

Men of the Year

Bono and Bush, Jakes and Jennings. The Men of the Year for 2005 have dug wells of inspiration from which others who aspire to the exceptional might drink.

There is little more beautiful to behold in the world than a man in the grasp of an idea. Women, of course, are also thrilling when they passionately give themselves to belief, but since men are the more easily distracted and the more commonly willing to settle for less than they might be, it is a man possessed of an idea who most often holds the fascination of the world.

Our 2005 Men of the Year are just such men. Except for one of them, they are not particularly exceptional apart from the ideas they serve. Yet, because they have chosen to preserve the heritage of a people or to loose the grip of poverty upon nations or to lead a tradition-bound church into cultural relevance, among other causes, they are living exceptional lives. They are also digging wells of inspiration from which others who aspire to the exceptional might drink.

American Soldier

The first among them is not a man but a tribe: the American soldier fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan today. Both supporters and critics of these wars have acknowledged, in the recent words of an instructor at the United States Military Academy, that this generation at war is “among the best educated, most effective and most unswervingly patriotic fighting forces America has ever put in the field.” Yet, it was not supposed to be, and the reason why is one of the most important tales of our times.

The average age of an American soldier serving overseas today

is 21.1 years old. As a generation, they are called the Millennials: those who came of age around the dawn of the new millennium. The truth is we did not expect much of them. This was the Columbine Generation, after all. We spoke of them as "latchkey kids" and "mall rats." They were supposed to be party animals who lacked a moral compass, products of a material age who whined to the world, "What have you done for me lately?" One scholarly journal spoke of them as the "new barbarians" who would one day undo American civilization.

Then came September 11, 2001, and their country's call. Something changed in this generation that seemed destined for decadence. One observer suggested that this tribe was finally given a chance to fight for something more than a parking space at the mall. Another said that 9/11 sobered this generation's young much as Pearl Harbor had their great-grandparents. Whatever the reason, the Millennials discovered their more noble selves and have conducted themselves with valor few expected of them.

They have performed magnificently. In a religiously charged war of swirling battle lines and cruel guerrilla insurgency, they have largely secured their objectives and have done so with an astonishingly low percentage of civilian casualties. Though every one of their nearly 2,000 comrades who have fallen is to be mourned deeply, this number is also surprisingly small given the nature of the war. In short, they have fought an increasingly nasty conflict with character and conscience, defying their critics as much as they have their enemies on the battlefield.

They have also conducted themselves with compassion. The aberration of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal aside, they have displayed a tenderheartedness that, while not uncommon among warriors, has belied the callousness expected of them. More than one unit has taken up a collection to provide food for the orphans of war. More than one soldier has joked and shared candy with an Iraqi child on the street only to find that

child violently dismembered by an insurgent's bomb the next day. Still, refusing to retreat into a self-protective cocoon, American soldiers have returned to those same streets to love still more children, knowing it might all happen again.

Though it was their great-grandparents who were rightly called "the greatest generation," this new generation at war has proven themselves the heirs of that noble legacy. Whatever course their war may take, they have risen above their lesser selves and put the world on notice that they intend even greater things. For this reason, they head our list of Men of the Year.

Pope John Paul II

The next notable we honor provided such inspiration to the world that though he only lived a few months of 2005, he must be remembered as one of the giants of the year. His name was Karol Józef Wojtyła, but he was better known as Pope John Paul II.

He was often called "the people's Pope." Though he reigned only a few decades after a time in which popes still wore three-tiered crowns and were carried aloft on thrones wherever they went, he eschewed the trappings of the centuries to reach for more meaningful contact with the modern world.

Yet his appeal was rooted in far more than mere style. He believed that the church of Jesus Christ had the answers for the crises of his age. The world was mired, he said, in a "culture of death." The nations needed faith in Jesus, a moral vision and the joy that the Holy Spirit alone could give. To take this message to the nations, he became the most traveled world leader in history.

Both the impoverished and the powerful of the world listened to him and largely because he had lived such an extraordinary life. Raised in the suffering nation of Poland, he attended an underground seminary during the Nazi occupation of World War

II and then began his priestly ministry while communism ruled his land. He rose quickly in the church, known for his fiery faith, broad intellect and winning ways, particularly with Communist officials. It was no accident that he became pope just as the Soviet walls began tumbling down.

An enduring image from his more than a quarter-century as pope tells much about his character. On May 13, 1981, he was shot during an appearance in St. Peter's Square by a Turk named Mehmet Ali Agca. He almost died of his wounds. After a near-miraculous recovery, he decided to visit Ali Agca in his prison cell and extend forgiveness. When he emerged from the visit and the media pressed him to recount what had happened, he said simply: "What we talked about will have to remain a secret between him and me. I spoke to him as a brother whom I have pardoned and who has my complete trust." It was an unprecedented act by a world leader, yet one that modeled what he wanted his church to be.

As the year 2000 loomed, John Paul II declared that the world should prepare for Jubilee, a time of cleansing and renewal. To ready his Church for a "renewing work of the Holy Spirit," he called it to repentance and decided to show the way himself. He asked forgiveness of Orthodox believers, Protestants and Jews for Catholic sins against them. He became the first pope to apologize for the Church's role in the Holocaust, the first to enter a synagogue and the first to call the Jews "our elder brothers." He even visited the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and slipped a prayer of repentance between the surviving stones of the ancient temple.

Though the pedophilia scandals among his priests broke his heart and distracted many from his dream of a "Catholic spring in the world," John Paul II not only transformed the papacy but lit a lamp of faith in a darkly secular age. His legacy will be felt for decades and so it is fitting that he should be named among the giants in 2005, the year of his death.

Bono

Among John Paul II's most unlikely admirers was another man who deserves to be named with 2005's Men of the Year: Bono, famed lead singer of the wildly popular rock band U2. Perhaps more than any other pop-culture icon, he has transformed himself into a global leader of conscience, and has done so fueled by an amorphous spirituality that continues to fascinate and inspire.

Bono has called his fame both as a rock star and a statesman "absurd." Many would agree. A rocker who has adopted personas such as "The Fly" and "Mirrorball Man" may seem an odd choice for global conscience. Others argue that U2's music and Bono's onstage antics are both poetry and parody, capturing the human condition as few artists do and, thus, making him perfectly suited to sound a trumpet call for change. Whatever the case, first as a voice for HIV-ravaged nations and then as an advocate for Third World debt relief, Bono has done what many performers wish they could: translate popular acclaim into global political influence.

There are more than a few who contend that both the poetry and the politics spring from the soul of a prophet. Born Paul David Hewson, Bono was thrown into a deep spiritual crisis after his mother died of cancer when he was 14. He found comfort in a loose evangelical gathering called Shalom that met for song, worship and Bible study, but he left the group when the meetings became too structured. This combination of passion for God but revulsion for organized religion has marked his life.

"I just go where the life is, you know? Where I feel the Holy Spirit," Bono has explained. "If it's in the back of a Roman Catholic cathedral, in the quietness and the incense, which suggest the mystery of God, of God's presence, or in the bright lights of the revival tent, I just go where I find life. I don't see denomination. I generally think religion

gets in the way of God.”

His ardent but unstructured spirituality resonates with the generation that buys his music. Surveys have repeatedly shown that those in their late teens and early 20s throughout the Western world largely believe in God but find little of value in structured religion. They are primarily looking for an experience of spirituality but one that moves them to make a difference in the world.

For this young tribe, Bono is indeed a prophet, whether he welcomes the role or not. It is not hard to understand why. Speaking to a gathering at an American church, Bono exploded: “This generation will be remembered for three things: the Internet, the war on terror, and how we let an entire content go up in flames while we stood around with watering cans.”

Bono’s personal ethics support his message and give him exceptional credibility in a generation skeptical of celebrity. He has been married to the same woman for more than two decades. He lives in relative simplicity and speaks with disarming transparency about his own flaws, as he once did in a forward he wrote for a modern edition of the psalms of David called The Book of Psalms. Calling for these same values of simplicity and humility on the global scene, Bono has become a leading voice for political compassion and economic generosity and, thus, he certainly ranks among our Men of the Year for 2005.

Lance Armstrong

The same generation that is moved by Bono’s lyrics is also inspired by the life of a cyclist from Plano, Texas. The evidence for their connection to this lone athlete’s story is obvious from the yellow wristbands they wear. Displaying the words “Live Strong,” these bands have become the symbols of a growing movement of courage and vision drawn from the heroic life of Lance Armstrong and, thus, he too is among our Men of

the Year for 2005.

Like many who live exceptional lives, Armstrong was fortunate not only to have a defining gift but also to know it from an early age. He could ride a bicycle like the wind. At the age of 13, he won the Iron Kids Triathlon and became a professional when he was only 16. He almost failed to graduate from high school but only because he was training with the U.S. Olympic cycling developmental team during his senior year.

Once he decided to make a career of racing, he began a string of astonishing victories. In rapid succession, he won a USPRO Championship title, stage victories in the Tour de France, a World Championship, multiple victories at the Tour du Pont and a spot on the U.S. Olympic team. By 1996, he was the top ranked cyclist in the world.

Then it happened. In early October of 1996, his doctor gave him the stunning news that he had testicular cancer. Moreover, the cancer had spread into his lungs and his brain. A devastated Armstrong held a press conference to announce the news. Though his chances of recovery were less than 50 percent, he spoke of his eventual return to the sport he loved. Then, he began an aggressive program of chemotherapy. Surprisingly, the therapy worked and did so without diminishing his lung capacity. In time, Armstrong was not only able to return to cycling, but he was also able to say that his victory over cancer was “ ... the best thing that ever happened to me.”

In 1999, he entered the Tour de France. Some suggested that just entering was enough for a man who had beaten cancer, but a determined Armstrong astonished the world by not just entering but winning the Tour de France. Even more amazingly, he continued to win the celebrated race each year for the following six years. It was one of the great accomplishments in sports history.

In the true spirit of the champion, Armstrong has built an inspiring monument on what might have been the ashes of his life. He has begun The Lance Armstrong Foundation that is devoted to helping others conquer cancer. The yellow wristbands bearing his life motto "Live Strong" are the symbol of the organization and its message. Armstrong has also transformed the date that he learned he had cancer, October 2 (10/2), and made it a symbol of victory. From athletic gear to motivational speeches, "10/2" has become a reminder of what indomitable courage can accomplish.

Lance Armstrong has done more than simply defeat cancer, an accomplishment that is laudable enough. He has defeated cancer and then made the fuel of that victory available to others. Both his life and his message are inspiring millions to live beyond the fear and the cowardice that might well keep them from achieving their best. So it is that we include Lance Armstrong among 2005's Men of the Year.

David McCullough

All throughout history, there have been those appointed to recount the great tales of mankind, to remind the present of a valiant past so as to inspire them to shape a noble future. In some cultures, those appointed are the wise men and the priests. In others, they are the storytellers and the poets. In American culture today, this role has fallen chiefly to David McCullough.

His children tease him that he will never be a successful writer because he is not tortured enough. He grew up in a happy Presbyterian home in New England. He might have joined his father and begun his career working at the firm that bore the family name, McCullough Electric Company, but his mother insisted instead that he go off to college. He enrolled at Yale in the 1950s and upon graduation began a series of jobs before he became an editor for American Heritage magazine.

His first books offered unique perspective on the American past. Then, he began years of research on the life of Harry Truman. McCullough combined flowing, even poetic, writing with detailed knowledge and an eye to the human dimension to produce a celebration of one of America's great men. The book earned him the Pulitzer Prize, an award he won again a decade later for his life of John Adams.

What distinguishes McCullough's work and has made him widely popular-John Adams has sold more than 2 million copies-is that his central theme is character. When asked why he wrote one of his most popular books he said, "I would hope [readers] will be less inclined to ever take for granted what brave men did, and [that they will] understand that character counts in the long run." He views history as the stage on which character determines the course of men and nations. Indeed, he would agree with the ancient Greeks who insisted, "Character is destiny."

Through his many narrations-as in the movie *Seabiscuit*-and on countless Public Television specials, in his widely influential books and through hundreds of public appearances, David McCullough is becoming the voice of the American past, the modern version of the ancient storyteller who passed the tribal lore to the next generation. He is reminding us of who we were and thus of what we may be, and so he is certainly among 2005's Men of the Year.

Each of these Men of the Year have become ennobled by believing in something beyond themselves, by devoting themselves to an ideal that has captured their hearts. This, surely, is the power behind the patriotism, the valor, the labor and the vision of each of these heroes. Since they have in turn offered these values to the world at large, they have enabled others to live exceptional lives as well-lives of beauty in the grasp of a glorious idea.

This article originally appeared in *New Man* magazine in 2005.

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MORE Men of the Year

Listed in Alphabetical Order

Pope Benedict XVI, leader of the Catholic Church. John Paul's successor has big shoes to fill and has a long road ahead of him as he guides the Catholic Church through controversy and difficult times.

Tony Blair, British prime minister. He is a steadfast ally of the United States and has been strong and principled in the face of great criticism, standing up for freedom, democracy and liberty at a time when so many lacked the conviction and courage to do so.

George W. Bush, president of the United States. Nobody wants this man's job right now: the war in Iraq, the global war on terror, hurricane-recovery efforts in the Southern states, soaring gas prices ... oh, and having to fill not one but two Supreme Court vacancies. The Bible tells us to pray for those in authority. It's time for us to stand in the gap for America's embattled commander in chief.

Jose Canseco, former baseball all-star. Decided that it's better to be a rat than a hypocrite. In his tell-all book, *Juiced*, he confessed his involvement with steroids and implicated several other high-profile players.

Napoleon Dynamite, cultural icon. OK, so this movie released

last year. We know, we know. But we're gonna do whatever we feel like we wanna do. Gosh! Bottom line: This Brillo-haired antihero is still a phenom. The film's an absolute classic, and without one cuss word, sexual references or violence (unless you count that big kid who gave Nap a massive headlock early on in the film). Get the special edition DVD, already. Sweet!

W. Mark Felt, "Deep Throat." This former FBI deputy director's identity as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's source was a closely guarded secret for three decades, and the source of much speculation in American politics and popular culture.

Bill Gates, Microsoft founder. Through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, he is pouring billions into charitable organizations, primarily medical and educational programs. Meanwhile, fewer than 10 percent of born-again Christians give 10 percent to their churches. What's wrong with this picture?

Malcolm Gladwell, business guru. His Tipping Point and Blink have taught people to think again. He has coined or introduced phrases that are becoming part of our daily lexicon (i.e. "thin-slicing"), and have explained complex economic and cognitive processes in ways the average person can understand and implement.

Billy Graham, evangelist. Finest public example of evangelical Christianity in the 20th century. Says he has preached his last crusade. People now wonder who will take his place, but nobody ever will.

Franklin Graham, evangelist and humanitarian. During the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, his spiritual commentary on FOX News and other media brought the most comfort-and a sense of leadership when America seemed to be without it. Can we put him in charge of FEMA?

John Grisham, best-selling author. Usually keeps charitable donations very private. But decided to disclose a \$5 million

contribution to establish a relief fund to help Mississippians rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly, talk-show hosts. Because they stand up for what they believe ... and entertain us at the same time.

Hank Hill, star of King of the Hill. This propane-obsessed Texan may be a cartoon character, but, dang it, he's still a man's man and a great dad, I'll tell you what. King of the Hill often pokes fun at conservatism, but ultimately presents a world in which right is right and wrong is wrong.

Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, three-star general. When the cavalry finally arrived in New Orleans to help the survivors of Hurricane Katrina, this cigar-chomping general led the way, winning over some of the government's harshest critics, including New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin, who blasted the Bush administration's initial response to his city's disaster. Nagin told a radio station: "I give the president some credit on this. He sent one John Wayne dude down here that can get some stuff done."

T.D. Jakes, pastor and best-selling author. More than 100,000 people converged on Atlanta this year for MegaFest 2005, one of the largest spiritual gatherings in the country that filled not only the Georgia Dome but also the Georgia World Congress Center, Philips Arena and the International Plaza.

Peter Jennings, ABC news anchor. The last of the "Big Three" newscasters, he pushed to have more coverage of religion in mainstream media at a time when some networks seemed to avoid anything related to evangelical Christianity. He will be missed.

Dean Koontz, best-selling author. For showing that commercial books can actually be about something-The Face, Odd Thomas and The Taking all had strong Christian themes.

Joel Osteen, pastor and best-selling author. For putting a new face on televangelism.

Rod Parsley, pastor and political activist. The senior pastor of World Harvest Church, author of Silent No More and founder of The Center for Moral Clarity is empowering Christians to take an active role in politics.

Brad Pitt, actor. For his work with the ONE Campaign, calling on people to come together to fight the global crises of AIDS, hunger and poverty. And, for proving that having a sexy wife does not guarantee a perfect marriage.

William Rehnquist, former Supreme Court chief justice. A conservative on issues such as abortion and gay marriage, he will be best-known for giving the 2000 election to George W. Bush. His vote counted.

John Roberts, newly appointed Supreme Court chief justice. The nation's youngest chief justice in two centuries, Roberts is presiding over a Supreme Court divided over abortion and other social issues. He needs our prayers.

Pat Robertson, Christian broadcaster. Not for his controversial remarks about Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, but for having the guts to appear in a commercial supporting the ONE Campaign with people of a different political stripe.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, actor-turned-governor of California. Whatever you think of the Terminator, he proved that he still has some spine left when he vetoed a gay-marriage bill in September.

Cameron Strang, founder of Relevant Media Group. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. This 29-year-old multimedia mogul is the son of New Man publisher Stephen Strang. He has created the edgiest magazine the church has ever seen (Gulp ... we concede!), along with Relevant Books, a college edition of Relevant magazine and a new magazine for 20-something women

called Radiant. What's next, a Christian men's magazine? Don't go there, Fella.

Darth Vader, Jedi bad boy. George Lucas FINALLY got it right with Revenge of the Sith. Anakin Skywalker's story is a powerful reminder that whenever you try to take your fate into your own hands, you get burned.

Rick Warren, pastor and best-selling author. The Purpose-Driven Life is "the little book that could." It just keeps going, and going ...

Kanye West, rapper. He dared to bring Jesus back to hip-hop.

Reggie White, NFL legend. Minister of Defense, we will never forget you.

Ralph Winter, Hollywood producer. For being an indefatigable voice of Christian values in Hollywood. He regularly bounces between superhero blockbusters such as X-Men and Fantastic Four, and small films such as Hangman's Curse. If he can make "Space Ghost" into a hit flick, then we'll really be impressed.