

James Dobson Portrays a Bleak Future for Families

Christian conservative leader **James Dobson**, the founder of the Focus on the Family ministry, has gained a new title: novelist.

Working with co-author Kurt Bruner, a Texas pastor, he's out with "Fatherless," the first of a dystopian trilogy that looks into the future when the elderly outnumber the young, advancing the culture wars to new dimensions.

Dobson, 76, answered emailed questions from Religion News Service about his new project.

Some answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you venture into fiction after writing about real-life parenting for so long?

This is my first novel, but not my first foray into fiction. I have always believed in the power of narratives to influence thought and shape the spiritual imagination. While with Focus on the Family I challenged the team to create a radio drama series called "Adventures in Odyssey." My co-author, Kurt Bruner, led that team for several years. We couldn't be more excited about the potential of this new trilogy to embody themes on which I have been writing, speaking and broadcasting for decades.

With a plot that includes parents of more than two children being dubbed "breeders," does "Fatherless" depict your worst nightmares?

Actually, that term is already being used in some circles today to disparage those who consider children a blessing rather than a burden. As we said in the prologue, a happy home

is the highest expression of God's image on earth. Marriage and parenthood echo heaven, something hell can't abide. In 1977 I founded what became a worldwide ministry dedicated to the preservation of the home. That effort placed me in one cultural skirmish after another, unwittingly confronting forces much darker than I knew. I don't pretend to comprehend what occurs in the unseen realm. But I know that we all live in what C.S. Lewis called "enemy-occupied territory."

Your book foresees a future in which the elderly are encouraged to end their lives to help younger family members pay for college. Do you fear this is where the country is headed?

These novels don't predict the future, they simply project the trajectory of current demographic trends. The story is set in the year 2042 when the economic pyramid flips, too few young bearing the burden of a rapidly aging population. These trends are already creating headlines around the globe. Japan, for example, has the oldest average citizen on the planet. Last year they sold more adult diapers than baby diapers, a trend coming fast to every developed nation in the world including the United States. A few weeks ago the finance minister of the newly elected government said the elderly need to "hurry up and die" because they can't sustain the social safety net. Bleak? You bet.

In general, do you consider your book's premise to be far-fetched?

Not in the least. The best demographers tell us it is inevitable since we can't go back in time and make more children.

What are some of the real-life issues today that made you write this future fantasy?

The single threat to our future is the trend away from forming families to begin with. Marriage is in drastic decline. For

the first time in history more women are single than married. Raising children is now considered an inconvenient burden rather than life's highest calling. For the first time in our history there are fewer households with children than without. The most basic human instinct, forming families, is in dramatic decline. And the implications of that reality, as we've depicted in these novels, are breathtaking. That's why we chose the looming demographic crisis as the backdrop to these stories.

How much did you write in comparison to co-author Kurt Bruner? How did you share the writing duties?

We both enjoyed the collaboration process. Kurt and I met at the start of each (part of the trilogy) project to brainstorm the characters, the story arc, etc. Then Kurt did the heavy lifting on the flow of the story while I made sure the trends and scenarios depicted had academic, medical and sociological veracity.

It's been almost three years since you left Focus on the Family's radio ministry. Do you miss it?

I haven't had time. The day after I left Focus on the Family I started a new radio show called "Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk" heard on over 1,100 stations. I continue to enjoy the opportunity to connect with listeners.

"Fatherless" is the first of a three-part series. Can you give any hints about what's coming up?

The first book, "Fatherless," released last month. The second, "Childless," is scheduled to come out in October. The final installment, "Godless," will release in early 2014. Each storyline builds on the previous theme with an entertaining mix of political intrigue, spiritual warfare, futuristic speculation and educated conjecture about the kind of world our children will face.