

GROWING EDGES



Dear Friends,

Jesus never mastered the secrets of management success. It is quite clear that if he had brought in professional help—an advisor or consultant—he would have run his organization very differently.

Just consider the facts. Jesus had no public ministry until the age of 30; he invested almost all his adult life in a building trade. He built his leadership team out of young, inexperienced men—short-tempered fishermen, impetuous resistance fighters, and grafting tax-gatherers, drawn from his following of peasants and low-life. He confined his time almost exclusively to out-of-the-way rural communities in small town Palestine; he was more Podunk, Tennessee, than Washington, DC. He never published a book, wrote a curriculum, initiated a building project, established a foundation, or raised an endowment. His extensive preaching produced twelve committed disciples and perhaps a hundred or so more-or-less fringe followers.

And even after the glory and wonder of the resurrection, the first act of these missionary apostles sent out into all the world. . . was to spend a month hiding behind locked doors. Frankly, it is hard to imagine Jesus being invited to speak at a church growth seminar.

Jesus' Measureless Passion...

Jesus' priorities lay elsewhere, of course. His benchmarks were never attendance, finances, programs, and expansion. Instead he lived out his own teaching, that the greatest *torah* (that is, wisdom, direction, or rule) is whole-heart, whole-mind, and whole-body love for God, and self-sacrificial love for other people. He did not have measures of success, only measureless passion for glorifying God and breathing new life into shattered human beings.

Eugene Peterson's recent book, *The Jesus Way*, draws from the Old Testament a series of cautionary tales for today's church, which is too often trying to achieve "Jesus' Goals" independently of walking the Jesus Way. We are passionate about the visionary aims of Jesus Christ: the evangelization of the world, the reaching of nations for Christ. But we seem very quickly to be swept up in a whirlwind of methodologies, techniques, programs, and processes that bear little resemblance to the way of life and ministry demonstrated by Christ and his disciples in the pages of Scripture. Eugene presents us with a challenging picture of what the Jesus Way might mean for the contemporary people of God, and shows very cogently how that same Jesus Way is also found displayed in the flawed but faithful men and women in Israel's history. It is a fascinating book, and not always a comfortable read.

Exploring What it Might Mean to Walk Together—The Jesus Way

We are eagerly anticipating the opportunity to explore this theme in much greater depth at next year's RENOVARÉ International Conference on *The Jesus Way: recovering the lost content of discipleship* (San Antonio, Texas, June 21-24, 2009). Eugene will be delivering our opening keynote address, initiating a conversation with an incredible range of Christian thinkers, writers, and speakers—including Richard Foster, Dallas Willard,

John Ortberg, Emilie Griffin, Robert Gelinas, Juanita Rasmus, James Bryan Smith, Mindy Caliguire, Joshua Choonmin Kang, myself, and about 40 more authors and speakers. There will be eight general sessions, almost 40 Individual Workshops, and seven unique Workshop Tracks, all carefully exploring from different angles what it might mean to walk together in the Jesus Way.

This issue of *Perspective* might help whet your appetite for that conversation. We have included (among other things) an extract from *The Jesus Way* and an interview with Eugene Peterson about the ideas behind the book. I sincerely hope you will consider joining us for the conference itself. I can make you some rather unusual promises. I promise that you *will not* discover magic secrets to transform your life overnight, you *will not* learn techniques and methods for converting the world, you *will not* be introduced to the latest program, product, or gimmick to make your church the hottest thing since sliced bread. And I promise that you *will* be invited to consider with us how our lives and our churches might look if we were more interested in persons not crowds, in hidden holiness not public visibility, in sacrifice not success, in spiritual formation not structured programs. Not an easy conversation, to be sure, but long overdue—and many of us are more than ready. I hope that might include you.

Every blessing,

Christopher S Webb

Christopher S. Webb, TSSF

GROWING TOGETHER

► LIFE IN ABUNDANCE

If we want to understand the Jesus Way our most important resource, of course, is the Gospels themselves. Using the guidance in the previous issue of *Perspective* on *lectio divina*, you might find it valuable to read slowly through one of the Gospels seeking to explore the character of Jesus' life and work.

Another invaluable help, drawn from the Jesuit tradition, is a particular way of reflecting on each day's activities. Find a quiet time towards the end of the day, and spend a little time thinking about these two questions:

- What was life-giving today (for ourselves, and for those around us)?
- What was life-denying today?

Beneath their surface simplicity, these questions bear great weight. Since Jesus spoke of himself as “the way, the truth, and the *life*” (John 14:6, emphasis added), and promised his disciples “*life* in abundance” (John 10:10, emphasis added), we are really seeking to identify the presence and action of Christ in our lives. The results can be surprising. If I reflect on this last weekend, I realize that what was most *productive* was an Adult Sunday School planning meeting. Most *fun* was an evening out at a restaurant with my wife and another friend. But most *life-giving* was the morning spent cleaning the house with my kids. There were not many laughs in our mopping and scrubbing, and by the next day the house was a pigsty again (my youngest is two years old: let the reader understand!). But we shared together the work, the accomplishment, the results, and the time. It felt like a gift from God.

The aim of this practice is to allow our lives to be guided more towards those—often small—things we recognize as life-giving, and increasingly away from those that are life-denying. To recognize what really matters, not just what seems important or worthy. To identify the Jesus Way in our own lives and experience—and, of course, to follow it.

—Chris Webb

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE JESUS WAY
BY EUGENE H. PETERSON

The ways employed in our North American culture are conspicuously impersonal: programs, organizations, techniques, general guidelines, information detached from place. In matters of ways and means, the vocabulary of numbers is preferred over names, ideologies crowd out ideas, the gray fog of abstraction absorbs the sharp particularities of the recognizable face and the familiar street. My concern is provoked by the observation that so many who understand themselves to be followers of Jesus, without hesitation, and apparently without thinking, embrace the ways and means of the culture as they go about their daily living “in Jesus’ name.” But the ways that dominate our culture have been developed either in ignorance or in defiance of the ways that Jesus uses to lead us. . .

Jesus as the truth gets far more attention than Jesus as the way. Jesus as the way is the most frequently evaded metaphor among the Christians with whom I have worked for fifty years as a North American pastor. We cannot skip the way of Jesus in our hurry to get the truth of Jesus as he is worshiped and proclaimed. The way of Jesus is the way that we practice and come to understand the truth of Jesus, living Jesus in our homes and workplaces, with our friends and family. . .

...the person that we follow is the primary shaping influence on the person that we become. Christians follow Jesus.

Eugene H. Peterson

The local congregation is the primary place for dealing with the particulars and people we live with. As created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, it is insistently local and personal. Unfortunately, the more popular American church strategies in respect to congregation are not friendly to the local and personal. The American way with its penchant for catchy slogans and stirring visions denigrates the local, and its programmatic ways of dealing with people erode the personal, replacing intimacies with functions. The North American church at present is conspicuous for replacing the Jesus way with the American way. . .

Jesus’ metaphor, kingdom of God, defines the world in which we live. We live in a world where Christ is king. If Christ is king, every *thing*, quite literally, every thing and every *one*, has to be re-imagined, re-configured, re-oriented to a way of life that consists in an obedient following of Jesus. A total renovation of our imagination, our way of looking at things—what Jesus commanded in his no-nonsense imperative, “Repent!”—is required. . . We can—we must!—take responsibility for the way we live and work in our homes and neighborhoods, workplaces and public squares. We can refuse to permit the culture to dictate the way we go about our lives. . .

Ways and means that are removed or abstracted from Jesus and the Scriptures that give witness to him amount sooner or later to a betrayal of Jesus. In this kingdom-of-God world, the person that we follow is the primary shaping influence on the person that we become. Christians follow Jesus.

Excerpted from *The Jesus Way: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way* by Eugene H. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 1, 4-5, 9, 13, 15. Used by permission.

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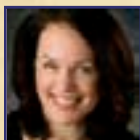
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recovering the lost content of discipleship

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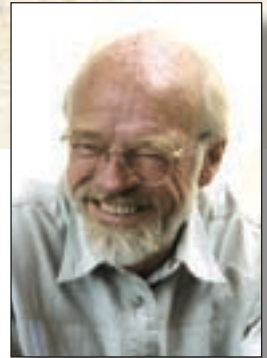
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On The Jesus Way:

A CONVERSATION ON THE WAYS THAT JESUS IS THE WAY

AN INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE PETERSON BY DIANA SMITH



Eugene H. Peterson is Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. He is the author of over thirty books, including *The Message*, his popular contemporary translation of the Bible, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, *Eat This Book*, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, and *The Contemplative Pastor*.

As *RENOVARE* prepares for the 2009 International Conference, we talk with Eugene Peterson about the theme of the conference, based on his book *The Jesus Way*.

The third volume in a five-part series, *The Jesus Way*: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way expands upon the theme of spiritual theology begun in the first two volumes, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* and *Eat This Book*. The fourth book, *Tell It Slant*, explores Jesus' use of language and story-telling to share the Good News of the kingdom of God.

Diana Smith: Not long after the publication of *The Message* you launched into writing this five-volume series on spiritual theology. Can you tell us about that process, and what led you to write the series?

Eugene Peterson: Well, *The Message* came along as an interruption. I had been cooking this five-volume series for years on the back burner of my imagination. But when *The Message* came along, I had to start doing that. It took me 10 years to do *The Message*, but the series was still in the back of my head, and was what I had originally started out to do. *The Message* was a nice interruption, I loved doing it, but when it was done I don't think I took a vacation, I just jumped right into the series. Those metaphors had been underground in my life a long time, but writing *The Message* brought them to the surface in a way that otherwise might not have happened.

DS: In a previous *Perspective* interview with Richard Foster you explained the concept of spiritual theology: integrating Theology and Spirituality into the Christian life. Why is it important to unite the two?

EP: Spiritual theology has to do with living out our theology. Everything in the Bible—everything theological

—is there to be lived. It's not just something cognitive or something evangelistic, it's livable. There are great parts of the church that have used the language of the gospel to convert, to train, to inform. But when that is the prominent motivation, we are mostly concerned about showing that the Bible is true. Now that's a legitimate thing. But I'm a pastor, and I just take it for granted that the Bible is true. There are plenty of people who are giving apologetics explaining these things, but my concern is that it be lived. Living is the thing, not knowing. Just because you know something doesn't necessarily mean you live it. Of course if you don't know the right thing you live the wrong thing, so it's not like you can separate those two things.

RENOVARE's whole ministry is revolved around this. The big challenge we face in America is how you can know this stuff and live it. Not, "Can you recite The Ten Commandments or The Apostles' Creed?" but what happens when you're changing diapers or carrying out the garbage or sitting at a boring job eight hours a day?

DS: You are writing each of the books in a conversational style. Why did you choose to approach them this way?

EP: As a pastor, the primary language in which we speak when we're doing relational work is conversation. We have two other kinds of speaking language, the charismatic and the teaching (or didactic) language. But when we're not at the pulpit and not behind a lectern, we speak conversationally. Conversation is a natural language for spiritual formation; it's not preaching, it's not teaching, it's relational. I wanted to provide a comprehensive sense of what's involved in spiritual formation, but in a conversational language so that the arena is participatory.

DS: Briefly summarize what *The Jesus Way* is about.

EP: The common way in which the American church has used the Jesus Way is “the way to heaven.” It’s pervasive in our culture that the end justifies the means. But the way Jesus does things is just as important as the way that he is. The way is the road, but it’s the way you walk on the way, too. So I’m trying to recover a sense of the way as a way of doing things, not just signposts on how to get there. One of the phrases in *The Jesus Way* that I like a lot is an old phrase from Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, who said, “The way up and the way down are the same way.” Well, the way we get to God and the way God gets to us is the same way: it’s Jesus. But God revealed himself to us through Jesus, so we have to look at how Jesus did it, not just what he did.

DS: How does *The Jesus Way* relate to spiritual formation?

EP: When spiritual formation becomes externalized, we’re not doing it the way Jesus did it. It includes the whole life. We can’t separate spiritual formation from the context in which we live. It’s like raising kids: it’s a constant thing. You never finish. And Jesus doesn’t stop us on the way to discipleship and say, “OK, I think you’ve got it now.” That’s why RENOVARÉ is in this business, because it’s ongoing. But it’s also constantly new; we’re always discovering new ways in which people understand these things. This is where the creative work of the Holy Spirit is most evident. It’s wonderful!

DS: You claim that the way of church today is not the way of Jesus. How do you think the church most neglects the Jesus Way?

EP: Let me come at it a different way. I believe the church provides the way of Jesus for the world. We’ve never done it perfectly. I don’t think the church today is any worse than the church in the first century, or any better. But here’s the thing: God created the church to use it. In other words, God uses an imperfect way to do a perfect thing. The sins and faults of the church are part of the mix. So all these attempts to make a better church are not biblical. God wants us to learn how to follow Jesus with sinners, and manage it with sinners, and learn to forgive people and love people. I think it’s very important to understand the church the way it is, not the way we want it to be. The church today sometimes does stupid things, but it’s still the church. So in these books I’ve been trying to encourage

people to accept what’s there, and say, “How do I live here? How do I be present to this imperfect group of people in a way that participates and cooperates with the way God deals with these people?” We are doing it in a context that looks like chaos. It’s a mess. But every artist works with a mess. Every poet throws away 90 percent of what they write. If you watch a painter at work, they’re always rubbing out, scratching out, throwing stuff away, going over it. The work of art is to bring beauty out of a mess. The work of the Christian life is to bring holiness out of sin.

DS: How do you think the church today has succeeded in following the way of Jesus?

EP: It succeeds every time people gather together, worship God, listen to the Scriptures, go home to their families, go to work, share the life of Jesus—it’s succeeding all the time. Every time the sacrament is served and received, every time there’s a baptism—these are all signs that the kingdom of God is alive and working.

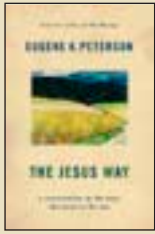
DS: *The Jesus Way* is the theme for RENOVARÉ’S upcoming 2009 International Conference, yet you specifically talk about the church in America in the book. How do you think the concepts apply in an international setting?

EP: Well, America’s the culture I know and live in. But American culture is also worldwide. I taught a lot of Asian students when I was at Regent College, and they’re more American than we are! Their values are Americanized, technologized, consumerized. I think a great deal of what goes on in America is infiltrated in other cultures.

DS: Tell us about the next book in the series, *Tell It Slant*, and how *The Jesus Way* lays the groundwork for it.

EP: I take the gospel of Luke, the way Jesus prayed and the way he told stories, and show how Jesus used language: through metaphor, through story, immediacy, and to what’s local. The way he used language was very down to earth, very honest, very basic stuff of his humanity and his divinity. I’ve been very specific to examine the way Jesus used language, so it’s an extension of *The Jesus Way*. I lay the groundwork for it in *The Jesus Way*, and now pick up the language aspect of it.

The Jesus Way • Tell It Slant • Eat This Book • Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places
A Series on Spiritual Theology by Eugene H. Peterson

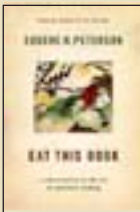
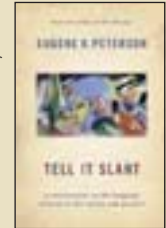


A way of sacrifice. A way of failure. A way on the margins. A way of holiness. All of these ways prepared the “way of the Lord” that became incarnate and complete in Jesus. Somewhere along the line, have we in the American church lost the Way? In *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus is The Way* Eugene Peterson continues his conversation in spiritual theology, considering all the ways that Jesus is the Way compared to the ways of modernity. Arguing that the way Jesus leads and the way we follow are symbiotic, the study begins with how the ways of those who came before Jesus—Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah of Jerusalem, and Isaiah of the Exile—revealed and prepared the Way. He then shows in stark relief how what we have chosen to focus on—consumerism, celebrity, charisma—obliterates what is unique in the Jesus way. Eerdmans, hardcover, 301 pages.

***The Jesus Way* \$ 15.99 each**

Just as God used words both to create the world and to give us commandments, we too use words for many different purposes. In fact, we use the same language to talk to each other and to talk to God. Can our everyday speech, then, be just as important as the words and prayers we hear from the pulpit? *Tell It Slant: A Conversation of the Ways of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* explores how Jesus used language—he was earthy, not abstract; metaphorical, not dogmatic. His was not a direct language of information or instruction but an indirect, oblique language requiring a participating imagination—“slant” language. In order to witness and teach accurately in Jesus’s name it is important for us to use language the way he did. Eerdmans, hardcover, 264 pages.

***Tell It Slant* \$ 16.49 each (available October 2008)**

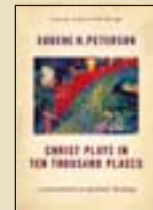


The *way* we read the Bible is as important as *that* we read it. Do we read the Bible for information about God and salvation, for principles and “truths”? Or do we read it to listen to God and respond in obedience? The second of Peterson’s five-volume work on spiritual theology, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* challenges us to read the Scriptures on their own terms, as God’s revelation, and to live them as we read them. Eerdmans, hardcover, 198 pages.

***Eat This Book* \$ 14.99 each**

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology reunites spirituality and theology, two vital facets of life and faith that have been rent asunder. Lamenting the vacuous, often pagan nature of contemporary spirituality, Eugene Peterson firmly grounds spirituality once more in Trinitarian theology and offers a clear, practical statement of what it means to actually *live out* the Christian life. Eerdmans, hardcover, 380 pages.

***Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* \$ 17.49 each**



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24 January 2009 — RENOVARÉ ESSENTIALS Conference

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 Speakers: Chris Webb ■ Second Speaker TBD
 Contact: Jonathan Martin jonathanm@renovatus.com 704-405-1290

28 February 2009 — RENOVARÉ ESSENTIALS Conference

Location: Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church - Moraga, California
 Speakers: Todd Hunter ■ Chris Webb
 Contact: Chris Bratton chris4j2@aol.com 925-631-0358

2 May 2009 — RENOVARÉ ESSENTIALS Conference

Location: Living Springs Worship Center - Colorado Springs, Colorado
 Speakers: Chris Webb ■ Second Speaker TBD
 Contact: Marcus Robinson marcus@cabag.org 719-528-6060

21-24 June 2009 — A RENOVARÉ International Conference

The Jesus Way: recovering the lost content of discipleship

Location: Municipal Auditorium & Hyatt Regency River Walk Hotel - San Antonio, Texas
 Speakers: Richard Foster ■ John Ortberg ■ Eugene Peterson ■ James Bryan Smith ■ Chris Webb ■ Dallas Willard
 Contact: Lyle SmithGraybeal lyle@renovare.org 303-792-0152, x 122



ANNOUNCING

► **The RENOVARÉ Academy for Christian Spiritual Formation**

The RENOVARÉ Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the launch of the RENOVARÉ Academy for Christian Spiritual Formation. The Academy will become a center of excellence in training for Christian discipleship and will further the work of RENOVARÉ and other churches and ministries, as we all help people in their process of “becoming like Jesus.”

A cohort of 30 students will be admitted to the first Academy, which will begin September 1, 2009, in Menlo Park, California. Each Academy will run for 24 months and offer the opportunity to participate in an experiential curriculum designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the key concepts of RENOVARÉ.

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In the coming months more detailed information will be made available. For now, please direct any inquiries to Gary W. Moon, the Executive Director of the Academy, at gary@renovare.org.

THE JESUS WAY:
 RECOVERING THE LOST CONTENT OF DISCIPLESHIP
*We are eagerly anticipating the opportunity to explore
 this theme in much greater depth at next year's
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 June 21-24, 2009
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