

Don't Burn This

On most days I love my job. Then there are other days when I'd like to turn off my computer, drive back home to Georgia and sit on a porch swing for a few months. I especially feel this way when I read through my bulging hate-mail file, where I collect responses from angry subscribers. For an editor, reading these letters is sort of like getting a root canal, only not as fun.

I react to these letters in different ways. In some cases I face my mistakes like a man and apologize for getting our facts wrong. At other times, when I realize what kinds of sick attitudes are brewing out there in the church, I get depressed.

Last summer, for example, we featured on our cover a photograph of four young people wearing black lipstick, metal-studded collars and Gothic clothes. I'll admit it was not your grandmother's issue of Charisma.

But the reason we wrote that story was to inform our readers about a significant trend going on in today's youth culture. A few days after that magazine hit newsstands, an angry pastor called to say he had burned it because he didn't want to look at images of "evil" teen-agers.

He torched the magazine! I hate to think how this man would react if a Goth walked into his church on Sunday and filled out a visitor's card.

In April we interviewed dozens of unchurched people so we

could get a sense of how they view the gospel and Christians. I learned a lot from their honest, humorous responses (especially their suspicions about what churches do with the money in the offering plate).

But a pastor from California dismissed our research. Regarding evangelism, he said he didn't have time for sinners. If the Holy Spirit should ever convict unbelievers in his city, he said, then "they can just drop by." (Great! I thought, I'm sure they'll be drawn to the Lord by your compassion and concern.)

Then there was the woman in Pennsylvania who was upset because she believes we are "pandering" to Goths, atheists and homosexuals by teaching our readers how to minister to them. She wrote: "You hide behind the idea of reaching the masses when actually you care more about them than you do Jesus Christ. Yes, He died for them. He also died for the button-down, normal guy down the street."

I agree that Jesus died for the button-down crowd. But when the "normal" folks embrace the gospel, the Holy Spirit comes with His fire to burn up their prejudices and stubborn religious mind-sets. The same Jesus who was willing to leave heaven and identify with demon-possessed prostitutes and greedy tax collectors is calling us to love people who aren't like us.

I wonder what our critics will say about our cover this month, which features a young man involved in the hip-hop scene. All of our readers need to study his face carefully. I hope that instead of burning this magazine, you will pin the cover photo on your refrigerator and pray for ministries that are using rap music and street jive to reach a needy subculture.

You don't have to dress like this guy or listen to his pulsating music. But maybe Jesus wants you to invite him into your "normal" world—so the Holy Spirit can incinerate some things in your heart.