

Altar recalls: Born yet again

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [March 21, 2006](#) issue

I like the title of Jon Sweeney's book *Born Again and Again*, reviewed in this issue along with three other memoirs dealing with fundamentalism. My own religious experience includes several trips to the altar as a youngster, one in a Baptist church, another in a revival tent. The evangelists' case was compelling, smoothly and persuasively delivered, illustrated with colorful flannel board displays, accompanied by sweet music and the usual "As we turn the lights down, and every head is bowed and eyes closed . . ." It was irresistible. So I went to the altar—several times. I always wondered if the buddies who brought me to the services were counting each trip to the altar as a separate conversion on their score card.

My chums truly cared, I think. And in an odd way those experiences are part of a journey that took a very different turn and ended in a very different place. I recall my Presbyterian mother gently suggesting that being "born again" probably started when she and my Dad took me to church and had me baptized. She thought the whole business was far too big to be confined to one experience, and took a lifetime. I guess we're always being converted, she said. I still think that's a pretty good answer.

Elsewhere this issue offers comment on a man who does what most of us only dream about or do from a distance: he speaks truth to power. Mainline church leaders can't get much of a hearing from this president and this administration. But there is Bono, traveling and talking about debt relief with treasury secretary Paul O'Neill or speaking to the president at the National Prayer Breakfast about AIDS in Africa.

Bono's songs sometimes are remarkably theological. Eva Stimson, editor of *Presbyterians Today*, called my attention to "Walk On," which suggests that faith precedes sight and that trust comes before assurance.

"Walk on, walk on / You're packing a suitcase for a place none of us have been / A place that has to be believed to be seen." That's a good Lenten charge, I'd say.