say of success?

- Ours
- Boss
- Lack of money
- Lack of support
- Lack of time

The pains of life

The pains of the identity of my family.

4

Rules?

- I'm #1
- Others come after me
- I'll help others when I'm more successful

To live a life worthy and S. pleasing to the Lord.

I believe the purpose of life is to obey God in everything we do.

Beliefs?

- Spiritual but no God
- God is not real
- God is multiple and answers our needs

What if I agree to?

- Make lots of money
- Be successful
- Have all the things

I want to ^{8.}

Be rich live a life worthy have a family and Retire

Assumptions?

- The only one who can help me is me
- I have to do everything on my own
- Look out for me alone

Human Success?

- Look at my bank account
- See my Instagram
- Check out how much I have
- See everywhere I go

Success is ^{9.}

Based on how much money you have and how wealthy you are.

I assume I ^{7.}

Need to live life get a job and die.

Can't keep Christ?

- Why?
- How much of trials
- Tribulations
- Deep impact of life
- "Not just about bread alone"

It would ^{10.}

Allow me to meet more and be influenced

My Beliefs ^{6.}

are there no God. I believe in what makes me happy.

Beliefs of other Religions?

- Grace
- Love
- Power
- Compassion
- Understanding

Allow me ^{11.}

to make more friends to share myself with. It's all about me.

Social connections materialism

self-centered isolated singular focus

getting by

(Summary: General issues are isolationism, materialism, anxiety, being self-centered, and struggling to get by. Nones have a high number of virtual social connections and generally have a singular focus, e.g. family or career or social connections, etc.)

Social/Cultural Factors:

- Key issue is affected by pop culture

- Media/Pop Culture affects how people think
- People told what to think, opposition to free thinking

Evidence of Success:

- Affected lives, changed lives
- Different purpose
- Churches changing people/community

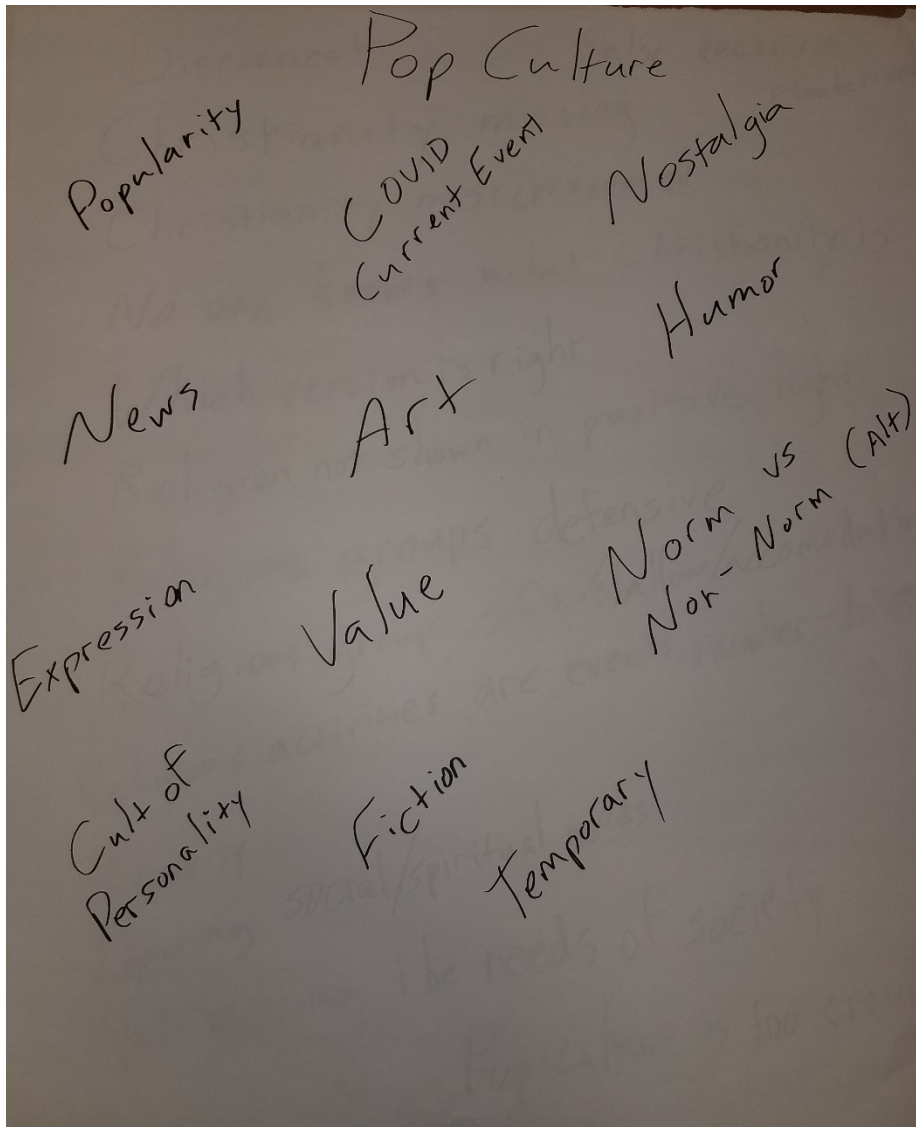
New NPO:

We've discovered there's conflicting info about Christianity caused by misinformation and not knowing what's true. If solved, we will see changed lives and perspectives reflected in popular culture.

Consider:

- Monitor Media: what's been done, does Christianity change lives/media, how does secular media influence people versus how does Christian media influence people
- Potential blind spots: Look for the story behind the story of success/failure, How do people believe what is factual?
- Potential pitfalls: Reliable/unreliable information, partial stories, lies, people believing what they're told

Notes From The Second Workshop:



About "Nones":

- Beliefs: do good to others, Golden Rule, only me has my back
- Wants: survival, to matter, validation, success, make others happy
- Success looks like: living comfortably, big home, good night's sleep, a day of genuine rest and no one asking me things

Key Issues:

Disconnect
False doctrine
Flanderized
Christianity missing
Christianity misrepresented
No one knows what Christianity is
Which version is right
Religion not shown in positive light
Religious groups defensive
Religious groups soft/shallow/accomodating
Religious activities are events/number-driven
Hypocrisy
Ignoring social/spiritual needs
Not meeting the needs of society
Pop culture is too crowded

5 Whys:

Why? No one knows what Christianity is... why? Because of a disconnect. why? a combination of lack of unity in the church + a social disconnect = 5 a whole!

Why? Pastors too scared to take a stand for core biblical values why? Too concerned with quantity over quality why? Heart is wrongly motivated.

Christian's Missing why? No one is looking for Jesus why? No need for truth

Religion is not shed in a positive light.

Because they have negatively impacted ~~some~~ people. Not all people

The wrong people use religion as an excuse or crutch

Because they can't face their own guilt or shame

The mental maturity is not there They never grew up + accepted responsibility

1- No one knows what Christianity is...

2- Because Christianity has been watered down & diluted its power & authority

3- Because Christian Leaders were tempted with an easier less painful Gospel

4- Because Christian Leaders were tempted & started to crave the immediate "Well Days" from man

5- Because true Christianity / Discipleship is not popular & leads to death. Not willing to see the eternal "Well Days"

Why? ~~Is there room in pop-culture for Christianity?~~ Is there room in pop-culture for Christianity? why? because pop culture is inherently narcissistic

Why? pop culture elevates the person as a symbol the person's value ~~is the person's value~~ comes from what people think they should be

Why? Because the ~~current~~ religious paradigms are no longer upheld

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY
① why? No understands the true points of Christianity
② why? People understand the Bible contextually
③ why? don't understand Jewish cultural context

Why? ~~Microscopic~~ ~~meaning~~ ~~lost~~ in the Bible life not invoked until late in life

(Summary of top three responses: No one knows what Christianity really is because the hearts of Christian leaders are wrongly motivated, watering down the faith in order to seek quantity over quality. There is no room in popular culture for Christianity because pop culture is narcissistic and religious paradigms are no longer valued. No one knows what Christianity is because it's watered down due to the unpopular requirements of Christian discipleship.)

Successful Change Looks Like:

- Not possible, pop culture too temporary
- Only possible if overshadowed existing misconceptions
- Change starts in churches, being more faithful and not skimming issues, then trickles into pop culture
- Teaching true attributes of God leads to fewer negative behaviors because needs are being met
- Biblically accurate memes
- Memes saying I care about you, not that I want to argue or want to manipulate you
- Can only change a little, maybe 30% tops, but requires a major event/catastrophe
- Actual representation of authentic Christians with struggles
- Requires seeing Jesus in a new light and not marketed to Christians, including his struggles (pop culture must be entertaining)
- Positively changed kids

Be sure to examine:

- Seek neutral opinions
- Why change? Church used to control culture, Church weaponized/misused it?
- Effect of information overload and confirmation bias
- Is pop culture evil, trying to take over the world versus Christianity taking over? Or is it filtering out fakes?
- Did Church create "nones" by excluding certain people (gatekeeping)?

Potential blind spots:

- Nones who see no need for religion/Christianity

Potential pitfalls:

- Popular/different perspectives overtaking biblical perspectives, creating false doctrine

One-Page Post-Workshop Message To Stakeholders

For stakeholders who attended the first workshop: Here is my summary of the workshop from the other day. If you have anything to add, let me know. Thanks for helping me out with this project.

Discovery Workshop, "Christianity, Nones, and Popular Culture"

Workshop A: October 24, 2020

What is popular culture?

Workshop A: media (ex. news), politics, current issues, music, tv, social media, books, events (book signings, comic conventions, etc.)

Issues affecting "Nones"

Workshop A: General issues are isolationism, materialism, anxiety, being self-centered, and struggling to get by. Nones have a high number of virtual social connections and generally have a singular focus, e.g. family or career or social connections, etc.

Key issues affecting Christianity, Nones, and popular culture

Workshop A: There's a lot of conflicting information—how do we know what's real?, There are misconstrued pictures of God in popular culture. Media/popular culture affects how people think and tell people how to think, standing in opposition to free thinking.

What would successfully addressing the key issue(s) look like?

Workshop A: Changed lives

A Proposed NPO

Workshop A: We've discovered there's conflicting information about Christianity caused by misinformation and not knowing what is true. If solved, we will see changed lives and perspectives reflected in popular culture.

What needs to be considered while researching this NPO?

Workshop A: Monitor the media and what's been done through it. Does Christianity change lives through media? How does secular pop culture influence people versus how does Christian media influence people?

What are potential blind spots in this research?

Workshop A: What is the story behind the story of "success" and "failure"? How do people believe what is factual?

What are potential pitfalls in this research?

Workshop A: Be aware of reliable/unreliable information. Beware of partial stories and lies. Beware of people believing what they're told.

For stakeholders who attended the second workshop: Here is my summary of the workshop from the other day. If you have anything to add, let me know. Thanks for helping me out with this project.

Discovery Workshop, "Christianity, Nones, and Popular Culture"

Workshop B: October 25, 2020

What is popular culture?

Workshop B: popularity, current events (ex. COVID), nostalgia, news, art, humor, expression, value, norm vs non-norm (or alternative), cult of personality, fiction, temporary

Issues affecting "Nones"

Workshop B: Nones believe they should do good to others and the Golden Rule, but also that they can only rely on themselves to have their back. Nones want survival, validation, success, to feel that they matter, and to make others happy. A successful life looks like living comfortably, owning a big home, getting adequate rest.

Key issues affecting Christianity, Nones, and popular culture

Workshop B: No one knows what Christianity really is because the hearts of Christian leaders are wrongly motivated, watering down the faith in order to seek quantity over quality. There is no room in popular culture for Christianity because pop culture is narcissistic and religious paradigms are no longer valued. No one knows what Christianity is because it's watered down due to the unpopular requirements of Christian discipleship.

What would successfully addressing the key issue(s) look like?

Workshop B: Intentional change is (likely) impossible. But if success did happen, you might see fewer negative behaviors, biblically accurate and/or compassionate memes, authentic representation of Christians and their struggles, positively changed kids

What needs to be considered while researching this NPO?

Workshop B: Seek neutral opinions. Perhaps change is undesirable because the church has misused or weaponized popular culture in the past. What is the effect of information overload and confirmation bias? Is popular culture an evil influence trying to replace Christianity? Did the church create Nones by excluding certain people (gatekeeping)?

What are potential blind spots in this research?

Workshop B: Many Nones don't see a need for better information about Christianity.

What are potential pitfalls in this research?

Workshop B: Popular or different perspectives may overtake the biblical perspective, creating false doctrine.

One-On-One Interview Documentation

1x1 Interview: A

What is Pop Culture?

I agree with the general assessment of both workshops, though I wouldn't categorize COVID as pop culture. The fact that Workshop B included cult of personality is interesting. While I don't have the exposure to it, I'd imagine that the Christian community isn't without a number of these things, with some crossover into the mainstream/secular world.

If I had to disagree with anything here, it might be the idea that modern pop culture hasn't had the impact that previous generations' pop culture has had. Things don't have the same staying power that they used to. Perhaps I'm blurring the lines between pop culture and nostalgia.

Issues Affecting "Nones"?

I'd agree more with Workshop B than I would Workshop A. The first sentence of Workshop B sounds about right, especially when you get into the atheist or agnostic none.

I'd disagree with Workshop A's assessment. This reminds me of the typical sermon we'd hear back in our High School days of the non-believer/secular world stereotype. Materialism, anxiety, self-centeredness, and struggling to get by aren't unique to the non-believer. I'd also strongly disagree that they have a singular focus. I think that's a pretty dangerous line of thought. As I fit the description of a "none", I take that personally, at least my interpretation of it.

I don't necessarily agree that a successful life looks like living comfortably, owning a big home, or getting adequate rest. A. Is one a good parent, husband, friend, worker? What is one's impact to

the world around them? How can one help others? Those ideas aren't unique to Christianity. The perspective that "nones" want nothing more than the above is short-sighted.

Nones are affected by the same issues that affect Christians, with the difference being that Christians tend to find themselves in a community environment, find comfort and prayer, and are strengthened by it. "Nones" can find this as well, but a church environment lends itself to finding it easier as you're already surrounded by people who, at least on the surface, share the same interest.

Key Issues Affecting Christianity, Nones, and Pop Culture

I agree with Workshop A in that there's a lot of conflicting information and it's hard to know what's real. God has certainly been twisted, misrepresented, misconstrued, and plenty of other words in TV shows, movies, and other media.

I also strongly agree with Workshop B's statement that the hearts of Christian leaders are wrongly motivated. Look at the most recent election. How many "leaders" were promoting Donald Trump? Yes, I'm hardly a fan, but promoting a man who's made a career out of deceit, sowing hatred and division as President, and, well, the list is long. From my perspective, Christian leaders are painting who to vote for based on one significant driving factor: the unborn. I don't want to turn this into a political discourse because it's not my area of expertise, but there's a lot of ideas that Jesus wouldn't be too happy with and would likely fly in the face of if he were physically on this earth. Ultimately, people focus on the hottest of topics and sweep the rest under the rug. Unfortunately, politics is forefront in pop culture now.

I disagree that Media affects how people think, as most people can differentiate between fiction and real life. No one is watching/reading Harry Potter and looking for guidance on who they should be, trying to cast spells, or anything else. Social Media is the bigger culprit...social media and the lack of critical thought because a headline or a meme fits our social narrative.

What would successfully addressing the key issue(s) look like?

Over the last few years, I've really latched onto the old (is it old?) idea of "Salt of the earth". What would it look like? A more even approach that is viewed by the "nones" as less judgmental, less "holier-than-thou", and less divisive. Accepting other people's points of view doesn't mean you're agreeing with them. Just as a Christian accepts that a friend or loved one doesn't believe in God, you can accept a difference of opinion. You'd hear less fire and brimstone speech over the sanctity of this, expecting others to subscribe to the tenets of your beliefs even if they don't share it, and see less hypocrisy (for thee but not for me). You'd find Christianity finding ways to fit in between the cracks of a fractured world rather than trying to carve their own space in it. Did Christ not join the sinners?

A Proposed NPO

Nothing to add here.

What Needs to be Considered While Researching This NPO

I agree with Workshop B and the whole “seek neutral opinions”.

I disagree with Workshop A’s “does Christianity change lives through media”. Brennan Manning (the dude at the beginning of that DC Talk “What if I Stumble?” song) said it best, “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

Christian media is presenting a “perfect” representation of what Christianity is. Christians can strive to live up to it, but that’s not what “nones” want to see. They want to see how Christianity has changed a Christian, not what they aspire to be. That’s not relatable. Christians need to lead by example, not concoct examples. In the end, Christian media is how I view a typical church: picking and choosing what fits their agenda and narrative instead of exploring an idea through a complete thought of a passage. That’s how Christian media feels and I often find it disingenuous.

I also disagree that pop culture is an evil influence trying to replace Christianity. Pop culture is the result of our society’s past. I think that line of thought wanders too dangerously to the persecution complex that I feel happens too often in Christianity. “We’re being attacked!!!” when that’s not the case at all. One can’t take another’s choice as an attack because it differs. That attitude is one I find that turns me off the most.

What are blind spots/pitfalls in this research?

People unwilling to explore faulty thinking. How can the world be changed instead of also asking “how can we change? What about our view is incorrect? How can it be adjusted as well?” Just because the world is sick doesn’t mean that Christians aren’t sick too. Salvation isn’t an instant fix, nor does it make one instantly correct.

1x1 Interview: B

On the NPO: 50-150 years ago there was more awareness of the Bible, but is today’s world less Christian in attitude or ethics? People aren’t compelled to go to church anymore, but they can worship however they want. We still have social ills, but those ills may be different now.

Popular vs Mass Culture: Popular is bottom-up while Mass is top-down, but those terms can be used interchangeably. Both A & B workshops seem on point when it comes to describing popular culture.

Nones: Struggles of Nones are pretty much the same as non-Nones.

When it comes to popular culture, we see what we look for. Nones see the Christian perspective in popular culture and talk about it, but they notice it less often than Christians do. For example, my None friends comment on messiah motifs.

Being forced or preachy undercut intended messages to Nones.

Better education and more references to Christianity makes popular culture better and more interesting.

Changes in perspective/worldview might happen, but it would be difficult to measure "success".

Even Christians have different understandings of what is a genuine or biblical Christian perspective, so no one can agree on what the "genuine" Christian perspective is.

Something to consider: Millions of Christians on each side of the election felt their side was the most Christian.

Potential blind spots: Nones are not monolithic.

Potential pitfalls: What **is** the biblical perspective?

Personally, 15 years ago I thought Christians were very different from each other (Wesleyan perspective) but now I don't view them as different because of Lutheran views of sanctification.

1x1 Interview: C

There is confusion about Christianity out there, and it depends on what you think Christianity is. False information is deliberately put out there for various reasons, such as political ends. Defining Christianity is part of the problem, so you need an agreed-upon definition of "true" Christianity.

I prefer Workshop A's view of popular culture. Media and news have a lot of propaganda (particularly the government propaganda machine) that may become popular culture.

There are two types of popular culture: authentic and manipulated. Authentic popular culture is bottom-up, organic, and natural, for example something people like and it just catches on (viral video, zipper coin purses). Manipulated popular culture is top-down, manufactured, contrived, propaganda-driven, and potentially corporate brainwashing. It's driven by vested interests such as money. An example of this type of popular culture is an overly-promoted artist of only so-so quality. A lot of Christian content is of this second type.

Publishing content, by necessity, might be top-down.

Individual art, like perhaps an indie film written and made by one person may be more authentic.

My latest film's distributor is very broad and a better place for authentic content than, say, Thomas Nelson.

Useful read: David R. Hawkins, "Power vs Force" and "Truth vs Falsehood"

I think true followers of Jesus make few attempts to control popular culture as popular culture is typically driven by need for money, fame, sex and it can be very unpredictable, and fad-centric. "This world is not my home."

As mentioned in the recent movie, "The Social Dilemma," the technocrat designers of social media platforms have admitted that they exploited the addictive tendencies of man and made devices and platforms to be addictive. So is popular culture simply a 'fleshing out' of man's ego-centric addictive behavior?

Regarding resistance Christians face influencing culture: When I was a kid, I was told that politicians were corrupt. Don't go into politics. I was also discouraged from going into business. I was told not to consider working in Hollywood because that was a selfish, corrupt desire.

There is a war of the secular man on "Christian" government. The war on Christianity for the sake of hatred for Christ in general is another. The war of "Christians" who are aggressively moving against the world is yet another.

Another potential problem/solution: Is Christianity at war? If so, with whom and what's the solution? If it's an age-old war with the devil then we have to consider that the nemesis is our primary antagonist, preventing us from affecting culture in a positive way.

Should we attempt to control or influence the culture? The Church has a track record of trying to control the world through force (Constantine, Papacy, Sects, Inquisition, etc), which has often begged an opposite reaction from the world.

I'm not sure Christianity has been defined or even can be except as by the observer. It may be impossible to prove that true Christianity is not represented or having an impact. Who defines its parameters?

Why is the presence of Christian Culture limited in broader society? Three ideas:

1) Many Christians are content with things as they are. They are not attempting to influence or change popular culture due to comfort, fear, or not believing it's their responsibility to change things.

2) Antagonism of Christ and Christians by the world and other faiths. This makes it difficult for Christians who are attempting to move culture to be heard and seen. Many studios or distributors won't distribute Christian content because they consider it racist, bigoted, or counter to their political agenda. They barely need a reason aside from the aroma of Christ which stinks to them—smells like death. Christianity, no matter how it's defined, has enemies within and without and I believe that this is a primary reason we don't have a larger impact on popular culture.

3) Western Christianity seems somehow very blind to government & intra-church deceptions, (government propaganda, false or error teaching, fads, antagonistic attacks from Marxists, hyperbole, etc...). Despite alleging to know the truth, they can't seem to tell the difference between true and false. Examples: Pattern Theology of the Church of Christ, Seven Mountains theology (driving Christians towards the attempt to control culture, "firing weapons into the enemy's camp," as I heard one guy say)

My assessment is that defining true Christianity is at the heart of your project. It's the litmus test by which you could compare and contrast anything to determine a problem and solution, but is its definition subjective or objective?

Problem: True Christianity cannot or has not been defined.

In short, I believe the world's culture hating Christ is the primary reason we don't have much impact; they block us out, and we tend to move in fear. When they don't block us out, those that are attempting to make an impact are often trying to own or control what the world already has, and I think this is a covetous spirit that's contrary to Jesus' teaching. This affects Christians in governance and in media, etc. I also know numerous missionaries propagating sectarian positionalities that may be harmful to Christ's reputation.

We have enemies within and without, but are we are own worst enemy?

Culture is informed by the hearts and desires and wants of a people, so perhaps changing people and people's hearts could change culture. But in order to do so, they'd have to not hate God, and Christians, and be able to tell the difference between true and false. Otherwise, even their attempts to influence are jaded by delusion, error, false teachings, coveting, power hungry motivations, etc.

Appendix B: NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Research Question

What theological framework, mindset, and methodologies might help Christians who are content creators share Christian perspectives and influence culture in a positive way?

Biblical And Theological Foundations

Content creation is a vital component of life in the twenty first century. Media, social media, art, architecture, music, film, literature, pop culture—these are all mediums through which we convey meaning and ideas. Content creators create new things to say, repurpose old ideas, and find new ways to express them. Content is perpetually in dialogue with culture, both influencing and being influenced by it.

All Scripture is content, produced by God and used by him to give us wisdom, teach us, convict us, correct us, lead us to salvation, and train us in righteousness.³ This content informs and transforms the lives of believers and has been used toward that end for millennia. Nature is also God's content, telling all people of his glory.⁴ God's content forms, informs, and transforms cultures around the world.

We have an example of God's culture creation activity in the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch can be viewed as God creating and implementing a culture for the ancient Israelites. The stories and laws contained within these books created new habits and customs, new ideas and beliefs, and new values that governed ancient Israelite life and religion. They provided origin stories, established the social organization and self-identity of the twelve tribes, and led to important cultural artifacts such as the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. God's content of the Law formed and informed the ancient Israelites' particular culture and continues to form and inform Jewish culture three thousand years later.

Christians who create content can participate in God's culture creating and transforming activity today, and Scripture provides insight on how and why this is possible.

³ Cf 2 Timothy 3:15-17

⁴ Cf Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19-20; 10:18

Christ Is Sovereign Over All Cultures

(Matthew 28:18-20)

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20 [NRSV])

Jesus claims he has been given full authority over heaven and earth and based on this authority he commissions his followers to go out into the world. He gives them the job of making disciples and promises to be with them in their work.

We often think of culture as things of the world that are exclusively of human effort and in opposition to Christ.⁵ However, Jesus claims authority over all things, and he sends his followers out into the world to disciple people living in all nations and cultures. His authority grants him sovereignty over all cultures⁶. He is present with his followers in this disciple-making activity, indicating that his support and authority accompany them. One day Christians will be part of every nation and culture, and it is reasonable to expect that the presence of Jesus with his people will affect the cultures they live in.

God Is Changing Culture (With or Without You)

(Colossians 1:3-14)

Just as [the gospel] is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it. (Colossians 1:6 [NRSV])

In this brief but powerful passage, Paul tells the believers in Colossae the good things he has heard about their spiritual growth, how he prays they will continue to grow, and what the Father and Son have done for us. Paul mentions being filled with gratitude because of the Colossians' faith, but what is truly notable here is the Colossians' lack of agency. Their faith and their love come "from hope laid up for you in heaven" (verse 5). The gospel is growing within them and bearing fruit—with or without their effort or input. Paul never asks the Colossians to do anything. He prays God will fill

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, author of the influential *Christ and Culture*, tries to define "culture" in this way, equating it with the negative aspects of "the world" as described in the New Testament (Niebuhr 2001, 32). However, this definition is problematic because over time Christians and Christian concepts have embedded themselves in Western culture and affected it. It is difficult—probably impossible—to extricate culture from all Christian influence, even in a "post-Christian" society (Carson 2012, 12).

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 63.

them with knowledge, and this knowledge will have them live well, please God, grow fruit, be strengthened, etc. God is expected to do all the real work.

Paul says the gospel is growing around the world and bearing fruit. It is still growing and bearing fruit today, with or without us. Therefore, it is only natural for it to be bearing fruit in our culture. God is the architect of its growth and the guarantor of its success. Success does not depend on us.

Paul ends this passage with a unique narrative-driven description of the gospel:

[Give] thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12-14 [NRSV])

God the Father does all the work in this story. The Father qualifies us, rescues us, and brings us into his son's kingdom. Through his son, he redeems and forgives.

There is no mention of the cross in this retelling of the gospel in verses 12-14, nor any mention of Jesus's name. Instead, Paul tells the familiar story of redemption using powerful metaphors: inheritance, holy people, kingdom of light, rescue, dominion of darkness, kingdom of the son. Paul does not change the heart nor the truth of the gospel, but he feels free to tell it in a different way. It is the same old story told in a new, vivid, and captivating form.

Be You (Matthew 5:13-16)

You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 [NRSV])

Believers do not choose to be salt, nor do they choose to be light. We are these things simply because Jesus says so.

Salt naturally reacts with its environment. It is necessary for life, which is why it was so valued in the ancient world. It was required for certain sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13; Ezekiel 43:24). It purifies, seasons, and preserves.⁷ Like salt, believers will naturally affect the world around them simply by

⁷ M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles on the New Testament; Matthew; Mark*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 181.

being in it. Also, like salt, the world needs us. Finally, like salt, we need to be disbursed throughout the world and not localized in one part of it.

It is the nature and purpose of light to illuminate the world around it. Trying to hide it is foolish—even impossible. Put it under a basket, and the light escapes through the weave. In a similar fashion, the life and work of a believer cannot be hidden away. Believers have a purpose that cannot be hidden: to reveal what is good in the world and allow that goodness to glorify God.

Believers are not called to work hard to be salt and light. We are told to be.⁸

Surviving Culture Change (1 Samuel 12:1-25)

See, here is the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; see, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king. (1 Samuel 12:13-15 [NRSV])

Once acting as prophet, priest, and judge for the people of Israel, Samuel is handing political leadership over to their new king. He invites the people to testify against him in a public forum and offers reparations to anyone he has wronged. After they proclaim his innocence, he reminds them of Israel's history with God under Moses and the judges. Samuel goes on to tell them that if they and their new king follow God then things will go well for them, but if they rebel then God will be against them. Samuel also promises to continue in his prophetic role to pray for them and to teach them what is right.

Samuel's speech marks a significant transition in Israel's history. Israel will no longer be led by prophets and judges but instead be led by a king. The primary focus of his speech is how the lessons Israel has learned in the past and the values and religious beliefs Israel has held should remain in place despite this transition. The idea of judgeship may be obsolete, but their covenant with God is not. The covenant still applies to this new era of kingship.⁹

One thing we learn from Samuel is a particular way of living and working in the public eye. In today's culture the value of what we say will be weighed against who we are. Authenticity and personal integrity are vital, but perfection is not. In a public forum Samuel invites anyone with accusations to

⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁹ Bruce C. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Numbers - Samuel*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1064.

come forward and promises to make it right. Christians should share his willingness to be held accountable for their actions and to offer reparations for their missteps.

A second takeaway from Samuel is that despite culture changes and regime changes, our historic faith is something to hold on to. Following God may look different in various stages of human history, but the necessity of following God will not change. Culture is always in a state of change, and these days it can change quickly. Some things Christians do are temporary cultural affectations and may be altered or dismissed, but our core values—such as loving God and loving one’s neighbor—should not change. Christians have a responsibility to recognize and uphold the values that should be kept in times of change.

Prayer is foundational to Samuel’s prophetic role. In Colossians 1, it is foundational to Paul’s pastoral role. It should also be foundational to the roles Christians take in society.

Creating Content for Other Cultures and Beliefs (Acts 17:16-34)

Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22b-23 [NRSV])

While waiting on his Christian co-workers in Athens, Paul is disturbed by all the idols in the city around him. He debates with both religious people and secular philosophers. The philosophers bring him to the Areopagus, where new ideas in Athens are shared and discussed. Paul shares the gospel in an unconventional way, citing popular philosophers rather than Scripture. Some of his listeners think what he says is ridiculous, some want to hear more, and some become believers.

Paul could just wait for his companions, and no one would criticize him for it. But when he sees the many idols of the city, Paul is disturbed. Literally “the spirit within him” is disturbed¹⁰, a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work within him and leading him to act. He carefully investigates these idols and begins debating people in the city. It is important to note that he is not belligerent or disrespectful in his debate. The Greek used is συμβάλλω (sympallō), which in Luke/Acts typically indicates a productive, harmonious exchange.¹¹

At some point Paul has studied philosophy, either in his education prior to arriving in Athens or while debating with Athenian philosophers. Speaking at the Areopagus, Paul demonstrates his

¹⁰ Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 244.

¹¹ Ibid.

knowledge of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophy that was popular in Athens at the time and cleverly uses what he has learned to express the gospel in words his audience will understand. He quotes liberally from philosophers and never once quotes Scripture. However, nothing he says contradicts the truths of Christianity or Scripture. He searches for and uses nuggets of truth in the Athenians' religious and philosophical beliefs in order to convince them of the truths he knows from Scripture.

In Paul's actions in Acts 17:16-34, we find a model for interacting with people with alternate beliefs to ours. Paul studies their culture, beliefs, and philosophy. He finds what is correct in their belief systems in addition to what is wrong. He respectfully presents an alternate point of view—his view, based on Scripture—using their own beliefs and their own language and their preferred mode of presenting new ideas.

Paul models the concepts of "cultural keys" and "redemptive analogies". Missionary Don Richardson promoted these concepts for use when presenting the gospel to other cultures. According to this missional theology, God embeds truths about himself, or "keys", in every culture that will allow the people of that culture to "unlock" the gospel, connect with it, and appropriate it. These truths are part of a redemption story or philosophy pre-existing in their culture prior to the arrival of a missionary, and it is the missionary's job to discover these truths as they appear in culture in order to share the gospel effectively.¹² It is assumed that the gospel is relevant to each and every culture and therefore can be appropriated and contextualized by every culture.

Reflections for Content Creators

- **It is not our job to transform culture.** Ultimately, Christ is sovereign over all culture forming activity, and God has been actively transforming culture for two thousand years through the gospel. This is God's work, not ours. Knowing that transforming culture is God's work takes pressure away from us. We can enjoy creating content and focus on its beauty, its quality, and its authenticity without worrying about its effectiveness. Content does not have to be useful.
- **We do not have to work hard to affect culture.** As salt and light, we are naturally world changers. God has set us up for this and he empowers us to do it. It is now part of our nature to affect the world around us. To avoid being a world changer would be unnatural and foolish.
- **We should be authentic.** Creating content should authentically come from who we are as salt and light in the world. Some missional content (i.e., explicitly sharing the gospel) is expected, but not all content is required to be missional. A believer who loves God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength, who loves her neighbor as herself, and commits herself to following Jesus will create worthy content, even if it is not a strict retelling of the gospel.

¹² These concepts are explored in all of Richardson's books, starting with *Peace Child*.

- **We are free to be creative.** In Paul's letter to the Colossians and in his address to the Athenians, he boldly used new metaphors and new language to express truth in fresh ways. His knowledge of truth was grounded in Scripture, but he could express God's truth without it. We need this freedom because the world and its cultures are always changing, and we must find new ways to express faith and truth.
- **We must remain faithful to God's truth.** Like Samuel, we must adapt to the change while still being faithful to the truth handed to us. We must learn to separate wheat from chaff even in our own Christian cultures. Not everyone will agree on what should be considered "wheat" and what should be considered "chaff", but this situation makes the conversation more important rather than less. Prayer and the Holy Spirit are vital to our discernment process. We must find new ways to express truth and faith.
- **We need to demonstrate personal integrity and transparency.** Content creators put themselves in the public eye when they release their work into the world. Like Samuel, the value of our content will be weighed against who we are. Christian content creators should share Samuel's willingness to be held accountable for their words and deeds. Remain open to criticism and correction. Be willing to admit your failures and mistakes and seek to make things right.
- **We should show respect for the existing culture and its people.** No matter how secular or "wrong" a culture appears to be, God embeds truth in all cultures in order to point them to him. Ask what the culture gets right. Use the language, the motifs, the philosophy, the metaphors, and other signs of the culture in order to communicate God's truth in a way they understand. It is not necessary to restrict ourselves to Bible stories or quoting Scripture in order to communicate truth.
- **Prayer is foundational to everything we do.**
- **Follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit showed Paul what issues needed to be addressed in Athens and directed him towards appropriate action.
- **Jesus Christ is with us, always.** Christ sends us out into the world to do his work. His authority undergirds everything we do, and as we work, he works alongside us. He is why we work, how we work, and who we work for.

Topic History And Key Voices

Creating content for a secular or post-religious society is a new phenomenon. Historically religion has been embedded in human societies, and Western culture has been predominantly Christian for the past two millennia. In earlier times, content creators could incorporate and build on religious cultural touchstones that everyone knew and understood. Today such touchstones are unreliable or absent due to the increasing diversity of religious belief and secularization—the withdrawal of religion from the public sphere. Though aspects of secularization can be traced back to the Enlightenment and the advent of modernism, it appears to have accelerated over the past twenty years. From 1937-1999, Gallup polls asking, "Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque?" put the religious affiliation of Americans between 68% and 76%. Since 2000 it has dropped. Now fewer than 50% of Americans are affiliated with a house of worship. The

percent of Americans who express no religious preference (i.e., “nones”) has grown to 21%.¹³ Americans are now arguably more secular than religious.

Creating Content for the Secular Age

The culture we live in today is different than it was a hundred, fifty, even just twenty years ago. For content creators to be successful in sharing Christian perspectives, they need to understand the situation in which we live in addition to guidance on how to create content.

Understanding the Secular Age: Charles Taylor

In his famous works *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, philosopher Charles Taylor does not define a secular society as one where there is an absence of religion in the public square; instead, a secular society is one where unbelief is a viable option for people to choose. The ability to choose unbelief is directly tied to the idea of a “buffered self”, where the individual is viewed as separate from society and other individuals and capable of thinking, perceiving, and existing apart from them. This new vision of the self contrasts sharply with the traditional “porus self”, who is defined largely by the society and the historical situation he or she lives in.

The advent of the buffered self did not require jettisoning belief in God, but it made such a thing possible. It also allowed the growth of individualism, humanism, and materialism. In the age of the porus self, one’s purpose in life could easily exist outside of the self—for example, to serve and to promote the goals of your god or king or lord. In the age of the buffered self, the highest purpose is generally that humans (either myself or others) may have their needs and desires met. People may be judged or valued in society according to their utility in meeting the needs and desires of others. Even for religious people, God’s goals and plans are often perceived as focusing on the welfare of human beings, a.k.a., Providential Deism.¹⁴

In ages past, content creators could depend on existing cultural beliefs or touchstones. Some things of historical or religious nature were simply known, understood, and accepted by everyone and held the same meaning for everyone. However, today many of these touchstones are no longer known or accepted. Content creators must create new symbols to express meaning. Nature and beauty are good places to start and generate a deep sense of meaning, even if what exactly they mean is ambiguous. Art can be a neutral space to explore both belief and unbelief.¹⁵

¹³ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” *Gallup.Com*, last modified March 29, 2021, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

¹⁴ Taylor dedicates an entire chapter to the anthropomorphic shift of religion in chapter 6, “Providential Deism” of Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1st edition. (Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ This is the subject of chapter 10.1 in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

In the 1960s, the widespread acceptance of the “buffered self” concept in Western culture led to an emphasis in authenticity:

We see a steady spread of what I have called the culture of “authenticity”....each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.¹⁶

If the self exists separately from society, then the self needs to be searched for and explored. Authenticity became a virtue and is tied to this quest. The pat answers often offered by “organized religion” appear to ignore any kind of quest for meaning, making them feel inauthentic and unsatisfactory.¹⁷ Spirituality, which is a quest for unity, wholeness, pleasure, integrity, and understanding of the individual self, is more attractive than “organized religion”.¹⁸ This situation leads to the often-recited dictum of “nones”: “spiritual but not religious”.

Taylor believes dismissing “organized religion” for ignoring the quest is unfair. Many prominent Christians over the centuries have struggled with their faith but remained tied to the Church. However, congregations hurt themselves and their perceived value by this trend where we emphasize our correct answers and de-emphasize the search for God and truth that is often part and parcel of the Christian life. “Too many answers choking off questions, and too little sense of the enigmas that accompany a life of faith; these are what stop a conversation from ever starting between our church and much of our world.”¹⁹

Despite secularization, science-based materialism is insufficient and unsatisfying for modern people. Taylor asserts that even in this secular age,

1. “There is the sense that we aren’t just determined, that we are active, building, creating, shaping agents.”
2. “We have higher ethical/spiritual motives.”
3. “Art, Nature moves us; we have a deeper sense of meaning; we can’t see our ‘aesthetic’ responses as just another form of pleasurable reaction. They have a deeper significance.”

¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 473-474.

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – To Whom?,” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, vol. 1, Christian Philosophical Studies 8 (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 18.

¹⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 506.

¹⁹ Taylor, “The Church Speaks – To Whom?,” 20.

He goes on to say, "Now, all of these can lead people to return to, or re-affirm, an orthodox faith."²⁰

In an essay titled, "The Church Speaks - To Whom?", Taylor suggests that Christians and institutions who successfully reach seekers spend time listening intently to their questions and life journeys. He believes that, in a world occasionally perceived to be defined by chaos, part of Christianity's greatest appeal is its commitment to "age-old answers". Borrowing expressions from Roger Lundin and W. H. Auden, Taylor divides religious people into two groups: "those who believe 'still,' and those who believe 'again.'"²¹ "Stills" never leave the church or their faith. "Agains" go questing and find their way back to church and faith. He is hopeful that those who have questioned, left, or rejected faith (those we refer to as "nones") will return to faith as "agains", and he believes that one day "agains" will outnumber "stills" in our churches.²²

Creativity from a Creator's Perspective: Julia Cameron

"O Great Creator... Help us to create as an act of worship to you."
—from "An Artist's Prayer" by Julia Cameron²³

Julia Cameron—author, teacher, filmmaker, playwright, poet, composer—is considered an authority on the creative process, particularly in its link to spirituality. Her book *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* has sold over five million copies since its publication in 1992. Though marketed as a kind of 12-step program for "unblocking" creativity, many already unblocked creative types find her guidance helpful. In her own words,

"These tools have unblocked children's books and feature films. They have been used by Hollywood actors and midwestern schoolteachers. Operas have been written, plays have been penned, novels have come to life, and one-person shows have sprung into being."²⁴

²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 595.

²¹ Taylor, "The Church Speaks - To Whom?," 21.

²² Ibid., 22-23.

²³ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: 25th Anniversary Edition*, 25th Anniversary ed. edition. (New York, New York: TarcherPerigee, 2016), 223.

²⁴ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way Workbook* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2006), x.

The applications for which Cameron's tools may be used are only as limited as the human imagination. They have even been used in seminary sermon-writing classes.

Some basic theology undergirds Cameron's work. Creativity is a gift from God that is given to every single person, not just a select few. His creative energy saturates everything. He intends for us to be creative like he is creative. Our creative desires come from God. Being creative is our natural state and refusing to be creative is a rebellious act that denies our God-given nature. Opening ourselves to our creativity opens us to God and his creativity and his ability to work in and through us. Being creative will transform us, but in positive ways.²⁵ Being creative is a form of worship. Art requires faith in both God and yourself: "It takes faith to move onto the page, the stage, the easel."²⁶

Being raised Roman Catholic, Cameron's conception of God is recognizably Christian. However, she wants her work to reach the largest possible audience and knows "God" may be a stumbling block to some artists. She invites her students to redefine the terms "God" or "Great Creator" in a way that suits them.

The artist's toolkit forms the backbone of Cameron's work. The two basic tools are disciplines that should be practiced regularly: morning pages and the artist's date. Morning pages are the most important tool in the artist's toolkit. Every morning, write three pages of whatever comes to mind. The content does not have to be profound or creative in any way, and Cameron suggests that most of the time it will be banal, such as "I need to do laundry today." It is perfectly permissible to be negative, for example, "My roommate is an idiot... The universe hates me..." The purpose of these morning pages is to work out the petty and annoying thoughts that get in the way of our creativity. Writing these morning pages also help our thoughts to start flowing for the day, which opens the door for creativity to appear. Morning pages are a tool for all artists, not just writers:

The morning pages will work for painters, for sculptors, for poets, for actors, for lawyers, for housewives—for anyone who wants to try anything creative... Lawyers who use them swear they make them more effective in court. Dancers claim their balance improves—and not just emotionally.²⁷

An artist's date is a play date with your inner artist. Think of your inner artist as a child who needs protection, affirmation, and nurturing provided by you. Set aside a block of time every week to be by yourself and cultivate your creativity. The experience should be enjoyable but also foster self-intimacy. Examples of the artist's date include taking a long walk, visiting an art gallery, or going to

²⁵ Most of this theology is enshrined in her Basic Principles outlined on page 3 of Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: 25th Anniversary Edition*.

²⁶ Cameron, *The Artist's Way Workbook*, x.

²⁷ Cameron, *The Artist's Way: 25th Anniversary Edition*, 16.

a concert. Experiencing new things and exposing yourself to the creativity of nature and other people renews and refreshes your own creativity. Cameron calls this “filling the well”. Though less vital than morning pages, the artist’s date is crucial to the well-being of your relationship to your inner artist.

Additional tools include:

- Reading Deprivation – If you feel stuck in your life or art, try not reading anything for a week. Avoid books, television, Internet, etc. Do other activities instead. Dance if you have to!
- Listening – God will send you what you need in order to do what you need to do. Listen to the second voice. We discover art rather than invent it. “We are the instrument more than the author of our work.”²⁸
- Blasting Through Blocks – Write down every fear and every anger related to finishing your project, even if it is foolish or petty. Ask yourself what good you will gain from the project. Share it with a friend for encouragement or make a deal with the Creator, “You take care of the quality. I’ll take care of the quantity.”²⁹

Creative dry spells happen. Some ideas do not work out, and this is both normal and expected. When this happens, keep going. As Cameron relates:

When I first gave the manuscript for *The Artist’s Way* to my literary agent at William Morris, she said, “Oh, Julia, *no one* is going to be interested in this.” So Mark Bryan and I self-published the book by photocopying it at a little Communist bookstore and selling a few copies at a time. Emma Lively and I have been working for eight years on a musical that is only now getting its lucky break.

You have to put up with dry spells and keep creating in the face of them.³⁰

Artists need support and encouragement. For this reason, Cameron suggests that her work to be studied in artist peer groups, or “creative clusters”. Seek to support other artists in their work and on their journey. As Cameron says, “Creativity is contagious.”³¹ Cameron also agrees with

²⁸ Cameron, *The Artist’s Way*: 25th Anniversary Edition, 118.

²⁹ Jane Meredith Adams, “‘I Can’t Write! I Can’t Paint! I Can’t Sing!’ Julia Cameron Says, ‘Yes, You Can.’,” *Biography* 3, no. 6 (June 1999): 75.

³⁰ Mariette DiChristina et al., “Let Your Creativity Soar,” *Scientific American Mind*, June-July 2008, 36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

psychologist Robert Epstein that all people have creative potential: "I've never met anyone who wasn't creative... We're all artists."³²

Creativity from a Scientist's Perspective: Robert Epstein

"[T]here's something both humbling and exhilarating about generating a new idea. I'm... trying to imagine the extraordinary things she's put on paper that have never been seen before by anyone in human history. I believe everyone has that kind of potential. Imagine that."

—Dr. Robert Epstein in a panel discussion on creativity with Julia Cameron³³

Psychologist Robert Epstein has conducted research on creativity in animals, children, and adults and published several books and articles on the subject. Epstein formulated the Generativity Theory of creativity based on his research, which postulates new behavior is generated by competition among already established behaviors. Insights from this theory has been used to predict new behavior and to enhance creativity. Several of Epstein's techniques for practical creativity-building have been published in *The Big Book of Creativity Games*.

For many people creativity seems mysterious and marked by frustration or confusion. Yet according to Epstein's research, creativity is orderly and predictable. Existing behaviors and ideas compete, build connections, and blend in the brain. New behaviors and ideas emerge from this process—the very essence of creativity. The human brain cannot conduct this process at the same time as observing it because it is very complex, which is why creativity appears to be mysterious and new ideas can seemingly arise from nothing. Epstein and his team have developed mathematical models to describe the creative process and can use these models to predict what novel behaviors his human subjects will display in a laboratory experiment, demonstrating the orderly and predictive nature of creativity.³⁴

Because the models developed using Generativity Theory work so well, it is reasonable to conclude every person has the same amount of creative potential. However, not every person displays the same level of creativity. Epstein believes one reason for this is socialization. From an early age, we are discouraged from expressing strange ideas or acting in ways that seem unusual. One of the side effects of this problem is that those who persist in being creative will often be those who are

³² Adams, 75.

³³ DiChristina, 39.

³⁴ Robert Epstein, "Generativity Theory," *Encyclopedia of Creativity* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1999), 763-764.

also resistant to socialization. “[O]ur society inadvertently makes creativity the nearly exclusive property of antisocial personality types.”³⁵

Fortunately there is hope for anyone who wants to be more creative. Because creativity is an orderly and predictable process, it can be studied, learned, and boosted. Creativity can be enhanced in any given person through building up the four core competencies of creative expression:

- Capturing – Preserve new ideas. Keep notebooks, recorders, or other resources handy to record new ideas right away without having to wait. Record these ideas as you receive them without judging their merit or value. You can evaluate them later.
- Surrounding – Surround yourself with interesting people and things. The more diverse your environment is, the better. Change it up on a regular basis. An interesting environment leads to interesting ideas.
- Challenging – Take on new tasks or difficult problems beyond your current skill and ability level and try to solve them. Whether you are successful is not what really matters. This process of problem-solving makes you revisit previous techniques that worked. These old behaviors will compete and build new connections in your mind. With new connections come new ideas and behaviors.
- Broadening – Expand and diversify your knowledge. Learning new and interesting things also builds new connections and boosts creativity. “New ideas emerge when old ones become interconnected; that’s where all creativity comes from.”³⁶

Epstein offers an online tool for measuring your current skill level in each creative competency at MyCreativitySkills.com. A high score indicates you are likely to show a high amount of creativity. The test takes about 10 minutes to complete and offers advice on how to boost your scores—and boost your creativity.

Many people fear failure, but this fear is misplaced. On the contrary, Thomas Edison claimed that he “failed his way to success”.³⁷ Epstein has noted in his laboratory that failure leads to resurgence, a phenomenon where previously effective behaviors show up again. They compete with current behaviors and create new connections. Failure actually generates creativity. Epstein says, “You have to learn not to fear failure and even to rejoice in it.”³⁸

³⁵ Epstein, “Generativity Theory,” 765.

³⁶ Robert Epstein, *Creativity for Crises: Ten Tweaks for Tough Times* (DrEpstein.com, 2009), 9.

³⁷ Quoted in Epstein, *Creativity for Crises: Ten Tweaks for Tough Times*, 8.

³⁸ DiChristina, 36.

Do not leave creativity to chance. Creativity can be nurtured and grown. Geniuses like Thomas Edison and Salvador Dali actively sought new experiences and mined ideas from them. There is no reason you cannot do the same.³⁹ Give yourself permission to be creative, and don't let criticism stop you.

Christian Content Creators in Film and Television

The history of Christians creating content for a post-Christian, secularized world is fairly short, but there are many Christians out there attempting to do it: novelists, bloggers, journalists, musicians, actors, directors, producers, etc. It may be helpful to highlight the work and philosophies of a couple Christians who have produced content in the areas of film and television.

Tyler Perry

Tyler Perry is an award-winning actor, director, producer, and screenwriter based in Atlanta, Georgia. He has created 24 stage plays, 22 feature films, and over 1,200 television episodes and is still going strong. His work tends toward comedy and melodrama but seeks to address moral and societal issues from a Southern Black Christian perspective. He owns and runs the largest privately-owned studio in the United States. *TIME Magazine* named him one of "The 100 Most Influential People of 2020".⁴⁰

Speak life & use your imagination

I shared a favorite scripture, one that has guided me through life: *The power of life and death lie in the tongue*. "You can speak life or you can speak death," I went on. "I chose to speak life into my situation. I chose to use my imagination to take me higher. Not just in this life, but higher in Christ."

—Tyler Perry to a disbelieving reporter⁴¹

Humor is a useful tool

Laughter can stand arm in arm with agony... I could lift them with humor and use that laughter as an anesthetic and talk about really deep, sensitive issues that were destroying so many of us -- things like rape and molestation and the inability to forgive.

³⁹ Epstein, *Creativity for Crises: Ten Tweaks for Tough Times*, 15.

⁴⁰ Oprah Winfrey, "Tyler Perry," *TIME Magazine* 196, no. 13/14 (October 5, 2020): 90.

⁴¹ Tyler Perry, *Higher Is Waiting* (New York: Random House, 2017), 147-148.

–Tyler Perry on the usefulness of his character Madea⁴²

Use your pain & write from your life experience

No matter what was happening to me, be it sexual abuse, whatever, I could escape and be somewhere else... I could create these worlds and be there for hours. I didn't realize it at the time, but that's where my gift to write came from—the heartache and the hell...

Every time I wrote a movie and one of the characters was a black woman who's in a bad situation or she's been hurt or abused, it was all subconscious for my mother... I wanted her to understand that she was worthy of more than what she was living in.

–Tyler Perry in *People*⁴³

Persevere through faith

Every year for five years I spent every cent I had on *I Know I've Been Changed*... Every single show—every one—failed. The financial failure and the heartbreak tore at my faith... I was sitting in the dressing room, angry, frustrated, and feeling empty and hopeless. I was so agitated with disappointment that I couldn't sit still. I stood up and started pacing back and forth and speaking out loud to God. "You bring me out to these moments and you never see me through. What's going on?"

...Suddenly I heard God's voice, the one I've heard ever since I was a kid. "I tell you when it's over. You don't tell me when it's over." ...A couple weeks later, the play was produced at the Fox Theatre, with more than 4,500 seats, and it sold out.

–Tyler Perry on his first play⁴⁴

Find your own ways of doing things

I mostly go on my gut and my instinct. I like to challenge the system and see what I can do differently.

⁴² Tyler Perry, "Time to Move On From Madea," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2019, Late Edition.

⁴³ Mary Green, "The Triumphant Life of Tyler Perry. (Cover Story)," *People* 92, no. 16 (October 14, 2019): 40, 42.

⁴⁴ Perry, *Higher Is Waiting*, 54-55.

–Tyler Perry in *Forbes*⁴⁵

While everybody else is fighting for a seat at the table, talking about “OscarsSoWhite, OscarsSoWhite,” I said, “Y’all go ahead and do that. While you’re fighting for a seat at the table, I’ll be down in Atlanta building my own.” Because what I know for sure is that if I could just build this table, God will prepare it for me in the presence of my enemies.

–Tyler Perry’s BET award speech⁴⁶

Fred Rogers

Presbyterian minister Fred McFeely Rogers was the creator, writer, puppeteer, composer, and host of the internationally acclaimed children’s program *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* from 1968-2001. He also published several books and articles for children, parents, and educators, two songbooks, and recorded a handful of albums. His work focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of children. He was inducted into the Television Hall of Fame in 1999. He earned several awards over the years, including a Lifetime Achievement Emmy in 1997 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2002.

Be yourself

I think one of the greatest gifts you can give anybody is the gift of your honest self... All I can do is be myself. I’ve had the grace to be able to do that. I walk into the studio and I think, “Let some word that is heard be Thine.” Whatever doesn’t come from the eternal is just dross anyway. So I just pass on what’s been given to me.

–Fred Rogers in an interview with Phil Hoose⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Madeline Berg, “The RISE and RISE of TYLER PERRY,” *Forbes* 203, no. 4 (October 2020): 118.

⁴⁶ “BET Awards Acceptance Speech: The BET Awards Honors Icon Award Winner Tyler Perry,” *BET.Com*, accessed February 9, 2021, <https://www.bet.com/video/betawards/2019/acceptance-speeches/tyler-perry-ultimate-icon-award.html>.

⁴⁷ Fred Rogers and David Bianculli, *Fred Rogers: The Last Interview: And Other Conversations* (Melville House, 2021), 29-30, 33.

Be sensitive to how your audience will respond

Instead of asking "How does what we see on television affect our lives?" I'd like to ask "*How do our lives affect what we see on television?*" ...Whenever we are looking at a television program, there are two dramas unfolding—the drama on the screen and the "inner drama" we bring to it. Often, our inner dramas happened so long ago, or were so painful, that we are not even consciously aware of them. But they are there...

It seems to me that this is what happens in all sorts of different communications: The communicator makes a statement which comes from his or her own inner dramas and we respond from the lifetime accumulation of ours. I doubt that the process is ever an exact match. It is more like a handshake; the two hands are different and unique, yet similar enough to create an understanding when they touch. These handshakes occur when we listen to a piece of music or when we look at a painting. They certainly occur, too, when we watch television.

...I think those of us who create programs need to be much more sensitive about the inner dramas people will be bringing to what we present on television. We need to care more about the effects our work may have on their lives.

—Fred Rogers on how people watch TV⁴⁸

Respect the space between speaker and listener

I heard the worst sermon I could have ever imagined. I sat in the pew thinking, "He's going against every rule they're teaching us about preaching. What a waste of time!" That's what I thought until the very end of the sermon when I happened to see the person beside me with tears in her eyes whispering, "He said exactly what I needed to hear." ...Somehow the words of that poorly crafted sermon had been translated into a message which spoke to her heart... [T]hat sermon's effect on the person beside me turned out to be one of the great lessons of my life. **Thanks to that preacher and listener-in-need, I now know that the space between a person doing his or her best to deliver a message of good news and the needy listener is holy ground.** The Holy Spirit uses that space in marvelously wonderful ways.

—Fred Rogers on the worst sermon he ever heard⁴⁹

I'm so convinced that the space between the television set and the viewer is holy ground... And what we put on the television can, by the Holy Spirit, be translated

⁴⁸ Fred Rogers, "What Do You Bring to TV?," *Saturday Evening Post* 250, no. 6 (September 1978): 50-51, 133.

⁴⁹ Fred Rogers, "Neighbor: Nourishing Our Life Together," *The Living Pulpit* 11, no. 3 (July 2002): 5.

into what this person needs to hear and see, and without that translation it's all dross as far as I'm concerned.

–Fred Rogers to Amy Hollingsworth⁵⁰

Love your way

What are *your* natural ways of expressing who *you* really are? ...Gymnastics, cooking, baseball, painting, piano, puppets, singing?—*comfortably using and loving your way in front of the children in your care may just be the greatest gift you ever give them....* [I]f you like to make things out of wood, or sew, or dance, or style people's hair, or dream up stories and act them out, or play the trumpet, or jump rope, or *whatever* you really love to do, and you love that in front of your children, that's going to be a far more important gift than anything you could ever give them wrapped up in a box with ribbons. And what's more, the last thing in the world you have to be is perfect at it. It's the spirit that gives that kind of gift its wings.

–Fred Rogers on how doing what you love is a gift to others⁵¹

Embrace new media opportunities, even if you don't like it

I got into television because I hated it so.

–Fred Rogers's CNN interview⁵²

I just saw people throwing pies in each other's faces. And I thought, you know, if this medium is going to be in everybody's home, and of course, at that time, it was in very few people's homes, I thought, this could be used for a lot better than that.... And I said to my parents, you know, I think I'd like to try television.

–Fred Rogers on the first time he saw television⁵³

⁵⁰ Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers: Spiritual Insights from the World's Most Beloved Neighbor* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 34.

⁵¹ Fred Rogers, "That Which Is Essential Is Invisible to the Eye," *Young Children* 49, no. 5 (1994): 33.

⁵² "Mr. Rogers Neighborhood To Air Last Show," *CNN.Com - Transcripts*, accessed August 26, 2018, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0108/31/lad.09.html>.

⁵³ Fred Rogers and David Bianculli, 78.

Anyone who knows me knows that I'm a pen-and-pencil person. I write our Neighborhood scripts in longhand on yellow legal pads and correspond with friends on notecards.... I'm an artist, a musician. But lately I've become intrigued by e-mail. When this online project was suggested, we decided to take advantage of it.... Through our mail, we've seen real evidence that a relationship is possible through television—and through the computer.

—Fred Rogers on starting an online service called “Ask Mister Rogers”⁵⁴

Synthesis

For the purpose of this research, the focus has been on Christians who make content for the wider, secularized culture. Not much scholarly work has been done on this particular subject. Part of the problem is the newness of secular culture. Another problem is that most of the scholarship regarding Christians and culture is in the vein of “should we or shouldn’t we engage culture” rather than addressing those who already find themselves doing so.

Human beings are creative people. Both Julia Cameron and Robert Epstein assert it is natural for us to be creators, and all of us have creative ability. As Christians who are salt and light it is natural for us to interact with the world and its culture. Paul intentionally sought this interaction and spoke to the Athenians on their terms. Both Tyler Perry and Fred Rogers felt led by God into being creative and sharing that gift with the world.

The theme that surfaces most often in this research is authenticity. When we speak, we speak from who we naturally are as salt and light in the world. Taylor notes that the value most prized by the secularized world is authenticity. Perry and Rogers both speak authentically from who they are and their life experience, and the world listens to them.

Related to authenticity is the need for truth. Authentic people express what they believe to be true, and God has revealed truth to us. Culture is always shifting, so it is important we hold on to and proclaim the truth we know. God wants to use us to reveal what is good and true in the world so that it may glorify him.

Another common theme is love and respect for your audience. Paul showed respect for the Athenians, their philosophy, their beliefs, and their culture. Taylor points out the value of listening before offering answers. Perry wants to address societal and moral issues because he cares about his audience and wants good things for them. Rogers loved children and wanted to love them through their television sets.

⁵⁴ Fred Rogers, “Mister Rogers on Kids and Technology.,” *Education Digest* 62 (April 1997): 8-11.

A third commonality is giving platform to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's role is explicit in the story of Paul in Athens and also in the work philosophy of Fred Rogers. Cameron insists that God is the author of our creative endeavors while we are merely instruments. Prayer and listening to God are values shared by Samuel and Paul in the Scriptures as well as Cameron, Perry, and Rogers in modern times.

The greatest tension is whether we should be missional in our content. Scripture does not provide a clear-cut answer. Cameron creates for the sake of creating, while Epstein does not offer an opinion about the purpose of creativity—only that it is natural for us. Perry and Rogers both display missional aspects in their work: Rogers viewed his work as a ministry to children, and Perry creates morality tales that tell battered women what he wanted to tell his mother. While it is true that Christians have things to say that the world needs to hear, that does not necessarily require all of our art to be strictly missional. Is it enough to simply speak the truth?

We believe that Christ has authority over the world and its cultures. God has been transforming culture for millennia. God is a creator, and so are we. If he is in the business of transforming culture, it is natural that transformation is also our business.

Appendix C: Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

There is a profound misunderstanding among religious ‘nones’ in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in various media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.

NPO Scope and Constraints

My focus is on American film and television and how they affect Americans, particularly religious “nones”. By the end of this doctorate program, I will draft guidelines to assist Christian content creators in positively affecting culture. I will also produce a script (and hopefully a product) to demonstrate proof of concept. A production-ready script would cost around \$120 to create. The cost of producing such a project would vary. Multiple people are required to complete most media projects. Because Texas is a right to work state (i.e., no union affiliation required), I can utilize deferred pay contracts or payment waivers to pay cast and crew willing to work on spec (or friends willing to work for free). Producing an independent film would be the most expensive project, but could reasonably be done in Texas for around \$60,000 plus deferred pay contracts and there are a variety of ways available to raise funds for such a project. The pilot for TV show or podcast would be cheaper.

NPO Context

My ministry context is Americans who watch films or TV and participate in media/social media in its various forms, regardless of education, race, or religion. This demographic skews toward young adults in their 20s and 30s and toward those who have at least some college education. Race and religion do not appear to be major factors. The goal is to encourage honest conversations about the Christian faith among “nones” and believers in public forums.

Root Causes

Authentic Christian/biblical perspectives are rare in popular culture, particularly in American television and film. Media creation tends to be profit-driven rather than art, truth, or agenda-driven. Misbehaving Christians generate negative perceptions of Christianity and may promote poor theology and lifestyles. Christian-generated media content tends toward being overly-simplistic, contrived, preachy, or manipulative. Religious “nones” are often suspicious of Christian media for these reasons. Also, Christian worldviews are no longer valued in the public square, and popular

culture tends toward narcissism. Finally, there are those who are hostile to Christianity and intentionally spread misinformation about its beliefs and practices.

Definition of 'Done'

If successful in addressing the NPO, we could expect to see a rise in biblical literacy, more accurate portrayals of Christianity in the media, and, most importantly, honest discussions among “nones” and Christians about faith.

Three Big Ideas

Sharing stories of faith can have a transformational effect in a way sharing propositional truths do not. The three avenues under consideration for sharing these stories are a film, a TV show, and a podcast.

3 Concept Pitches

Film

- Big Idea: Create a sci-fi film featuring fallible Christians in a difficult setting, authentically putting their faith on display.
- Audience: Young adults who normally wouldn't watch a “Christian” film
- NPO: This audience needs to see examples of authentic faith and practice lived out in the morally ambiguous “real” world.
- Benefit: This experience should encourage the audience to wonder why Christian characters act the way they do and link it to our faith.
- Approach: Tell a compelling story (or a collection of stories) in a creative setting.
- Risks: There may be issues creating or distributing the film, which means the audience may never see it. It would also be easy to go over-budget.
- Assumptions/hypotheses to test: A faith-based film in an unusual genre and told in an unusual way will generate interest in the subject matter.
- Benchmarks of success: Articles and reviews being published about the film, discussions of the film on social media by religious “nones”, memes based on the film being shared on social media
- Other Approaches: Historical films like *Washington's Armor* (currently in production) that illustrate the faith of famous people, comedies like the Madea films that present Christian characters as real people

TV Show (Pilot)

- Big Idea: Create a sci-fi TV show featuring fallible Christians in difficult settings, authentically putting their faith on display.

- Audience: Young adults who normally wouldn't watch a "Christian" TV show
- NPO: This audience needs to see examples of authentic faith and practice lived out in the morally ambiguous "real" world.
- Benefit: This experience should encourage the audience to wonder why Christian characters act the way they do and link it to our faith.
- Approach: Tell a collection of stories in a creative setting, allowing the audience to get to know these characters deeply over time.
- Risks: If the show is not picked up by a network or streaming service few people will see it.
- Assumptions/hypotheses to test: A faith-based show in an unusual genre and told in an unusual way will generate interest in the subject matter.
- Benchmarks of success: Articles and reviews being published about the show and its characters, discussions of the show on social media by religious "nones", memes based on the show being shared on social media
- Other Approaches: Sitcoms featuring Christian characters (for example, *Last Man Standing*), children's programming such as *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* where the host embodies Christian ideals

Podcast (Pilot)

- Big Idea: Create a podcast that features real-life stories of Christians in various settings and interviews some of them
- Audience: Young and middle aged adults who enjoy uplifting stories
- NPO: This audience needs to see examples of authentic faith and practice lived out in the morally ambiguous "real" world.
- Benefit: The audience can understand how faith helps real people get through difficult situations.
- Approach: Seek out Christians from all walks of life to tell their stories.
- Risks: If the podcast is seen as too religious, "nones" will not tune in. It is also difficult to stand out in this crowded field.
- Assumptions/hypotheses to test: Hearing inspirational true stories will encourage people to consider what makes Christians resilient in the face of difficult circumstances.
- Benchmarks of success: High number of "none" subscribers
- Other Approaches: *Confessions of a Crappy Christian* utilizes the podcast format to authentically address issues that are often ignored, *Turning to the Mystics* taps into the spiritual curiosity of many "nones"

Design Workshop Stakeholders

Stakeholders included an actor, an accountant, a few college students, and a few high school students. Several "nones" were invited to the workshops, but they had other commitments.

One on One Interviews

Because the “none” perspective was sorely needed, I interviewed two “nones”: an actor and an Internet data and communications analyst. I also interviewed a Christian who had worked several years for a major TV/media company.

Further Research

The following items were recommended during the workshops and interviews for conducting further research on Christianity, “nones”, and the media:

Baron, Zach. "The Redemption of Justin Bieber." *GQ*, May 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.gq.com/story/justin-bieber-cover-profile-may-2021>

Collins, Ryan. "Evangelism in the Tech Industry: Interviews with Evangelists." Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2021.

Kitchener, Caroline. "What It Means To Be Spiritual But Not Religious." *The Atlantic*, January 11, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/membership/archive/2018/01/what-it-means-to-be-spiritual-but-not-religious/550337/>

Pew Research Center. "Why America's 'nones' don't identify with a religion." August 8, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>

Appendix Ca: Design Workshops

Design Workshop Description

I held two workshops in November 2021 regarding this Need/ Problem/ Opportunity statement (NPO): “There is a profound misunderstanding among religious ‘nones’ in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in the media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.”

The original workshop was held on Saturday, November 13, in the back room of Italiano’s in River Oaks, Texas at 11 am. Most stakeholders who had intended to come needed to cancel last minute, so a second workshop was held on Thursday, November 18, in the basement of Trinity Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas at 7:15 pm. The first group consisted of two white churchgoers in their 60’s, while the second group consisted of seven English-speaking children of Mexican immigrants, also churchgoers, averaging 20 years old. I had invited several “nones”, but none of them were able to attend these workshops.

The agenda for both meetings included:

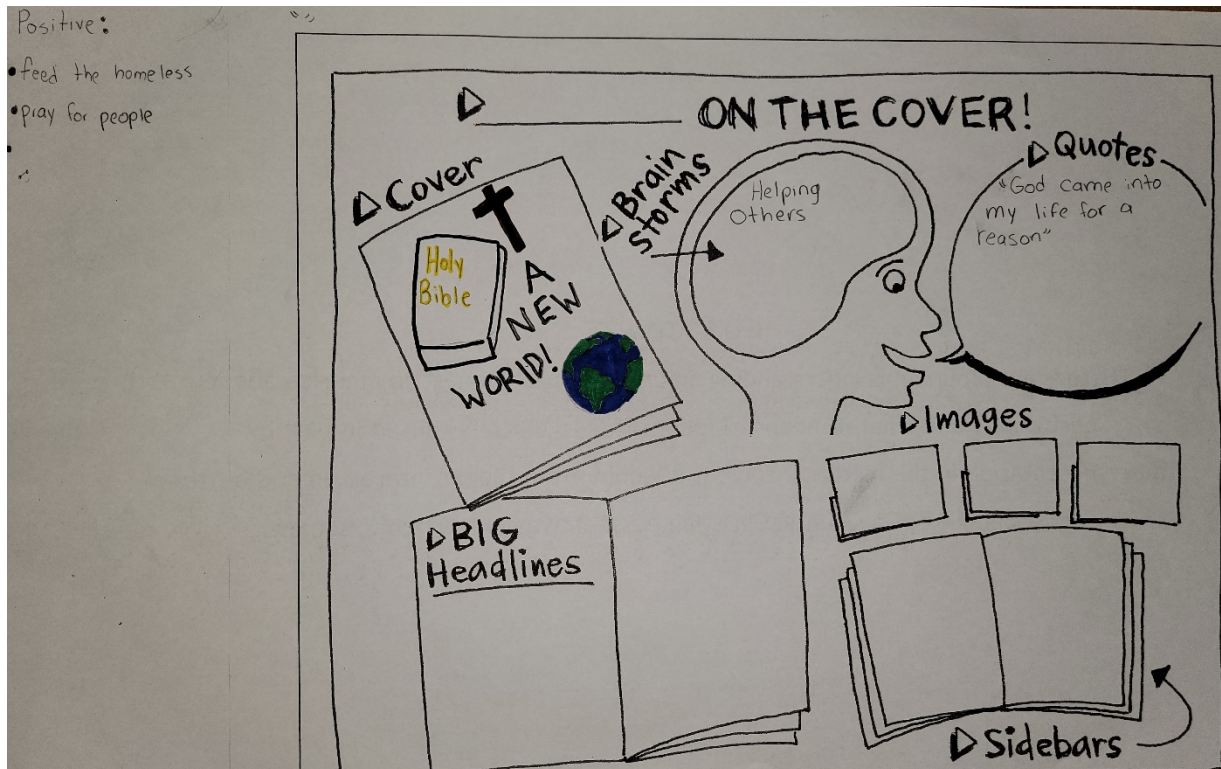
- Revisiting the NPO. We discussed issues surrounding the NPO and the problems it is designed to address.
- Exploring NPO outcomes using “Anti-Problem” and “Cover Story”. Attendees were invited to brainstorm how to intentionally produce the opposite of the intended outcome. Then they were encouraged to imagine what successfully addressing the NPO might look like.
- Proposing project ideas. The first workshop verbally volunteered ideas which were then written on sticky notes. The second workshop reviewed the ideas of the first, then each attendee anonymously submitted three ideas written on sticky notes.
- Judging quality of ideas using “Impact and Effort Matrix”. This activity was only done in first workshop, but the results of this activity were reviewed by the second workshop.
- Voting on project ideas. Each person in the first workshop verbally named their top three favorite ideas. The attendees in the second workshop voted secretly on their favorites using sticky dots.
- Debrief. I invited questions and additional comments. I asked for advice on what issues I should examine and what potential blind spots or pitfalls they could identify.

I was looking forward to the design workshop, but it did not go as planned. The low attendance at the first workshop left me in a bind. I was disappointed I was not able to receive input from any of the religious “nones” I had invited. One of the attendees refused to participate in any of the activities, which I found frustrating. Unfortunately, we ran out of time in both workshops to flesh out their favorite ideas. However, these two groups produced several project ideas that were creative and wide-ranging. Despite the issues involved in holding these workshops, I am pleased with this outcome.

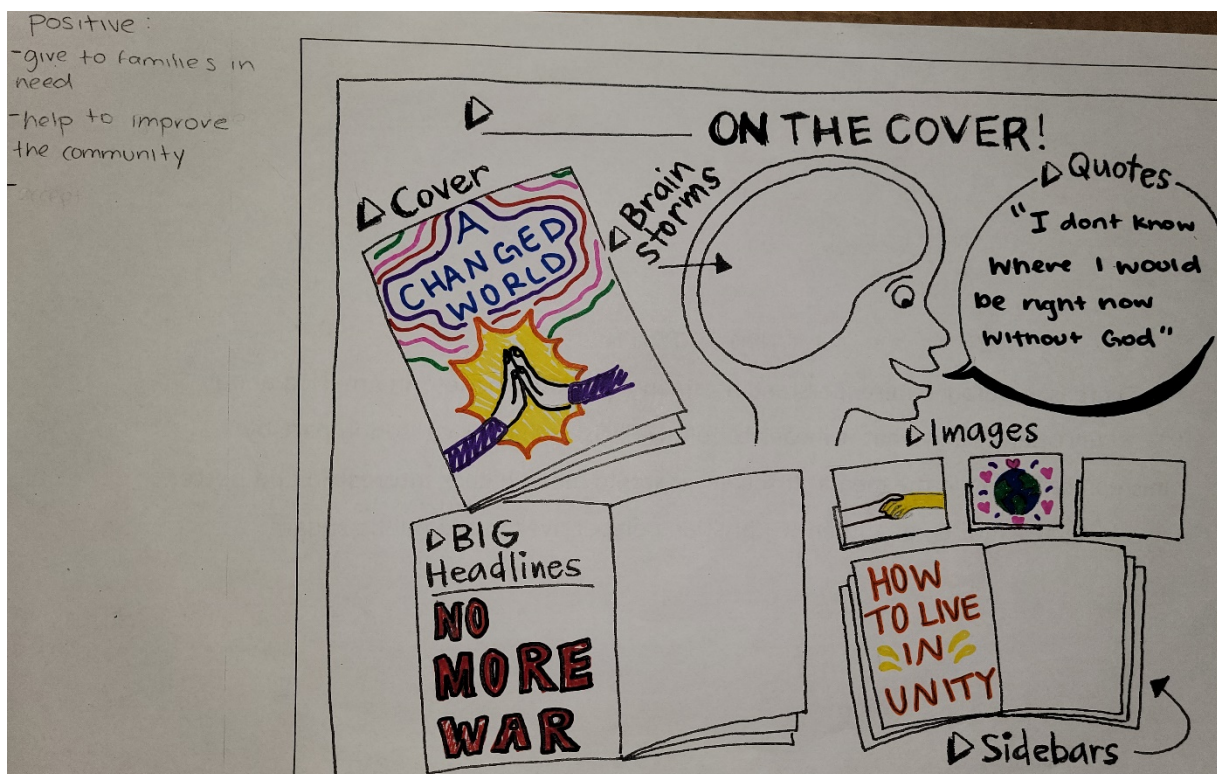
Design Workshop Documentation

Cover Story: Imagining a wildly successful outcome

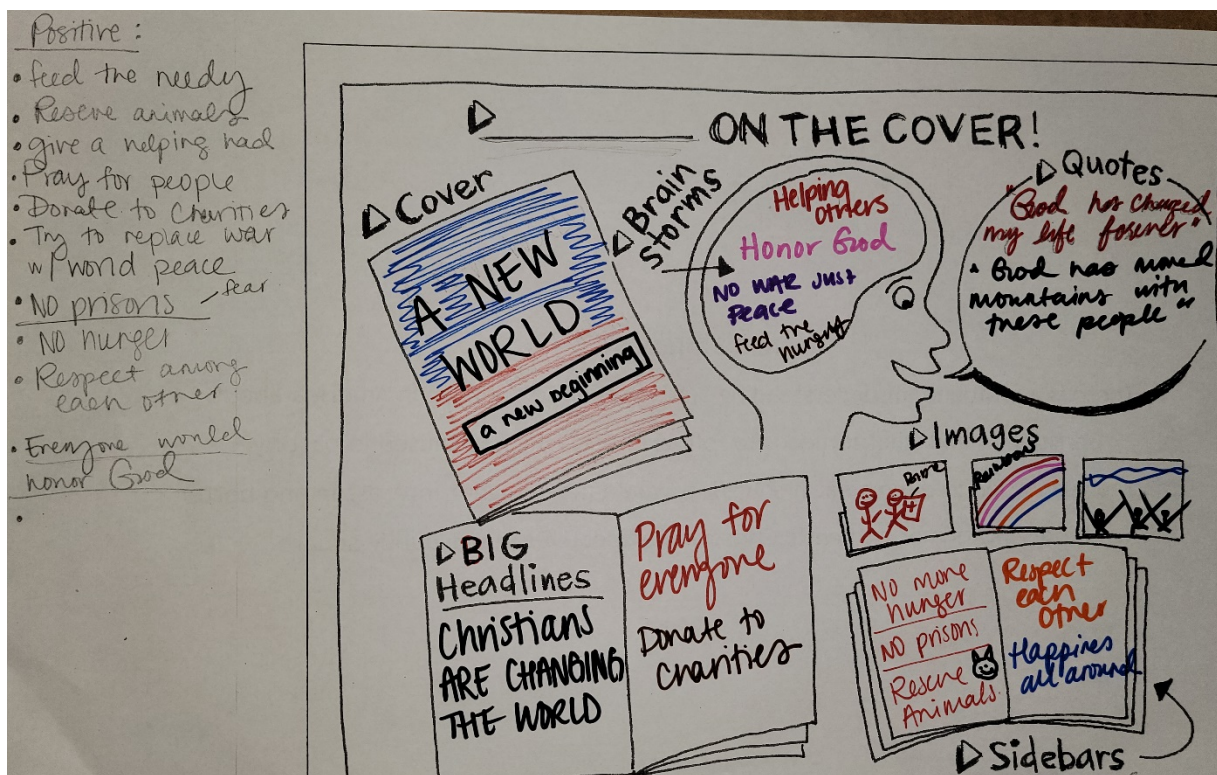
Attendees were asked to imagine what the world would be like if we were wildly successful in addressing the NPO and then create an edition of *Life* magazine documenting the phenomenon. The overall themes of these entries appear to be "change" and "helping others" with Christians leading the way.

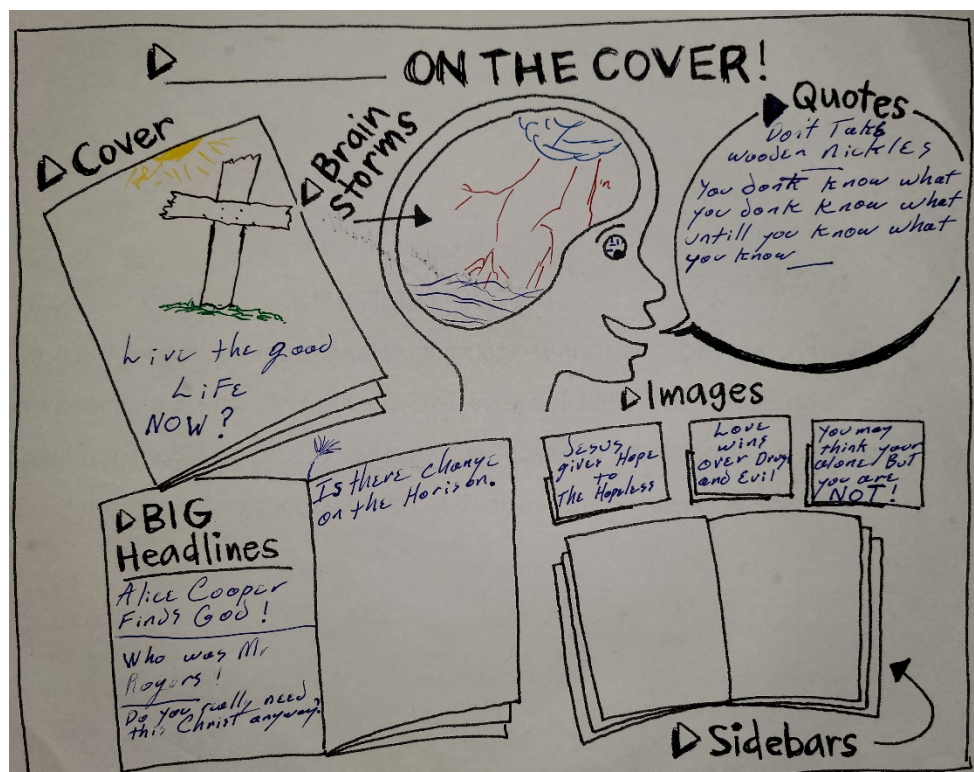
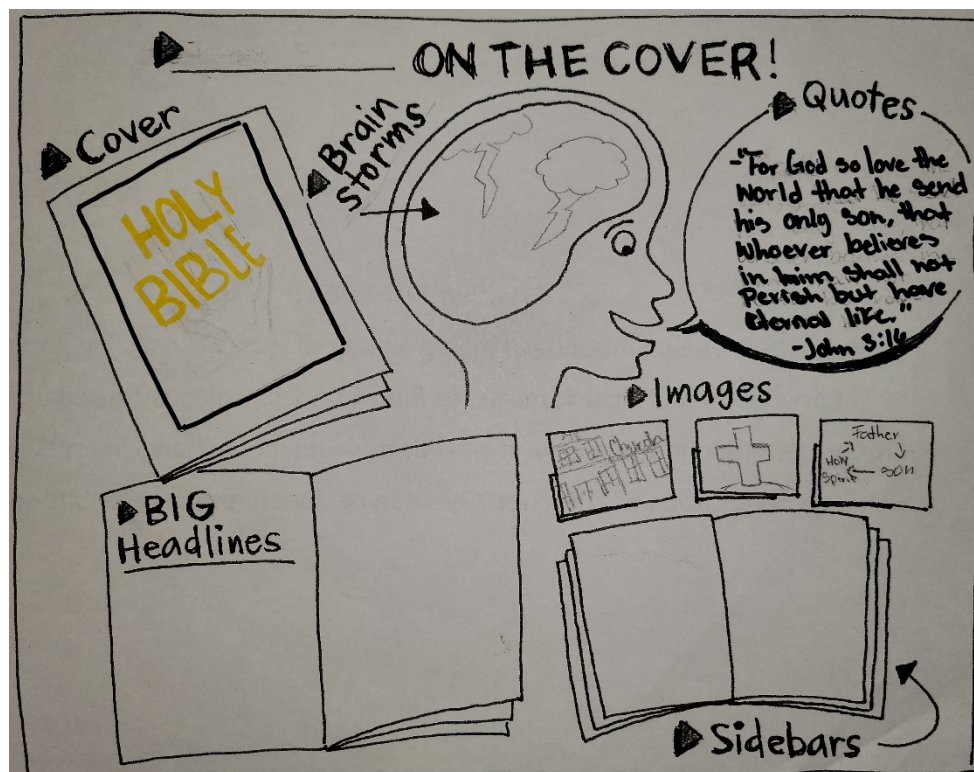


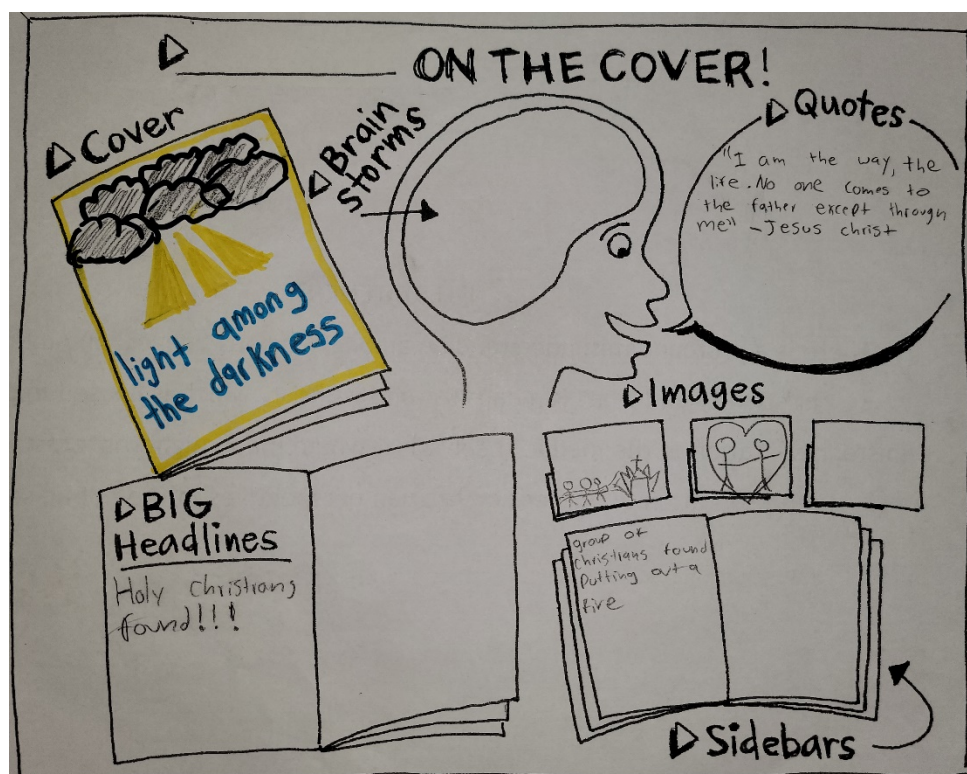
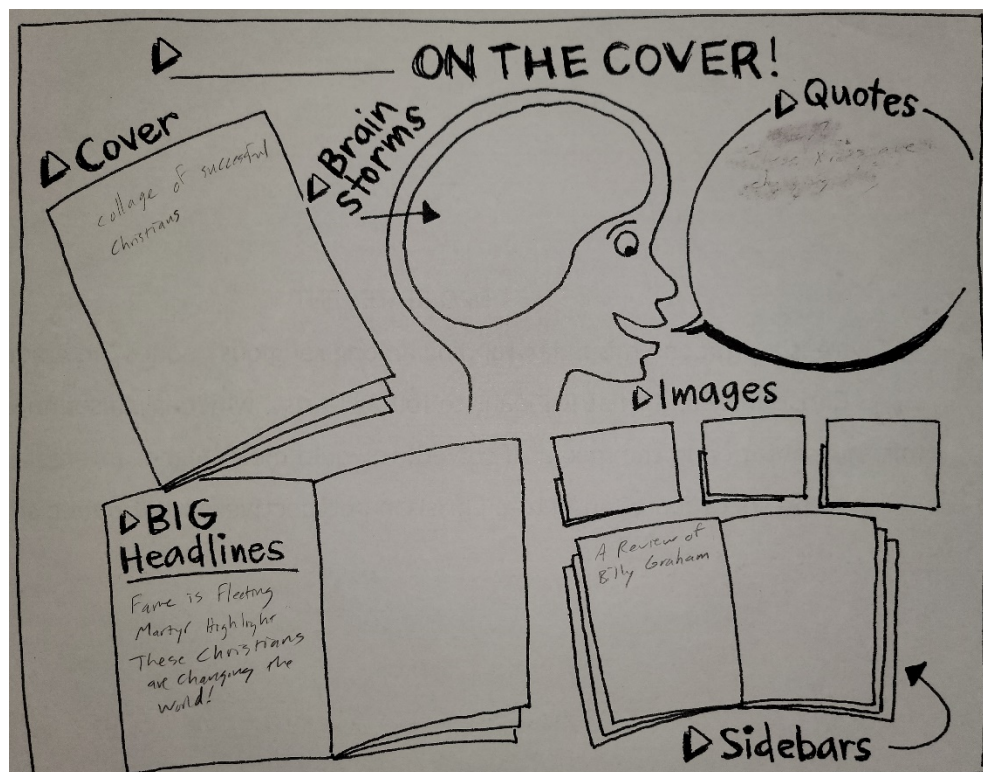
- Positive:
- give to families in need
 - help to improve the community

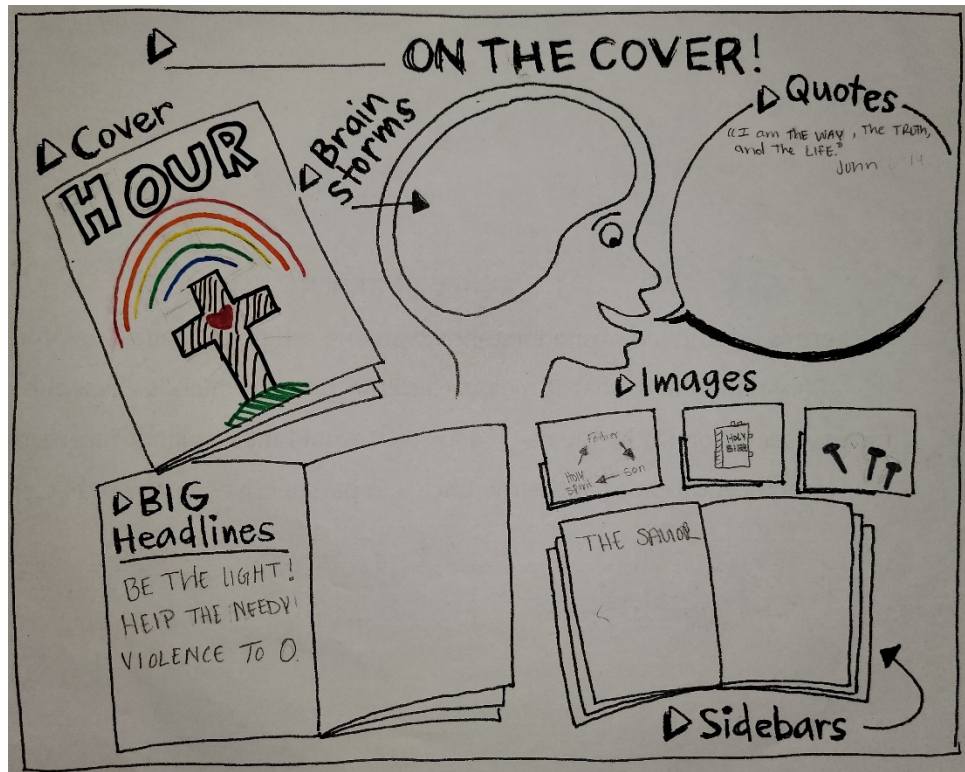
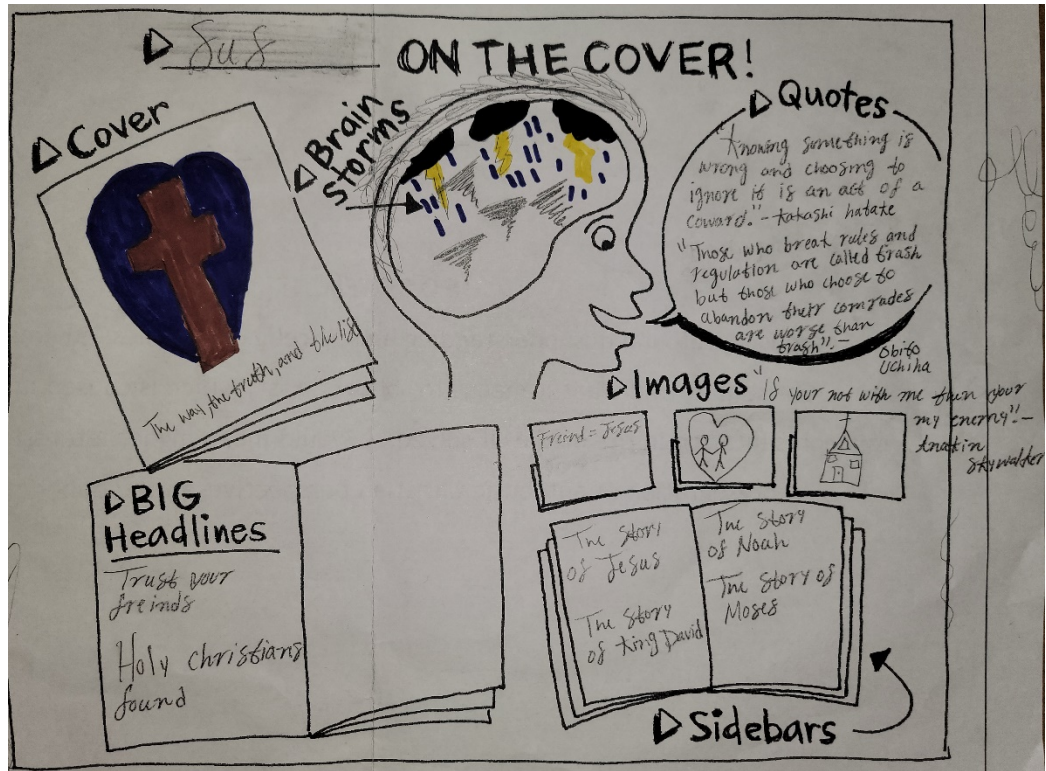


- Positive:
- feed the needy
 - Rescure animals
 - give a helping hand
 - Pray for people
 - Donate to Charities
 - Try to replace war w/ word peace
 - NO prisons - fear
 - NO hunger
 - Respect among each other
 - Everyone would honor God



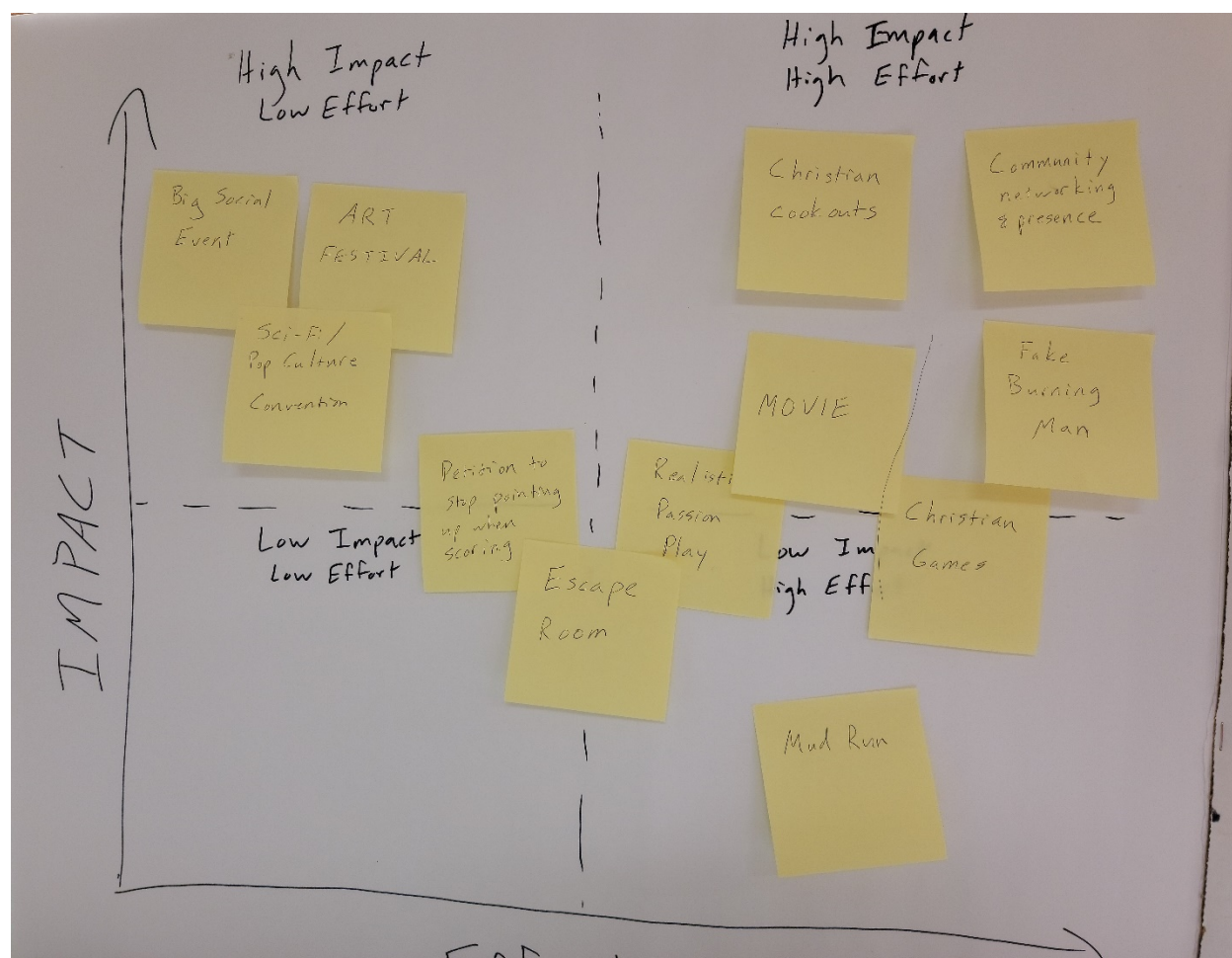






Impact and Effort Matrix

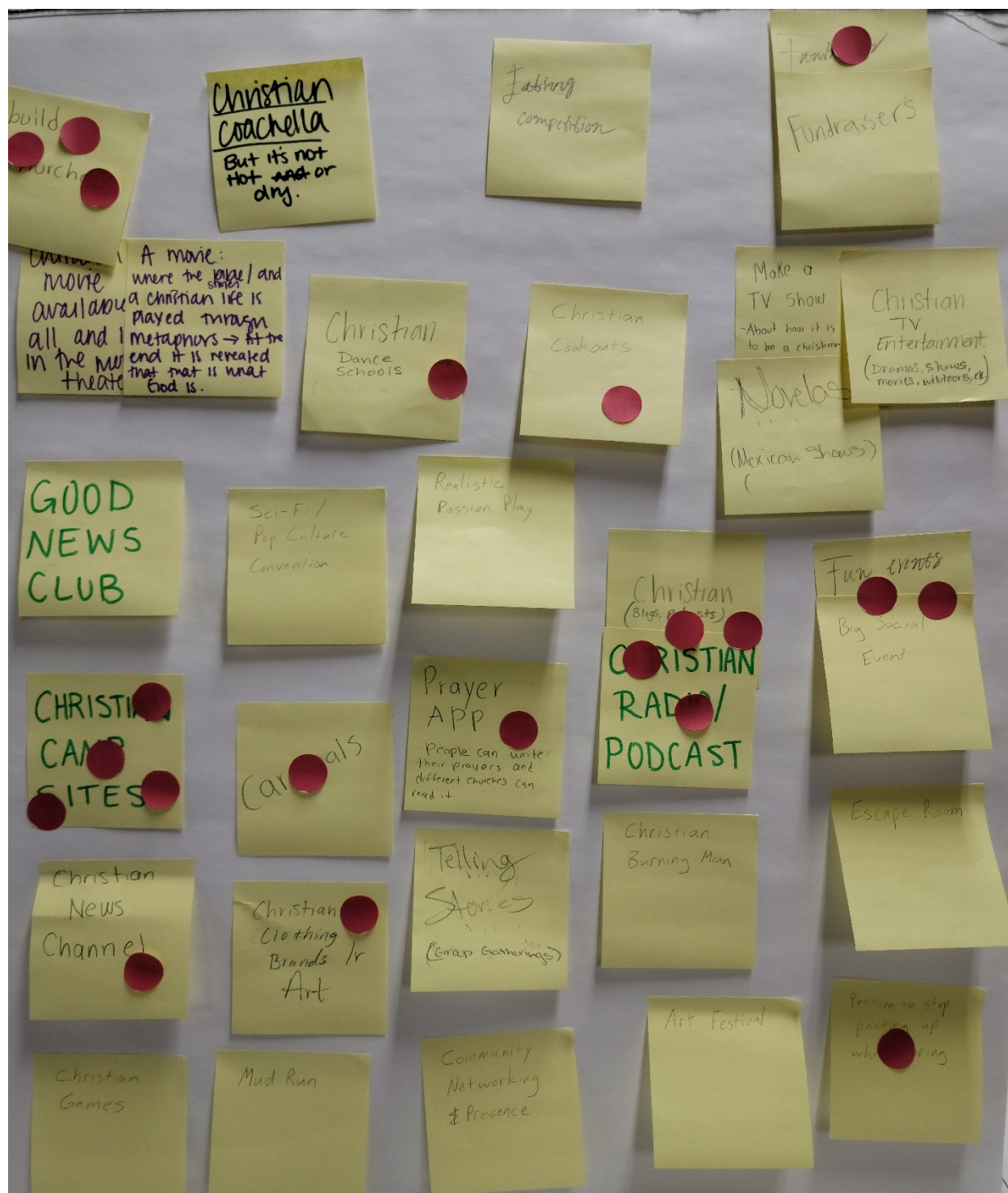
Attendees were asked to judge several early ideas by how impactful the project would be versus how much effort it would take to complete the project. The “biggest bang for your buck” projects appeared to be a large social event (such as a biking event or a concert), a community art festival, and a sci-fi/ pop culture convention held in a church. Projects that were considered high impact but also high effort were neighborhood cookouts, community networking, a movie, and a Christian version of the Burning Man festival.



Voting on Ideas

Attendees each submitted three (or more) ideas, which were encouraged to be "out of the box". Then they secretly voted on their favorite ideas using dots. They were asked to consider impact versus effort as well as which ideas they were most excited about.

There were three submissions regarding making a movie, three submissions regarding making TV shows, two submissions regarding Christian podcasts and radio, and two submissions regarding fun community events. The most highly-rated ideas were Christian podcasts and radio, Christian summer camps, and building new churches.



Post-Workshop Message To Stakeholders

I held two workshops in November 2021 addressing this statement: "There is a profound misunderstanding among religious 'nones' in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in the media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square." The purpose of these workshops was to explore this statement and generate project ideas for addressing the problem.

Workshop attendees had various ideas concerning the root of the problem. First, they believe some "nones" intentionally misunderstand Christianity because they are not interested in God. Second, they believe Christians are partly at fault for their own misrepresentation because there are bad Christians in the news and because Christians don't demonstrate love for other people. Finally, modern life and technology make God seem unnecessary. However, there are opportunities to address the problem. People need to be loved and that love needs to be demonstrated. Media can be a tool for correcting misunderstanding, but the presentation needs to be well done and done out of love. It should also connect with what "nones" already know and understand.

What if Christians wanted to make the problem worse? Attendees suggested ideas such as superficial fun events or worship with no spiritual substance, preaching judgment and telling them they're wrong, invalidating others' positions, creating systems that unfairly benefit Christians, fighting people with different belief systems, segregation, and removing the first amendment.

Attendees felt that if we were wildly successful in addressing the problem, it could potentially change the world. Helping others would be more common, as would seeking peaceful solutions to problems, changed lives, and improved biblical literacy. Christians would be known for being leaders in these areas.

Over 30 project ideas were proposed and discussed, and then attendees voted on their favorites. Several ideas fell under the category of "community events" such as cookouts, concerts, bike riding, art festivals, pop culture conventions, and the like. Other popular ideas involved films, television shows, podcasts & radio, and Christian camps.

Workshop attendees shared various concerns about moving forward with any of these projects. The target audience for any project needs to be considered and understood, as does feasibility and cost. Additional issues include legality, city ordinances, long-term effectiveness, and if others are doing similar projects. Anything with a "Christian" label should be Scripturally sound and grounded in prayer. Also, backlash against "Christian" projects should be expected. As one person put it, "Don't expect the world to love what you pour your heart into."

Appendix D: Design Research Report

Prototype Plan

My NPO is “There is a profound misunderstanding among religious ‘nones’ in America about Christianity and what it means to follow Christ, which is caused in part by misrepresentation in various media. If solved, it would mean higher interest in and better representation of authentic Christian perspectives in the public square.” The three concept pitches that emerged to address the NPO during the design research last year were TV/web series, film, and podcast. The idea is to create a project that presents a Christian perspective and would be of interest to religious nones. Since making a film was one of the popular suggestions in my workshops and I have connections that make producing a film a viable project, I intend to create a film that could serve as either a pilot episode for a series or as a standalone movie. This semester I worked on prototyping a film through a rough draft of a script, a concept art poster, an original song, and recording a scene from the script.

Prototype Summary And Findings

One particular suggestion from my research was to make a film, podcast, or TV show with realistic Christian protagonists that face difficulties and respond in ways that are definitively Christian. Such stories, whether true or fictional, could demonstrate what being a Christian is like to an audience that is only superficially familiar with Christianity through news stories or stereotypes in film, TV, and other media.

Many Americans demonstrate knee-jerk and deeply emotional reactions to current issues and events, so a setting outside current-day America could allow a more agreeable space for telling a story that envisions what can be, could be, or should be. The Duffer Brothers have effectively presented alternate views of masculinity and gender norms by setting their Netflix show *Stranger Things* in the 1980s as opposed to the 21st century.⁵⁵ Emily Hunter McGowin, an assistant professor of theology at Wheaton College, points out that fantasy is useful for “explor[ing] ultimate questions about what is good, true, and beautiful through an alternate reality.”⁵⁶ The same could be said for fantasy’s close cousin, science fiction. Christian writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and

⁵⁵ Jessica S. Ornelas, “‘Stranger Things’ Provides an Alternative Model of Masculinity,” *Collider*, last modified July 31, 2022, accessed July 31, 2022, <https://collider.com/stranger-things-alternative-model-of-masculinity/>.

⁵⁶ Emily Hunter McGowin, “The Gospel According to Dungeons & Dragons,” *ChristianityToday.Com*, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/august-web-only/dungeons-dragons-fantasy-role-playing-christianity-theology.html>.

Madeleine L'Engle famously put both fantasy and science fiction to good use toward such questions.

Film as a medium has been noted for its ability to create and portray alternate worlds. Films are also commonly-used vehicles for exploring what kind of persons we should be and what is required to become that kind of person. The hero's journey, a common plot in films such as *Star Wars* and many superhero and Disney films, is inspiring: "A hero myth fosters a sense of identity, of who one might be, and of the ethics and therefore choices one must consider to become such."⁵⁷

Considering the objective of putting an authentic Christian life on display and how best to do that, I chose to prototype a hero's journey film involving a Christian missionary in the far future. I modeled the missionary on circuit riders of the 19th century American West, giving the film a western-in-space feel that is similar to popular television shows like *Firefly* or *The Mandalorian*. I tentatively used *Space Preacher* as a working title.

For this prototype I produced a rough draft of a script, a concept art poster, an original song, and a recording of a scene from the script. I talked to people one-on-one and solicited input from both friends and strangers on social media, seeking answers to the following questions: Would they want to view this film if it were made? What makes it appealing? What makes it unappealing? What would make it more appealing? Does it make sense? What questions do they have?

My concept art poster was well-received, as was the example dialogue. Most responders indicated an interest in viewing the film. Some expressed concern that the film would be too similar to *Firefly*, which also has a preacher as a main character. This concern demonstrates that I need to distinguish myself from *Firefly* while still paying homage to it. My key demographic includes people who enjoy and appreciate that show. Other responders had questions about how "campy" the film would be. My working title *Space Preacher* appears to indicate campiness, which some potential viewers would appreciate while others would not. (The appropriate degree of campiness is often a matter of personal taste.) If I want to make a more serious film and avoid being campy, I probably should choose a different title.

One responder pointed out that I need to show people something they hadn't seen before. Many science fiction viewers expect to see something visual that is new and interesting. The story I'm telling is something new to most of them, but film is inherently a visual medium. I need to find creative ways to tell the story on screen. To this end, I'm experimenting with cheap but clever special effects and researching how camera angles and lighting affect visual storytelling.

My production consultant pointed out to me that a script can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, on a recent film he took a script with serious dialogue and turned it into a comedy by incorporating visual gags. Therefore my script, which is mostly serious with a few witty one-liners,

⁵⁷ S. Brent Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*, second edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 26.

could be made more like a western or more like science fiction. It could be interpreted as a horror film or as a comedy, or it could be more serious versus more campy. The most important decision I must make now is to decide firmly on a particular genre. This decision will in turn determine what style of filming I need to use and help me choose an appropriate title for the film.

Viability

Because I am a member of the Fort Worth Actors Studio, I have resources available to me that make producing a film a viable project. Several other members of the studio have expressed interest in helping me film the project, both in front of and behind the camera. The director of the studio, Nathan D. Myers, has produced and directed a number of shorts and independent films, and he has volunteered to be my production consultant. Myers started making his award-winning independent film *Aria Appleton* with only \$10,000 in his pocket. He raised an additional \$50,000 and used special contract arrangements with his cast and crew that allowed him to make a film for \$60,000 that looked like it had a budget many times larger than that. He also filmed it in only two months. I am starting out in a similar situation with only \$10,000, a concept, and a short timeframe. Myers is confident that my film can be completed on time—or at least progressed enough to demonstrate proof of concept.

New Research Issues

In my second year of research, two new issues arose that should be addressed, both related to a Christian desire to control art. The first issue is the Seven Mountain Mandate (or “7M”), a populist theology whose proponents feel Christians should dominate culture in the areas of media, government, education, economy/business, family, religion, and arts/entertainment. The basic idea is to create the Kingdom of God on earth by forcing everyone and everything to embody a particular vision of what the Kingdom of God should look like. Obvious problems with 7M include violating non-Christians their First Amendment rights and the fact that Christians do not agree on the particulars of what the Kingdom of God should look like. There is also the problem that Christians are never commanded to seize control of the world but instead are generally commanded to submit (such as turning the other cheek) and to influence (such as being salt and light). Instead of appointing people into places of authority, God seems to prefer working with people in low places, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29: “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” (NIV)

The second issue is the Hays Code, a set of guidelines for self-censorship that early Hollywood developed in conjunction with religious leaders. The Hays Code affected all American films released between 1934 and 1968 by dictating which stories could be told through film and which items or activities were allowed to be shown on screen. “Objectional” films during that period had difficulty being made or marketed. Since white straight Christian men were the creators and

gatekeepers of the Hays Code, it is easy to see how bias against telling minority, women, non-Christian, and non-gender conforming stories would be created and perpetuated by such a code. Even under the less stringent MPAA rating system that succeeded the Hayes Code, these kinds of biases flourish.⁵⁸

Both 7M and the Hays Code have affected Christianity's relationship to the film industry, and the two easily conflate. Three years ago I attended Content19, a Christian film festival and media summit for Christian content creators from around the world. In a lecture on the Hays Code, the presenter praised the Hays Code and held it up as a model of how the church can exert enormous influence on art and culture, ensuring its quality and cleanliness. He expressed a desire for the church to have that kind of dominating influence again on Hollywood.

This desire for control is problematic for Christians, evangelism, and art, even when the motives appear to be good. While many people would appreciate films devoid of the sex, violence, and foul language that is common in contemporary films, gatekeeping and censorship causes issues. For example, how can films demonstrate the effects of violence when violence is taboo? How can films explore redemption when certain sins are not even allowed to be mentioned? How can films expose hypocrisy in the church when clergy are never allowed to be shown in a negative light? These are topics Christian filmmakers may desire to address but would have been unable to in the days of the Hays Code.

If Christians were able to exert control over art, it would not be received well by non-Christians. After all, non-Christians would not be allowed a voice in the gatekeeping or censorship process. The evangelism and vision-casting opportunities afforded by films would then dissipate. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, Christians who will be successful in reaching out to seekers will first listen to the seekers tell their stories.⁵⁹ Therefore, if we desire to share truth through story to "nones" via film, "nones" must have the same freedom we do to tell their own stories via film.

⁵⁸ Chloé Nurik, "50 Shades of Film Censorship: Gender Bias From the Hays Code to MPAA Ratings," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 11, no. 4 (December 2018): 530-532.

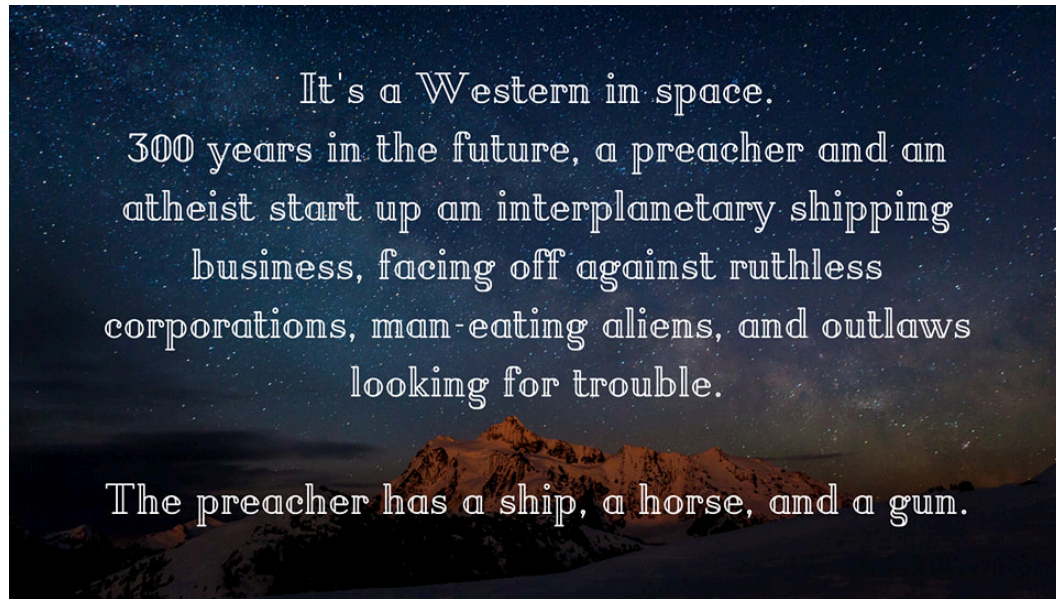
⁵⁹ Charles Taylor, "The Church Speaks - To Whom?," in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, vol. 1, Christian Philosophical Studies 8 (The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012).

Appendix Da

Concept Art Poster



Social Media Promos



Theme Music

There's a Land of Bright Tomorrow

Version A

Words and Music by Jonah McGuire

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is common time (C). The score includes lyrics and chord symbols above the notes.

System 1 (Measures 1-4):

Chords: F, F^{sus}, F, B^b, F, B^b, F, B^b, C

Lyrics: There's a land of bright to - mor - row in the sky, in the
 There's a bet - ter world a - wait - in' in the sky, (in the sky) in the
 There's a fi - nal des - tin - a - tion in the sky, in the

System 2 (Measures 5-8):

Chords: F, F7, F^{sus}, F, B^b, F, B^b, C, C

Lyrics: sky, Where there'll be no tears or sor - row in the sky, in the
 sky, (in the sky) There's no fight - in' or hat - in' in the sky, (in the sky) in the
 sky, A new home for God's ho - ly na - tion in the sky, in the

System 3 (Measures 9-12):

Chords: C, F, F^{sus}, F, B^b, F, B^b, C

Lyrics: sky. Un - til the Sa - vior comes in glo - ry, We'll re - peat (we'll re - peat) the won - drous
 sky, (in the sky) sky. sky.

System 4 (Measures 13-16):

Chords: Gm7, C7, F, F^{sus}, F, B^b, F, B^b, C, F

Lyrics: sto - ry. There's a land of bright to - mor - row in the sky!

©2018

[Click here](#) for audio

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ChNuq6_vII4gPe3E92bbk0aNWyk2NAtC/view?usp=share_link

There's a Land of Bright Tomorrow

(short version)

Version B

Words and Music by Jonah McGuire

Chords: F^{sus} F B^b F B^b F B^b C

Voice

There's a land _____ of bright to - mor - row Where there'll be _____ no tears or

Chords: F C F^{sus} F B^b F B^b F B^b C

4 sor - row in the sky. There's a bet - ter world a - wait - in'; There's no fight - in' or

Chords: F F^{sus} F B^b F B^b C F

9 hat - in'. There's a land _____ of bright to - mor - row in the sky!

[Click here](#) for audio

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Cp7neD8s0Kpzi-hpJ-yine0t_CCW4dMM/view?usp=share_link

Example Scene

[Click here](#) for video with poster + example scene audio + theme music

<https://youtu.be/HXe-HFdI6zk>

Rough Draft

[Click here](#) for rough draft, part 1

https://drive.google.com/file/d/15vCL39pznIQceubR8y6q3S4cFQ8-kFj2/view?usp=share_link

Appendix E: Full Length (Long) Script (approximately 1 ½ hours)

Space Preacher

Episode 1: The Horror of Isis

by

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MUNIN

Sunna System

EXT. SPACE NEAR THE SMALL MOON MUNIN ORBITING THE PLANET ODIN

An old rusty transport vessel travels past a green, forested moon in orbit around the large blue gas giant planet. "LOKI MINING CORP" is written on the side of the transport.

INT. TRANSPORT

The corridors inside the ship are empty and the ship is unmanned. Alerts are blaring. A screen indicates several failed security checks.

EXT. SPACE OUTSIDE TRANSPORT

The transport explodes.

EXT. AFTERNOON, RELIGIOUS FARMING COMMUNITY ON MUNIN

On the surface of the moon is a beautiful, idyllic, Mennonite farming community. Very rustic. There are farmers plowing.

INT. MENNONITE HOME ON MUNIN

There are women in a sewing circle.

There is a father reading to his children.

EXT. AFTERNOON, RELIGIOUS FARMING COMMUNITY ON MUNIN

Chunks of transport start raining from the sky like a fiery meteor shower.

The air is filled with screams. There are buildings burning, people running, and bodies lying on the ground.

ISIS

Ra System

EXT. SPACE NEAR ISIS

The desert planet Isis comes into view.

The Space Corps ship EXCELSIOR flies toward Isis.

COLONEL (V.O.)

Welcome to Isis. If there's such a thing as a bright, shiny center of the Thirteen Systems, you've reached the system it's the farthest from.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY

Two Spacers, COLONEL and SPACEMAN, are walking down the hall. They both wear Space Corps uniforms. As they walk, they pass by researchers in lab coats.

COLONEL

(continuing)

There's not much going on here. The nearest doctor is in the Inti system, so don't get sick or injured.

SPACEMAN

I don't intend to, sir.

COLONEL

The Loki Mining Corp has purchased rights to this system, so most of the few humans around here are LMC researchers reviewing this world's resources. There are also a couple religious nuts who insist we treat the natives with respect. The natives themselves are quite primitive, cannibalistic, and definitely sub-human. They mostly keep to themselves. The Space Corps is only here to make sure the space port and the system gate stay up and running. Lt. Rogers wanted to go on leave, which is why you're here.

SPACEMAN

I'll do the best I can, sir.

COLONEL

Don't get excited, Spaceman. The hardest part of this job is staying awake. Nothing interesting happens here.

EXT. NIGHT, ISIS DESERT

A group of Isis aliens gather in a circle, gesturing to one another. Their faces are lit by torches.

The aliens break into groups that attack and overrun human outposts.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY

Isis aliens are attacking people. The place appears to be on fire. Humans are screaming.

ISIS CAPTAIN looms over SPACEMAN on his knees. The ISIS CAPTAIN holds back SPACEMAN's head by his hair and leans into his upturned face. SPACEMAN is obviously terrified.

ISIS CAPTAIN
Die, filthy foreigner, and share
with me what you know.

CORPS

Happy Kitty Communications Group Core System

INT. BAR

If there's a bright, shiny center of the Universe, Corps is it. However, this bar is in a seedy part of this high-tech world. SETH is wearing a Space Corps jacket and playing pool. Then he wanders over to the bar to get a drink.

REV. STEWART enters the bar. She is dressed in black, including a black cowboy hat. She walks up to the bar.

REV
Howdy.

BARTENDER
Can I help you?

REV
I'm looking for a pilot.

BARTENDER
We don't sell those. Can I get you
a drink?

REV
Do y'all have ice tea? No alcohol
or nuthin', just tea and ice?

BARTENDER
Tea? Let me check.

As the BARTENDER busies himself with getting her a glass of tea, SETH starts up a conversation with REV.

SETH
Hey there. The name's Seth
Rothenberg. I hear you're looking
for a pilot?

Some time later, SETH and REV are sitting at a table. SETH has a beer and REV has a glass of iced tea.

SETH
So, uh, Terry is it?

REV

Reverend Stewart.

SETH

Reverend Stewart. What are we transporting?

REV

Basic goods to start: pots and pans, small tech, medical supplies, clothing, printing supplies. I'm just now dipping my toes into the trading business. In addition to the Argo, I also got a wagon and a horse.

SETH

You're bringing a horse into space?

REV

I heard they make handy transportation on Mama Pancha.

SETH

You want to start with Mama Pancha? Are you a special kind of crazy?

REV

Well, I don't reckon I'm all that special, Son-

SETH

I'm not your son.

REV

Fine, PARD. I thought you were eager to sign on.

SETH

Sure, but when I agreed to go schlepping some preacher around the universe, I wasn't expecting to head to the "most lawless place in the galaxy" first thing.

REV

We could go to Mawu.

SETH

The plague planet?

REV

Plague's mostly died down.

SETH

Uh-huh. How about Bixia?

REV

They still ain't accepting visitors
on account of the plague.

There's silence as REV and SETH stare at each other.

REV

So Mama Pancha it is.

SETH

Great. The hellhole populated with
rednecks, ghosts, and man-eating
aliens.

REV

Them man-eating aliens are hunkered
down a star system over.

SETH

They have a gate, and despite what
those pundits on the news say, they
may have figured out how to use it
by now.

REV

I didn't realize y'all ex-Spacers
were such chickens.

SETH

I didn't realize you preachers were
such idiots.

REV

...So when can we leave?

SETH

I can meet you at the Argo tomorrow
morning and run system checks. If
everything checks out, we can leave
as soon as you're ready.

REV

It should take us a day or two to
get the cargo loaded, and I expect
you to help with that.

SETH

Fair enough. But for the record,
I'm not shoveling any horse drek.
I'm a pilot, not a whoever does
that kind of thing.

REV

Understood. My animal, my ship, my
responsibility.

MAMA
PANCHHA

Inti System

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHHA

Mama Pancha, an Earth-like planet, is visible in the distance. The small ship Bandit flies into view, apparently coming from the L4 gate.

INT. BANDIT SHIP COCKPIT

Two humans are aboard. They both look scruffy.

PILOT
See? There's Mama Pancha up ahead.
I told you we'd make it.

CO-PILOT
I don't know, man. I still got the
creeps about this trip. A lot of
ships have gone missing around here
lately.

PILOT
Will you quit it with the
conspiracy and ghost stories? There
are no monsters on Mawu or ghosts
on Mama Pancha or man-eating aliens
in space. There aren't even any
pirates around here.

CO-PILOT
You don't know that.

PILOT
Oh, yes I do.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHHA

The Space Corps vessel Excelsior hides behind an asteroid. While the crew of the Bandit are arguing and their ship is passing by, the Excelsior pulls behind them.

INT. EXCELSIOR COCKPIT

The Excelsior is completely manned by Isis aliens, including a CAPTAIN and PRIEST.

ISIS CAPTAIN
Destroy it.

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD NEAR MAMA PANCHHA

The Excelsior fires at the Bandit and it explodes in a single shot.

Then the Excelsior returns to hide behind the asteroid again.

CORPS

Rebirth Research Corp Core System (renamed)

EXT. DAY, SPACEPORT ON CORPS

The name of humanity's primary core system is up for sale, and Rebirth Research Corp just bought the rights. Goodbye, "Happy Kitty".

REV and SETH meet outside the Argo. The Argo is a rocket-style ship with "ARGO" and "MTXXVIII.19" imprinted on its side.

SETH

Everything is loaded up, Boss.

REV

All right. Let's take a moment to pray for success before we take off.

SETH

Are you afraid we're not going to make it?

REV

This is God's mission, and I wanna recognize he's the real boss here.

SETH

Right... Why don't you pray and I'll run a last minute check on the Argo's systems.

REV

Don't tell me you don't believe in prayer.

SETH

I don't believe in imaginary friends.

EXT. ARGO IN SPACE, APPROACHING GATE L4 OF THE REBIRTH RESEARCH CORP CORE SYSTEM

System Gate L4 is like a beautiful metal donut in space with colorful lights swirling inside of it. The Argo is headed toward the gate.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

REV is reading a Bible. Throughout this conversation, SETH is reading instruments and periodically glances above him at the window in the ceiling. Colored lights from the gate play across the cockpit.

SETH
We're approaching the gate.

REV looks up.

REV
I remember the first time I traveled through a gate. I was about six years old and I was filled with this great wonder and awe. I knew God had to be a powerful artist to create something so beautiful.

SETH
The Mahuikans created the gates.

REV
True, but God created the physics that allow gates to exist.

SETH
...The first time I traveled through a gate I shat my pants.

REV
Everyone responds to the divine in their own special way.

The ARGO flies into the hole in the middle of the gate. The ship seems to disappear into it.

MAMA
PANCHA

Inti System

EXT. GATE L4 OF THE INTI SYSTEM

The ARGO exits the L4 system gate.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

SETH
Welcome to the Inti system... Well,

that's weird.

REV

What?

SETH

There's a lot of debris up ahead.
You'd expect that with Earth, but
not out in the boonies like this.

REV

Is that a problem?

SETH

No. It's just... unexpected. I'll
have to ask the local Spacers about
it.

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHA

The ARGO flies by the asteroid hiding the EXCELSIOR.

INT. EXCELSIOR COCKPIT

ISIS CAPTAIN

On my mark.

PRIEST notices the markings on the side of the ARGO.

PRIEST

No, wait. Leave that one alone.

EXT. DAY, PORT CITY, MAMA PANCHA

Port City feels like a town straight out of the Old West,
except that most signs are labeled in Cyrillic letters.
(Some are also labeled in English and/or pictures.) There
are various business fronts along Main Street, including a
3D print shop, a saloon/hotel, a brothel, and several shops.
The people here come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and
various languages and accents can be heard, particularly
Slavic.

REV and SETH walk out of the print shop.

REV

(to SETH)

I'll let you load up the wagon. I
got a meeting with a local rancher
to iron out details for the camp
meetin' tonight.

SETH

What's a "camp meetin'?"

REV and SETH are distracted by a commotion at the end of the
street. They go investigate.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PORT CITY

Some townspeople are leading/dragging a QUETZO, who's been roughed up. Some people are shouting. REV flags down one of them. VELEZ stands at the edge of the crowd, watching.

REV

What in tarnation is going on here?

TOWNIE

We're gonna string up the alien as an example to the others. They can't just come in here, kill people, and take our kids as slaves. We gotta show them who's in charge here.

REV

Good Lord, have mercy.

REV walks up a small hill off to the side, pulls out her pistol, and fires it into the air. Startled, the people stop and look at her. REV leaves her gun out rather than re-holstering it.

REV

Howdy. I'm Reverend Terry Stewart, and I'm a circuit preacher from Inara. Bring that alien over here. I can handle him.

The crowd brings the QUETZO to REV and leave him there.

REV

(to the QUETZO)

Ahn ZEH-neh, pee ah-PEE-yeh? (Are you OK, friend?)

The QUETZO nods but looks fearfully at the crowd.

REV

(to the crowd)

This fellow is gonna stay with me. Anyone who's upset about it can take it up with my Peacemaker. I got two things to say to y'all. First of all, learn your aliens. It's Isis that kills people and the Mahuikans that keep slaves. This here is a Quetzo, and they don't hurt nobody.

The crowd begins to grumble as they realize there will be no hanging today.

REV

Second, the good people of this town have planned a tent meeting this evening on the Baker Ranch. I highly recommend all y'all show up. It's obvious many of y'all need Jesus and a baptized conscience. Thank you for your time.

The group disperses.

INT. EVENING, TENT MEETING, BAKER RANCH NEAR PORT CITY

People are gathered inside a tent, clapping and singing "There's a Land of Bright Tomorrow". The QUETZO is there, near the platform. VELEZ stands in the back, watching everything.

REV stands on a platform at the other end of the tent.

REV

Well, that was lovely. Thanks y'all for coming tonight. You know, there is a land of bright tomorrow for those who believe. As the good book says, "God loved the cosmos so much, he gave us his only naturally born son, so that anyone who believes won't perish but have eternal life..."

INT. ROSIE'S BROTHEL, PORT CITY

It's a slow day at Rosie's. There are no customers tonight, and the workers are milling around, mostly bored. ROSIE strolls in with SETH on her arm.

ROSIE

Lookie here, girls! A fresh face.

SETH immediately becomes the focus of attention.

ROSIE

Where are you from, stranger?

SETH

Here, there, and everywhere. Just flew into port this morning.

LADY

(noticing Seth's jacket)
Are you a Spacer?

SETH

Ex-Spacer, yeah. Trying my hand at trade now.

ROSIE

We're in luck tonight, ladies.
We've got ourselves a Spaceman!

Some ladies giggle.

ROSIE
Didn't you fly in with Reverend
Stewart, though? Why aren't you at
the camp meeting?

SETH
Not exactly my kind of scene.

ROSIE
Well you're more than welcome here.
Let's get you a drink. Whiskey?

SETH
Sounds perfect.

ROSIE goes to the bar to fetch a shot of whiskey.

LADY 1
(to SETH)
What do you think of Mama Pancha,
Spaceman? Have you seen any Dewsha
yet?

SETH
What's a Dewsha?

LADY 2
They're the first settlers of Mama
Pancha. They all died shortly after
arriving here and their ghosts
haunt the place.

ROSIE
(interrupting)
They're a bunch of govno. Just old
wives tales for scaring children.

ROSIE silences LADY 2 with a sharp look, then warmly smiles
as she offers SETH his drink.

ROSIE
Whiskey?

EXT. DAY, PORT CITY, MAMA PANCHA

REV is talking to VELEZ. The QUETZO is standing nearby.

REV
So you can take care of my friend
here.

VELEZ

(winking at the QUETZO)
My pleasure.

REV
And if he needs more than what I
paid you, we'll settle when I get
back.

VELEZ
Deal.

QUETZO
(to REV)
Xew geh zeh-NEH-xee-yahg,
ah-PEE-yeh. (God bless you,
friend.)

REV
(to QUETZO)
Mahd. (Peace.)

QUETZO
Mahd.

SETH is loading a wagon. REV walks up, picks up a box, and
begins helping him load.

SETH
The local Spacers never responded,
but my Spacer buddies in the Sol
system did.

REV
Hmm?

SETH
They say that ships have gone
missing and no one knows why. But
it's a low priority item.

REV
That's mighty curious.

SETH
Not really. No one cares about the
Inti system.

REV
Someone cares enough to do
somethin' to them ships.

SETH
Probably LMC. Those ships are
probably old and blowing themselves
up.

REV

Like the transport in the Sunna system?

SETH
Right, or they were local competition and LMC knows nobody would care if they disappeared.

REV
Couldn't it be Rama pirates?

SETH
If it's dirty or underhanded, my money is always on the LMC.

REV
You definitely ain't a fan of the Loki Mining Corp.

SETH
They're bastards. If I could only prove half of what I know they do, the rest of the Thirteen Systems would throw them out an airlock without a suit... Looks like everything is loaded, Boss.

REV climbs up on right side of the wagon, carrying a rifle.

REV
You drive, and I'll ride shotgun.

SETH climbs up on the left side. He looks at the reins but doesn't touch them.

SETH
I don't know how to drive this thing. I'm a pilot, not a wagon driver.

REV
It's easy. Pick up them reins and do what I tell you. Even a Spaceman can do this. (gestures at the horses) Paul and Barnie here are pretty smart and they'll do most of the work for you.

SETH
And where are we headed?

REV
North.

SETH
Where's north?

REV

You pulling my leg, Pard?

SETH

Don't look at me like that. I fly spaceships. There's no north in space!

REV

(points)

That way. Go that way.

EXT. NIGHT, WOODS

REV and SETH are in sleeping bags on opposite sides of a campfire.

SETH

I didn't realize it would get so damn freezing up here!

REV

The townsfolk said the weather could change quick.

SETH

You know, if we put our sleeping bags together, we could keep each other warm.

REV

I'm good. Jesus keeps me warm.

SETH

That's convenient. Does Jesus have any sisters?

EXT. MORNING, PRAIRIE, NORTHERN PROVINCE

REV and SETH are traveling in the wagon.

REV

Now I understand Spacers go all over, but I reckon everyone comes from somewhere. What's home for you, Seth? Where do you take off your boots?

SETH

Space is my home.

REV

Uh-huh. Surely you weren't born and raised in space?

SETH

(reluctant to answer)

I was born on Laufey, but got the hell out of there as soon as I could.

REV

Ah, I take it you didn't want to work them mines on Loki.

SETH

Damn straight. The LMC treats human beings like tissue paper to be used and thrown away. They think they own you body and soul, and after they suck the life out of you they just grab the next person in line. It's a long line.

REV

You lose someone in them mines?

SETH

My dad... And my faith in the universe.

REV

(grunts)

...I lost my parents in the plague on Mawu last year.

SETH

I thought you guys were from Inara.

REV

My mother was a doctor and my father was a preacher. If they thought they could help people, body or soul, they were there. So when they heard about the plague, they headed straight to Mawu as medical missionaries. My sister and I didn't even get to bury them.

EXT. DAY, SMALL TOWN IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE ON MAMA PANCHIA

REV and SETH pull into a small town on their wagon.

SETH

Civilization at last! (looks around) Well, almost.

REV and SETH dismount and DEACON approaches them. DEACON carries a gun on his hip.

DEACON

(to REV)

Are you the preacher?

REV

Reverend Terry Stewart, at your service. And this is my partner in crime, Seth Rauschenbusch.

SETH

Rothenberg

REV

What he said.

DEACON

Deacon Cartwright from the Methodist church. We've been spreading the word you'd be here, and we got folk driving in from all over the northern province. Looking forward to spending a great week in the Word with you.

REV

Wonderful! Let us get situated and then why don't you show me your setup?

DEACON nods.

REV

(to SETH)

Alright, Pard. Your time to shine. Set up shop and start hawking wares while I check out where I'm preaching this week.

SETH

I'm a pilot, not a salesman.

REV

Don't matter. Ain't been no traders up here in months. These folk are so desperate for what you got, the hardest part will be counting the money. And you can keep a third of the profit of anything you sell this week.

SETH

Two thirds. I'm doing the selling.

REV

Half. I bought the goods.

SETH

Sounds fair. Never too late to learn a new trade!

SETH enthusiastically starts unloading and hustling

passersby.

EXT. EVENING, TENT, SMALL TOWN IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE ON
MAMA PANCHA

It's the fifth day of camp meeting. REV is preaching to a crowd gathered under a large tent and holding a rock in her hand. She's walking around the stage as she speaks. DEACON is standing off to the side. There's an open Bible on a nearby lectern.

SETH has set up shop outside the tent, selling miscellaneous household items. He's got a long line of customers.

REV

As y'all know, rocks get a bum rap.
When a man is unfeeling, we say he
has a heart of stone. When there
are no good choices, we say you're
caught between a rock and a hard
place. If a woman makes a lot of
bad decisions, adds two and two
together and gets three, people
might say she's dumber than a box
of rocks. (pause) If anyone just
took that personally, I apologize.

The crowd chuckles.

JACKSON and his four ROGUES enter the tent.

They spread out among the crowd.

They attract attention and people are obviously uncomfortable by their presence.

REV

And what do we call it when life
gets the worst that it can get? We
call it hittin'...

CROWD

Rock bottom!

REV

Right. But as y'all also know,
rocks come in handy. You can build
bridges and roads with them. You
can build homes for your families
and walls to protect them. But no
matter how useful rocks are, they
ain't alive.

ROGUE 1 walks up behind a YOUNG MAN leaning against a tree in the back and kicks the YOUNG MAN's leg out from under him. The YOUNG MAN falls and ROGUE 1 laughs.

REV

Most of us think the opposite of "alive" is "dead", but that ain't true. Something that's dead was once alive. The real opposite of "alive" is "lifeless". This rock is lifeless. It ain't ever been alive and it won't ever be alive--well, it'll never be alive outside of an act of God.

ROGUE 2 sits next to a TEENAGER and takes his Bible. He casually rifles through it while the TEENAGER watches, and the TEENAGER is obviously uncertain what to do about it.

REV

But the power of God can do great things! God can take lifeless rocks and make them sing his praises!

Some members of the crowd yell "Amen!"

ROGUE 3 picks up a crutch obviously belonging to an OLD MAN. ROGUE 3 holds it like a rifle and pretends to shoot the OLD MAN, who winces.

REV

God can take lifeless rocks and turn them into living stones. Without God, we are nothing. We are as lifeless as this rock. We are as lifeless as a barren moon hangin' in space. But Jesus came to give us life--abundant life!

She gets a few Amens from the crowd.

ROGUE 2 motions to ROGUE 4, who comes over. ROGUE 2 points out a page. ROGUE 4 takes the Bible and tears out the page. Then he hands the Bible to ROGUE 2. ROGUE 2 hands it back to the TEENAGER, who looks ready to cry.

JACKSON speaks to a WOMAN, who is shocked and offended by his words.

REV

Now Jesus himself is a living stone, but not just any living stone. He's the Cornerstone--rejected by men but chosen by God! And he has the power to make us into living stones. And by living stones I mean a community of believers who love the Lord, a community of believers who are active in the cosmos, a community of folks who are the building

blocks for God's spiritual house
 where Jesus Christ is already the
 Cornerstone.

A MAN next to the WOMAN stands up to come between them and
 confronts JACKSON.

REV drops her rock and eyes them suspiciously. Then she goes
 to look at the Bible on the lectern.

REV
 (trying to recover from
 being distracted)
 So the book of First Peter tells us
 that Jesus Christ is a living stone
 who was rejected by humans but who
 is a precious chosen stone in God's
 sight, and by comin' to him y'all
 are also living stones and being
 built into a spiritual house...

JACKSON and the MAN scuffle. A shot rings out. They quickly
 turn to look at REV, who is holding a smoking gun.

The crowd is a little shocked and very quiet. All attention
 is on REV and JACKSON.

REV
 Now excuse me, son, but some of
 these good people have traveled
 hundreds of miles to hear the Word
 of God preached, and I've traveled
 three star systems to give it to
 'em.

JACKSON
 Not tryin' to cause trouble. This
 here's a lady friend of mine. Just
 wanted a little friendly chat.
 That's all.

REV turns her attention to the WOMAN.

REV
 Is that true, ma'am?

The WOMAN is obviously afraid and won't speak. Instead she
 shakes her head at REV.

REV glances back and forth between JACKSON and the WOMAN.
 She points her gun at JACKSON.

DEACON
 It looks like the lady ain't
 interested in your company. Why
 don't you and your friends
 skedaddle and leave these good folk

in peace?

DEACON and various people stationed around the edge of the tent pull out guns and/or rifles and point them at JACKSON, who raises his hands.

JACKSON glances at his four ROGUES and jerks his head towards the back of the tent.

The ROGUES get up and leave.

JACKSON walks backward to leave, hands still raised, mostly keeping his eyes on REV.

JACKSON
I ain't gonna forget this,
preacher.

REV waits until JACKSON is gone, then holsters her gun.

REV
All right, now where was I?

DEACON
(holsters his gun)
First Peter!

REV
Right. (looks at Bible) First Peter two, verses four and five says, "By comin' to him, a living stone, which was rejected by humans but which is a precious chosen stone in God's sight, you yourselves, as living stones, are also being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God...

INT. EVENING, FAMILY DINING ROOM, DEACON'S HOUSE, NORTHERN PROVINCE

REV is seated at the dinner table with DEACON, his WIFE, and a few guests. Everyone is finishing eating and they're in good spirits and sharing stories. SETH and DEACON'S DAUGHTER are sitting and chatting by the fireplace.

SETH
...so me and my buddy Rainbow barely made it out of Bixia station with just the clothes on our backs.

DEACON'S DAUGHTER
That's amazing! It must be exciting to be a Spaceman.

SETH

Maybe 3% of the time. Space is mostly big, boring, and empty. But that 3% makes it worth it.

DEACON, his WIFE, and REV are seated together at one head of the table.

DEACON

Reverend, sorry about that ruckus this evening. That rascal Jackson, you just gotta keep an eye on him. He lives for trouble. Maybe I should have shot him and saved us all a lot of hassle.

REV

That so?

DEACON'S WIFE

It's true. That man and his gang causes trouble wherever they go. (lowers her voice) I heard he deflowered young Miss Anne. She was distraught over it and her father was furious of course. But when he challenged Jackson, Jackson laughed--and shot him dead.

REV

Lord, have mercy!

DEACON

(sigh)

I suppose it wouldn't have been right to shoot a man at a tent meeting.

REV

Certainly not my preference. The good Lord said those who live by the sword tend to die by them. But let's be sure to pray for Jackson and his gang before anybody else gets hurt.

DEACON'S WIFE

You're kidding, right?

REV

Nope. Pray for your friends and pray for your enemies even harder.

SETH is still chatting with DEACON'S DAUGHTER and nursing a glass of wine.

SETH

So tell me about these Dewsha. What are they?

DEACON'S DAUGHTER

Oh. Well, the city folk say they're ghosts. Daddy says they're demons. And Mama says they're just fairy tales and don't exist.

SETH

What do you say?

DEACON'S DAUGHTER

I don't know what they are, but I know they're real. I saw them once.

SETH

Really? Where?

DEACON'S DAUGHTER

In the barn. I could see shadows of people moving across the wall, but there weren't any people. I called for Daddy, but when he showed up they were gone.

SETH

Interesting.

EXT. MORNING, SMALL TOWN IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE ON MAMA PANCHA

SETH and REV are loading and checking the wagon, getting ready to leave.

SETH

We have a lot of room back here now. I sold most of our wares this week. Except for the medical supplies--nobody seemed very interested in those.

REV

Huh. Those usually go quick. God must have something special in mind for those supplies.

SETH gives REV a quizzical look as she loads a crate of chickens.

SETH

We're schlepping chickens now?

REV

They took up a love offering for us during the camp meeting.

SETH

And they gave us chickens?

REV

Well, folks got what they got.
Folks on the frontier, sometimes
they only got what they can grow
out of the ground or hunt or breed
or cook. But they gave us some
money, too.

SETH and REV climb into the wagon.

DEACON approaches.

DEACON

When are you coming back this way,
Reverend?

REV

I reckon about a month.

DEACON

Great! You know, it's been so long
since we had a bona fide preacher
around here and there's a couple
folks who would like a real wedding
with a real preacher.

REV

I suppose I could make time for
that. I love a good wedding.

SETH

(to REV)

Which way, Boss?

REV

South.

SETH doesn't know which direction is south.

REV

(pointing)

That way.

REV waves goodbye to DEACON as they drive off.

EXT. MORNING, PRAIRIE, NORTHERN PROVINCE

REV and SETH are in the wagon, headed south.

SETH

For the record, I don't accept
chickens as payment.

REV

That's all right. I'm keeping aside
a store of filthy lucre just for
paying you if times get lean.

SETH
And I still get paid even when I
don't go to the meeting, right?

REV
Yes. Shoot, Judas done skipped out
on the Last Supper and betrayed
Jesus and he still got paid.

REV checks her watch.

REV
I got a message from my boss.

REV holds up her watch, and a small holo of DR. ISAIAH WHITE
appears above it.

SETH
(looks over at WHITE)
That's Jesus?

REV
No, it's my other boss. Dr. White
from the Interplanetary Missions
Society. He probably wants me to
check in.

EXT. NIGHT, WOODS

REV and SETH are sitting around a campfire. SETH is relaxing
and staring at the stars. REV is playing "Amazing Grace" on
a venova.

SETH
Do you have to ruin a beautiful
night with a funeral song?

REV
(stops playing)
It ain't no funeral song. It's
"Amazing Grace", one of the most
famous hymns ever.

SETH
I've only ever heard it at
funerals.

REV
Well come to a camp meetin' and
you'll get to hear it proper.

SETH
Do I have to?

REV

Course not.

SETH

Then I'll pass.

REV

So tell me, Pard. Do you believe in anything?

SETH

Oh, sure.

REV

And?

SETH

I believe in open space, good whiskey, and loose women.

REV

I meant religion.

SETH

That is my religion... Though I'd never say no to Bubby's matza ball soup.

REV

Mmm... I ain't sure I'd say no to anybody's bubby's matza ball soup, neither.

INT. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF PORT CITY

The church is small. All furniture is wooden. REV is preaching. As usual, she carries a gun on her hip.

REV

Now lemme tell you four rules about the wilderness. First off, don't go there if you don't have to. The wilderness is a dangerous place. There's wild critters and bandits out there. Second, don't go alone. Third, don't go out there at night when it's dark. That's plumb loco. And fourth, bring a weapon to protect yourself.

Outside the church, CYRUS hangs out in the shadows.

CYRUS pulls out a gun and checks it over.

REV

These folk in Capernaum bring sick

people to Jesus and he stays up all night healin' each and every one of 'em. Now any normal person would be exhausted after all that, so you'd expect him to get some shuteye. But no, Jesus says to himself, "This is a good time for some prayer," and he gets up and heads straight into the wilderness, alone, in the dark, and unarmed!

CYRUS enters from the back.

REV

When his disciples realize Jesus is gone, they form a search party to go into the wilderness. In groups. While the sun is shinin' and Simon the Zealot is packin'. And when they finally locate Jesus, instead of agreeing to go back home, he says...

A shot rings out. CYRUS has shot a man, who slumps over.

CYRUS takes aim at a kid. People are screaming.

Another shot rings out, and CYRUS is hit in the right shoulder. He stumbles backward and falls.

REV, holding her smoking gun, stares in horror at CYRUS and her gun. She drops the gun and sinks to the floor, shocked at what just happened.

Church members rush to help both CYRUS and REV.

INT. HOTEL, PORT CITY

REV is in her hotel room, listening to a holo message from DR. WHITE.

WHITE

...Our thoughts and prayers are with you and everyone else in Port City. However, we are all also deeply disturbed by recent events, and we are anxious to hear your side of the story before making any firm decisions about your future with the Interplanetary Missions Society. Let us know as soon as possible when you can meet with us.

REV stares at herself in the mirror, despondent. She hears a chirp and touches her ear.

REV

Stewart here.

SETH
(over a speaker)
Hey, Boss, could you join me
downstairs? We should talk.

REV sighs.

INT. SALOON, PORT CITY

VELEZ is playing bartender today, standing behind the bar.
SETH is waiting by the bar, and brightens up as REV walks
in.

SETH
Hey there, Boss. Glad you could
come.

REV
What do you need to talk about?

SETH
The fact that you, my friend,
obviously need a drink.

VELEZ
(to SETH and REV)
What can I get for you?

SETH
Another shot of whiskey for me and
whatever the lady wants.

REV
Tea, please.

SETH
(to REV)
Tea? Seriously?

VELEZ waves his hand under the bar where no one can see. A
teapot appears near his hand under the bar.

REV
(to VELEZ)
Make sure that's ice tea. Sorry.

VELEZ
Not a problem. I just happen to
have some ready.

VELEZ waves his hand in front of the hidden teapot under the
bar. It changes into pitcher of iced tea. He takes a glass
off the shelf behind him and places it on top of the bar in
front of REV. Ice appears in the glass, but no one notices.
VELEZ pulls out the pitcher and fills the glass with tea.

VELEZ grabs a bottle of whiskey and refills SETH's shot glass.

SETH
(to REV)
Did you hear back from what's his name?

REV
Dr. White? Yeah. The IMS is recallin' me from the field. They're givin' me a hearing, but it looks like my career is over before it had a chance to get goin'.

SETH
Damn. Sorry to hear that.

REV stares blankly ahead, mostly talking to herself and not really listening to SETH. She occasionally sips her tea.

REV
I never should have left Inara.

SETH
Well, I'm glad you did. I was getting bored and really needed a job.

REV
I'm still processin' what went down. I ain't ever shot a man before. I didn't intend to do it, either. It just happened.

SETH
For what it's worth, I think you're a hero. You saved that kid's life.

REV
What did that youngun want to shoot up a church for, anyways?

SETH
Maybe someone tried to pay him in chickens.

REV
I'm supposed to be saving souls, not taking lives.

SETH
You only winged him. He's recovering in the hospital and I hear he's going to be fine.

REV
(emotional)

I wish... I wish I could be back home on the family farm with my sister and her kids. I wish I hadn't tried to fill our parents' shoes. Everythin' always seemed to make sense when they were here. I don't know what I'm gonna do.

SETH
Well for now brooding over your iced tea is about all you can do. We're not going anywhere for a while. The atmosphere is too ionized for us to take off. Apparently that happens once in a while here. We'll have to wait for a good rainstorm to clear it out, and it's the dry season.

REV snaps out of her reverie and looks at SETH.

REV
How long you reckon we're going to be stuck here?

SETH
(gestures toward VELEZ)
This guy tells me it could be a few weeks... Are you sure you don't want to try something stronger than tea?

INT. HOTEL, PORT CITY

The lights are off in REV's room. A shadow moves in the darkness.

REV enters the room. She doesn't bother turning on the light. She takes off her gun belt and hat, hanging both on the coat rack. She goes the holo device to record a message. She takes a big breath and releases it slowly before pressing record.

REV
Howdy, sis. They say the only thing that travels faster 'n light is bad news. Y'all probably heard already about what happened at First Baptist in Port City. The IMS is investigating what happened. My first solo mission and I'm already being recalled. If I ever needed prayer, it's now--hold on.

REV hears a noise behind her. She pauses the recording and

turns around, peering into the darkness.

REV

Uh, hello? Anybody there?

PRIEST steps into the light. He is between REV and the door.
REV is basically trapped.

REV recognizes PRIEST as a potential threat. She reaches toward her hip, then glances at her gun hanging on the coat rack by the door--far out of reach.

PRIEST

Reverend Stewart, we need your help.

REV

...What the what?

PRIEST

I recognized your sign and convinced my comrades you might be willing to help us.

REV

My... sign?

PRIEST

On your ship. Matthew 28:19, "Go and disciple all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

REV

I didn't know Isis aliens could quote Scripture.

PRIEST

Most of us can't. We have no interest in human religion--or didn't before the uprising. But I ate a missionary and everything changed.

REV

Come again?

Scenes from the uprising from the PRIEST's point of view appear onscreen as he speaks. A group of ISIS ALIENS, including PRIEST, attack a missionary outpost.

PRIEST (V.O.)

We planned to hit every human outpost at once, suddenly and without warning, to get rid of you all before you could resist us. My family was assigned to attack the

missionary outpost. All they had wanted was to make sure Loki Mining Corp didn't take advantage of us and to share the love of their God with us. But they were foreigners and had to go.

PRIEST stands before FATHER JOHN (a human priest), who is on his knees.

PRIEST (V.O.)
I found a priest and before I ripped him open I said,

PRIEST
(to FATHER JOHN)
Die, filthy foreigner, and share with me what you know.

FATHER JOHN looks up at PRIEST with compassion and resolve rather than fear.

FATHER JOHN
Take it.

The flashback scenes end.

REV
And you ate him?! What's... What's wrong with y'all?

PRIEST
My people eat our own dead to preserve the wisdom and passions of our loved ones, so they are never fully gone. We thought we could weaponize this ability and use it to gain your human knowledge.

REV
You don't want to eat me. My head is mostly full of useless stuff like Greek and Hebrew.

PRIEST
You're safe. I know all that now, plus Latin. But I received far more than I anticipated. Some power has gripped me and is transforming me. I know what he knew and love what he loved and I am completely changed.

There is a moment of silence while REV absorbs this information.

REV

Was he someone I know?

PRIEST

John Sasaki

REV

Father John?! You ate Father John?!
My parents knew him. He was such a
great guy.

PRIEST

And he knew you. Which is why I
thought you could help us.

REV

Come again?

PRIEST

Two things. First, in consuming
human flesh, we also inadvertently
opened ourselves to human diseases
that we have no defense against. We
need medical supplies and
assistance. Second, we stole
equipment from LMC and the Space
Corps to come through the systems
gate, but due to our lack of
practical knowledge, we damaged the
gate.

In a flashback, the Space Corps ship hits the side of the
system gate as it flies through it. Lights on the gate
flicker and shut off.

PRIEST

Our people are dying and we cannot
go home. Devoid of hope, my people
thought they would continue waging
war against humanity, but I
convinced them otherwise when I saw
your ship. If anyone would help us,
surely it would be a missionary
like you.

REV

I reckon you don't know me as well
as you think. This is my first
missionary assignment on my own and
I done screwed it up big time.

PRIEST

If you are anything like James and
Marie Stewart--

REV

Son of a Baptist preacher. You're
playin' the parents card?

PRIEST waits patiently while REV struggles with herself.

REV
(resigned)
I'll see what I can do.

INT. SALOON, PORT CITY

The QUETZO rushes to greet REV.

QUETZO
(slowly)
Friend! Thank you for all.

REV
You're welcome. Are they treating
you alright?

The QUETZO doesn't understand the question.

REV
Uh... Ahn ZEH-neh, pee ah-PEE-yeh?
(Are you OK, friend?)

QUETZO
EE-gah hoop. (Yes, I am.) Thank
you.

REV
I don't reckon you know anything
about fixing system gates.

The QUETZO shakes his head.

REV
It was worth askin'. We're headed
to Earth soon if you want to go.
Take care of yourself, hear?

The QUETZO nods.

REV sees SETH in the corner, playing cards. She heads over
there and sits by him.

REV
Tell me, Pard. Do you know how to
repair system gates?

SETH
It depends on what's wrong with
them. I worked on them all the time
in the Space Corps. Is there
something wrong with the L4 gate?

REV
Nope. The L5 gate.

SETH

That's probably a good thing. That would keep the Isis aliens out.

REV

What if we needed it fixed?

SETH

It's the Space Corps's job to keep them up and running.

REV

You know better 'n I do they'll call it a "low priority" item.

SETH

And for good reason.

REV

So could you do it?

SETH

Maybe, but the Space Corps would frown on non-Spacers or ex-Spacers touching their equipment. I could get in a lot of trouble, and taking that risk would cost you a lot more than you were raking in on those "love offerings".

REV

(deep breath)

What if I told you there was someone on the other side who knows all the inner workings and shady dealings of LMC and has proof of it all and would be willing to share it all with you if we'd, uh, rescue him?

SETH

Rescue him? Where the hell is he?

REV

Isis

SETH

Govno! Woman, you're crazy. I'm not going to Isis.

REV

We don't have to go to Isis. We just have to fix the gate.

SETH

Govno

REV

Is that a yay or nay?

SETH

It's my favorite new word. But it doesn't matter. We're stuck here until it rains, remember? Go pray for rain. If your imaginary friend helps you, then we'll talk.

EXT. LATE AFTERNOON, PORT CITY, MAMA PANCHA

REV is sitting on the steps in front of a shop, Bible in hand, oblivious to the world. A GIRL around 10 years old sits next to her.

GIRL

Hello, Reverend Stewart.

REV

What? Oh, howdy. Didn't see you there.

GIRL

What are you doing?

REV

Thinkin', prayin', readin'

GIRL

About what?

REV

(reading from Psalm 135)
Rain. "For I know that Jehovah is great and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever Jehovah pleases, he does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and all the depths. He causes the vapor to rise from the end of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain. He brings out the wind from his storehouses."
(sigh) I want God to send rain.

GIRL

What do you want rain for?

REV

Well, lil one, it would help save some lives. There are some people out there who are sick and need medicine and need to get home.

GIRL

And rain would help?

REV

Yeah

There's a moment of silence, then the GIRL speaks up.

GIRL

You said at the camp meeting that when we pray, God can answer in all sorts of ways. Like if we ask him to heal people, he can wave his hand and just heal them or he can heal you through doctors and medicine.

REV

There's that, but I don't think he's going to send someone that can make it rain. No one on Mama Pancha has the money for one of them fancy weather satellites.

GIRL

Oh

There's another moment of silence with both REV and the GIRL trapped in their thoughts.

REV

I suppose you should head home, lil one. It'll get dark soon.

GIRL

Right. I'll see you around, Reverend Stewart.

The GIRL hops up and waves goodbye to REV, who waves back. The GIRL walks away while REV is left sighing and thinking.

As the GIRL turns a corner, she transforms into VELEZ.

EXT. NIGHT, HILL UNDER THE STARS

It's a clear night, and the sky is filled with stars. VELEZ walks up a hill and removes his hat.

VELEZ looks intently into the sky and grins as if greeting an old friend.

A moment passes, and VELEZ winks at the sky.

VELEZ puts his hat back on and walks down the hill. There's a distant rumble.

EXT. NIGHT, FARM HOUSE

A couple is sitting on their front porch.

MAN

You know, when I was a kid, it was mostly beech trees around here. Now it seems like they're all oaks.

WOMAN

Your memory is going. Trees don't just up and change.

VELEZ passes by.

VELEZ

You might want to head inside and close your windows. Rain's coming.

MAN

Don't be ridiculous. It's the wrong time of year for rain.

There's a rumble and rain starts to fall.

MAN

Govno! Woman, get inside quick!

The couple rushes indoors.

INT. HOTEL, PORT CITY

REV is watching a holo message from her sister TABBY. TABBY is holding a baby and playing with it.

TABBY

(mock exasperation)

Esther Marie Stewart, whatever are we going to do with you?

(kind)

We heard about what happened, and I thought you needed a baby pick-me-up.

(to baby)

Can we say hi to Auntie Terry?

(speaking for the baby)

Hi, Auntie Terry!

REV smiles and waves back.

TABBY

(in her own voice)

Remember we're always praying for you and we always got your back. God is good...

There's a crack of thunder. Surprised, REV leaps up to pause the holo and looks out the window. It's raining. REV breathes a sigh of relief and smiles.

REV
...all the time.

INT. SALOON, PORT CITY

REV enters the saloon by walking down the stairs. VELEZ ignores the rain as he polishes glasses to put back on the shelf. The saloon PATRONS are gathered by the window, gawking at the rain.

PATRON 1
I ain't ever seen it like this.

PATRON 2
(in Ukrainian)
Ya nikoly ne bachyv takoho doshchu.

REV walks up behind SETH, who is peering out the window.

REV
I talked to my invisible-but-not-imaginary friend today.

SETH
(looking at the rain)
I see that.

REV
Interested in helping my buddy?

SETH
Which buddy?

REV
The one with dirt on the LMC.

SETH
Assuming the rain means we can leave this rock, I can look into it. But no promises.

REV
I'll take what I can get.

SETH
Tell me about this guy we're trying to rescue.

REV
He's, uh, devoured everything there is to know about LMC. He got the inside scoop from the vice president they sent to oversee their interests on Isis. And he has access to all their data.

SETH

How did he get it?

REV grimaces, but this goes unnoticed by SETH who keeps his attention on the rain outside.

REV
I heard he dug deep, but I wasn't
interested in hearin' the details.

SETH
How did you hear about this guy?

REV
He's a friend of a friend.

SETH
One of your missionary friends?

REV
Something like that.

SETH turns around to look at REV.

SETH
It's not like you to be evasive.

REV
Did you know when Isis aliens eat
people they gain their knowledge?

SETH
You have a missionary friend who
knows an alien who ate an LMC exec?

REV
Yes.

SETH
I think I'd like to shake that
alien's hand. Assuming he won't eat
it.

REV
I think you're safe, Pard. They've
had their fill of Spacers. All
their Spacer pockets are full.

SETH
They've been eating Spacers?

REV
That's how they got through the
gate--and how they broke it.

SETH
They've been eating Spacers?

REV

You said that already.

SETH

Good guys don't eat Spacers! So they got through the gate... Are they here on Mama Pancha??

REV

That's how I met them. One snuck into my room upstairs.

SETH

Holy sh... govno.

REV

So, are you ready to send them back where they came from, or would you rather they hole up here for a while?

SETH

Govno.

REV

I'm hopin' that's a yes.

SETH

If they have incriminating dirt on LMC, it might be worth sending them back where they came from.

REV

That's the spirit!

EXT. GATE L5 OF THE INTI SYSTEM

SETH, wearing a spacesuit, is working on the system gate.

SETH

(grunting & cursing to himself)

Damn stupid man-eating aliens...
Damn greedy Loki Mining Corp...
Damn crazy space preachers...

INT. EXCELSIOR MEDICAL BAY

REV hands a datapad to PRIEST. ISIS CAPTAIN stands nearby.

REV

That's everythin' y'all need to know about the medical supplies--including the latest vaccines--and how to use 'em.

REV and PRIEST shake hands.

PRIEST

Thank you for your help.

REV

Happy to be of service.

ISIS CAPTAIN offers a datapad to REV.

ISIS CAPTAIN

I also want to thank you for your help. I believe this is the payment you requested.

REV

I don't need nothin'. But my pard Seth would appreciate it.

ISIS CAPTAIN exits, leaving REV and PRIEST alone.

PRIEST

Thank you again for your help. I know this has been awkward for you and your pilot.

REV

It certainly has, but honestly I needed the opportunity to do good for somebody before I head back to Earth.

PRIEST

...Tell me, Reverend Stewart, do you think I'm a monster? Since I ate your friend, I often wonder if that's the case.

REV

I don't believe in monsters. We're all redeemable. To claim otherwise is to say that God ain't in charge no more. I have to believe in grace; otherwise nothing I do is worth the trouble... You know, I have to stand before a Interplanetary Missions Society committee that will judge me to see if I'm still worthy to represent them on the field.

PRIEST

You will be in my prayers, Reverend Stewart. You have proven yourself worthy in my eyes.

REV

Thank you, uh... What do I call

you? "Father"?

PRIEST

My people have started calling me
"Priest".

REV

Well. God bless you and your
people, Priest.

PRIEST

Thank you. And God bless you as
well. If you ever need assistance
from us in the future, we would be
honored to be your allies.

INT. EXCELSIOR HALLWAY

SETH is hanging up his spacesuit near the airlock. ISIS
CAPTAIN approaches him.

SETH eyes him warily.

ISIS CAPTAIN

Friend--

SETH

I'm not your friend.

ISIS CAPTAIN offers SETH the datapad.

ISIS CAPTAIN

Spaceman Rothenberg, I believe you
wanted this. We cannot thank you
enough for your help.

SETH takes the datapad. SETH scrolls through the information
and lets out a low whistle.

SETH

Wow. This is amazing. I knew they
were shitty but even I didn't know
they were this plain evil. And it's
so thorough. This information could
ruin them.

SETH

(to ISIS CAPTAIN)

Thank you for the data, but the
best thanks is if you go home and
don't come back.

ISIS CAPTAIN

Understood.

REV walks down the corridor.

REV
 (to SETH)
 Ready to go, Pard?

SETH
 Damn straight. Let's get out of
 here.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

REV hears clucking noises. She opens the locker and sees a
 chicken.

REV
 Ya kept one.

SETH
 I named him Shlomo.

REV is speechless.

SETH
 It's OK. He's kosher.

EARTH
 Sol System

EXT. SPACE NEAR EARTH

Earth looms ahead. The ARGO flies toward it.

INT. MEETING ROOM, IMS HEADQUARTERS

Several Christian leaders of various ethnicities around the
 world are gathered in this room, holding a conference. DR.
 WHITE stands in the front of the room, acting as moderator.

DR. WHITE
 (addressing the
 committee)
 To those who haven't met her, allow
 me to introduce to you Reverend
 Esther Stewart.

DR. WHITE motions for REV to join him at the front of the
 room. She walks toward him as he continues.

DR. WHITE
 Esther "Terry" Stewart is the
 daughter of James and Marie Stewart
 who, as you recall, faithfully
 served with the IMS for several
 years. I invited her to address you
 today.

REV

Howdy. Many of y'all know me. I grew up before your eyes. And I know I'm expected to defend myself as to what happened on Mama Pancha... I acted without thinkin', and I ain't got no good excuse for my actions. But if you ask me to stop preachin', this is what I know: Like Jeremiah, "his word is in my heart like a fire, a burnin' fire shut up in my bones, I'll be weary of trying to hold it in, and I can't." [Jer. 20:9] Preachin' is what God made me for. If I can't preach, I'm done. I may as well keel over and give up the ghost. God knows--and I know--I don't deserve a second chance. I can't promise y'all that I'll never make mistakes but I can promise that I'll learn from 'em.

(to DR. WHITE)

...And that's all I got to say 'bout that.

DR. WHITE

Thank you for sharing, Terry.

(to the committee)

Does anyone have any questions for Reverend Stewart?

A couple hands go up. DR. WHITE gestures toward one of them, and that person stands up.

INT. HALLWAY, IMS HEADQUARTERS

REV nervously stands by the doorway to the meeting room like she's awaiting execution. MISS SUZIE, an older woman, approaches her.

MISS SUZIE

Land sakes! Do my eyes deceive me?
Is it little Miss Terry Stewart?

REV

(warmly)

Hello, Miss Suzie.

MISS SUZIE

I haven't seen you since you were a little girl following James around like you were his shadow.

REV

It has been a while.

MISS SUZIE

I'd heard you followed him into the ministry, and here you are. I remember he was so proud of you. He called you his little Timothy.

REV

I ain't so sure he'd be proud now.
I done blew it.

MISS SUZIE

Oh, I doubt that, honey. Your daddy would never give up on you, just like Jesus never gives up on us. God put something special in you that he wants you to use out there, and I don't think he's done working through you yet.

REV

I just pray the folks in there agree with you.

MISS SUZIE

Let me pray over you.

MISS SUZIE lays a hand on REV. REV bows her head as MISS SUZIE looks up toward the ceiling.

MISS SUZIE

God of Earth and Space and the Thirteen Systems, Lord of all we see and don't see, Lord of all we know and all we cannot understand. Send your healing Spirit to come alongside Sister Terry Stewart. I thank you for this brave young lady you have called to your service. I pray that you forgive her and that she may forgive herself. Comfort her, strengthen her, and fill her with your peace and your wisdom. Thank you for the life of service she leads. In your power, raise her up and use her in a mighty way for your glory. Make her an instrument of your justice and peace. Make her life an example for us to follow. May those on the board of elders listen to you and act according to your will and send her back out to continue serving you in the field. I boldly ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

DR. WHITE enters the hallway from the meeting room.

DR. WHITE

Good news, Terry. You haven't been dismissed, but you have been put on probation.

DR. WHITE shakes REV's hand.

DR. WHITE
Be careful out there; remember you don't only represent us but you also represent the Lord.

REV
Thank you, sir.

MAMA
PANCHA

Inti System

EXT. SPACE NEAR MAMA PANCHA

The ARGO flies toward Mama Pancha.

EXT. AFTERNOON, MARKETPLACE, PORT CITY

SETH walks out of a shop. The marketplace is a combination of permanent wooden structures and outdoor vendors with booths, but it's not very busy. There are vendors selling food such as odd-looking fruits and vegetables, unidentifiable meats, and bread alongside vendors selling small electronics, small manufactured home items, and both small and large handcrafted items like wooden furniture. The vendors look tired and bored--it's been a long, slow day. VELEZ is one of the vendors today, selling cooking pots.

SETH presses a button on his watch.

VELEZ makes eye contact with SETH and holds up a pot, looking hopeful, speechlessly trying to make a sell. SETH waves him away and walks up and down the street while talking to REV, occasionally checking out various wares.

REV
(voice on the other end)
Stewart here.

SETH
Hey, Boss. I just finished unloading our latest shipment.

REV is at the back of the meeting tent where she had been preaching on her last visit. The tent is mostly empty. Flip back and forth between REV and SETH.

REV
Good to know. Anything else?

SETH

I just heard they've been having trouble with these creatures called "karakonds" lately. Apparently they like to migrate up here for a couple weeks this time of year.

REV

Are they dangerous?

SETH

Yeah. They've attacked and killed about five people in the last week. Really nasty. So it's probably a good idea not to be out after dark.

REV

(sighs)

Right. I'll hole up here for the night and head back down tomorrow. You can hold down the fort until then, right?

SETH

Only if "hold down the fort" means "party all night at Rosie's".

REV

Sin on your own time, Seth.

SETH

Oh, I am. The Argo is locked up tight and the grain shipment from the southern province won't be in until next Friday.

REV

What?! That puts us a week behind schedule.

SETH

Yeah. Nobody likes to travel during karakond season, so everything is backed up.

REV

Hmm... Well, it gives me more time to preach. Maybe the people of this world are overdue for a revival.

SETH

(snorts)

(sarcastic) Oh yeah. Right. I'll be sure to invite the girls at Rosie's.

REV

Ladies of the night need Jesus,
too, son.

SETH
Oh, God. I was joking. Don't ruin
Rosie's. Rothenberg out.

SETH has somehow made it back in front of VELEZ's booth.

SETH
(to VELEZ)
So how much for the pot?

INT. EVENING, HOSPITAL ROOM, PORT CITY

The CHAPLAIN is speaking with CYRUS, who is laying in a hospital bed.

The CHAPLAIN nods towards the door. Three CHURCH LADIES are standing just outside the door, peering in. One is carrying a casserole.

CHAPLAIN
It looks like you have some
visitors.

CYRUS is a little confused. He doesn't recognize them.

CHURCH LADY 1
Hello, young man. May we come in?

CYRUS
Um, I guess so.

The CHURCH LADIES hustle into the room.

CYRUS
So who are you?

The CHURCH LADIES speak quickly, almost on top of each other. CYRUS is afraid and concerned when he realizes who they are.

CHURCH LADY 2
Oh we're from the WMU at First
Baptist Church of Port City--

CHURCH LADY 1
You know, where you got shot?

CHURCH LADY 2
--But we wanted to let you know
we're all praying for you--that
you'd have a quick recovery and
all.

CHURCH LADY 3

(offering him the
casserole)
And we brought you a casserole!

CYRUS is speechless.

CHAPLAIN
Well that seems very nice of you
ladies. (to CYRUS) Don't you think,
Cyrus?

CHURCH LADY 2
We hope we can become friends, and
if you need anything--

CHURCH LADY 1
Anything at all, really!

CHURCH LADY 2
--just let us know.

CHURCH LADY 3
And I'll bring a cake tomorrow.

CHURCH LADY 1
She makes the best cake!

CHURCH LADY 3
Do you like oatmeal cake?

CHURCH LADY 2
We'd like to come by on a regular
basis, if that's OK with you.

CHURCH LADY 1
Because honey child, you are much
too thin.

CHURCH LADY 2
Seriously, if you don't put on ten
pounds by the time you get out of
here, we'll feel like we've failed
you somehow.

There's a pregnant pause.

CYRUS
Wow... I don't know... But... I do
like oatmeal cake.

CHURCH LADY 3
That's my boy's favorite, too.

EXT. MORNING, OUTSIDE TENT, WESTERN PROVINCE

A rooster crows in the distance. REV is checking the bags on
her horse NATHANIEL, getting ready to leave. DEACON

approaches.

DEACON

Reverend, I hope you're not ready
to leave us just yet.

REV

How's that?

DEACON

Well, remember I told you there's a
few folks who would like a wedding
with a real preacher.

REV

(checking the sky)

I reckon I got the time for that.

EXT. DAY, TENT, WESTERN PROVINCE

There's a line of couples waiting to get married! DEACON
stands to the side to make sure couples get in and out
quickly.

REV

(to DEACON)

A few folks, huh?

DEACON shrugs apologetically.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 1

REV

(to groom)

Will you, Ralph, have Laura to be
your wife? Will you love her,
comfort and keep her, and forsaking
all others remain true to her, as
long as you both shall live?

GROOM 1

I will.

REV

(to bride)

Will you...

Shot of REV and COUPLE 2

REV

(to bride)

...Elizabeth, have Thomas to be
your husband? Will you love him,
comfort and keep him, and forsaking
all others remain true to him, as
long as you both shall live?

BRIDE 2

I will.

REV

(to groom)

Will you...

Shot of REV and COUPLE 3

REV

(to groom)

...Billy, have Annie to be your wife? Will you love her, comfort and keep her, and forsaking all others remain true to her, as long as you both shall live?

GROOM 3

I will.

REV

(to bride)

Will you...

Shot of REV and COUPLE 4

REV

(getting tired & flustered)

(to bride)

...Helen, have George to be your wife, uh, husband? Will you love him, comfort and keep him, and forsaking all others remain true to him, as long as you both shall live?

BRIDE 4

I will.

REV

(to groom)

Will you...

Shot of REV and COUPLE 5

GROOM 5

You bet I will!

REV

(to groom)

I haven't even asked you the question yet!

GROOM 5

Oh, I'm just that ready.

REV

All right then. (to bride) Will
you, Cindy...

Shot of REV and COUPLE 6

REV

(to groom)
What's your name?

GROOM 6

Bubba

REV

(to bride)
And yours?

BRIDE 6

Rachel

REV

All right. Bubba, Rachel. Rachel,
Bubba. What do you think? Will you
have each other?

GROOM 6

I will.

BRIDE 6

Me, too.

REV

Wonderful.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 7

REV

Jim, Dinah.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 8

REV

Phoebe, Paul.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 9

REV

By the power invested in me, I
pronounce you husband and wife.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 10

REV

Husband and wife.

Shot of REV and COUPLE 11

REV

Yay!

Shot of REV and COUPLE 12. The BEST MAN is next to them.

REV

(to BEST MAN)

What's your name?

BEST MAN

Me? Oh, I'm Andy.

REV

(to bride)

And you?

BRIDE 12

I'm Julia.

REV

(to BEST MAN)

Will you, Andy, have Julia to be
your wife?

BEST MAN

Wait. What?

REV

(to bride)

Will you, Julia, have Andy to be
your husband?

BRIDE 12

Um...

GROOM 12

Hey!

REV

By the power invested in me, I
pronounce you husband and wife. (to
DEACON) Next!

DEACON

That was the last one.

GROOM 12

You were supposed to marry me to
Julia.

REV

What now?

BEST MAN

You married me to Julia, but she
was supposed to marry him.

REV
(to BEST MAN)
What's the matter, son? Don't you like her?

BEST MAN
That's not the point.

REV
Is she not pretty enough for you?

BEST MAN
That's not the point, either.

REV
Because honestly, son, you ain't gonna do any better. (to bride) Is he OK with you?

BRIDE 12
Well, yes, actually.

REV
All right, then. My work here is done!

REV leaves the tent.

EXT. NOON, OUTSIDE TENT, WESTERN PROVINCE

REV is petting her horse. GROOM 12, BRIDE 12, and the BEST MAN approach her. The BEST MAN shakes her hand.

BEST MAN
Thank you for working that out for us, Reverend. It couldn't have gone any better.

BRIDE 12
Yes! My parents would never have let me marry Andy if it wasn't for your "mistake". They're convinced that because the Reverend said "husband and wife" that there's no going back on it.

REV
I'm glad I could help you young people out. (to bride) But honey, it sounds like you need to have a sit-down chat with your folks. Y'all obviously have some issues you need to work through.

BRIDE 12
We will, Reverend. Thank you for everything!

The BEST MAN, GROOM 12, and BRIDE 12 leave.

REV looks up at the sky.

REV
(to NATHANIEL)
You and I better get a move on if
we're going to make it to Port City
by dark. It could get dangerous out
there.

REV pauses to pray and cocks her head as if she's listening to something.

She pulls a shoulder holster out of one of NATHANIEL's bags and puts it on. Then she takes her gun out of her usual holster and puts it in the shoulder holster.

Then REV pulls on a poncho over her shoulders. It hides the shoulder holster.

EXT. AFTERNOON, WESTERN PROVINCE

REV is galloping on horseback eastward toward Port City. There's plenty of open space.

EXT. SUNSET, WESTERN PROVINCE

REV is galloping on horseback eastward toward Port City. There's plenty of open space.

EXT. EVENING, WEST OF PORT CITY

REV is riding on horseback.

There are lots of trees here, so the horse must walk and pick its way through.

Suddenly a black bag is brought down over REV's head.

REV is dragged off her horse.

Everything is black.

The hood is taken off of REV, and she discovers she's still in the forest.

REV is lying on the ground.

JACKSON and his four ROGUES are gathered around her.

JACKSON crouches down to get in her face.

JACKSON
Well, well, well. If it ain't the
right Reverend Stewart. What brings

you to our neck of the woods?

The ROGUES snicker.

JACKSON pats REV on the cheek.

JACKSON
(smiling)
I'm so glad you dropped in for a
visit.

JACKSON stands and steps back.

He nods to his ROGUES.

The ROGUES begin vigorously kicking REV. The sound is
similar to corn popping.

REV curls into a fetal position on her left side and wraps
her arms around her head, but otherwise doesn't speak or
defend herself.

JACKSON stands out of the way, watching.

ROGUE 1 puts a hand up.

ROGUE 1
Hold on, ain't this a lady
preacher? I know what to do with
lady preachers.

The other ROGUES step back. ROGUE 1 fumbles with his belt.

An eerie cry pierces the woods. Only JACKSON and REV seem to
notice, and they both look up sharply.

REV quickly draws her gun from beneath her poncho and fires
it into a tree behind JACKSON. Something falls out of the
tree to the ground with a thud.

JACKSON and his ROGUES glance at the tree and then back at
REV, who looks at them for a moment and re-holsters her gun.

REV
Sorry. As y'all were.

REV curls up again and hides her face in her hands.

The ROGUES begin talking over each other.

ROGUE 2
What the hell?

ROGUE 3
I thought you searched her.

ROGUE 4

I thought you already took her gun.

JACKSON turns and walks over to the tree. He squats down, grabs a fallen limb, and uses it to turn over something in the grass. It's a squat, black furry creature vaguely resembling a miniature gorilla with a tail and huge red eyes. There's a bullet hole in the middle of its forehead.

JACKSON
It's one of those damn karakonds.
(looks back at REV) She nailed it
right between the eyes.

ROGUE 1
Govno!

The ROGUES back away from the creature.

JACKSON walks back to REV and crouches down next to her.

JACKSON
Hey, preach.

REV doesn't move.

JACKSON
Hey, preacher!

REV looks up at him through her fingers. Then she takes her hands off her face.

JACKSON
Nice shooting back there. You just
saved my life.

REV
(pause)
You're welcome.

JACKSON
So how come you didn't shoot one of
us instead? You seemed ready to at
the tent meeting.

REV
Been thinking about that a lot
lately, and I reckon many will
disagree with me. I figure it's my
duty to protect my flock, but I
ain't gonna send you on a fast
train to hell just to save my own
skin.

JACKSON mulls it over.

JACKSON
You know what, Reverend? You're all

right.

REV

I ain't sure about the opinion of
an outlaw, but thanks.

JACKSON

Can you get up and walk?

REV

(shifts position and
grunts)

I don't know.

JACKSON

(to ROGUES)

Help her up. Let's get her to the
doc in Port City.

INT. MORNING, HOSPITAL ROOM, PORT CITY

The room is sparsely decorated, but clean. REV's bed has a wooden frame. Electronic hospital equipment beep quietly with REV's heartbeat. There's an IV hooked up to her arm.

SETH

Looks like your Jesus got you in
hot water.

REV

Yeah.

SETH

Is this going to become a thing?
Does Jesus have a good health plan?

REV tries to laugh, but it hurts. She clutches her side.

REV

Usually not. Lots of us space
preachers die young... How was
Rosie's?

SETH

The ladies are all worried about
you.

REV

That's kind.

SETH

And you've got a visitor.

REV grunts. CYRUS walks in. REV is curious.

CYRUS

How are you feeling, Reverend?

REV

Like I been rode hard and put up
wet. How's the arm, son?

CYRUS

(holds his upper right
arm)

Still hurts but I can't complain.
The church ladies are feeding me
well.

REV

What's your name, son?

CYRUS

Cyrus Peterson

REV

Cyrus, I'm so sorry for shootin'
you. I should've found another way.

CYRUS

Hey, I was in a bad place. I
planned to hurt a lot of people and
then kill myself. I didn't have
nothin' to live for. People from
the church have shown me different.
You may have saved my life.

REV

(unconvinced)

Hmm...

CYRUS

They sent me to ask you if you'd
come preach at their church
tomorrow.

REV

Provided I can stand by then, I'll
be delighted to preach tomorrow. If
I can't stand, just give me a chair
to sit on.

INT. DAY, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, PORT CITY

The pews are filled with people. REV is preaching.

REV

Once upon a time, a rock collector
was out takin' a walk. Did you know
there were people who collect
rocks? Anyway, he passed by this
pile of normal, everyday, worthless
rocks. He picked one of them up and
examined it real close. Then he

said, "I'm gonna take this one home!" So he took it home and he polished it until it was real shiny. Then he put it up on his shelf next to his display of precious stones like emeralds and rubies. Now that seems kinda odd now, don't it?

The crowd mumbles in agreement.

REV

But that's exactly what God does for us! He takes ordinary, worthless sinners like you and me, polishes 'em up, and puts 'em on display with saints. He counts us among his special treasures.

JACKSON and his ROGUES enter and find seats near the back, where they sit quietly.

REV

But he doesn't want us to sit there and look pretty. God is using us as building blocks to build himself a spiritual home in our universe--a place he'll live forever. It'll be a place marked by unity, integrity, justice, and righteousness, and you can be a part of it if you're willing. Now who wants to be a part of God's house?

A few hands go up. ROGUE 1 looks around and then raises his hand.

EXT. DAY, SLAVUTA RIVER

It's not much of a river--about three feet deep. REV stands in the middle of it, wearing a white robe. A new line of converts is standing in line, waiting to go in. They're all wearing white robes. Several spectators are standing on the banks, wearing ordinary clothes.

A TEENAGE GIRL is standing in front of REV, facing REV's left. Her hands are crossed in front of her chest.

REV raises her right hand to the sky and places her left hand on top of the TEENAGE GIRL's right arm.

REV

Upon your confession of faith in Jesus Christ I baptize you my sister in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

REV puts her right hand on the TEENAGE GIRL's back. With her left hand she gently pushes the girl backward while supporting her with her right hand. The TEENAGE GIRL bends her knees and leans backward into the water.

REV
Buried with him in his death...

REV helps the TEENAGE GIRL stand back up.

REV
Raised to walk in the newness of
life.

The spectators say "Amen". The TEENAGE GIRL walks away, and REV turns her attention to the next person in line. It's ROGUE 1. REV views him suspiciously.

REV
I ain't lookin' for no trouble now.

ROGUE 1
I ain't lookin' to give it.

REV
How do I know that?

ROGUE 1
I know we gave you hell and I'm
sorry.

REV
Uh-huh.

ROGUE 1
Look, I've been a worthless piece
of govno my whole life, but you
said God would take me.

REV glances at the spectators on the shore and then back at ROGUE 1.

REV
Do you believe Jesus is Savior and
Lord?

ROGUE 1
Yes.

REV
Do you believe in your heart God
raised him from the dead?

ROGUE 1
Yes.

REV

(sighs)
Well I guess I better baptize you,
then.

INT. NIGHT, HOTEL ROOM, PORT CITY

REV is making a video recording.

REV
And sis, I've done a lot of
difficult things in my life as a
space preacher, but that there was
one of the hardest things I've ever
done. I remembered how terrified I
was that night Jackson's gang
jumped me. I remembered that one
man joking about raping me and I
wanted to run. I didn't want to
touch that man, much less baptize
him. But there was a crowd of
witnesses gathered on the shore.
How could I preach about God's
forgiveness when I wasn't willin'
to forgive?

REV pauses to think for a moment.

REV
So, I did it. I took my disgust and
my fear and my hate and gave it to
Jesus and I baptized that man.
(sighs) But I have to admit, Tabby,
that I'm still human. I held that
man underwater a few seconds longer
than I should have. And it felt
really, really good. (smiles) And I
know you're not goin' to see this
message for several hours, but I
can already hear you laughin' four
star systems away. Uh-huh. And I
also know that if you were the one
baptizin' him instead of me, you
would've held him down a whole
minute.

INT. NIGHT, SALOON, PORT CITY

The place is basically empty and dark. VELEZ is sweeping.
SETH walks up.

SETH
So... you seem like someone who
knows what's going on around here.
How long have you been on Mama
Pancha?

VELEZ

My entire life

SETH

Can you tell me anything about
these so-called Dewsha?

VELEZ briefly stops cleaning.

VELEZ

Some people say they're the ghosts
of the original settlers of Mama
Pancha.

SETH

What do you say?

VELEZ

I can tell you that the original
settlers were all from eastern
Europe. Since then all sorts of
people--many of them outlaws from
other systems--have shown up here.
But I've never seen any *ghosts*
around here.

The light flickers off. When it comes back on, VELEZ appears
to be missing. SETH looks around for VELEZ.

SETH

Hey, where did you go?

VELEZ walks out of a doorway near the bar.

VELEZ

I'm sorry. I started cleaning the
back room. Did you need something?

EXT. DAY, MARKETPLACE, MAMA PANCHA

REV and SETH are walking in the street of the marketplace.
Today it's busy. REV has a slight limp.

SETH

I've got the grain from the
southern province loaded, boss, and
we're stocked up on supplies.
Everything's set for us to take off
tomorrow.

REV

Good. I'm more than ready to get
out of here. It's been an excitin'
two weeks.

SETH

Heard anything more from the
Jackson gang?

REV

Jackson said they were headed west tomorrow. I don' know where. But he wanted me to know that they'll have my back if I run into any trouble.

Somehow they end up at VELEZ's booth.

SETH

Don't they cause most of the trouble around here?

VELEZ tries to catch their attention. He shows off one of his pots.

REV

That's what I said.

SETH

I suppose it doesn't hurt to have allies in this corner of the thirteen systems. But with allies like them...

REV

Who needs enemies?

REV looks at VELEZ's pot.

REV

(to VELEZ)

How much for the pot?

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

SETH

Where are we headed, Boss?

REV

You still got that info from the Isis aliens?

SETH

Yes

REV

How about we head home?

SETH

Inara?

REV

Your home

SETH

I don't have one.

REV

Laufey. It's high time for a little justice. Let's have a chat with the head of the company and call it judgment day.

SETH is delighted and punches the heading into the navigation computer.

LAUFHEY

Sunna System

EXT. SPACE NEAR LAUFHEY AND LOKI

Laufey and Loki are twin planets. Laufey has been terraformed to seem Earth-like. Loki is a barren rock.

The ARGO is headed toward Laufey.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

REV is perusing the datapad SETH received from the Isis aliens.

REV

...So the LMC headquarters is in Valhalla, and the executive offices are on the top floor... And here is the access code for the executive elevator in the back of the building... The CEO is Angela Gomez...

SETH

Aren't you going to take your gun?

REV

That's why I'm goin' in instead of you. You might shoot first and ask questions later.

SETH

I like that idea.

REV

No need to go in guns blazin'. I won't need it. But you keep the motor runnin'--just in case.

EXT. LMC HEADQUARTERS, VALHALLA

It's an impressive, tall building that screams LMC means business.

REV ducks down an alley to the back of the building.

She enters a code to let herself into the back door.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, LMC HEADQUARTERS

ANGELA sits behind her fancy desk, perusing a datapad and watching a hologram while drinking coffee.

There's a ding and the wooshing sound of an automatic door. ANGELA turns to see REV enter the room.

ANGELA
Who the hell are you?

REV
Reverend Terry Stewart

ANGELA
If you want a meeting, you'll have to set up an appointment with my secretary.

REV
I ain't gonna be here long. I'm just here to announce judgment day.

REV lays her datapad on ANGELA's desk. ANGELA picks it up and starts perusing its contents.

ANGELA
Where did you get this?

REV
One of your veeps, Ronald Buck

ANGELA
I haven't heard from him since he went to the Ra system. How is he?

REV
An Isis alien ate him.

ANGELA
Shit

ANGELA looks up from the datapad.

ANGELA
I'm sorry. Did you say something about judgment day?

REV
Yes, ma'am. I made a copy of everything you see there and I'm ready to hand it over to the news

outlets on Corps and to the Central Authority. They're gonna have a field day tearing you apart.

ANGELA

How much money do you want?

REV

I ain't here seeking money. I'm seeking justice.

ANGELA

Justice?

REV

And offering mercy. I'm giving LMC the opportunity to do turn over a new page and do something right for once. Not long ago, y'all "accidentally" destroyed a Mennonite colony on Odin's moon. You owe them a new home.

ANGELA

We offered them a large settlement.

REV

That ain't the same.

ANGELA

You obviously have something in mind.

REV

The LMC has a failed terreforming experiment in the Gun Ana system--a little planet called Umay. It's worthless to you, but it's exactly what the Mennonites would love to call home. With a little support and supplies, they'd turn that brown rock green.

ANGELA

What are you proposing?

REV

LMC foots the bill to transport the survivors to Umay, gives them full ownership of the planet, provides them with the tools they need to get started, and pays the system gate fees for the Gun Ana system--in perpetuity. And in the future you swear to be more careful in respecting both human and alien life, including workers' rights.

I've got a proposed list right there that my friend Seth worked up.

ANGELA
(checking the list)
And what does the LMC get out of this?

REV
I'll keep the ugly contents of that datapad to myself.

ANGELA
You drive a hard bargain, Reverend Stewart.

REV
I'll be back once in a while to make sure y'all are keeping your side of the deal... There is one gotcha to the plan.

ANGELA
And what's that?

REV
The Gun Ana system is on the other side of the Ra system, and the Isis aliens will only allow one trader to travel through their system. And that trader will charge you a lot of money to take that risk.

ANGELA
And that trader is you.

REV
You're a smart one, ain't ya?

REV offers her hand, and ANGELA shakes it.

INT. ARGO COCKPIT

SETH and REV are arguing.

SETH
I can't believe you let her off so easily!

REV
We can charge them through the nose.

SETH
It doesn't matter how much we charge them. It will still be just

pocket change to them.

REV

You wanna go up there and punch her in the face? Would that make you feel better? What LMC has done to people is not the fault of just one person. It's a corporate ethos--a disease that affects the entire company and how they do things. Arm twisting the top person may be the best we can do for now. Maybe it'll filter down. Now let's go pick up those Mennonites.

SETH grumbles to himself while entering commands on his pad.
REV starts looking around the cockpit.

REV

Hey, didn't you and I buy souvenirs on Mama Pancha?

SETH

Yes, we did.

REV

Where did they go?

SETH

I put mine in the locker.

REV

So did I.

REV opens the locker.

REV

(to the locker)

Shlomo, did you develop a taste for cookware?

ISIS

Ra System

EXT. SPACE NEAR ISIS

The planet Isis fills the screen.

INT. MISSIONARY OUTPOST ON ISIS

A group of Isis aliens are seated in a circle. PRIEST holds up flatbread.

PRIEST

While they were eating, Jesus took bread. After he had given thanks,

he broke it and gave it to his
disciples, saying, "Take it. This
is my body."

PRIEST rips the bread and hands the pieces to those around
him. The Isis aliens in the circle solemnly continue to rip
the bread and share it with their neighbors. Everyone eats a
piece of the bread.

After eating the bread, one of the Isis aliens sheds a tear.

UMAY

Gun Ana System

EXT. SPACE NEAR UMay

The planet Umay is mostly barren rock with a thin strip of
forest by the equator. The ARGO flies toward it.

EXT. DAY, PORT OF UMay

A large group of Mennonites are unloading livestock and
crates of supplies from the ARGO. BROTHER ZECHARIAH and REV
are standing by.

BROTHER ZECHARIAH

Thank you for your help, Sister
Stewart.

REV

No one should bother you out here.
This is as far from civilization as
you can get.

The Mennonites finish unloading and gather around the
BROTHER ZECHARIAH and REV for a prayer over their new home.

BROTHER ZECHARIAH

We humbly and wholeheartedly thank
you, O loving Lord God, and give
you all praise, honor, and glory
for your great kindnesses and
fatherly faithfulness, and for your
tremendous gifts and mercies that
you show us now and forever. We
also give you heartfelt thanks,
gracious, holy Father, for all that
you created: heaven and earth, the
sea and everything in it. You keep
faith forever, and you bring
justice to those who have suffered
much injustice. You have saved all
those who cling to you, those who
have believed in you, trusted in
you, faithfully served you, and
forever remained in awe of you.

Amen.

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