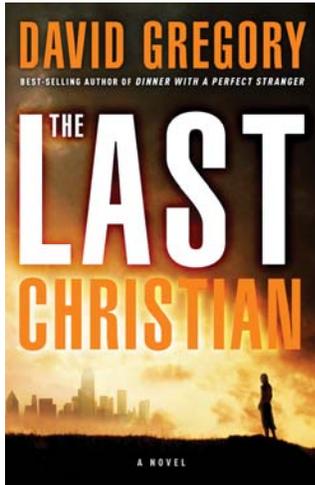


THE LAST CHRISTIAN: An interview with David Gregory



Q: Your books *Dinner with a Perfect Stranger* and *A Day with a Perfect Stranger* were tremendously well-received by audiences, having sold over half a million copies combined, with multiple translations and sold in many different formats. *The Last Christian* is a different type of book than your previous novellas. Can you explain how it is different and what about it will appeal to the reader of those books?

A: At first glance, the reader might wonder if there is any similarity at all! My prior books were 100 page novellas consisting primarily of single conversations. *The Last Christian* is a 400 page thriller placed 80 years in the future, featuring a complex plot with elements of science fiction and characters seeking to unravel technological, medical, and theological mysteries. But beneath the change to what I hope will be a very entertaining genre, the reader will discover many of the same themes of my prior books—the nature of ultimate reality, the historical legitimacy of the Christian faith, God’s intention in joining himself to us—as well as some new ones. In addition, readers will discover that my purpose has remained constant: to challenge us to ponder new questions and to think in potentially new ways, through the medium of an engaging story.

Q: The book is eight decades in the future. What challenges does writing a novel with that framework present and how do you think the themes of a book featuring such advances will connect with readers?

A: I discovered that setting a story 80 years in the future is perhaps the most difficult of time frames. In present day settings, the author simply writes about the world he or she knows. Place a story 500 years in the future and the world can look pretty much however you may want to imagine it. But 80 years is far enough ahead that the world will change considerably, yet close enough that it has to be tied to today’s reality, or the reader won’t accept it. Everything in such a story has to be thought through: transportation systems, communications, electronics, entertainment, social mores—and it all has to be consistent. The research necessary to create such a world is extensive. I think a strong appeal of the book is that readers will enjoy seeing the possibilities of life 80 years from now.

Q: Talk to us about what changes we are currently witnessing in evangelical Christianity and how those could lead to a world like the one *The Last Christian* describes. How do you think these changes are relevant to both believers and people who don’t claim to be Christians?

A: I don’t honestly believe we will see the demise of Christianity in America. *The Last Christian* simply presents a fascinating “what if” scenario. That scenario would not be intriguing, however, were we not witnessing troublesome trends in the church and culture. A recent book by Josh McDowell indicates that only one third of those growing up in the church are retaining an active faith after high school. In my lifetime I have seen the culture evolve from Christianity as an accepted cultural norm to viewing it suspiciously and as a potential threat. The silver lining is that this provides Christians with greater opportunity to be light to their world—provided the character of Christ shows clearly through their lives. Many of those not claiming to be Christians will look for personal meaning in other realms, both religious and not, and find their hearts still searching. Christ offers what they ultimately seek, but they may not discover that unless others of us have gone deep enough with him to show that he truly does satisfy the longings of our hearts.

Q: Do you see characteristics or trends in the church in America that will prevent it from going the way of secular Europe?

A: I'm not an expert on the history of the church in Europe during the last several hundred years, but it's safe to say that today's American church certainly seems more vital than that of Europe at the turn of the last century. Large segments of today's church are wedded to the American lifestyle, but others seem to be discovering anew what it means to allow Christ's life to flow through them, to be fully Christ's, and to enjoy true intimacy with and devotion to him. These are critical signs for a church that may be approaching rougher waters in the decades ahead.

Q: In the story Creighton, a professor and one of the main characters, teaches his class about five primary reasons for the demise of Christianity in the U.S. What are those 5 reasons and what leads you to believe these will lead to demise? Which trend is currently the biggest threat?

A: According to Creighton, Christianity's decline in the U.S. was hastened by (1) scientific trends that promoted a materialistic worldview, (2) the rejection of the evangelical culture war by the larger society as secularism's grip on society tightened, (3) the backlash against religion in general due to Islamic fundamentalism, (4) the rejection of the notion of absolute truth and morality as postmodernism became entrenched in the culture, and (5) the church's lack of distinctiveness relative to the culture around it, thus diminishing its potential appeal. These are argued from Creighton's secularist mindset, of course, but I think all have some legitimacy. The church's lack of distinctiveness is by far the biggest threat. If people truly see something different about the lives of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, they will always be drawn to him. If they don't see that, the gospel usually falls on deaf ears. The church's challenge today is not erecting barriers that set us apart, but having hearts that are noticeably different.

Q: What were the primary effects writing *The Last Christian* had upon you? Has it changed you and the way you live your life at all?

A: This may seem mundane, but it's most immediate effect has been to substantially expand the universe of my writing. Crafting a 400 page novel with layered character development and a complicated plot in a genre previously unfamiliar to me as a writer was a stretching experience, to say the least. It's much different that writing a 100 page conversation a la *Dinner with a Perfect Stranger*. But I feel much more equipped to create longer stories that will both captivate readers and challenge them to think in ways that perhaps they haven't before, which is always the goal of my writing.

On the personal side, contemplating the spiritual truths that the main characters must confront has, as always, challenged me to deepen my own faith walk and see the reality of Christ living his life through me.

The Last Christian is available on May 4, 2010.
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