

Books & Culture survives financial crisis

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [October 2, 2013](#) issue

Print publications across the board are struggling to find a financial formula to help them survive—or praying for a deep-pocketed savior to rescue them the way Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is doing with the *Washington Post*.

Religious publications are also feeling the pinch, and the latest evidence was a dire warning from the Christian literary magazine *Books & Culture* that it could have shut down if it hadn't reached its \$250,000 fund-raising goal on September 9.

The magazine survived the chopping block, receiving just above the amount needed to continue in 2014. The publication has pledges of \$110,000 a year until 2018.

Since June, the bimonthly publication had been trying to raise the \$250,000, saying it was needed to cover operating costs. In the first week of September, John Wilson, *Books & Culture's* sole editor, tweeted that the next issue would be the last if he didn't come up with about half of the amount.

"Anyone who has been following the publishing world at all in the last decade or more is aware of the tremendous pressures that there are," Wilson said.

Books & Culture started in 1995 under the umbrella of *Christianity Today*, which publishes the magazine founded by Billy Graham as well as many other print and online media aimed at evangelicals and the wider public.

Since it started, *Books & Culture* has been hailed for showcasing high-quality essays by top-shelf writers and for providing evidence of robust evangelical engagement with philosophy, the arts and other cultural and intellectual pursuits. Like many intellectual magazines and journals, it has a small but passionate readership.

Its editorial board and contributing editors have included Notre Dame history professor Mark Noll, Wake Forest president Nathan Hatch and Duke Divinity School professor Lauren Winner.

A one-year subscription of six issues costs about \$30. The journal has about 9,000 subscribers, and it costs \$550,000 to \$570,000 per year to publish. It has sustained itself through advertising and subscriptions, along with nearly equal contributions from its parent organization and outside funders.

But *Christianity Today* has had serious financial setbacks in recent years. In 2009, it closed four publications and laid off about a quarter of its staff.

Over the course of *Books & Culture*'s 18-year life span, *Christianity Today* has contributed between \$1 million and \$2 million to keep the magazine afloat, a subsidy the organization decided it could no longer afford. With about \$11.4 million in revenue, *Christianity Today* ran a \$1.2 million deficit in 2012, according to the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

As it sought help from the general public this time around, *Christianity Today* still seeks a long-term solution, not a stopgap on the way to an inevitable demise. "Some will wonder, is this [fund-raising appeal] going to be an every other month event? The answer is no," said Harold Smith, *Christianity Today*'s president and CEO.

Smith said about a dozen Christian schools have pledged financial support to help stabilize the magazine. "This is a unique situation. Right now we see this as a critical juncture. We cannot continue in a deficit situation."

The September/October 2010 issue included a timeline on its cover that started with Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, a book that drew wide notice for critiquing evangelicals' alleged lack of intellectual curiosity and learning. The timeline also shows the death of nonreligious publications—and the survival of *Books & Culture*. "Scandal? What scandal?" the headline asks.

Religiously oriented publications across the board are struggling alongside their secular counterparts. Since the death of Richard John Neuhaus in 2009, the conservative, cross-denominational journal *First Things* has had to work very hard to find enough support to keep going, said its editor, R. R. Reno. "It's very difficult to sustain a publication devoted to serious ideas," Reno said. —RNS

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