



## My Writing Affects My Christianity

By Sandra Glahn

Every spring at Dallas Theological Seminary [<http://www.dts.edu/>], I teach a writing-for-publication class. During the semester, I show my students a creativity video. It features many Christ-following artists, one of whom is Madeleine L'Engle [<http://www.madeleinelengle.com>], who says something I now consider foundational to how Christians approach writing about truth: "People ask if my Christianity affects my writing. I tell them no, it's the other way around. My writing affects my Christianity. I stray and the writing brings **me back.**"

The first time I heard L'Engle's words, they made little sense. Yet as I've continued to write books, edit a magazine, and train writers, I've come to believe L'Engle had it right after all. For the writer wishing to communicate a Christian worldview, writing forces us to clarify what we believe, commit to what we believe, and be consistent with what we believe.

*Writing forces us to clarify what we believe.* The subject of my first book was infertility, and in it I explored how patients seeking high-tech treatment can navigate the moral maze. Foundational to that was an understanding based on Psalm 139 that humans, even at the one-cell stage, have inherent value because God created us.

Yet in the decade that followed the book's release, cloning and stem cell announcements made headlines. And this meant I had to find more finely nuanced language to express a biblical anthropology. I used to say life begins at conception. But then I learned that the official ob-gyn

dictionary has long equated conception with "implantation," which happens about two weeks after fertilization. So I changed my statement to, "I believe life begins at fertilization."

Yet with cloning I ran into another difficulty. Cloning happens with eggs, not sperm, so there is no moment of fertilization. Life happens at the DNA/chromosomal level. Suddenly Psalm 139:13, about life "in my mother's womb," was not precise enough to use as a proof text.

My need for precision drove me back to Genesis. One day as my Hebrew professor was taking our class through chapter one, he listed the creatures over which God gave humans dominion—birds, fish, creeping things. I raised my hand, "Creeping things include humans, right?" I asked.

My professor shook his head and told me the phrase "creeping things" usually refers to four-legged beasts. Then it hit me. God did not give humanity dominion over other humans. He did not give individuals the right to take human life. Overstepping the boundaries of dominion is *possible*, but it is not *just*. So today I argue for respecting life at the pre-implantation stage on the basis of "limited dominion" rather than "God's weaving in the womb."

In the process of exploring how best to communicate, my writing forced me to examine what I believed and why. As a result I gained clarity about my faith and its ramifications.

*Writing about truth forces us to commit to what we believe.* Each fall, I teach a class on the role of women in ministry. And even though I require my students to read eight books, we barely cover the many views within orthodoxy alone. Because so much is said on the topic, I set up the class so my students read and read and then come prepared to spend three hours discussing the merits of each argument. Usually students try on different views as they seek to find what is most consistent biblically.

After they spend an entire semester reading and processing and praying and studying and debating, students must write a 15-page philosophy paper. In it they have to state their beliefs about women in ministry and support their ideas with Scripture.

And every semester after the bleary-eyed students drag themselves into the final class to turn in their papers, I hear something like this: “I know I complained, but thank you for making me write this. It forced me to decide what I think. Having to articulate my view sent me to the text to formulate a biblical approach.”

Writing not only requires us to examine our foundations to be sure they are firm. Writing also forces us out of ambivalence with a deadline for decision-making about what we do and do not believe.

*Writing about truth forces me to live what I believe.* In the past few years I’ve written six books in a Bible study series for women. One of them explores Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

In His sermon Jesus makes this statement: “If your right hand sins, cut it off” (Matt. 5:30). I know He’s using hyperbole, along the lines of “I’m so hungry, I could eat a horse.” So if I take home a box of paperclips my employer has paid for, Jesus doesn’t expect me to pull out a machete and chop off my hand. He expects me to return the paperclips—now! His point: Take drastic action against sin.

I explained this in my text and then sent off my manuscript. And months later when I received my first copy of *Mocha on the Mount*, I held it in my hands and re-read my own words. Suddenly—ouch! The pleasant sensation of holding my “new child” was replaced by conviction. Only moments before the manuscript arrived, I’d had an angry outburst with my daughter, and Jesus’ words again reminded me to run from sin. I had to go apologize—now! My own words on paper came back and challenged me to live what I believe.

In *The Crosswicks Journal, Book Three*, L’Engle further developed her thoughts on how authoring changes the Christian. There she explained, “In a way one might say that my stories keep converting me back to Christianity, from which I am constantly tempted to stray because the circle of blessing seems frayed and close to breaking, and my faith is so frail and flawed that I fall away over and over again from my God.”

When I want to be imprecise, writing forces me to clarify. When I want to remain uncommitted, writing forces me to decide. When I want to live a life of hypocrisy, my stories re-convert me, drawing me back to the One for Whose glory I work. It’s not so much that my Christianity affects my writing. My writing affects my Christianity.

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