

Triumph or Triumphalism?



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It was the week before Memorial Day. I was backpacking in the wilderness of Yosemite when I inadvertently crossed paths with a bear cub. Hearing a growl I knew the she-bear was only seconds away, and sure enough, she came crashing through the bushes. I ran as fast as I could but she quickly began to close in. I could hear her grunting and growling, and the pounding of her paws grew louder as she gained on me. Just as she was about to tackle me, jaws snapping, claws slashing, I flung myself into a rushing river, and escaped over a small waterfall. I was soaking wet and the contents of my backpack were all but ruined, but I was safe...

How I wish I could claim that story instead of the one that actually happened. I was backpacking in Yosemite the week before Memorial Day—with two pastor friends from my home congregation. And I did get thoroughly soaked in a rushing river—but it was no death-defying escape from a bear. I was attempting to cross

the river on a large tree trunk that had fallen across the water when I began to teeter, forty-pound backpack and all, then slipped and fell backwards into the freezing water. I could barely keep my head above the turbulent, though not-so-deep, water. Eventually, I managed to plant my feet and walk my way out of the chest high white water to the other side of the river. That is the real story and of course my two pastor friends enjoyed telling it to all my buddies at church!

While the first story of my wilderness mishap sounds scary, exhilarating and maybe even slightly heroic, the real one is embarrassing, even a bit humiliating. It's a human foible to present ourselves as more capable, more noble, more heroic and admirable than what we really are. (Did you ever see an elephant or a goldfish trying to demonstrate its coolness to the rest of the herd or school?)

From earliest childhood we begin to imagine ourselves as the heroes of our own narratives. That impulse can

become sinful if we deceive ourselves into believing and/or promoting our own inflated self-images and stories. Despite all the fears today over poor self-esteem (or perhaps because of them), we find it natural to do just what the Scriptures admonish us not to do: think of ourselves "more highly than we ought" (Romans 12:3). And whether or not we recognize that tendency in ourselves, we see it clearly enough in others. It's easy to be skeptical about their claims, expecting that they will invariably be "putting their best foot forward."

The result is a cynical society in which it's difficult to believe much of what we hear. We are accustomed to athletes exaggerating their feats, business people fluffing up their resumes, politicians twisting truth . . . and even Christian leaders stretching their credibility by describing their efforts "evangelistically."

As the head of a Jewish mission, I am keenly aware of the tension regarding expectations to look good. I find myself

having to fight the propensity to want Jews for Jesus to appear more noble, diligent or successful than what we truly are.

While on the way to Yosemite, I stopped at a Starbucks and happened upon two Christian couples who were excited to see my Jews for Jesus van. One said, "I hear that thousands of Jews are coming to Christ in Israel. Is that what you are seeing in Jews for Jesus?" I had to explain that while we are encouraged by the opportunities God gives us to meet and talk with many Israelis, we only see a handful coming to Christ at any given time. I wish I could say differently, but I can't.

It takes a great deal of patience, courage and endurance to remain faithful in Jewish evangelism in Israel or anywhere else. Opposition is strong, rejection is constant—and if we depended on excitement over how many people we actually see receive Y'shua to keep us going, we'd soon run out of gas. During our recent month-long witnessing campaign in Israel, we prayed with five Jewish people to surrender their hearts to Jesus. (See p. 3.) More than 1,000 Jewish Israelis gave their contact information to hear more about Jesus. A small percentage of them want to meet with us personally after receiving the promised literature. But that is to be expected when working with people groups that missiologists describe as "gospel resistant."

Last month we conducted our usual campaign in New York City and a

special campaign in London for the Olympics. As usual, our campaigners were enthusiastic and experienced the joy of the Lord as their strength. But it wasn't easy. It is always difficult to stand up publicly for the Lord, and our missionaries and volunteers have to fight weariness and discouragement. We need you to hear and know that so you can care and pray more effectively for the work of the gospel. Being transparent and honest with our struggles takes careful commitment and trust, but it is a far better way to communicate with our friends and supporters than sounding a note of Messianic triumphalism.

When I fell into the river on this most recent backpacking trip, instead of leaving me cold, wet and embarrassed, my pastor friends took the occasion to show extra love and care for me. All of my reading materials had been ruined through my fall into the river, so they shared theirs. I meditated on far more Scripture than I had planned to because Pastor Paul had brought many pages of photocopied Bible passages. I also ended up reading *Below the Waterline* (no pun intended), a book by Gordon McDonald that Pastor Terry had brought.

Reflecting on the course of his life, McDonald observed that one benefit of aging is a keener awareness of just how extensive our sin really is. That awareness can protect us from our own pretenses and help us to see our fellow sinners through eyes of grace. I want to cultivate that awareness before I am too old to reap the benefits. I want to

be the kind of person who can smell my own sin long before others do, and not think more highly of myself than I ought. I want to face head-on the temptation to make myself appear better than I am. Don't you? So doing not only helps a person give grace to others, but it makes it easier to receive grace as well.

I didn't enjoy making a spectacle of myself by falling into the river. But what was more memorable than my momentary embarrassment was how these two men demonstrated such love and care for me—and how God spoke to me through it all. It would seem that being weak and vulnerable can turn out to be far better than appearing strong and competent.

The Bible says, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ..." (2 Corinthians 2:14). Too often we imagine that triumph as a royal procession in sparkling raiment rather than what it truly is, a following in the footsteps of the Pierced One. We have to remember that even when Y'shua heard the hosannas of the adoring Jerusalem crowd, He was on His way to the cross. So are we.

To take up our cross and follow Jesus requires us to walk in humble reliance upon Him. It is not a posture of proud triumphalism but rather a vulnerable commitment to a road of suffering and weakness, yet it is a road that always leads to triumph in Him. Let's remember to choose that triumph over triumphalism each and every day.

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JEWISH CORE VALUES, JESUS and YOU

by Rich Robinson

JEWISH CORE VALUE

Do not oppress the stranger, orphan, and widow. Or phrased more positively, extend help to the vulnerable of society.

IN TRADITIONAL JEWISH LIFE

According to Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, more than just material support of widows and orphans is required. He cites the medieval sage Maimonides: "A man ought to be especially heedful of his behavior toward widows and orphans, for their souls are exceedingly depressed and their spirits low. Even if they are wealthy, even if they are the widows and orphans of a king, we are specifically enjoined concerning them." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that the Hebrew word for widow, *almah*, derives from *illem*, meaning "dumb, speechless." *Yatom*, the word for orphan, comes from a word implying mutilation. Hirsch interprets this to mean that a widow no longer has anyone to speak up for her (especially true in former times when the status of women was not what it is today in the West), while an orphan's hand has been figuratively cut off since there is no father to lead with a helping hand. He concludes that the vulnerable of society need to be given both a voice and strength to live.

BASIS IN HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Many verses tell how we should relate to the powerless, with strangers (sojourners), widows and orphans (sometimes translated "fatherless") as key examples. Note how it is stated both negatively (what not to do) and positively (what should be done and why):

"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; . . ." (Ex. 22:22-23 [or vv. 21-22 in the Hebrew text]).

"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut.

10:17-19).

"Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow" (Deut 27:19; see also Deut. 24:17). "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Is. 1:17; see also Jer. 22:3). "Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy" (Psa. 82:3). Consider this verse as a counterpart to the above; "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me" (Psa. 27:10).

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Following are some New Testament mentions of widows that show how God regards them:

• **Their frequent plight of poverty in no way diminishes their ability to love and please God:**

Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (Mark 12:41-44).

• **Jesus' care for a widow provides the context for one of His most dramatic miracles:**

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, say-

ing, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people" (Luke 7:11-16).

• **Jesus warned against those who are unjust to widows:**

"Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation" (Luke 20:46-47).

• **The church was instructed to care for widows, as well as orphans:**

"Honor widows who are really widows"* (1Tim. 5:3; see also 1 Tim. 5:16).

*The context (verses 4-5) differentiates between widows who are truly alone and those who have children and grandchildren who ought to care for them.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

The New Testament also makes promises to believers using the imagery of widows, orphans and strangers.

Jesus promised His followers that He was not abandoning them as orphans but would send the Holy Spirit:

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

Also to prevent us being as helpless as orphans, widows or strangers, we have Jesus as our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and the Holy Spirit as our Helper in prayer (Romans 8:26).

EXAMPLES OF THIS CORE VALUE IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH CULTURE

The "heyday" of Jewish societies for orphans was in the late 19th–early 20th centuries. As explained by the American Jewish Historical Society, "When the first Jewish orphanages were created in the

1860s, government agencies rarely provided social services, so Jewish philanthropies had to meet the needs of their most vulnerable members or risk losing them to the streets or to Christian missionaries."

These institutions provided not only for orphans, but for any children whose parents were unable to care for them—underscoring that this core value is really about all the vulnerable. Some institutions included care for widows, as the Jewish Widows and Orphans Home of New Orleans.

To get an idea of the extensive network of such homes and societies, see the list at knickerbockervillage.blogspot.com/2008/12/site-of-israel-orphan-asy-lum.html.

For an outstanding collection of historical photographs from the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York (which existed 1860–1941), see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/23366371@N08/sets/72157607469100974/>.

For a contemporary Orthodox Jewish response to a question about widows, see: <http://www.aish.com/ci/be/48882947.html>.

WAYS TO CONNECT WITH JEWISH FRIENDS

Should you have a Jewish friend who has recently lost parents or spouse, it is good to send a Jewish sympathy card (they can be found in many card shops). Let your friend know that you are praying for him or her. Remember that it is often better to listen than to speak to those grieving. However, at an appropriate time, it is certainly right to speak of God's love even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Depending on your relationship with the bereaved, you may be able to talk about Jesus' care for widows (see above) which may lead to a further conversation about the gospel.

To those with a cynical view of "religion" or the church, you can agree that people have not always done what they should do, and point out the many biblical admonitions and examples of care for the vulnerable of society. If your friend "doesn't like organized religion," you can also point to James 1:27 (above) on what "pure religion" should be about, in contrast to simply going through the motions of faith.

Finally, be aware that many Jewish people are acutely sensitive to the sufferings of those who might be viewed as disenfranchised or disempowered, and that is often a driving force in their approach to social issues. Christians may disagree on the meaning of or solution to some of these issues, but can still express biblical compassion as a common point of contact.

Bits from branches

BEHOLD YOUR GOD: ISRAEL

God answered prayer for our month-long Lower Galilee Behold Your God Israel Campaign. Dan Sered reports: "There's no way to know the number of people that saw our T-shirts and media ads, the number of people that were touched by the way that we handled opposition and returned love for hate, etc. But I can tell you that during the campaign we had hundreds of calls coming into our office. Most were as a result of our banners. We handed out 66,305 gospel tracts, attempted 18,192 phone calls and connected with 7,202 of the people we called. We got the contact information of 1,072 Jewish Israelis who told us they wanted to know more about Y'shua. We also got the contact information of 200 unsaved Gentiles who showed interest in Jesus. Most of these were Arabs. Praise the Lord for the five Jewish people who professed faith in Jesus for the first time."

NEW YORK CITY

Josh Turnil reports, "Brooklyn has some of the most Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods in New York. Karol Joseph has had interesting contacts among the Hasidic community there and encouraged me to join her to hand out Isaiah 53 pamphlets.

"After about fifteen minutes someone starting yelling at us. It seemed as if the man could not notice me despite my best efforts to engage him in a conversation and give Karol some respite. As I attempted to distract him, another Hasidic man tapped me on the shoulder and asked politely, 'Are you handing these out?'

"When I responded affirmatively, he smiled and said, 'I'm very glad to meet you, I've been reading Philipians and wanting to talk to someone about it.' It was rather

surreal, in one ear I could hear the rantings and railings against my colleague and in the other the polite and sincere tone of an Orthodox Jew who was delighted to meet us.

"It turns out Isaac came to faith in Jesus (recently) through a local radio program. He and I have been studying the Bible off and on, but his rabbi friends would like him to stop seeing me. Please pray that Isaac grows in his faith and that others would continue to come to Y'shua, despite the pressure they face."

NEW YORK CITY

Stewart Weinisch reports, "I was making phone calls along with my wife Shosh and one of the missionary trainees, Chantale. Chantale was speaking to a man who was listed as a Jewish believer in Jesus. As Shosh listened in on the conversation, she sensed that the man Chantale was speaking to was spiritually hungry. Because Chantale's first language is French, Shosh asked Chantale if she thought it would be helpful to have me speak with Herman. A few minutes later I made the call and scheduled a visit with Herman for the next day. We spoke at length about salvation. Herman concluded he had never quite understood his need to ask Jesus to be his Messiah—and he did just that! Before leaving our NYC Branch he announced to most of our staff, 'I just prayed to receive Jesus as my Messiah and He has forgiven all of my sin!' A few days later Herman called me to say that he wanted to learn how to share his new faith with his wife who is also Jewish. What joy!"

The Hope of Eternal Life



by Lynn McCoy

A few months ago, Carol, a Jewish woman I've been ministering to came to faith. I came in contact with her through an elder at a nearby church. In fact, some of my most meaningful and fruitful times of ministry have come through connections made with Christian friends. I had been meeting with Carol every couple of weeks over the past nine months. I was blessed by her excitement as she told me she had just prayed to receive Jesus after watching an old Billy Graham rebroadcast.

Carol has been in stage four cancer for years, but last month her doctors told her that they had exhausted every effort to keep the disease at bay, and she would not have much longer to live. Though she had already trusted her soul to Jesus, it was very difficult news to hear.

Whereas the first stage of my ministry was helping Carol to see the truth of Jesus, more recently I've been helping her come to terms with her prognosis. We have spent time reading the book of Job, and she really could identify with him. We also discussed I Corinthians 10:13, in which Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." Despite tremendous pain, Carol has seen God's hand of grace on her life and has also found strength that she never knew she had.

Recently we've had extensive conversations about the hope that Carol now has in Messiah, both for her present condition and eternal life. In Titus 3:7, Paul tells us, "so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become

heirs having the hope of eternal life."

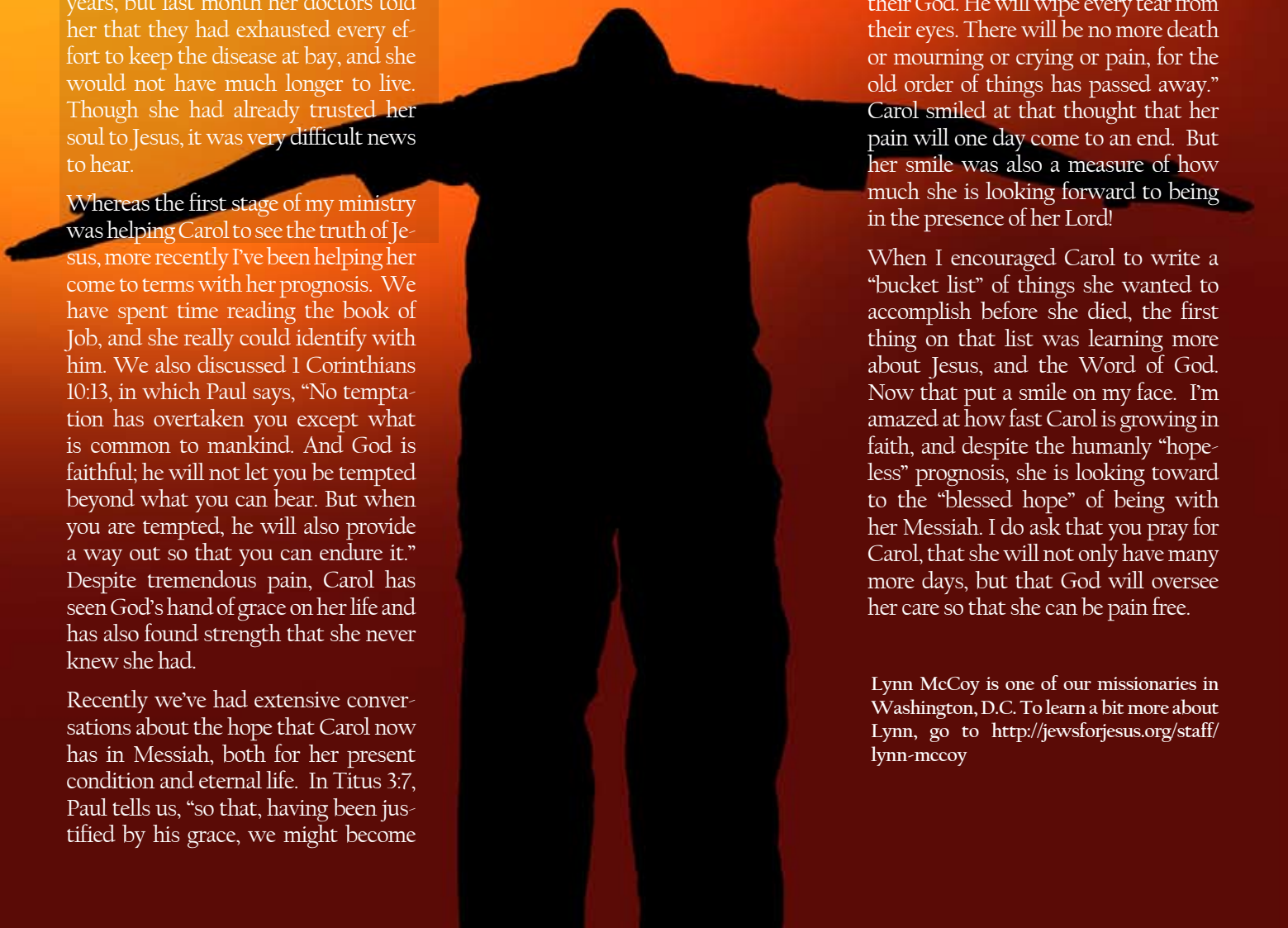
That prompted a whole discussion on what exactly is eternal life. I explained that the moment Carol came to faith in Jesus, she entered into a new life not bound by her physical body, nor bound by time. Her life with Messiah will last forever, and though her physical body will die, she will have a new glorified body, which will never die. Not only that, but the joy and satisfaction of her eternal life in Christ will know no limit. It will only get better and better and better—

forever. None of the things that diminish the quality of life here on earth will trouble her, or any of us who belong to Jesus. Sin will be completely vanquished. Disease will be no more. Interpersonal conflicts will all be healed. Every wrong will be righted. Injustice will no longer exist. We will live a life of complete joy.

She read Revelation 21 (3-4), "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Carol smiled at that thought that her pain will one day come to an end. But her smile was also a measure of how much she is looking forward to being in the presence of her Lord!

When I encouraged Carol to write a "bucket list" of things she wanted to accomplish before she died, the first thing on that list was learning more about Jesus, and the Word of God. Now that put a smile on my face. I'm amazed at how fast Carol is growing in faith, and despite the humanly "hopeless" prognosis, she is looking toward to the "blessed hope" of being with her Messiah. I do ask that you pray for Carol, that she will not only have many more days, but that God will oversee her care so that she can be pain free.

Lynn McCoy is one of our missionaries in Washington, D.C. To learn a bit more about Lynn, go to <http://jewsforjesus.org/staff/lynn-mccoy>



Calendar for 2012-2013

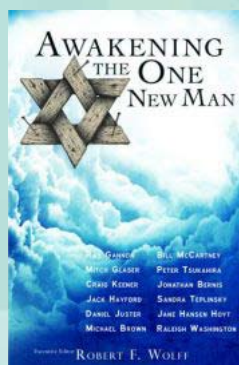


Jews for Jesus is proud to present our 16-month calendar from Israel featuring the beautiful work of calligraphy artist, Hannah Wells. Hannah studied Hebrew calligraphy with a Torah scribe in Jerusalem. Her desire is to magnify God's Word with beautiful calligraphy art presented in both Hebrew and English. Each month points to a scripture and a reminder of God's blessings. All major Jewish and Israeli holidays are highlighted. These will be delivered to us from Israel in late July, but you can pre-order your copy now and be among the first to receive yours. Long before the New Year.

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Betrayed!

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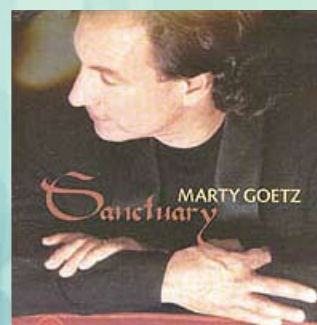


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