

Bigger Than Bono

Calgary's pop-culture preacher found just what he was looking for in U2's latest release, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*

BY PASTOR JOHN VAN SLOTEN

There is something about U2's music that compels me to preach it. It's just so tempting, I can't help myself. Fellow ministers tell me I'm a little co-dependent, gotta pull that pop-culture needle out of my arm, but I say, "Back off buddy! What do you know? I can stop any time I want." If I want.

But I can't. U2 is the spiritual guide for a generation; they're modern-day prophets challenging our consumer-centred western culture to get off its butt and start loving its neighbour as it loves itself; they're fellow human beings giving voice to the eternal cries of the human heart. The way they do the faith thing—it's inspiring, it's real, it curses on one hand and blesses on the other, and it makes for a heck of an interesting sermon topic in my mind.

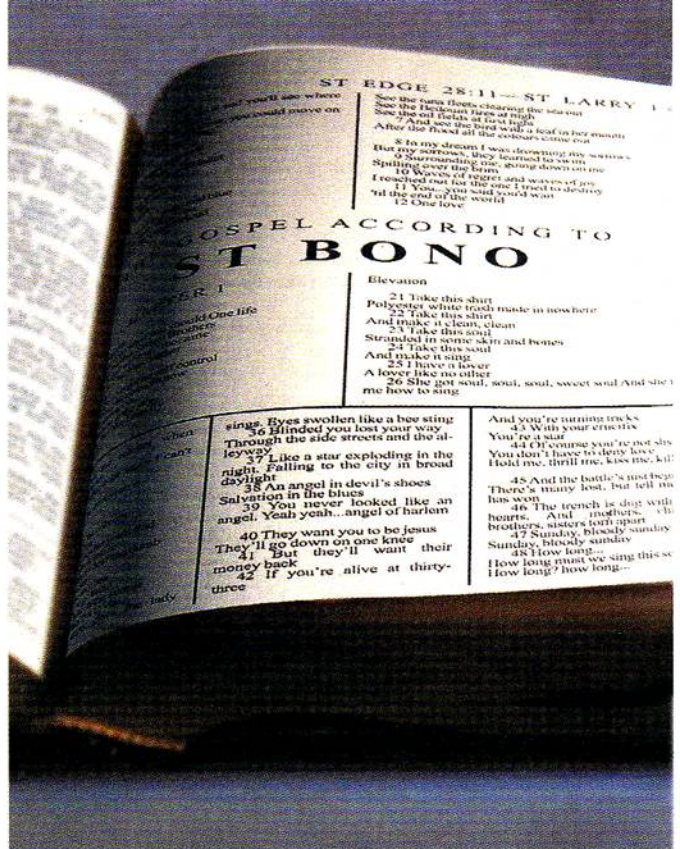
So, once again, I think I'll use U2 as my text for this Sunday morning. I can see it now: "Welcome to church everyone. This morning, we'll be reading from the good book of U2. If you could all please turn with me to the chapter on *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, Album 11. We'll begin reading at the verses dealing with Vertigo." Press play.

Serious? Yeah, I am. Music is one of the biggest sources of spiritual information in our culture today. While people may not be going to church to feed their faith, they are finding their spiritual nourishment elsewhere; often through music, and even through a pop song such as Vertigo.

I remember how excited I was when I initially got home with U2's latest CD, sat down and listened to it for the first time. It starts with the drumsticks, then The Edge's very cool staccato guitar riff, then in comes Bono, in Spanish no less, "Onos, dos, tres, catorce," and away we go, to a place called Vertigo. First time I listened for pure enjoyment. Then I played it again, lyrics in hand, and tried to figure out what the heck this band was really up to with this song. Then I asked myself, "How in the world am I going to preach this thing?" There's got to be some divine truth here somewhere, I figure. If Bono and the boys really were created by God, then they must reflect a bit of the artistry of their maker in their music.

In my mind the link is pretty clear: all real truth, beauty and brilliant guitar riffs are God's. Where else would they come from? (Really—this is how I think.)

So I'm discerningly listening to the song and then, boom, it hit me. I got to the part where Bono seductively whispers, "All this, all of this can be yours"—you know the part, that strange sounding



bridge—and the entire sermon began to fall into place. I'm thinking, "This song's about a lot more than just selling iPods." It's really about temptation. And those alluring words are exactly the words whispered to Christ in his temptation, verbatim.

And the whole Vertigo thing, well, it's that disorienting place you sometimes find yourself when faced with a tempting choice; that very real, and somewhat terrifying moment when you're still not sure which way you're going to fall. I find myself thinking, "I've been there." As have most of the people who attend our church, I would imagine. We all struggle with wanting to do the right thing in life, we're prone to giving in and we'd love to know if there's anything or anyone that can help.

Now, let's see, Sunday morning, we'll start with the band playing the song, connect the dots with the whole temptation angle, let the congregation feel that Vertigo feeling ("Lights go down and all I know/Is that you give me something I can feel/You're teaching me/Your love is teaching me/How to kneel") and then move on to talk about a cure. We'll tie U2's story to the Jesus tempted in the Gospels story, and then conclude the message with how Bono and Christ land in the same place in terms of resolving their Vertigo dilemma. Rock on. ☺