

Crosswords

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [September 12, 2001](#) issue

Would you like to make working crosswords more difficult? Ian Alterman suggests two methods, beginning with “to fill in the first ‘across’ word, and then use only the letters from that word to continue. An even more challenging method is to fill in the first ‘across’ word, fill in the ‘down’ word from the last letter of that word and complete the grid by adding the word that includes the last letter of a new word. There is,” he says, “nothing like an extra challenge to keep the mind sharp and the solving interesting.”

We can think of other ways. Do crosswords standing on your head, or submerged, or while reciting the Gettysburg address or wearing a blindfold or drinking eight Scotches. There’s nothing like an extra challenge.

Alterman was challenging readers in a recent letters-to-the-editor page of the Sunday *New York Times*. He complained that the puzzles in that weekly are too simple, but his lines of advice and complaint framed the sentence that made clear his real reason for writing: “As one who was ranked among the top 150 crossword solvers nationwide in a contest held by *Games Magazine*, . . . I can offer a couple of ways [to make the puzzles better].” Next to these words some Marty family member had red-penned the comment, “*Well lah-de-dah.*”

You’ve met the “well lah-de-dah” types in the faith-based fields too. Such a person might say, for example, “There is nothing like an extra challenge to keep the mind sharp. Translate the Septuagint back from Greek to Hebrew, but writing the Hebrew from left to right, and reading the result softly aloud while listening to *Rigoletto* played at full blast.” Whence the credentials to offer such a challenge? “Because I got straight A’s in Hebrew and Greek, and was nominated for an international scholarship, though I didn’t get it because I was turned down by some anti-Semite or anti-Hellenist.”

You’ve met the “well lah-de-dah” type in the church growth field. “Growing congregations is too simple. I can offer a couple of harder ways. For instance, don’t locate where two superhighways cross and a mall is next door; stay close to two

ordinary roads. To make it more challenging, don't just take a market survey to find out what people want and give it to them. Instead, hire a good reporter who can use his journalistic instincts to promote your church, and build on that. As one who was ranked among the top 50 megachurch builders in a nation-wide survey . . ."

Here's lah-de-dah in the spiritual life: "There is nothing like an extra challenge. Try this: Take three themes of Hinduism and three practices of Buddhism; shake well and ingest them. Then stare at the mirror from sunrise to sunset, bow to Jesus and to yourself, and . . . As one who was ranked among the top 150 gurus in an Asia-wide canvass before I came to America . . ."

And in preaching: "There is nothing like an extra challenge. Get a reputation as a crowd pleaser, even though every few weeks you do nothing more in the pulpit than exegete a biblical text. Attract a following with only two spotlights on your pulpit. Be noticed even if you are only on local cable. As one who was chosen by *First-Rate Pulpiters* magazine as among the top 150 preachers . . ."

You get the point. You can use your "as one who . . ." credentials to say something that would be just as credible if you were not "one who . . ." Why not leave the credentials at home while trying to make life more interesting for the mere mortals and mental sluggards near you?