

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS VOLUME 9, NUMBER 4 AGGREGATE ISSUE 46 OCTOBER 2003

*"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'"* Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23

**Is Life A Trophy Hunt** *Joe E. Trull*

**We've Got Mail** *Letters From Our Readers*

**The Book of Revelation and the Global Conflict in the Middle East**

*By William E. Hull*

**I. The Lord God Omnipotent Reigns**

**II. The Beast from the Bottomless Pit**

**III. A New Heaven and a New Earth (Next Issue)**

**The Prayer of Job** *Skippy R. in The Door Magazine*

**From Afghanistan to Georgia** *Tripp York*

**What I've Learned About Women in Ministry** *David M. Scholar*

**Christian Schools Don't Always Practice Values They Preach** *Alberta Philips*

**Dealing With Depression** *Hal Haralson*

**Credit God for Talent, But Pay the IRS** *Matthew Miller*

**A TRILOGY ON FREEDOM** *Dwight A. Moody*

**Just How Free Are These Methodists? W. W. J. D. In Alabama?**

**Meddling Ministers and the Prophet's Reward**

**Nuclear Arms and the American Military Empire** *John M. Swomley*

**SBC Leader Applies Church-Christ Analogy to Bedroom** *Robert Parham*

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Christianity at the Religious Roundtable** *Reviewed by Renate Viveen Hood*

**The Brain Behind the Oval Office** *Reviewed by Jena Heath*

**Trivial Pursuits** *Foy Valentine*



**KUDZU** by Doug Marlette  
[www.dougmarlette.com](http://www.dougmarlette.com)

---

# Is Life A Trophy Hunt?

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

At the funeral I conducted last week, a devoted daughter's eulogy included: "He loved hunting, but he only killed for meat!" She said it twice. In her mind, her father was a true gentleman of Texas—he only killed animals for food, not for fun.

I thought of a conversation two years earlier outside of the Methodist Community Church just south of Austin, where I preached for the Baptists every other week. An old-timer, but not a native Texan, shared stories of hunting coons at night, vividly describing how he enjoyed seeing his dogs tree and finally devour the trapped raccoon. I noticed the story seemed only to please the storyteller.

Yes, I know that 'Dan'l Boone kilt a bear' and young David slew both lions and bears in Israel, but it was not for sport, but out of necessity (1 Sam. 17:35). True, the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem sacrificed animals as an act of worship. But killing animals for the fun of it is something different from these examples.

Albert Schweitzer, the famous medical doctor, musician, and theologian of the early 1900s, left the luxuries of Europe to invest his life as a missionary in the heart of equatorial Africa. A dominant theme of his life and teachings was the call for Christians to reverence life in all its forms.

Recently, evangelical thinkers have questioned whether today's ecological crisis is the result of greed and materialism caused by a misunderstanding of God's command to "subdue" the earth and "have dominion" over it (Gen. 2:28). It also seems to me that the killing of animals just for the "sport" of it, may be more an evidence of our sinful misuse of God's creation, than our stewardship of it.

In the beginning, when God created the earth and all life upon it, "God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:25). In the words of Wendell Berry, "God made the world. He thinks the world is good. He loves it. It's his world. He has never relinquished title to it. And he has never revoked the conditions that oblige us to take excellent care of it."

It was then that God created humanity in his image, "in the image of God he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Thus the goodness of creation and the sanctity of life are based on these twin revelations. However, from Genesis 3 onward

human sin has twisted the image of God in humanity out of shape and corrupted God's good creation.

One of the original acts of God was to take the man and "put him in the garden of Eden to till and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). This command is the basis for our stewardship of the earth—our obligation to take good care of God's good world. In addition, we are to recognize that all life is a gift from God and that human life bears the image of God and should be treated with reverence and respect. According to Paul, we are partners with God in setting free all of creation from the effects of sin (Rom. 8:18-25).

The question I wish to raise is this: Is there a connection between the way we treat God's good creation and the way we treat humanity, the culmination of God's creative work? I think so.

Let me illustrate. I learned recently that a prominent minister is an avid "Trophy Hunter." Big game safaris are his passion. He is a featured speaker for Hunting Clubs. Those who have visited his "Trophy Room" tell me of an amazing collection of animals—a giraffe, a leopard, a lion, and several varieties of deer—his present quest is for an elephant, I am told. One recent kill sits stuffed on a table—a baboon reading Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. A good laugh, but at what cost?

Now some of you at this point think I am majoring on our doorstep, why bother with such a minor issue?

But consider this. The more I have reflected on the killing of animals for sport, the more the ironies, analogies, and connections between this practice and the treatment of fellow humans began to merge. I have witnessed the way this particular "Trophy Hunter" has treated some people, particularly those considered to be fair game in his mission on earth.

Is there a connection between the two? Is the way we treat God's creation, especially the animals God has placed on planet earth, a reflection of how we view all of life? Or does the way we treat the rest of creation influence the way we treat humans? Probably both are true.

Sometimes I wonder if Darwin isn't right—especially when we act more like baboons than like humans. ■

---

Editor: Joe E. Trull

Publisher: Christian Ethics Today Foundation, 101 Mt. View Rd.; Wimberley, TX 78676. (512) 847-8721; FAX (512) 847-8171.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY is produced in the U.S.A. and is published bi-monthly, mailed from Dallas, Texas, where third-class postage is paid. Articles published in CET express the views of the authors and not necessarily the viewpoint of the Journal or the Editor. Send corrections and change of addresses to P.O. Box 26, Wimberley, Texas, 78676.

---

# We've Got Mail

## Letters From Our Readers

"Thanks for your perceptive, provocative and prophetic article about lying [Summer 2003]. Keep thinking and talking."

**Henlee Barnette, Louisville, KY**

"You're doing the Lord's work."

**Bill and Judith Moyers, New York City, NY**

"I read the current issue of CET (Summer, 2003)—it was outstanding, especially the editorial. . . . this journal was especially good, even though I was depressed after reading it. Thank goodness for Hal Haralson, Foy Valentine, and the cartoons (though they sometimes are depressing too!)."

**Mary Rickenbaker, Belton, SC**

"C.E.T. is an irritating Journal. I get irritated because I can't read it all at one setting!"

**Dr. Grady C. Cothen, FL**

"My yearly subscription cost—free! My financial support—not much! The information and inspiration I receive—PRICELESS! . . . a prophetic voice that speaks to my head and heart."

**Charles Hal Shipley, Murray, KY**

"I consider CET the best journal of its kind . . . Keep up the good work in the kingdom of God."

**Fred V. Richards, M.D., FBC, San Antonio, TX**

"I have just finished 'How Baptists Got Into This Debate Over Women' [April, 2003]. 'BRAVO!!!' What a well-crafted document, indeed! At the same time, I feel an inexorable sadness as I relive the history in your text and read the names of friends with whom I served in the trenches."

**Dr. Gladys S. Lewis, Edmond, OK**

"Thanks for an absolutely great job with CET!"

**Dwight and Emma Baker, Emeritus Missionaries Israel & India, Duncanville, TX**

"It is my privilege to send along a check so that the more than 3100 persons who read and enjoy our Journal may continue."

**Martha C. Herod, Navasota, TX**

"Thank you for *Putting Women in Their Place: The Baptist Debate Over Female Equality*. Before I could read the preface it was commandeered by my wife, her sister declared seconds, then my daughter-in-law; I do not know when I will get to read it. . . . how very much we depend on C.E.T. . . . for

our information and encouragement."

**John S. Casey, Heflin AL**

"I [disagreed with] the review of Charles Kimball's book, *When Religion Becomes Evil* by Douglas Groothuis (April 2003) only days after he was our speaker at the Alabama CBF. He gave the most reasoned, rational, and biblical response to the 9/11 crisis, Middle East politics, and the milieu of issues surrounding Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue and understanding that I have heard to date!"

**Mart Gray, Coordinator Alabama CBF**

"We are pleased to support your work and ministry with this special gift from our congregation."

**Robbi B. Mundy, Min. Educ., FBC, Asheville, NC**

"I just read Valentine's piece on 'a word fitly spoken' and remembered such . . . Years ago I was speaking for the CLC at Glorieta. It looked as though every participant had arrived in a pick-up truck with guns in the rear window. My topics: "Gun Control, The Military-Industrial Complex, etc."—you get the picture. No matter what I said, there were angry outcries and the real danger that I might get lynched. At the back of the room I saw Foy grinning from ear to ear and crying, "Stone him! Stone him! . . . I'm proud to call you all brothers."

**Doug Watterson, North Stuart BC, FL**

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Note: In 2002 and 2003, a few readers raised serious questions about Christian ethics and the mission of our Journal. Our reply is shared in the hope of increasing understanding.**

**Q.** "My support of CET was based on it being [a magazine of] very good Christian articles for the family. I was shocked by the article in Summer, 2003, p. 11 ["The Morality of This President"]. Does this article indicate that the magazine is moving into politics? . . . This article should not be in a Christian Ethics magazine. I recommend you leave [political] judgments to history."

**G. S., Dallas, TX**

**A.** Thanks for your honest response and comments. Al Staggs' brief article speaks to several key Christian ethics issues. Contrasting ethical failures of the Clinton era with those of the present administration, he addresses Just War and Economic Policies, both serious concerns of the OT prophets and of Jesus. Since Jesus did not leave his "political judgments" about the Jewish and Roman rulers of his day to the

“judgment of history,” I doubt if we should either. To be prophetic is dangerous and controversial—yet, that is the role with God’s help we will try to follow. (By the way, as noted at the bottom of page 2, every article “expresses the views of the author and not necessarily the views of the Journal or the Editor.” Sometimes [as on pp. 13-15 of the same issue] we give contradictory viewpoints to elicit thought and discussion.)

**Q.** *“I am now convinced that your interpretations of the ethical mandates of Christianity are not only wrong but pernicious. Your October issue is the climax of your ‘wrong-headedness.’ It is obvious to me that you have no recollection of history; no appreciation of what happens when Christians standby and allow evil and Godless men to prevail; no memory of the terrible price good men have forever paid whenever they have attempted to appease the despots, the tyrants, the fratricides, the bigots, and the dictators. . . . Christianity does not equate with cowardice, . . . yet your Messrs. Hunsinger, Swomley and Stassen would suggest that prevention and deterrence are ‘unchristian’ and unacceptable strategies. I am ashamed of all of them and if they represent Christian Ethics then Christianity is in serious trouble and is as senile and impotent as your idols, Sen. Byrd and the United Nations.”*

**W.D.N., Arlington Hts., ILL**

**A.** I am sorry the articles on peacemaking upset you so. It is obvious your understanding of the Scriptures and of Christian ethics is very different from mine. All I can do is to encourage you to read the Sermon on the Mount and a few books on the ethical subjects of ‘War and Peace,’ including the histories of Christian ethics, which, by the way note that for the first 200+ years of Christianity no follower of Jesus would serve in the military or as a civil Judge. (The first Christians believed they should not take a life for any reason, probably because they took seriously the example and teachings of Jesus.) One of our CET Directors, Tony Campolo, recently said, “America is the greatest Babylon on earth, but it is still Babylon. It is not the kingdom of God.” Like the early Christians, sometimes we too have to decide, “Will I obey God or government?”

**Q.** *“I was disappointed by Joel Gregory’s ‘Reflections on T. B. Maston’ . . . His characterization of Christian brothers as ‘theological dwarfs’ and ‘Lilliputians’ was mean-spirited and inflammatory. What possible purpose could be served by publishing this*

*diatribe other than to widen the chasm between quarreling factions. I will have to admit to harboring the same thoughts . . . but what possible good was done by printing them?”*

**J. P., Georgetown, TX**

**A.** Thanks for your thoughts and the spirit in which you wrote them. After re-reading Joel’s letter, I would have to conclude the words “theological dwarfs” and “Lilliputians” are very descriptive of certain present SBC leaders—the words are not derogatory, and certainly no worse than Jesus’ description of certain religious leaders in his day whom he called “hypocrites, blind fools, snakes, and vipers” (Matt. 25). About addressing factions, the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to confront Peter in a strong debate over matters crucial to the Christian mission (Acts 15). In addition, Paul’s words about Demas and Alexander the coppersmith were strong denunciations of their evil actions. When people spread falsehoods and play the role of the hypocrite, I think they should be confronted with the truth, which is exactly what Joel Gregory did in defense of T. B. Maston.

**Q.** *“I have enjoyed and appreciated your fine publication. Unfortunately, you have now moved toward a liberal political bias. It saddens me to see you take this political agenda, because you have featured so many of my heroes—Carlyle Marney, T. B. Maston, Ken Chafin, Cecil Sherman, Tony Campolo, and others.”*

**G.L., Lufkin, TX**

**A.** Your letter reminds me of one of T. B. Maston’s favorite quotes: “You can be a theological conservative without being politically conservative. I am theologically conservative, but liberal in my application of the gospel to life!” It seems ironic that you and I have some of the same heroes, and without exception *every one of the persons you named* have been tagged as “liberals.” In fact, I believe a strong case can be made that Jesus was considered a “liberal” by the religious and political leaders of his day—he was liberal in his attitude toward the religious traditions of his day, liberal in his understanding of political power and rule, and certainly liberal in his treatment of slaves, women, lepers, and other outcasts of his day. Again, our position is not derived from political views, but one derived from our understanding of the teachings of the Scriptures and from the life and teachings of Jesus. If these positions are termed “liberal,” then we are guilty, but we are in good company. ■





---

# The Book of Revelation and the Global Conflict In the Middle East

*By William E. Hull, Research Professor  
Samford University, Birmingham, AL*

**Note:** This three-part sermon series was preached at the Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in April/May/June, 2003. Dr. Hull notes that “he was driven by the thrust of the book’s message to wrestle with major ethical issues: national hubris in the first sermon, systemic evil in the second sermon, and religious pacifism in the third sermon.”

## **Sermon One: The Lord God Omnipotent Reigns!**

Let’s face it: we are afraid of the Book of Revelation. It is at once the least read yet most misunderstood book in the New Testament. When we pass from the Gospels and Epistles to its pages, we are confronted with a bizarre scenario that seems to unfold in an alien land. Weird and esoteric symbolism abounds on every page. While some choose to ignore this last book of the Bible, others make it the key to their understanding of the whole of Scripture. Revelation has been the happy hunting ground for many a religious crackpot, from the Millerites who were convinced that the world would end in 1844 to the Branch Davidians whose leader, David Koresh, believed that he had been chosen to open the seven seals of the Apocalypse and launch God’s judgment on the world. It is a book of unspeakable violence in the name of God which chills the blood of those who want religion to offer a haven of safety and peace.

Lest we despair, the cryptic language that so easily confuses offers a clue to the unique genius of the book. Here we have nothing less than an attempt to peer into another world, to make visible the invisible and to utter the unutterable. It forces us out of our routine ways of thinking and asks us to discover reality through the imagination rather than the intellect. Make no mistake: the Revelation of John intends to startle us, even to shock us, for it is subversive literature with a dangerous message for an evil day when those who challenged the powers that be in the name of Christ were courting persecution and even death. The book is high drama designed to awaken buried emotions, to enlarge the boundaries of experience, to jar its readers out of complacency with God’s wake-up call. It dares to view all of life in the ultimate dimension!

One of our primary sources of confusion is the time perspective which its message intends. Was Revelation written only for its day, or to describe the subsequent sweep of human history, or to predict the ultimate end of the world? The answer is found in a formula used three times (1:4; 1:8; 4:8, reinforced by 11:17 and 16:5), where God is seen as “the One who is and who was and who is to come,” the one “in whom the ultimate past and the ultimate future are compre-

hended in an eternal present.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike the religious sensationalists of our day, John wrote to be relevant and intensely practical for his desperate readers who were trying to survive in an alien culture, for whom our endless speculations about the latest skirmish in the Middle East would be of little or no help. And yet John probed the depths of life so profoundly that his core convictions are just as valid in our day as in his own. It is precisely because John was so effective in guiding the embattled church of the first century as it lived on the edge of extinction that his book is worthy of our closest attention in the twenty-first century.

As is the case in most drama, the central reality of Revelation is conflict. The three great themes that dominate the book from beginning to end concern (a) the divine protagonist, God; (b) the evil antagonist, Satan; and (c) the resolution of the cosmic struggle between the two, Victory. Here two worlds are pictured as locked in a titanic battle for the loyalty of the human heart, the outcome of which will determine the character of both time and eternity. Amazing as it may be, we mortal earthlings are the prize for which the ultimate powers of the universe now contend! Revelation is profoundly theocentric, thus we look first at what it has to say about God.

## **God the Father**

John lived in a day when the Roman Empire, then at the height of its power, was determined to control the course of history. Its imperial designs knew no limits. The ages of time would be determined by the rule of its Caesars (Luke 3:1). Rome had already crushed every other earthly power within the wider Mediterranean world, thus none dared challenge its supremacy. Intoxicated with its own self-importance, the empire moved steadily to make itself the unifying power around which political, economic, cultural, and religious life would cohere.

Over against this absolutizing of Roman authority, John dared to make the most subversive claim imaginable, namely, that history was guided, not by the Caesars, but by the sovereign Lord of heaven. Three interlocking claims made clear that God alone controlled the unfolding of the ages from cre-

ation to consummation, for he is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (22:13). The meaning of time would be determined by his eternal purposes, not by the latest ruler in Rome. Throughout the book there is an emphasis on wholeness, completeness, and ultimacy as seen, for example, in the frequent use of the number seven which, in Jewish numerology, stood for the fullness of reality, as in the seven days of the week. In Revelation we have seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven bowls, seven attributes of the Lamb, seven beatitudes, seven acts in the drama which unfolds, and God guides it all.

In exalting the awesome majesty and mystery of God, John goes out of his way to underscore his utter transcendence by describing him seven times as “almighty” or “omnipotent” (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22). This is seen not only in his vivid descriptions of God’s glory but particularly in John’s sevenfold designation of God as “the One who sits on the throne” (4:9; 5:1; 5:7; 5:13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5). Caesar’s throne stood for his right to rule, but John saw a greater throne than Caesar’s, not in Rome but in heaven (4:2). Everything about the description of God on his throne (4:3-6) was calculated to trump the ostentation that Rome heaped upon its Caesar in a futile effort to make him seem superhuman. In passages such as this, John is crying at the top of his voice that appearance is not reality, that the dazzling temples to Caesar being built all over Asia Minor were nothing compared to the heavenly court, and that while Caesar may rule momentarily on earth, God reigns eternally in heaven.

And yet John makes an equally important point by what he does not say about this cosmic Potentate. To be sure, God is supreme, but his sovereignty is not coercive. Despots like Nero could rigidly control events by the exercise of arbitrary and capricious power, intimidating and terrorizing whole populations with the threat of violence. But almighty God chooses to rule in a context of human freedom. In his universe, one can decide to be either friend or foe. The greatness of God is seen precisely in the fact that he is not a “control freak” like the Caesars, but accomplishes his purposes in the face of radical contingency. Revelation is animated by a breathtaking vision of the God who *lets us be*, who fashions his future out of our choices whether they be good or bad, a God who desires only our love, even though love is the most voluntary relationship in human experience.

### God the Son

**B**ut if God does not bully his subjects with coercive power, how does he hope to win their fickle hearts? The answer to that central question is that God responded to the unpredictabilities of human freedom by sending his Son to earth

---

*God is going to triumph over the most hideous evil imaginable, but that his only weapon will be a vulnerable Lamb.*

---

to save us from self-destructive decisions. Perhaps the most incredible symbol in the entire book is that of Christ as a sacrificial Lamb. John knew that the messianic hope looked for a “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” who would come to conquer the enemies of the people of God (5:5). But as soon as we move to his next paragraph, we are shocked to discover that this Lion has become a Lamb with his throat cut (5:12)! Now we begin to realize that God has given us so much freedom that we can make him bleed, that evil “can be conquered only by being allowed to conquer and so to burn itself out.”<sup>22</sup>

How quickly we come to the heart of the plot in this drama of redemption: here is the daring claim, not only that God is going to triumph over the most hideous evil imaginable, but that his only weapon will be a vulnerable Lamb. This is John’s key image of Christ in the Apocalypse, being used as a title for Jesus twenty-nine times. But more: it is not just that this Lamb was willing to be a helpless victim. Rather, it was precisely *as* victim that he became victor over every malignant force in the universe, worthy “to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing,” a sevenfold tribute no less (5:12)! Jesus is “worthy,” not *despite* the fact that he had to suffer, but precisely *because* he had to suffer. His defeat *is* his victory, his shame *is* his glory, his humiliation *is* his vindication, his cross *is* his crown.

What an incredible claim: that Rome is going to be vanquished, not by swords and spears, but by a splintery cross! Any doubt that the crucified Christ will reign triumphant is dispelled at the outset of the book when the risen Lord is described in glorious terms reminiscent of God himself (1:12-16). Even Caesar in all of his finery never looked like that! Make no mistake: Jesus Christ, the faithful witness and first born of the dead, is “the ruler of kings on earth” (1:5). To be sure, the enemies of God “will make war on the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14). What a seditious thing for John to say!

### God the Holy Spirit

**A**ll over Asia Minor the oppressive power of Rome was acutely felt even though the throne of the Caesar was far away in the so-called Eternal City. Just so, John and his readers could take heart that the Lord and his Lamb were already sovereign in heaven even though their throne often seemed so far away. A more immediate help for these beleaguered Christians was offered by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, another constant refrain in the Book of Revelation. Indeed, John was given a vision of heaven because he was “in the Spirit” (1:10). This momentous disclosure happened on the isolated island of Patmos, a remote military outpost some eighty-eight miles off the coast of Asia Minor. Only ten miles long and six miles wide, this rocky outcropping in the

Aegean Sea was a perfect place to isolate troublemakers who needed to come to their senses. But God's Spirit was also present on Patmos, not only to inspire the writing of John's book, but also to serve as God's living agent of persuasion for all who would read it (22:17).

But more than that, John could write confidently that the Holy Spirit would not only interpret his divine revelation but also strengthen the Christians to whom he was writing. Each of the letters to the seven churches ends with the refrain, "Let the one with ears hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Since each of these seven letters begins by announcing that the words which follow are from the exalted Christ, this means that the Holy Spirit mediates the realities of heaven to those struggling here on earth. It is as if each church, regardless of its condition, has the Holy Spirit of God intimately present to function somewhat like its guardian angel (1:4, 20; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

Revelation constantly emphasizes that worship is the setting in which God the Father and God the Son are most intimately present with us as God the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, there are scenes of heavenly worship interspersed throughout the book with at least fifteen hymns or hymn-like fragments: (1) the thrice-holy cry (4:8); (2) three songs acclaiming God or the Lamb as "worthy" (4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12); (3) three doxologies (5:13; 7:12; 16:5-7); (4) seven "victory" songs (7:10; 11:15; 11:17-18; 12:10-12; 15:3-4; 19:1-2; 19:6-8); and (5) an exhortation to praise God (19:5).<sup>3</sup> These hymns help to carry the story line of the book in poetic fashion. In a profound sense, the Revelation sings its message through stanza after stanza to a grand climax.

But, on the other hand, it is precisely in earthly worship that Christians both anticipate and participate in the worship of the heavenly court. The reference to "the Lord's day" (1:10) implies that the book began in worship and the "Amen" cry (22:20) implies that it ended in worship. To us, worship is often little more than a weekly habit, but to John's

---

*One response to the  
terrorist attacks of  
9/11 is to conceive  
our strategic role as  
that of an imperialist  
empire exercising  
global hegemony in  
unipolar fashion.*

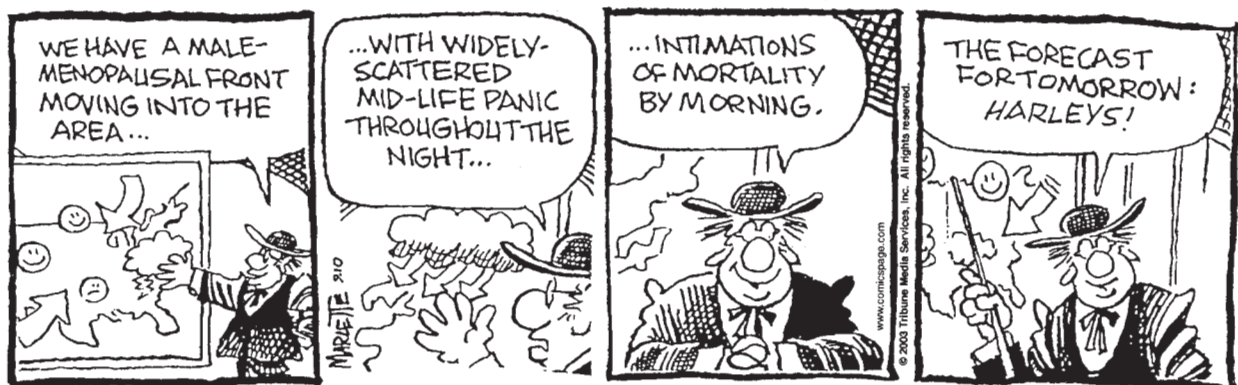
---

readers it was a daring act of political protest. For one thing, its heavenly descriptions of worship were a parody of imperial court ceremonies, a way of saying that none of Rome's impressive pageantry was worthy to be compared with the liturgy of heaven. To gather for worship on earth, and to have that heavenly worship mediated by the living Holy Spirit, was a concrete declaration that this people would bow to no other God, that only the Lord of Heaven deserves our ultimate allegiance, that any compromise with the worship of the Lamb is nothing less than treason. The inference is inescapable: if God and the Lamb are truly *worthy* of worship, then there can be no doubt that the Caesars are *unworthy* of the worship which they were demanding.

In our modern democratic culture with its emphasis on autonomous individualism, some have reacted negatively to the insistence of Revelation that the triune God is omnipotent. Far from sanctioning "authoritarian structures of power and domination in human society," however, "this is the exact opposite of the way the image of divine sovereignty functions in Revelation. There, so far from legitimizing human autocracy, divine rule radically de-legitimizes it. Absolute power, by definition, belongs only to God, and it is precisely the recognition of God's absolute power that relativizes all human power."<sup>4</sup>

Our nation and its people need this message of an omnipotent God as never before in its history, for like Rome in its day, we possess unrivaled military, political, economic, and cultural power. One response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 is to conceive our strategic role as that of an imperialist empire exercising global hegemony in unipolar fashion.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, some feel that we are already well down that Roman road with a complicit Christianity leading the way. Listen to the stinging indictment of Wendell Berry which has so many resonances with the Book of Revelation:

Despite its protests to the contrary, modern Christianity has become willy-nilly the religion of



the state and the economic status quo. . . . It has, for the most part, stood silently by while a predatory economy has ravaged the world, destroyed its natural beauty and health, divided and plundered its human communities and households. It has flown the flag and chanted the slogans of empire. It has assumed with the economists that 'economic forces' automatically work for good and has assumed with the industrialists and militarists that technology determines history. . . . It has admired Caesar and comforted him in his depredations and faults. But in its de facto alliance with Caesar, Christianity connives directly in the murder of Creation. For in these days, Caesar is no longer a mere destroyer of armies, cities, and nations. He is a contradicter of the fundamental miracle of life.<sup>6</sup>

In its radically theocentric vision of ultimate reality, Revelation offers us an astringent reminder that we allow God to have earthly competitors only at our peril, even if those rivals be democracy and capitalism. Our nation was founded as an experiment in *limited* government unlike the absolute monarchies of Europe. It was to be carefully circumscribed by checks and balances, one of which was the separation of church and state so that government and religion could not control or even unduly influence each other. Our market economy was designed to protect the yeoman farmer and village shopkeeper from destructive competition by industrial and commercial behemoths. There are many ways to restrain the totalitarian impulse, including a free press in the community, a free pulpit in the church, and a free podium in the classroom. But the best way to curb the unbridled appetite for power is to affirm with Handel that the Lord God alone is omnipotent and that "he shall reign forever and ever!" ■

<sup>1</sup> Caird, G. B., *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 291.

<sup>2</sup> Caird, 293.

<sup>3</sup> Gloer, W. Hulitt, "Worship God! Liturgical Elements in the Apocalypse," *Review and Expositor*, vol. 98, no. 1, Winter, 2001, 40.

<sup>4</sup> Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44.

<sup>5</sup> The centerpiece of the debate over this option is "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" issued by President George W. Bush on September 17, 2002, with its so-called "doctrine of pre-emption."

<sup>6</sup> Berry, Wendell, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 114-115.

---

## Sermon Two: The Beast From The Bottomless Pit

One of the most fascinating yet frightening features of the Book of Revelation is its use of grotesque symbolism to describe supernatural evil. Here we meet a beast coming up from the sea (13:1) and a great red dragon (12:3) coming down from the sky, each of them with ten horns and seven heads, reminiscent of the sea monster Leviathan and the earth monster Behemoth. They are joined by the great harlot of Babylon with whom the kings of earth have committed fornication until they and their subjects have become drunk on debauchery (17:1-2). The imagery is deliberately repulsive, never more so than today when we have ripped our Halloween masks off the face of evil and eliminated the word Satan from our vocabulary as "a medieval term that should probably be banished from civilized discourse in a multicultural world."<sup>1</sup>

But before we repudiate the last book of the Bible for its scare tactics, consider the enormous impact of contemporary efforts to portray evil in monstrous terms. Think of Darth Vader's sinister minions in the "Star Wars" epic. Or of the hideous subterranean creatures that abound in "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. In the second installment, "The Two Towers," for example, the defining battle of Helm's Deep depicts the beastly warriors of Saruman marching in vast phalanxes on the final outpost of Rohan in a manner reminiscent of Hitler's ferocious onslaughts in World War II. Revelation has dared to construct a symbolic world adequate to depict the magnitude of evil that its readers were being called upon to oppose. Gazing into the crater that was once the World Trade Center, we dare not do less. So let us explore why John has chosen to depict the reality of evil in all of its horrid ugliness.

### Cosmic Evil

What does it mean to portray evil as a kingdom ruled by a tyrant more sinister than anything human? Is John saying that we are up against a foe mightier than our human strength to withstand? Unfortunately, that troubling question must be answered in the affirmative. As if that were not bad enough, even worse is the realization that we have created the monster ourselves! For John does not posit an absolute metaphysical dualism that would divide the universe into two eternal domains, one ruled by goodness and the other by evil. In place of this Zoroastrian/Manichean heresy, what John is saying is that there is an abyss, a "dark hole" as it were, at the heart of life which acts as a vast reservoir of accumulated evil to which we have all contributed. Nazism, for example, was not the work of Adolf Hitler alone, but was the result of innumerable compromises by thousands, even millions, of people willing to embrace the lie of a Master Race. People willing to deify a deranged paper-hanger as absolute leader, willing to erect a superstructure of "principalities and powers" that perpetrated a Holocaust that snuffed out millions of lives in an orgy of gratuitous violence.

But why do such senseless things happen again and again



with numbing regularity? It is because evil wears an endless number of disguises. It dresses up in immaculate uniforms, it holds impressive parades, it plays spine-tingling music, it appeals to idealistic motives, it exploits ancient resentments. And once it gains legitimacy, it begins to build its bureaucracy of horror until it becomes a totalitarian juggernaut out of control. The task of John was to unmask this monster, to strip the seductive whore called Babylon of her allurements (17:4) so that all could see her for what she really was. Irony of ironies, even though evil is like a devouring beast (13:2; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8), its strategy is not to intimidate but to fascinate, for it does not merely want to be feared but to be “worshiped” and “followed with wonder” (13:3-4). Beware, Revelation is saying, the pomp and circumstance that parades itself in surface splendor to win your allegiance, for underneath its seductive camouflage is a disgusting brute bent on your destruction.

John deliberately used the most offensive language possible in order to show that Rome was not the glittering spectacle that it presented to the world but was a loathsome beast intent on ravaging the human spirit. The beast even employed a second beast, symbolizing the imperial cult, as its public relations agent who used dazzling displays and propaganda to glamorize its atrocities, much as Hitler used Goebbels to cover the crimes of the Third Reich (13:11-15).<sup>2</sup> The strategy of evil is always to use deception in offering counterfeit glory. Satan is “the deceiver of the whole world” (12:9) who misleads by telling lies both about God and about himself. The Antichrist is a false messiah who utters blasphemous denials of Christ (2 Jn. 7). If you are sickened by the repulsiveness of evil in the Apocalypse, then John has accomplished his purpose. If only Germany had been sick of Adolf Hitler in 1933 rather than in 1945! Sometimes our only defense against evil is revulsion, which comes when we have seen it for what it really is.

### Human Evil

Once evil is allowed to create its own superstructure, then individuals can use, and be used by, this apparatus for diabolical ends. In John’s day, each new Caesar inherited the throne of an empire that had been drunk on its own power for generations. For example, the emperor Nero gladly volunteered to become the human incarnation of the Beast,

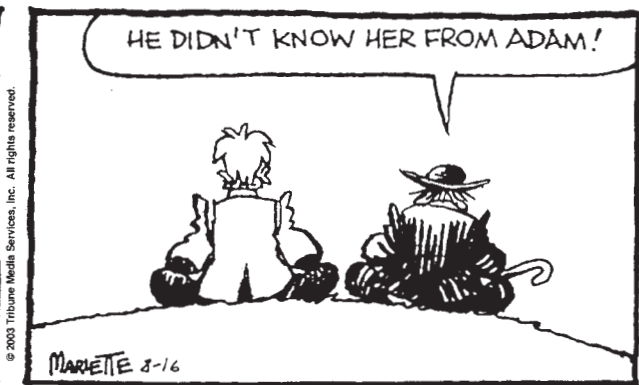
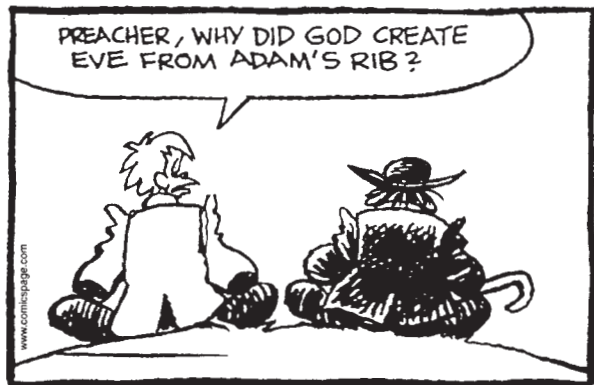
identified by the number 666 (13:18), and the Empire gladly let him do it because the people wanted their Caesar to function as the unquestioned symbol of Rome’s absolute power.

Once Nero fornicated with the harlot of national hubris, he became the kind of man who could kick his pregnant wife to death, castrate and then “marry” a boy named Sporus, murder his own young mother, and delight in being praised as a god until he was finally declared insane by the Roman Senate. If that seems extreme, think of how we are still being brutalized by pathological narcissists, such as Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Jong II. With their subjects starving, lacking the most basic necessities of healthcare, and desperately needing education and economic development, such rulers build multiple palaces and plot nuclear catastrophe. Why? Because the disenfranchised masses are willing to concentrate unlimited power in them so that they may function as reckless agents of revenge and retaliation against a world that they resent. Lord Acton was right: absolute power does corrupt absolutely, turning potentially decent humans into cunning predators.

John was particularly sensitive to the way in which cities could become the stronghold of evil. In Revelation 17:9, he pictured Babylon as a whore seated on seven mountains, a scarcely veiled reference to Rome as the city built on seven hills. The dirge for “the great city” in Revelation 18 is a lament for the way in which urban pride can finally become self-destructive. Cities in our day easily succumb to the empire building of rapacious capitalism, of technological superiority, of cultural elitism, of intoxicating pride. When John wrote, Jerusalem already lay in ruins, but he saw that one day Rome would become “a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every fowl and hateful bird” (18:2). No wonder he closed his book with a vision of the New Jerusalem as a replacement for the Babylon that had sold its soul for power and glory.

### The Consequences of Evil

Because John believed in the power of evil both to aggregate and to escalate, with no shortage of earthly agents to do its bidding, he was profoundly realistic about the ability of evil to wreck havoc on planet earth. In the middle chapters of Revelation we find a grim recitation of the horrors that



depraved despots can visit on humanity. It begins in Chapter 6 with the four horsemen of the Apocalypse who ravage the earth with conquest, warfare, famine, and death (6:2-8). The devastation seems endless: first there are plagues launched by the opening of the seven seals (6:1-8:5), then havoc wrought by the blowing of the seven trumpets (8:6-11:15), then pestilence poured out by the seven bowls (16:1-18:24). Each visitation seems worse than the one before as if the carnage is cumulative. However, these three symbolic series are not so much sequential as they are simultaneous, each ending in the same fashion with a terrible earthquake (8:5; 11:19; 16:17). What John is saying by his repetition for emphasis is that evil relentlessly hammers human life over and over again until the cosmos itself comes unhinged.

Rather than indulging in fantasy to construct this chamber of horrors, John ransacked the Old Testament for lurid depictions of tragedy.<sup>3</sup> When we read about water turning to blood, of darkness, hail, boils, frogs and locusts (8:7-8; 9:3; 16:2-4, 10), we are reminded of the plagues that fell on Egypt (Exod. 7:8-11:10). The picture of people hiding in caves and among rocks (6:15-16) echoed Isaiah's description of the Day of the Lord (Isa. 2:10, 19). Even such cosmic portents as the rolling up of the sky and the falling of stars (6:12-14; 8:10-11) were widely anticipated by the prophets as symbolic of the overthrow of "principalities and powers" arrayed against God (Isa. 14:12-15; 34:2-4; Joel 2:28-32; Jer. 51:25-26). The massing of great hordes from across the Euphrates to fight at Armageddon (16:12-16) gathered up repeated experiences with invading armies out of the east from the time of the Assyrians to that of the Parthians. In all of this calamitous tale of woe stretching over centuries of biblical history but now reaching its climactic expression in John's day, the most striking feature was that even catastrophe after catastrophe could not induce humankind to repent! (9:20-21).

It is not easy to read about blood flowing "as high as a horse's bridle for two hundred miles" (14:20), but is such apocalyptic hyperbole unrealistic? Go to Auschwitz and see the ovens that filled the sky with the human ashes of genocide. Or to Dachau where ministers were horsewhipped until their bodies were a bloody pulp only because they would not salute and say "Heil Hitler." Or to the Gulag where Stalin

slaughtered upward of twenty million merely to eliminate dissent and make his regime a reign of terror. Or to the killing fields of Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge indiscriminately butchered 1,200,000 people, a fifth of the population, all in the name of social engineering driven by ideological fanaticism. Can we really claim that our capacity for cruelty has diminished over the twenty centuries since Revelation was written?

Nor are such atrocities always perpetrated by "the other side." When our family lived in Göttingen, Germany, one of our dearest friends was Herbert Caspari, a pillar in the local Baptist church. He once told me how he stood on the hills of Göttingen and saw the fires of Kassel nearly fifty miles away. On the night of October 22, 1943, 444 British planes unloaded 1,812 tons of bombs in a span of twenty-two minutes that set the entire city ablaze leaving ten thousand people dead, including two thousand children. This was part of British General "Bomber" Harris' strategy to incinerate 161 German cities, killing up to 650,000 civilians on the misguided supposition that this carnage would somehow weaken morale and hasten the end of the war. To read these chapters of Revelation in the lurid glare of Hiroshima and Nagasaki makes John's symbolism seem almost understated.

The ultimate question, of course, is why God would allow such unimaginable suffering either in the first century or in the twentieth. The first thing to note in Revelation is that these are not capricious acts of a vengeful God upon humanity; rather, they are acts by humanity upon itself, illustrating what people are capable of doing when they turn from God to a ruthless quest for personal power. It is here that we see the terrible cost of human freedom. To be given enough liberty to love deeply, we must also be given enough liberty to hate deeply. Note how easily love can become loathing when a marriage ends in divorce, as if the two attitudes coexist side-by-side. If God kept us on a tight leash, allowing only a modest amount of rebellion, then that same leash would leave us free to give him only a modest amount of devotion. In other words, if evil is freedom misused, then the more freedom we have the more misuse is possible.

In an ultimate sense, therefore, God shares responsibility for the horror of evil because it is he who lets us self-destruct



in our sin. Because he wants our freely-chosen loyalty, he permits us to engage in freely-chosen treachery. But there is no hint anywhere in Revelation that God enjoys such folly. Even when we cry to him for revenge against our enemies (6:10), his response is to give up his own Son as “the Lamb who was slain” both to share our suffering and to show us how human waywardness breaks his heart.

What have we learned from this journey into horror? Three things at least.

- That evil is not just a spiritual “bad cold” that can be blown away with a box of Kleenex, but it is a deadly epidemic, a virus of the spirit much like the SARS that so quickly has blighted Asia and brought the world’s most populous nation to its knees.
- That we would never choose evil if we knew what it is really like, but it always comes disguised as patriotic fervor or religious zeal or personal fulfillment.
- That true freedom is costly indeed because it offers us the opportunity for compassion or cruelty, salvation or destruction, God-centeredness or self-centeredness.

The ability to choose such diametrically different options is the most dangerous gift which we possess!

If these contentions be true, confirmed both by Scripture and by contemporary experience, then how can we overcome that hideous strength that insinuates itself into our lives as counterfeit idealism but, when embraced, seeks only to exploit and enslave? Is it enough to be shocked by the lurid symbolism with which the last book of the Bible ends? John knew that many in his day had already capitulated: “they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” (13:4).

What is to keep us from doing the same in a day when deception is rampant, when the most flagrant sins can be made to seem innocuous with a little media spin? To ask such questions is our first line of defense against the enticements of evil. But there must be more, for our questions only expose the reality of the beast, they do not defeat it. John dared to lay bare the hideousness of the foe because he knew one who could overcome its malevolent power and in whose strength we can do the same:

“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world . . . And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser . . . has been thrown down . . . and they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb . . .” (12:9-11). ■

<sup>1</sup> Morrow, Lance, “The Real Meaning of Evil,” *Time*, February 24, 2003, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Spilsbury, Paul, *The Throne, the Lamb & the Dragon: A Reader’s Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Spilsbury, 114-125.

## MOVING? CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

Help Us Save Money

“Unable to Deliver” Journals  
Are Returned At A Cost Of  
\$2.63 Each  
Over \$100 Last Month

Please Send Us Your New Address –  
See Back Cover

## BOOK OFFER STILL AVAILABLE

*Putting Women In Their Place* is available as a gift to anyone contributing \$100 or more to CET. Over 150 readers have received the book, based in part on articles from CET. The text was featured at the recent CBF meeting in NC, and is an excellent primer on the Baptist debate over women.





# The Prayer of Job

By Skippy R., *The Door Magazine*

**Note:** This article was first published in the Nov-Dec 2001 issue of *The Door Magazine* and is reprinted by permission. For 32 years *The Door* has delighted readers with religious satire unequalled anywhere. Readers may want to consider subscribing (as we do) by visiting their website at [www.thedoormagazine.com](http://www.thedoormagazine.com) or calling 1-800-597-3667.

When our son totaled our car the other day, my wife and I should have been dismayed. But we weren't. Instead we just looked at each other and smiled . . . knowingly.

We knew it was *The Prayer of Job* coming to pass.

Ever since I picked up *The Prayer of Job* at our local Christian bookstore, our family has been reciting its words almost as a mantra. The small but powerful devotional book is climbing the best-seller lists and transforming lives by re-adjusting people's attitudes toward success and tragedy.

Long hidden in an obscure part of the Bible just before the Psalms (you may have to consult the table of contents to find it), the Book of Job is a revelation to many churchgoers. The book is based on statements of Job recorded in Chapter 14: vss. 1, 10, 22: "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. Man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? His flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn."

The concept is similar to the popular book *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson. That work, based on a brief, silly little prayer mentioned in 1 Chronicles 4:9,10, sold millions of copies. The new Job-based book is less widely known, but is having an impact nonetheless, showing up everywhere, from congressional Bible studies to high school baccalaureate speeches to pulpits and even bar mitzvas around the country.

*The Prayer of Job* reminds us of a simple truth—things

can always get worse.

Where the earlier book encouraged readers to pray for God to "extend their territory," readers of *The Prayer of Job* tend to "hunker down and keep a low profile" according to author Peter Strepghum. The former campaign advisor for Al Gore in Florida left politics soon after the 2000 election and authored the book during a time of deep reflection.

The book's dust jacket contains endorsements from Navy Cmdr. Scott Waddle, captain of the USS Greenville, ("It buoyed my spirits after my sub accidentally sunk a Japanese freighter," he said) and former FBI director Louis Freeh ("After our bungling of the cases of the spy Robert Hanssen, scientist Wen Ho Lee, and the McVeigh trial documents, this book was like a tonic.").

Rep. Gary Condit was given a copy just before his interview with Connie Chung.

Other personal testimonies abound.

Steve Jinks, associate pastor at a medium-sized Baptist church in Shreveport, La., reported his career was at a standstill, his children were misbehaving at school and his bank account was depleted to single digits.

"I picked up *The Prayer of Job* at the local Joshua's Bookstore, and the next day an inspector told us our house was infested with giant Formosan termites and toxic black mold. It was amazing how the text of the prayer reminded





me of a simple truth—things can always get worse.”

Layman and plumber’s helper Bob Kindersen of St. Paul, Minnesota admitted he’d never read Job before, but said “the guy must’a been readin’ my mind” because his experiences paralleled his own. “Well almost, anyway. If you lose the boils. But Job’s friends, those guys I recognize.”

The theology of *The Prayer of Job* has become a matter of debate.

Despite its growing popularity, some theologians warn the book is pandering to a sado-masochistic streak in American religion akin to Presbyterianism.

“Soon we’ll be having to explain every bad circumstance as being solely from the hand of God rather than blaming it on Satan, the TV networks, Bill Clinton, or the IRS,” said Pastor Sid Precious of Holy Trinkets Church of the Kudzu in Raleigh, N.C. With the Prayer of Job as their guide, “people might not even need or want professional counseling at all.”

Bishop S.T.D. Takes of Greater Bullion Community Church in Houston, agreed. “Half my sermons are spent reassuring the congregation that God really isn’t behind the bad things that happen to them; that if they just behave, pray more, and give more, God will snap to the fact that he made a mistake and go back to fix it.”

Richly illustrated with images of suffering from around the world, the book is causing many to rethink their definition of what is “good.”

“The philosophy has been likened to the Deistic ‘watchmaker’ view of God,” said Dr. John Won Ton, professor of divine benign neglect at Evangelical Grace Seminary in San Francisco, “except in this instance the watchmaker winds up the timepiece and then seems to smash it against the wall. The point seems to be that whatever God does is good, no matter how it looks to us. God is in control. It’s a concept at once refreshing and subversive to popular religion, not to mention to the human propensity to whine.”

The phenomenon is even sparking a whole industry of *Prayer of Job* paraphernalia, including *Prayer of Job* sackcloth vests, plastic stick-on boils, designer scraping potsherds, and “Just Curse God and Die” multi-colored bead bracelets. ■

**NOTES:** *The Prayer of Job* is available for \$12.99 through Land of Uz Publishers, (although there is a 10-week delay in order fulfillment due to a breakdown at their Birmingham, Ala., press).

The book’s website, [www.prayerofjob.com](http://www.prayerofjob.com), should be repaired and functioning some time after Jan. 12.

A Land of Uz Publishers press release Nov. 18 apologized to purchasers of the book for the poor print quality of the first press run, which caused ink to rub off on reader’s hands.

---

## From Afghanistan to Georgia

By Tripp York, PhD Student and Research Intern

Center of Ethics and Values,  
Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary

Dorothy and Gwen Hennessey, sisters both biologically and as members of Dubuque’s Sisters of St. Francis, received the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award last October. The Roman Catholics nuns share company with a distinguished list of other recipients: Mother Teresa, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Sister Helen Prejean, Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day and many others. The Sisters’ Hennessey also happen to be recent convicts.

After being banned from the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (originally named the School of Americas), the sisters violated the ban by joining in with more than 5,000 other demonstrators advocating for the school’s closure. Following a six-month prison sentence, the sisters have been released and are now being honored with the award that commemorates Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris*. It is in this letter that Pope John invites all people—regardless of particular faith or nationality—to strive for peace. It has been in the sisters’ active persistence for ending those things that perpetuate violence that have led them both to prison and this award. It is precisely such service to what the sisters’ claim is simply “faithfulness to Christ” that truly renders them, in the words of Aristotle, “political animals.”

For those who do not know what the WHISC is, a little history lesson—along with a brief list of the kind of graduates it has produced—may be illuminating. The U.S. Army School of Americas (SOA), as it was dubbed in 1946, was founded in Panama as an effort to promote friendly relations between the U.S. military and its Central and South American counterparts. In 1984, the school moved to Ft. Benning, Georgia, where it has continued to train Latin American soldiers in counter-resistance to drug trafficking and insurrection. After the Pentagon was forced to release training manuals used at the school (revealing the encouragement of torture, extortion and execution), Congress authorized the WHISC to replace the SOA and in 2001 the name was changed. Its critics, however, have viewed this change as an attempt to diffuse public protest. It remains apparent that, though the name has changed, the tactics remain the same.

It is often said that one can know a teacher by the kind of students they produce. This school reflects this aphorism well. Graduates of WHISC are responsible for some of the

most notorious human rights abuses in Latin America. Among the WHISC's infamous alumni are dictators Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos of Panama, Guillermo Rodriguez of Ecuador, Leopoldo Galtieri and Roberto Viola of Argentina, Hugo Banzer Suarez of Bolivia and Juan Velasco Alvarado of Peru. Some of the more mediocre students have not fared quite as well. Their list of atrocities include (but are in no way limited to): the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero; the slaughtering of nearly 1,000 civilians in the El Mozote Massacre; the killing of more than 3,000 people during Augusto Pinochet's 17-year reign in Chile; and the torture of Carlos Mauricio—a science teacher at Balboa High School in San Francisco who, paradoxically, fled to the U.S. in the early 1980's to escape soldiers trained by the U.S.!

It is true that, due to public protests, the school revised its curriculum in 1989 to integrate training on human rights. Critics, however, claim that this is hardly enough. Respect for human dignity barely stands a chance when one is taught how to torture and kill fellow human beings. Which brings us to the bottom line: WHISC operates as a school that trains its students how to deal with its enemies in a very particular manner—by any means necessary. This kind of formation is not only directly at odds with the Christian narrative, but it also trains people how to locate enemies that are not even deserving of such a title. How is it that Christians in America can—in good conscience—support this school when it trains soldiers how to kill fellow Christians (like Romero) in other countries? The question is one of allegiance: Does baptism link us to all Christians regardless of nationality? Or, does patriotic fervor blind us to our own disobedience to Christ?

This brings me back to our good sisters. Their witness reminds us that following Jesus is hardly an apolitical affair. True political behavior is concomitant with a bodily imitation of Christ. An imitation that, as it placed Jesus in the center of political controversy (his kingdom is, after all, a rival kingdom), places his followers in the position of narrating the world in such a way that may lead them to the same place it led him: the cross.

What have we learned from not only these two witnesses, but also from a church that recognizes them as witnesses? What does this demand that we as Christians must say to the U.S. government? Perhaps we can say that if it can destroy terrorist training facilities in Afghanistan, it could do the same in Georgia. ■

---

## What I've Learned About Women In Ministry

By David M. Scholar, Professor of New Testament  
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA

Note: This article is adapted from a paper the author presented at the American Baptist Churches Women in Ministry Biennial Breakfast on June 22, 2001, in Providence Rhode Island, and also was published in *Priscilla Papers*, Fall, 2002, and is reprinted with permission.

I want to share with you my personal reflections on my forty years' involvement with women in ministry, trusting that I am old enough and have been at it long enough that such personal reflection is not in poor taste.

### From John R. Rice to Paul King Jewett

My journey began almost fifty years ago in the fundamentalist church that was the context for my early development in the faith. A voracious reader and curious about theology, by the time I was fifteen I had read John R. Rice's 1941 classic, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers: Significant Questions for Honest Christian Women Settled by the Word of God*.<sup>1</sup> I was a good fundamentalist Baptist boy who knew the place of women!

Still, in my high school years I had private, unvoiced doubts about three aspects of my context: the place of women in the church; the pretribulation, millennial, literalistic eschatology; and ecclesiastical separationism. I once went with two friends to their Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Sunday morning worship, and I reported to my pastor that, to my great surprise, I discovered that they worshiped and honored Jesus Christ. My pastor declared: "Son, do not be deceived; the words may be the same, but they have a completely different meaning!"

When I went off to college, I enrolled in New Testament Greek, determined to find answers to my private theological doubts and questions. A long journey must here be compressed. By 1960 I married my wife, Jeannette, a wonderfully strong, intelligent woman. By 1962 I had two years of formal theological education behind me, I had become an American Baptist, shed my dispensationalism, and written in a seminary paper that I could find no biblical reason to exclude women from any form of the ministry.

As naïve and uninformed as I then was, I had become, within my social and theological context, a kind of "radical" on the issue of women in ministry. Jeannette's reading in 1963 (the year of its publication) Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*<sup>2</sup> and my continuing theological education as a budding New Testament scholar drove me inexorably

further into the issues of women and ministry in the New Testament and in the life of the church.

By the time I began my career as a New Testament professor in 1969, I was perceived as a kind of champion of women in ministry. In 1972 I first offered my seminary course “Women and Ministry in the New Testament.” I have no clear evidence of my assertion, but I think it may have been the first such seminary course anywhere; it was certainly the first such in the evangelical tradition of the church. (The Evangelical Women’s Caucus came in 1974; Paul King Jewett’s book *Man as Male and Female*<sup>3</sup> in 1975—the two great landmarks of the evangelical awakening to the issues of women in the contemporary church.) It was also in 1972 that I gave my first major public lecture on women and ministry in the New Testament—before a conservative group of about two hundred students at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. I still remember the first question from the floor: “Professor Scholer, just imagine for a moment that you were a Christian, how would you answer this question . . .?”

I have now taught my seminary course twenty-five times, have lectured on women and ministry in hundreds of places and contexts, have been deeply involved in these matters in the ABCUSA and in many other denominations and institutions, have debated publicly most of the conservative scholars who have argued from the Bible for limits to the ministry of women, and have become a professional colleague and friend of many of the feminist New Testament scholars in the English-speaking world. In these contexts, and from hundreds of women who have been students and colleagues, I have learned much, grown in knowledge and understanding, and have changed in my perceptions, perspectives, and emphases. I want to attempt to summarize what I think I have learned.

### Exegesis and Hermeneutics

I am, among other things, a New Testament scholar. Much of my learning over the last three decades comes especially in areas of exegesis and hermeneutics. But the very nature of the material with which I work and, even more critically, the persons with whom I have worked, have driven me to invest in the whole history of women in the church, the feminist movement and especially its critiques of Christianity, issues of inclusive and God language, the grim realities of the abuse of women, and more.

I think my most important exegetical-hermeneutical discovery, beginning about 1975 and continuing to unfold, has to do with starting points. When I first taught my course, I began with 1 Timothy 2; after all, that is where the discussion had always begun. My opposition began—and ended—with that text: it was the all-important piece of biblical data. But it began to dawn on me that the New Testament did not tell us where to begin; that was a hermeneutical decision we had to make—on this and on any issue.

The more involved I became with Pauline theology, the more I came to see that Galatians 3:28 was a major focus, if not a primary center, of Pauline thought. And that it was a

better, sounder, more defensible starting point for a discussion of women in Christ than 1 Timothy 2. This started me down a very long road of research, debate, and writing. The value of this insight revolutionized my teaching and my hermeneutical reflections.

A second critical exegetical development was my research into the women who were coworkers with the apostle Paul in the ministry of the church. I discovered that we knew thirteen of these women by name—Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Mary, Persis, Tryphena, Tryposa, Euodia, Syntyche, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Junia—over 18 percent of Paul’s named coworkers in the New Testament. This led in 1980 to my first significant article on women in the New Testament. Although it was not, perhaps, the pioneer piece on the significance of these women, it was one of the earliest studies using these data as an argument for women in ministry today. Much here is crucial, including the importance of the NT term *kopiao*, “work hard”; the identification of Junia as both a woman and an apostle; and the possibility that Euodia and Syntyche were bishops (*episcopoi*).

A third critical area of exegetical study had to do with Jesus and women. I have had to learn to deal with many issues here, from the most frequent stock conservative question of “If what you say is true, why didn’t Jesus have a woman among the Twelve?” to the disturbing and difficult charge of Jewish feminists that Christian feminists who lift up Jesus’ positive relationship with women are only engaging in a new form of anti-Semitism.

Let me tell a paradigmatic story. I had a male student in one of my classes about twelve years ago who made it very clear that he was opposed to the ordination of women, and that I could do nothing to change his mind. He challenged every lecture. However, after the one on Jesus and women he announced to the class that he had been challenged and impressed. He said he never realized how deeply Jesus accepted and affirmed women; this would have to change his attitude. I decided to take a risk, thinking—as it turned out—that I knew what would happen.

I said to him: “I will make a deal with you: I will no longer try to convince you of the ordination of women if you will promise me to preach once a year on what you have just learned: Jesus’ deep affirmation of women.”

There was a very long silence, and then he said: “No deal. If I really did that, women would too quickly and readily see that the next logical step would be to accept the ordination of women.”

A sad story, yes, but one hermeneutically important and powerful about the assessment of New Testament data.

### The History of the Church

Some of my deepest learnings have come in areas of research and reflection I could never have envisioned in 1972 when I first taught my course, and even in 1980 when I began serious publication on women in the New Testament. The general and overwhelmingly important reality I have learned is the power of history to shape one’s vision. To oversimplify, but I believe not to misrepresent, I think that it is

relatively easy for “people of the Good Book” to hold the traditionalist position that excludes women from important aspects of ministry when they know little of the marginalization and abuse of women in the history of the church on the one hand, or the wonderful achievements of women in the history of the gospel on the other. Learning the history of women in the church does not alter exegetical facts, but it dramatically alters one’s angle of vision and hermeneutical assessment of exegetical data.

I am deeply grateful for Elizabeth A. Clark’s collection of passages on women from the Church Fathers, published in 1983.<sup>4</sup> I use it always as a required text in my New Testament course on women. Two examples will need to suffice. First, Saint Augustine, admired by all for his shaping of Christian theology, said in his *Literal Commentary on Genesis* about the creation of a female companion for the male: “If it were not the case that the woman was created to be man’s helper specifically for the production of children, then why would she have been created as a ‘helper’? . . . One can . . . posit that the reason for her creation as a helper had to do with the companionship she could provide for the man. . . . Yet for company and conversation, how much more agreeable it is for two male friends to dwell together than for a man and a woman.”<sup>5</sup>

Second, Tertullian, a truly brilliant apologist for the church and its faith, said in his book *On the Dress of Women*: “God’s judgment on this sex lives on in our age; the guilt necessarily lives on as well. You are the Devil’s gateway. . . . you so lightly crushed the image of God.”<sup>6</sup>

I have seen these texts open the eyes and minds of hundreds of seminary students, who were then able to understand that the so-called traditionalist approach to the New Testament on women in ministry was, in fact, shaped by a sexist and misogynist attitude deep in the thinking of the church.

It was not until 1991, just over a decade ago, that my constant searching in this history of women in the church led me to Jarena Lee’s book, published in 1849, *Religious Experience and Journal of Jarena Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*.<sup>7</sup> This earliest African-American female preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church

wrote with power these words, which all my students have since learned as a critical exegetical lesson: “If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.”

One of the most important historical learnings has been to see that the issue of women’s participation in ministry has been argued throughout the history of the church, starting in the second century as attested by Origen. This certainly shows that our concern in the church with these issues did not begin with Betty Friedan and the second American feminist movement!

The first book published in defense of women as preachers of the gospel appeared in London in 1666, authored by Margaret Fell, entitled *Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus. And how Women Were the first that Preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and Were Sent by Christ’s Own Command, Before He Ascended to the Father, John 20:17*.<sup>8</sup> No modern marketing with a catchy title! Fell anticipated most of the exegetical arguments still in discussion today.

I have attempted to collect the numerous nineteenth-century defenses of women as preachers published in the U.S.A., of which there are certainly more than fifty. One of the most colorful of these is by William B. Godbey, one of the best-known Wesleyan Holiness preachers and evangelists of that time (1832-1920). He wrote, in 1891, a booklet entitled *Woman Preacher*. Godbey argues from the list of Paul’s women coworkers and calls Galatians 3:28 the climax, writing: “Farewell old controversy on the woman question, you have wrapped the church in sackcloth and give the devil the world the last fifteen hundred years. Here the *ipse dixit* [very words] of the Almighty, by his servant, Paul, settles you forever . . . . Hence, we see beyond the possibility of cavil, there is no such thing as sexual distinction in the kingdom of grace and glory.”<sup>9</sup>

Another critical issue in my learning curve and journey of life has been my engagement with feminist hermeneutics at many levels. I have probably learned most from Carolyn





Osiek and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and have been most challenged and sharpened by Tina Pippin. I wrote in 1987 and would still affirm that “I have found feminist hermeneutics to be the most stunning challenge . . . to the evangelical myth of objective hermeneutics and interpretation . . . . Authoritative texts do require interpretation . . . . Although I continue to believe it is theologically . . . and methodologically important and historically valid to affirm that the locus of authority is in the text, such as position is an abstraction that has no significance apart from the reality that the locus of meaning for all of us as actually experienced or practiced is found in individual interpreters, communities of faith, or ecclesiastical and theological traditions.”<sup>10</sup> In short, I know now far more that I knew in 1961, 1972, or 1980: that the important biblical exegetical debates about women in ministry are at the deepest level principal hermeneutical debates of overarching significance.

### Issues of Abuse

My investment in the issues of women and ministry has led me on yet another journey, one I have found both painful and sacred. Virtually from the beginning of teaching my course on women and ministry in the New Testament, many women who have been deeply touched by it again and again confided in me about sexual abuse in their lives. I began my professional career as a veritable “innocent” in this area; I was as uniformed and naïve as could be. Over the years I have been privileged to share what I call the “sacred pain” of many women and, but the grace of God, often to share in journeys of healing. Eventually, I came to understand the deep connections between the awful realities of men’s abuse of women and men’s exclusion of women from offices and opportunities of ministry—expressed so often with hostility and even venom. These experiences and learnings also reshaped my classroom and my teaching. I was led into more conversations, reading, and reflection.

In 1994 I gave a paper at a conference on “Women, Abuse and the Bible.”<sup>11</sup> In preparing the paper I learned many things, but probably none so disturbing as the need to reflect deeply on two passages from Saint Augustine. In both his *Confessions*,<sup>12</sup> in a context about the abuse his mother received from his father, and in *Letter 262*<sup>13</sup> to a Christian woman, Ecdicia, whose unbelieving husband had abused her, Augustine steadfastly encouraged Christian women to silence and submission as that which is most befitting to being a woman.

### Will the Future Be Better for Women?

Here, at the beginning of a new century and new millennium, will it be better for women in ministry? Will justice be found? Will we live out fully, fairly, and faithfully the implications of the gospel?

We do have, in the big picture, much to do—think of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, just to name three large and powerful groups who actively exclude women from the pastoral office. We have a long road ahead. I have sometimes said that we will not have arrived until a female

senior pastor has an affair with a man in her congregation and no one says: “This is why women should not be in the ministry!” My perspective is limited, of course, but I do wish to make six observations.

1. As people of the Good Book, and in light of the realities in the church at large, the biblical debate is still relevant and needed for each new generation of young women and men. The issues, of course, are deeper than exegesis and even hermeneutics, but the hermeneutical and exegetical data are genuine and real in the struggle for true partnership of women and men in ministry. The study and debate here must be engaged.
2. I would dare to issue a call to men. As men, we must learn a very difficult lesson: the engagement in partnership without paternalism. Given our cultural and social heritages, paternalism will always be for us a danger. Further, as men we must be active, not passive. How many of the men I know who—genuinely, I think—speak of their commitment to equal partnership in ministry but who—dare I say it—hardly ever does anything to act it out?
3. I would dare, also, to issue a call to women: Beware of the danger of making it for yourself and then forgetting your sisters. Never let your own comfort zone lead you to forget the conflict and pain in which many of your sisters remain. Further, remember that bitterness and resentment, even when justified, never convince or convert those who oppose us. It is still gospel truth that only love converts another person.
4. We must, more strongly than ever, confront male violence and abuse in our society. Of course, there are also abusive and violent women, but that is hardly the issue. It is the long, long tradition of male privilege and misogyny that consciously or unconsciously leads far too many men far too often to believe that it is their right to abuse women, in whatever form that takes. The church must speak and seek justice for the sake of the gospel of Christ and those Christ loves.
5. Historically, much of the nineteenth-century women’s-rights movement and the twentieth-century feminist movement, and the literature produced out of them, has come from white sisters (and some white brothers). But the issues of women and ministry are ones within and across every ethnic and racial and national and global boundary. These are issues for all humanity, and we must share the struggle and learn to work together to show that for every shade of skin and every language and culture in the world there is “neither male nor female in Christ.”
6. We must face a very difficult theological question. For example, in the history of the church and apartheid the issue has been seen only as ethical misunderstanding within the gospel. For the church, the back of apartheid was not broken until it was under-

stood that apartheid was actually a perversion of or departure from the gospel, not just a misunderstanding within it.

Between 1988 and 1994 I came to the conclusion that the denial and exclusion of women from all or some offices of ministry was not just a misunderstanding of the gospel; it was a departure from the very core of the gospel as expressed, for example, in Galatians 3:28. Such a position, of course, increases the difficulty, and makes more sensitive, the debate and dialogue with those within the church with whom one disagrees on this issue. But, with every attempt to avoid judgmentalism and to exemplify humility and love, we must be committed to the understanding and lifestyle that the partnership of women and men in the gospel flows from the heart of the gospel.

May God grant us courage, wisdom, forgiveness and love. ■

<sup>1</sup> John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers: Significant Questions for Honest Christian Women Settled by the Word of God* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Paul King Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Message of the Fathers of the Church 13; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1849); reprinted in Sue E. Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives* (The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers; New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus. And how Women Were the first that Preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and Were Sent by Christ's Own Command, Before He Ascended to the Father, John 20:17* (London, 1666).

<sup>9</sup> William B. Godbey, *Woman Preacher* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing Co., 1891), 11.

<sup>10</sup> David M. Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987), 412-13.

<sup>11</sup> David M. Scholer, "The Evangelical Debate over Biblical 'Headship,'" chap. 2 in *Women, Abuse, and the Bible: How Scripture Can Be Used to Hurt or to Heal* (ed. C.C. Kroeger and J. R. Beck; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 281-57.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 9.9 in Clark, 252-53.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Letter* 262 in Clark, 65-69.

---

# Christian Schools Don't Always Practice Values They Preach

By Alberta Phillips, Columnist

Austin-American Statesman

As a product of Christian schools, it's obvious to me that U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige has a few things to learn about religious schools and values.

I agree with his preference, though poorly stated, for schools with traditional values, strong discipline and high expectations. Had Paige stopped there, he wouldn't have stirred up a hornet's nest. But he took it further.

"All things equal, I would prefer to have a child in a school that has a strong appreciation for the values of the Christian community, where a child is taught to have a strong faith," Paige said in remarks first reported last week by the Baptist Press, the news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He went on: "In a religious environment, the value system is set. That's not the case in a public school where there are so many different kids with different kinds of values."

Paige spent last week fending off criticism for suggesting that public schools should mimic Christian values and insinuating that diversity has somehow dragged down values of our nation's public schools.

Frankly, public schools could use a little more values, such as those found in the Ten Commandments. Public campuses shouldn't be hostile to student prayer as long as it doesn't violate constitutional protections regarding church and state.

But if Paige believes that Christian schools are inherently good and public schools innately amoral, then he should heed the lesson I learned in eighth grade at Nassau Christian School: Institutions don't make values—people do.

My parents chose Nassau Christian in Long Island for the same reasons many parents chose religious schools. They wanted their children to get a quality education in a religious setting that stressed Christian values.

From the time I arrived at the school, in third grade, I loved it. The curriculum was superior to what we had in public school, the teachers were more attentive and the campus was safer. I loved daily Bible studies and Friday chapel. And of course, we did a lot of praying—especially on exam days.

The highlight for graduating eighth-graders was the annual school trip to Washington, D.C. But you didn't automatically get to go. Eighth-graders had to score a B-plus or

better in history to go to the nation's capital. After receiving our report cards, I went to the principal's office, where the list of those who earned the trip was posted. I searched for my name—"Alberta Phillips"—that should have fallen after "Robin Olsen."

It wasn't there. I was baffled. After all, I had worked hard and had an A to show for it. Only an A-plus beat that grade, and there were many kids on the list with B-pluses. (Grades were also posted.)

Every day I went to the principal's wall expecting to see my name. Each day I came away disappointed. I asked my teacher, Mr. Hagemann, about it. Nothing happened.

When mom found out I wasn't on the list, she made a rare trip to the school. She worked two jobs to afford the tuition, so she didn't typically go to our school for PTA meetings, basketball games or school wide square dances.

Yes, mom was told, her daughter had indeed earned the grade for the three-day trip. But there was a dilemma: Who would room with the black girl?

After mom's visit and frank talk with the principal, my name appeared on the list. I traveled with my class to the Washington and Lincoln memorials, the Supreme Court Building, the White House and the halls of Congress. But the experience ripped my self-esteem. I guess deep down I knew all along race was the issue. I reasoned that if Christians found me and other blacks inferior, then it must be so. I wanted to be invisible after that. But as the only black girl in my class, I couldn't hide in the sea of white faces.

In case you're thinking that this is something that never could happen in our Christian schools today, let me remind you what happened when all-black St. Sabina Catholic School in Chicago tried to join the Southside Catholic Conference last year.

The Sabina Saints were denied membership to the Southside conference, an athletic league made up of 21 white Catholic parishes. It took an emotional plea from Cardinal Francis George to sway those Christians to admit the Saints.

After racial insults and snubs, the Saints quit the league. Those insults were delivered not just by students and parents, but by school officials.

That's why Paige should be careful about declaring Christian schools superior in values. That's also why he shouldn't criticize diversity, which provided public school students real lessons in values that are missing in many Christian schools. ■

©2003 Austin-American Statesman. Reprinted with permission from April 13, E-3.

---

## Dealing with Depression

*By Hal Haralson, Austin, TX*

Linda stuck her head in the door. "There's a lawyer in the waiting room who wants to talk to you. He doesn't have an appointment." She handed me his card and went back to the reception desk.

Andrew Wilson was with one of the largest law firms in Dallas (not his real name or location).

My "international" law practice took me as far as Bastrop, Elgin and Lampassas . . . never Dallas!

Attorneys don't usually show up without an appointment. This was unusual.

I walked to the reception room and introduced myself to Wilson. He was about 40 years old, well dressed, with an appropriate lawyer-like appearance. He appeared to be nervous and upset.

We sat down in my office and he apologized for not having an appointment. "I've got to talk to you."

I asked if he would like coffee.

"Yes, please . . . black."

I buzzed Linda and asked her to bring us two cups of black coffee.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Wilson?"

"Call me Andrew please," he replied as he took out his wallet and removed a wrinkled piece of paper. He unfolded a newspaper article and handed it to me.

It was an Associated Press story that had appeared about five years ago. It told about my depression (at age 27), suicide attempt and three months in the San Antonio State Hospital, including 13 shock treatments.

The AP interview had taken place nearly 20 years after this experience. The reporter wrote about my six years in the business world, indicating that I had been an ordained minister for ten years prior to the attempted suicide. The diagnosis was "bipolar."

Six years later, at age 33, I entered law school at The University of Texas, graduating when I was 37. At that time I had practiced law in Austin, Texas for 20 years as a solo practitioner. I was a country lawyer (general practice) who happened to live in the city.

Andrew had a desperate look on his face. "I'm depressed and contemplating suicide. I'm scared. I didn't know where to turn. I had kept this article for about five years. Can you help me?"

Andrew looked at the floor and hesitated. "I finished law school at the top of my class. I was editor of the law review and took a job with one of the top law firms in the state."

"I have everything I ever wanted. I am paid well, have a beautiful home in the right neighborhood, a beautiful wife

and two small children. We belong to the right clubs and live an exciting life.”

“I thought all was going well until my wife told me last week she is filing for divorce. She wants full custody of our children.”

“I haven’t been able to sleep. I have lost all confidence in myself. I can’t concentrate. There’s no way I can continue to practice law like this. I’m constantly thinking of taking my life.”

Andrew paused and regained his composure.

“Do you have any idea what brought this on?” I asked.

“I know what has caused this, I work nights, weekends, and holidays. The law firm required us young lawyers to produce sixty billable hours per week. I rationalized that I am doing this for my wife and children. They have the right house and luxury cars as a result of my commitment to this law firm.”

“Sarah and I hardly see each other. I’m always exhausted and thinking about trials that are coming up. Sarah has had an affair with one of the lawyers in my office. It’s gone on for months. He’s going to divorce his wife and they plan to marry.”

“I have failed as a husband and father. I will lose my job. It’s all over! I remembered reading this article about you. I have kept it five years. I guess I knew this might happen. Can you help me?”

My answer was based on reality. “Andrew, there is no way to stop your wife from getting a divorce if she is determined to do so. I’m more concerned about your depression at this point. You must get to a psychiatrist and have him put you on antidepressant medication. He will tell you if he feels you need to be hospitalized. The downward spiral of depression can get out of control if you don’t get help immediately. This could lead to suicide.”

“I was on the staff of a University when I first became depressed. I had been a minister for ten years. I spent days in bed. I didn’t want to see anyone. When I went to the office, I checked in with my secretary and went to a broom closet on the third floor and spent the rest of the day.”

“What would my friends say if I left the ministry? It would embarrass my family. I would have no way to support my wife and child.”

These kinds of thoughts drove me to complete despair. I knew I needed help.

“Andrew, you have taken the first and most important

step. You asked for help. There is help available. Let me suggest some things I learned from my experience.”

“First, see a psychiatrist and get on medication that will help you deal with the depression.

Second, do not take yourself off the medication when the depression begins to get better. Do exactly what your doctor says.

Third, accept the reality of your circumstances. Do not try to resist your wife’s demand for divorce. You have no energy to fight an emotional battle. It would only make matters worse.

Fourth, be honest with your employer. If you can’t handle the kind of pressure you have described, don’t stay where you are.

Fifth, don’t give up. Call me and we will talk. I will come to you if I am needed. This will pass. Believe that. Life goes on.

Sixth, develop a support system. Talk to friends and family. Don’t keep this all inside. Faith in God and the support of your church family can make all the difference in the world. Pray! God does not intend this to be the end. Don’t give up!

The final suggestion: Exercise. Walk 30 minutes each day. Work out in a gym. This will enable you to restore confidence by knowing you are doing something good for yourself.

I am thankful to God for helping me. The steps I have suggested to you worked for me. That was 30 years ago. I’ve been on lithium for 25 years. I continue to see my psychiatrist.

My children are grown and doing well. I’ve practiced law for 25 years. I’m still in love with my wife, who has stood by me for over 40 years.

None of this would have happened if I had given up.”

Andrew agreed to meet with me weekly for the next few months. His psychiatrist gave him what he needed medically and he accepted help from other sources.

The divorce was granted. I saw Andrew several times and watched as he began to face life and start over.

Five years later Andrew came by to see me. He had joined a small firm in another city. The pressure was much less.

He married a young widow with two small children and worked hard at being involved in the lives of his children from his first marriage.

Life has turned around for Andrew. I’m thankful for the psychiatrist who made it possible for my own life to continue and for the opportunity to use my experience to benefit Andrew and others. ■





---

# Credit God for Talent, But Pay the IRS

*By Matthew Miller, Syndicated Columnist*

**B**ack on orange alert? Cut taxes for the wealthy. Economy sluggish? Cut taxes for the wealthy. Mideast peace prospects dimming? Cut taxes for the wealthy. Heartbreak of psoriasis? Let's try the acronym for variety: CTFTW.

This recap of Bush administration economic policy has evoked too little outrage from business leaders who ought to know better. But when Warren Buffett weighed in against "dividend voodoo" on the op-ed page of *The Washington Post* the other day, he made an argument that could inspire a sea change in national priorities.

Buffett noted that today both he and the receptionist at his firm, Berkshire Hathaway, pay about 30 percent of their income in overall federal taxes (including taxes on income, capital gains and the payroll tax). If dividends became tax-free to recipients, and Berkshire decided to pay \$1 billion dividends next year, Buffett's share would be \$310 million in additional income.

Under the Bush plan, of course, Buffett would owe not a penny more in taxes. As a result, his federal tax rate would plummet to 3 percent. His receptionist would still be at 30 percent. "She would be contributing about 10 times the proportion of her income that I would to such government pursuits as fighting terrorism, waging wars and supporting the elderly," Buffett writes.

The reason such a result strikes Buffett as absurdly unjustified comes down to one word: luck. Buffett says he and his receptionist both know that were lucky to be born in America. "But I was luckier," Buffett adds, "in that I came wired at birth with a talent for capital allocation—valuable ability to have had in this country during the past half-century."

"Credit America for most of this value, not me," the multibillionaire continues, "If the receptionist and I had been born in, say, Bangladesh, the story would have been far different. There, the market value of our respective talents would not have varied greatly."

Put simply, Buffett is crediting luck—where he was born and what talents he happened to come into the world with—with being the major force in explaining differences in economic status.

Buffett's sensitivity to the "pre-birth lottery" ends to be in

short supply among America's well-to-do. Polls show that the richer people are, the more likely they are to feel that their wealth is a function of effort as opposed to luck.

But who in public life ever challenges America's elite to examine that premise as a way of thinking about national tradeoffs? Especially at a time when it is simply not possible to have endless tax cuts targeted to the rich and also provide things like basic health coverage to the uninsured?

Besides Buffett, there's only one group of well-to-do Americans I can think of who routinely look at things this way: Hollywood stars. They don't gripe about taxes the way many other wealthy Americans do—and they overwhelmingly support Democrats who seem likelier to raise them. Why?

My theory is that these super-talents are more sensitive than the average rich person to the portion of their wealth that's attributable to luck. Yes, there's hard work and persistence and making your own breaks, but the voice, the presence, the body (well, minus certain modern enhancements) clearly come from God.

The idea that beneficiaries of such income-enhancing blessings might be asked to bear more of the burden of government seems fair to them, not cause for resentment. Even though similar accidents of birth (i.e., brains) account for the lofty incomes of, say, corporate lawyers, they're much more likely to credit their toil, presumably because what they do all day is less pleasant.

(If I'm right, maybe the platonic ideal for tax reform would combine a flat tax on income that's due to one's own efforts and character, with sharply higher rates on cash derived from an excess of gifts from God. Over to you, IRS.)

Buffett, who has peerless credibility in the business and financial worlds, should be encouraged to make his luck-based view of political economy a crusade. Given the stakes for the nation at today's fiscal and moral crossroads, an op-ed here and there won't do it. At 72, maybe it's time for the Sage of Omaha to consider that a campaign on behalf of "value politics" could be the logical coda to a lifetime of "value investing." ■

Reprinted with permission from [mattino@worldnet.att.net](mailto:mattino@worldnet.att.net).

---

# A TRILOGY ON FREEDOM

*By Dwight A. Moody, Dean of the Chapel*

Georgetown College, KY

---

## Just How Free Are These Methodists?

Jan is my wife and Sharon is her friend. They work together at the Baptist Hospital in Lexington.

When Sharon invited us to her ordination service we decided to go, thus marking our first visit to a Free Methodist gathering. As it turned out, the episode may have given some clue as to the significance of the 'Free' part of their name but not necessarily what this might imply about all the other Methodists.

The pastor met us at the door and, like every other religious professional, immediately expressed interest in my name—not simply because of the famed Chicago evangelist who died in 1899, but also because of Pat and Bob Moody (church members whom he introduced). And because the meeting house in which we stood was built, he explained, on the homestead of the old Moody farm on the north side of Wilmore.

All of this made me feel at home, as did the hymn-singing, the gospel-preaching, and the low-key, casual way in which the ordination itself was handled.

She was one of two candidates for the office of elder, and they stood at the altar rail with their spouses while the presiding officers read the prepared litany, calling upon them to be 'fervent in prayer, enthusiastic in worship, holy in lifestyle, insistent for justice, caring for the poor, and reaching out locally and globally to bring all people into relationship with Jesus Christ.'

A finer expression of gospel work I have never heard.

When other elders present were invited to join in the laying-on-of hands, I wanted badly to gather with them around the candidates. I held back, uncertain of how free these Methodists were in such matters and fearful that my participation might give grounds for eventual annulment, should our friend Sharon prove an embarrassment to the Methodists.

Which is not at all unlikely, given she is a woman, one with deep convictions and a rather straight-forward, matter-of-fact way of letting you know what they are: which has a way of irritating many men.

These Methodists trace their roots to that nineteenth century grass-roots yearning for piety known as 'the holiness movement.'

Women played prominent roles in the early years, as they

did later in the Pentecostal movements of the twentieth century, and continued to do so as long as these movements remained secluded on the circumference of the Christian community, without institutions, organizations, or cultural influence.

But a rather predictable transformation occurred: as the movements gained social status—the men took over, assuming their 'proper' place in the exercise of institutional and organizational power.

A growing number of scholars are contending (in such books as *When Women Were Priests*) that this same evolution was a hallmark of the early Christian movement two thousand years ago—that the free and unfettered engagement of women in the work of the Lord was later replaced by regulations and restrictions.

Ordination is, after all, about ministry, but also about power. As long as the focus remains on service, the women are welcome.

But many men are uncomfortable including women in the power equation. In fact, it could be described as fear, even though it is always couched in terms that are biblical, ecclesiastical, and theological.

Whether the Free Methodists have anything to fear from our friend Sharon remains to be seen.

But in that regard, the ordination service ended on an ominous note.

The pastor stood to dismiss the people, saying, 'Will the newly ordained and their wives please make their way to the receiving line so all present can greet you.'

Before the words were out of his mouth and from her seat on the front row, Sharon spoke a word of clarification, right there in front of pastor, superintendent, bishop, and all those present, including God Almighty. 'I don't have a wife!'

Her first act as an elder: correcting the pastor, in public, no less.

Perhaps that is what they mean when they call themselves 'Free Methodists.' ■

---

## What Would Jesus Do in Alabama?

A two-ton rock and a new tax code present the people of Alabama with a clear and present opportunity to ask the question that counts, "What would Jesus do?"

The rock is a 2.6 ton granite display featuring the Ten

Commandments. It was set up in the lobby of the state Supreme Court building in Montgomery by Chief Justice Roy Moore. He was elected to the office with the help of the slogan, "Still the Ten Commandments Judge."

When the federal judges told Moore to remove the rock, he refused; and thousands of Bible-waving, hymn-singing people came to his defense. "I must acknowledge God," he said, explaining his position.

This raises the question: how do we "acknowledge God" as citizens of these United States?

Some in this southern state think it has nothing to do with the two-ton rock but rather with the new tax proposal that will be on the ballot this fall.

"It has been well documented that Alabama's state tax structure is the worst in the nation." So begins the 21-page brief written by Professor Susan Pace Hamill, of the University of Alabama School of Law.

High rates of sales tax and low rates of property tax, she explains, places an unequal burden upon the poor, who own no land but must buy groceries and clothing.

The tax rate for the vast stretches of timberland averages one dollar per acre. This keeps rural school districts from securing sufficient funds to support schools, leaving Alabama's public education at the bottom on the national pile.

The system is not fair, Hamill contends in an open letter to political leaders of the state; it favors the rich and oppresses the poor. "Biblically based Judeo-Christian ethical principles hold you to the highest level of accountability to eliminate this injustice poisoning our state."

Her crusade for justice in the name of Jesus arose out of a mid-career course in theology at the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham. Her awareness of social inequities was confronted by the plain teaching of Holy Scripture. In an appeal to Christians in the state, she wrote: "The Bible has a great deal to say about how individual people and their communities must treat the poor, powerless and needy among them."

Her most important convert was Governor Bob Riley, like Moore and Hamill, a devout Christian. He has presented to the people a proposal to transform the tax structure of state.

The ballot initiative will not only raise taxes, but will

do so by distributing the responsibility more evenly among the citizens and corporations of Alabama. "We have no other choice," Riley said, giving testimony to the role his own Christian principles have played in this process.

The tax has not received as much attention as the rock. This is unfortunate; for it is the equitable distribution of the wealth of the land and the proper care of those in need that more surely represents the values of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Jesus had much to say about generosity, justice, and the poor. The questions of Judgment Day bear this out: "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was sick and you cared for me; I was in prison and you came to see me."

Jesus also had much to say about the public display of religion, mostly in the way of warning.

One of his most famous stories describes the religious man coming into the public place and declaring his faith in God while the sinner stood afar off and humbly sought forgiveness. Religious hypocrites love to be seen in public, he said, showing signs of their devotion: beware such people, Jesus said.

The rock is the public symbol of faith. The tax is the substantive act of faith.

If those who expend their energy defending the need for the two-ton symbol of God would give equal time and talent to the cause of economic and social justice, they would be acting, it seems to me, in accordance with the spirit and practice of Jesus.

In other words, they would be "acknowledging God" exactly as Jesus would do!

**Note:** On September 9, Alabamians defeated Gov. Riley's plan by about 68% to 32%. ■

## Meddling Ministers and the Prophet's Reward

John the Baptist, the New Testament tells us, had a penchant for saying what he thought; and what he thought



was this: Herod the governor was violating the law of God by having his wife murdered and marrying her sister. This involves commandments number six, seven, and ten.

Herod did not take kindly to this ministerial intrusion into his private life, so he arrested John, then had him beheaded, a gruesome tale immortalized in the Renaissance paintings by Fabritus and Reni. It is an extreme example of what happens when a man of God “quits preaching and goes to meddling,” as we Baptists sometimes say.

It is not always easy to know where that preach-meddling line is and preachers are not keen on the notion that other people have the right to draw the line. By “other people” I include deacons or bishops, sheriffs or judges, and government bureaucrats of all sizes and shapes.

A few years ago a minister in New York used his Sunday morning pulpit to campaign for a particular candidate for public office. Word of that came to the government workers of the Internal Revenue Office and they promptly revoked the tax-exempt status of his church. That case went all the way to the Supreme Court. He lost.

Here is another example. Jerry Falwell is the television preacher in Virginia, well-known for his outspoken opposition to homosexuality. He rarely is at a loss for words and never seems to temper his comments to appease an audience.

Falwell broadcasts his services all over the world. Canada considers anti-homosexual rhetoric as a form of hate speech; which means Rev. Falwell edits his Canada-bound material so that it does not violate the broadcast regulations of that country. He does not want to go to jail, let alone lose his head; in fact, he doesn't even want his preaching banned from the Canadian airwaves.

Now comes another case.

Seems Father Scott Mansfield, when conducting the funeral mass for Ben Martinez near Santa Fe, had some stern words for the dearly departed. He had been a lukewarm Catholic, the priest supposedly said, had been living in sin, and was therefore going straight to hell. Not to pass GO and not to collect \$200.

Whatever else he had, the priest apparently had what the

Jews call chutzpah-nerve!

If in fact he actually said all that, and it appears that either a state or federal judge will decide, the minister and his boss are in a mess. The family of Mr. Martinez has filed a civil lawsuit naming both the priest and the diocese as defendants and requesting damages for pain and suffering (theirs, presumably, and not Ben's, for they are of the opinion that his post-mortem suffering is less than what the priest predicted).

There is a time and place, I suppose, to talk about sin and damnation. Jesus himself had a few choice words on these matters, but I doubt that a funeral is that time and place. I myself have officiated at funerals of people widely held to be scoundrels, but even such people have a few redeeming qualities that can be the focus of a eulogy.

Nevertheless, it reminds all of us preachers how precarious things are when we take it upon ourselves to speak our minds.

Just ask Amos. He was the Hebrew prophet living some 800 years before Jesus who confronted King Jereboam about the lack of justice and equity in the land.

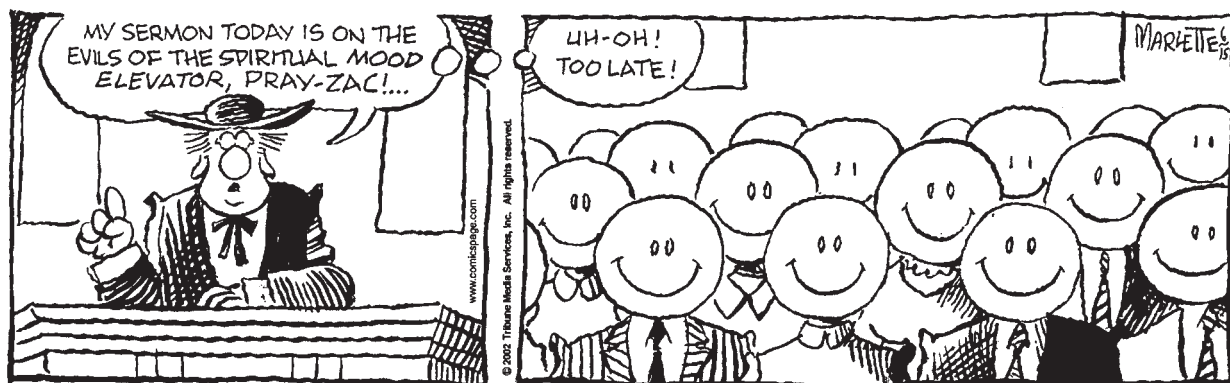
“Amos is conspiring against you,” Amaziah, priest at Bethel in the land of Israel, told the king. “The land is not able to bear all his words” (meaning, of course, that the preacher was, as I said above, meddling instead of preaching—that is, taking public issue with the way the king was doing his business).

So the king sent Amaziah, who also served as his personal minister, to deliver a warning to the fearless prophet. “Go, prophet, flee to the land of Judah, earn your living there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel for it is the King's sanctuary and a temple of the kingdom.”

Scripture does not record what became of Amos, except that he did not take kindly to royal interference with his prophetic ministry. He probably lost his job, his tax-exempt status, and his television contracts, if not his entire free-thinking, straight-talking head.

Which is one version of what we normally call a prophet's reward! ■

©2003 Dwight A. Moody





---

# Nuclear Arms and the American Military Empire

By John M. Swomley, Professor Emeritus of Christian Social Ethics

St. Paul School of Theology

I believe President G. W. Bush is the most dangerous President in American history. This is no exaggeration, no unwarranted hyperbole. Bush is now embarked on a program of world domination with plans, heretofore unthinkable, for the deliberate use of nuclear weapons. He not only withdrew the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in June 2002, but has recently asked Congress to lift a 10-year ban on research, development, and production of smaller nuclear weapons of less than five kilotons. The Senate has already, by a vote of 51 to 43, agreed to this proposal.<sup>1</sup>

Nuclear weapons, even if they are smaller than those of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, will not only kill on impact, but raise immense radioactive dust, with the terrible results of slow, agonizing death from radiation.

There is an assumption, in using smaller nuclear weapons, that there can be accurate precision bombing such as was claimed in the bombing of Iraq. What was not reported by officials is that although those bombs rarely missed a target by more than 13 feet, when the bomb blew up it sent high-speed shrapnel flying as far as a mile, causing many civilian casualties. The additional power of a nuclear bomb, together with the dispersal of radioactivity, is sure to produce infinitely more harm.

When Bush released his "Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction" in countries deemed a threat to the United States, he declared that the U.S. "reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force, including through resort to all our options." That includes "both conventional and nuclear response" even "in appropriate cases, through preemptive measures."<sup>2</sup>

The small nuclear weapons proposed would not be a substitute for any of the massive stockpile the U.S. now possesses. There are 500 nuclear missiles deployed at three Air Force bases in Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming, which can be launched on short notice. As of mid-2003, there were also 16 operational nuclear-powered ballistic submarines that carry 384 ballistic missiles with as many as 2,880 nuclear warheads. Eight of these are in the Atlantic and four in the Pacific. There are also long-range bombers deployed in Missouri that carry earth-penetrating nuclear bombs.<sup>3</sup> These weapons are already developed. However, the Navy is constantly updating its striking force. In October 2003 the Navy will begin deployment of a new Re-targeting System for its offensive strike platform.<sup>4</sup>

According to one analyst, Bill Donahue, the United States is spending an estimated \$5.8 billion on nuclear weapons this year and "in 2002 President Bush cued the Los Alamos National Laboratories to begin developing 'Earth Penetrator' mini-nukes" even before seeking permission from Congress.<sup>5</sup>

"The B-61 bomb is perhaps the most versatile and abundant nuclear weapon in the U.S. stockpile" according to the "Nuclear Notebook" in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. That Notebook said, "Approximately 150 B61s are deployed with U.S. Air Force units in Britain, Germany, and Turkey and held in U.S. custody for use by NATO allied air force wings and squadrons in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey." It is "the only remaining nuclear weapon deployed outside U.S. borders except for missile warheads on patrolling nuclear-powered ballistic-missile subs."<sup>6</sup>

However, "a serious flaw in the concept of nuclear earth-penetrating weapons, even those with relatively low yields, is that they cannot penetrate deeply enough to contain a nuclear explosion and its deadly radioactive fallout. If used in an urban environment, such a weapon would cause thousands of casualties."<sup>7</sup>

It is therefore essential for Americans to note a classified (secret) Pentagon report leaked to the press on March 9, 2002, under one headline: "U.S. Prepares for Wider Options on Nuclear Arms." It said, "The Bush Administration has directed the military to prepare plans to use nuclear weapons against at least seven countries." They were "China, Russia, North Korea, Syria, Iran and Libya."<sup>8</sup>

However, the first country targeted for action was Iraq. The war there was waged on the justification that it had or has nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction. It is now obvious that there were hidden reasons.

If Iraq is only the first of other countries targeted for action, there are certain facts and assumptions that flow from U.S. control there. One is that the U.S. will control the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to China, Japan, Korea and most other countries. The second is that the Pentagon has announced it will maintain four long-term military bases in Iraq.

Third, The Bush Administration will not foster genuine democracy in Iraq; it will only permit a regime under U.S. influence and control, as it has in other countries, notably South Korea, Haiti, and Afghanistan. As a *New York Times*

report indicated, "The United States is planning a long term military relationship with the emerging government of Iraq. . . [this relationship] will grant the Pentagon access to military bases and project U.S. influence into the heart of the unsettled region, senior Bush administration officials say."<sup>9</sup>

Fifty-seven years after World War II, the U.S. still maintains occupation forces in Germany, Japan, South Korea and other countries. In South Korea it has steadily maintained 37,000 combat troops at 96 bases occupying 65,500 acres. It controls South Korea's armed force of 670,000 troops, 460 combat aircraft, 44 destroyers and frigates, and four attack submarines, which regularly conduct maneuvers in the air space and coastal waters around North Korea.

The occupation of Japan still continues with eight major U.S. bases. In Japan's island of Okinawa, U.S. bases occupy 20% of the land. There are also bases in Guam, and Taiwan. Australia is also integrated into the American military system with various U.S. stations from which U.S. submarines and vessels can control the Indian Ocean and South Pacific.

In addition the U.S. has ten bases in seven European countries and sends military training missions to the armed forces of 110 countries.

Most Americans do not know the real results of the war against Afghanistan or its inclusion in the American Empire. There is a U.S. air base near Bishtek, the capital of Kyrgistan, just north of Afghanistan. It will hold 3,000 troops. There are military bases in Uzbekistan and Pakistan; there are also bases in Afghanistan.

In the Mideast the U.S. now has bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, along with the four now established in Iraq.

With the possible exception of the former British Empire, this pattern of overseas bases establishes the United States as the largest imperial power in history. It is an empire which U.S. taxpayers have to maintain, along with the present federal debt: *Six trillion, three hundred ninety-nine billion, nine hundred million, seventy-five thousand dollars.* Actually, it is higher than that, but the federal debt limit is \$6.4 trillion.<sup>10</sup>

The building of this empire has taken place over years in which the U.S. military-industrial complex has profited from huge arms sales and the building of these bases. The collapse of the Soviet Union ought to have been a signal to disarm and strengthen the United Nations for a world at peace. Instead, the problem we face now is one which Al Gore described as a new doctrine that destroys "the goal of a world in which states consider themselves subject to law, in favor of the notion that there is no law but the discretion of the President of the United States." ■

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, May 21, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> National Security Strategy Paper, September 20, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> "Nuclear Notebook," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May-June, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Donahue, "Fear and Fallout in Los Alamos," *Mother Jones*, May-June, 2003.

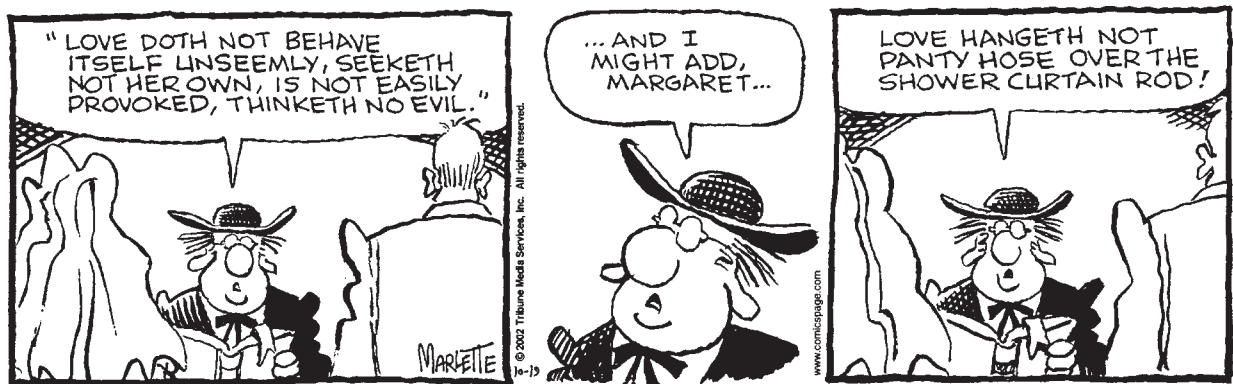
<sup>6</sup> "Nuclear Notebook," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May-June, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> "Nuclear Notebook," January-February, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Kansas City Star*, March 9, 2003, from *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, April 20, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Jerry Heaster column, *Kansas City Star*, April 25, 2003.



---

# SBC Leader Applies Church-Christ Analogy to Bedroom

By Robert Parham, Executive Director

Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, TN

A Southern Baptist Convention leader says that if a husband reads his Bible enough, then he will have a good sex life.

Writing in *Unbreakable: The Seven Pillars of a Kingdom Family*, Tom Elliff said a Christian man complained to him that “his wife was rejecting his overtures of affection.”

“She’s always too tired,” Elliff quoted the man. “Or she has a headache or too much to do or too much on her mind at the moment. I don’t know what the problem is.”

Interpreting the man’s plight, Elliff wrote, “I could tell he was even wondering if he had married the right woman.”

Elliff, chair of the SBC’s Council on Family Life and former convention president, asked the man if he was familiar with the biblical analogy of the church as the bride of Christ and Christ as the groom.

“How many times recently has Christ, your Lord, made an overture of affection to you,” Elliff asked, “only to hear that you have headache, you’re too tired, or you’re too busy and distracted?”

The man confessed that “his own devotional life was in shambles. For weeks, he had neglected the practice of prayer and Bible reading,” wrote Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Oklahoma.

“Interestingly,” the man said, “I have offered the same line to God that I have heard from my wife-too busy, tired, and distracted.”

Elliff wrote, “He got the picture! Later when I visited with him, he acknowledged that both his devotional life and his relationship with his wife had drastically improved.”

In a sex-saturated society, Elliff has added daily Bible reading to the list of pharmaceuticals and techniques that promise to improve the sex life of married couples.

Now really, can Southern Baptist fundamentalists get any goofier?

After a series of gaffes connected with recent annual SBC meetings, Southern Baptist leaders have attempted to spin this year’s gathering into a competition with Mormons as

the family friendly faith group of choice. Elliff’s book, a pre-convention family rally, and the work of the family council are supposed to recast the Southern Baptist image and rescue Christian families.

Yet Elliff’s bizarre marital advice does a disservice to families when he distorts the biblical witness, claiming for the Bible what the Bible does not claim for itself.

Apostle Paul, the author of the analogy of the church as bride and Christ as groom, neither wrote nor implied that husband’s prayer life and Bible reading would cause his wife to embrace his “overtures of affection.” Paul did not encourage male spirituality for the sake of male sexual fulfillment. Paul did write about conjugal rights in the context of sexual mutuality in marriage with a note about an agreed upon abstinence for prayer (1 Cor. 7:1-9).

When Paul did use the bride-groom analogy (Eph. 5:21-33), he advocated marital mutuality, which ran counter to the prevailing Hebraic view that held males as dominant and females as inferior. Mutual submission resulted from reverence to Christ. After all, Paul saw equality in Christ between male and female (Gal. 3:28).

The Bible defines the highest form of love in terms of sacrificial giving, responsibility and accountability, ideals that are applicable to marriage. The biblical witness also recounts a host of inspiring and dark stories about marriages from which much may be gleaned for real life.

Instead of taking these accounts about family life seriously, Elliff ignored germane passages and twisted a revered biblical analogy.

Implicitly promising husbands that getting right with God will get matters right in the bedroom distorts spirituality. It also perpetuates the idea of the wife as a spiritually and sexually second-class marriage partner. ■

©2003 EthicsDaily.com is an imprint of the Baptist Center for Ethics. Reprinted with permission. [www.ethicsdaily.com](http://www.ethicsdaily.com)

---

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

### **Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicals in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam**

Timothy C. Tennent

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002). \$19.99

*Reviewed by Renate Viveen Hood*

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies,  
LeTourneau University, Longview, TX

Never again will I feel the same about boarding an airplane. Neither are overseas embassies on my list of exciting places to visit. Many people share these sentiments. After all, looking over our shoulders in the windshield of life watching out for Al Quaida sleeper cells or other fanatical groups on a mission of destruction has become a way of life for many travelers.

Having grown up in Europe, I am accustomed to news of attacks by political radicals such as IRA, ETA, and Neo-Nazis. Though spiced up with religious sentiments, the overarching aims of these groups were political or social. Public opinion agrees that these groups have a right to hold different, even extreme ideas. However, no one thinks about terrorist actions as included in this right to express such ideas.

On September 11, 2001, many Americans woke up from hiding behind first amendment rights. Religious fanaticism had led to a disaster of catastrophic proportion. Suddenly, every Muslim or Middle-Eastern looking person became a suspect of religious fanaticism. Postmodern parents who raised their kids to tolerate all religions and expression of ideas as valid truth were forced to sit down with their children and condemn the actions of terrorists. Terrorism had exchanged its political hat for religious head wear.

How will this affect societal ethics? Christian ethics? Evangelical approaches to interaction with non-Christian religions?

Timothy Tennent correctly points out the cracks that are appearing in the postmodern worldview. Many postmodernists realize that there must be standards of judgment and objective criteria in order to exclude certain viewpoints, and actions associated with such viewpoints, as well as welcoming others. Asking poignant questions, Tennent gets to the core of the issues. "The terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, believed sincerely and passionately that they were serving Allah and making the world a better place for the spread of Islam. Hitler believed passionately that Europe would be better off by putting six million Jews into gas chambers. Are these personal perspectives on

truth to be regarded with equal validity as those of the person who believes we should live in harmony and peace with our friends and neighbors?"

With Tennent's astute observation concerning the challenge posted to postmodern ethics and theology by religious fanaticism, one would expect *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* to be an apologetic work. Or, with the idea of the book patterned after Martin Luther's legendary *Table Talk* (*Tischreden*), one would at least expect Evangelicalism to be at the head of the table. Rather, Tennent purposed to "emulate the give-and-take of Luther's talks in an informal, non-combative way for the mutual edification of all who participate." The participants are identified as adherents to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Evangelicalism.

Tennent (Ph.D., University of Edinburgh) is associate professor of world missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and visiting professor at the Luther New Theological College in India. Other writings include *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 2000). He brings his rich missionary experience as well as his love for theology and church history to the table as he prepares to dialogue effectively with other world religions. Tennent is a self-identified engaged exclusivist who recognizes continuity between general revelation and special revelation.

Recognizing a need for more evangelical Christians to be involved in genuine and effective interreligious dialogue, Tennent advocates active listening rather than hard core apologetics. He sees an obligation to listen to the doctrinal rejections of non-Christian religions. Evangelicals often fear interreligious dialogue due to faulty presuppositions. One such commonly held presupposition is the belief that dialogue by virtue of equality demands that one does not attempt to witness or convert a participant. Tennent rejects that belief and is convinced that genuine dialogue must bring together persuaded people. Interfaith dialogue must have a faith commitment. This allows for the participants of other religions freedom to attempt to convert evangelical Christians as well.

According to Tennent, stereotyping can render one's witness ineffective. Informed evangelical Christians will not engage in stereotyping. Not every Muslim is a religious fanatic; not every Buddhist believes that ultimate reality is consciousness. However, equally important it is for Evangelicals to be informed about their own traditions to counter effectively stereotypical ideas other religions have about Christianity. Tennent desired to show his own camp the importance of "our" historical and theological traditions.

Tennent allows for laypeople, students, and scholars alike to join the roundtable. An informative introductory chapter



and a glossary at the end of the book are helpful for students and laity. The format of the book is effective. The main body of the book is divided into four parts. In the first three parts Tennent dialogued consecutively with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. The individual conversations were structured around two key doctrines within each tradition. The dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism focused on the Doctrines of God and Creation. The Doctrines of God and Ethics were discussed in the dialogue with Buddhism. Christianity and Islam dialogued about the Doctrine of God, and the Doctrine of Christ and the Incarnation. Each dialogue followed a set pattern: an introduction to the world religion followed by an evangelical attempt to demonstrate why Christianity is distinctive. A rebuttal by the dialogue partner, along with clarifications, was followed by another evangelical response and closing thoughts by either of the participants.

Part four consists of case studies and a conclusion. These case studies form another mode of interreligious dialogue—historical dialogue. This mode portrays a dialogue between contemporary Christians and Christians of past times in the history of the Church who encountered issues of pluralism and concept fulfillment. Tennent discussed respectively Justin Martyr's use of *Logos Spermatikos*, Bragmabandhav Upadhyay's use of *saccidananda*, and A. G. Hogg's distinction between faith and faiths.

*Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* is a timely work for a society shaped by growing religious pluralism. Tennent shows himself keenly aware of the shift in the global religious horizon. Indeed, Christianity is no longer at the head of the table and finds itself in need of dialoguing with competing faiths. To use such dialogue as a means of persuasive witness is both daring and refreshing. The content of the book evidences meticulous research. In addition to providing invaluable resource materials for encounters with people of other religions, Tennent also presented concisely and effectively the diversity within those religions.

Tennent's heart for India is reflected in two case studies related to that area of the world. Both augmented the dialogues with Hinduism and Buddhism. The case studies are helpful in making missionary application. In addition, Tennent did not shy away from presenting contrasting case studies. In this polarization of theological efforts the readers are encouraged to think critically regarding their approach to indigenous missions. It is however unfortunate that his excellent attempt to apply and evaluate Justin Martyr's *Logos Spermatikos* to modern-day African missions lacked the backing of a discussion or dialogue involving Animism. Another regrettable aspect is that despite the insightful recognition that Christianity has become a fellow-participant rather than the leader in world religion's dialogues, Evangelicals still takes on the role of the moderator. Though the book is based on many conversations Tennent had with representatives of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam from all over the world, he still appeared the one in control of the dialogue.

Students of world religions and missions will greatly benefit from this text. Tennent's respectful and yet critical approach to interreligious dialogue sets an example for the evangelical Christian community that will take mission endeavors to a new and exciting level. His invitation to make ourselves vulnerable is pertinent to the Great Commission. After all, the gospel is not fragile and will endure contests. ■

---

## The Brain Behind the Oval Office

Reviewed by Jena Heath, Assistant Metro Editor  
Austin American Statesman, Austin, TX

**Note:** Jena Heath covered the 2000 Bush presidential campaign and, until May, 2002, the White House. This article is reprinted by permission from the February 21, 2003, Statesman.

Surely Wayne Slater and James Moore did not set out to write an indictment of the George W. Bush presidency. But that is the unexpected result of the second, and more substantial, of the recent books about Bush's longtime political partner, Karl Rove.

"He has created a politics of pretense," the Austin-based reporters write of the senior adviser to the president as their 347-page "Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential" draws to its scathing close.

"Neither Rove nor the Bush administration give the electorate credit for being sophisticated enough to call them to account. If they were concerned about being caught, Rove would reduce the president's exposure to claims of hypocrisy and broken campaign pledges. Instead, Bush signs his education bill, the 'Leave No Child Behind Act' with a smiling Ted Kennedy over his shoulder. This is the TV moment the electorate remembers, a president appearing to create bipartisan coalitions and endeavoring to 'change the tone' in Washington while helping our children."

They also fault Democratic leaders for failing to articulate arguments on any number of fronts: "No politician emerged to discuss what the potential war against Iraq was really about. Nor was anyone speaking of the careful dismantling of environmental regulations or proposed reductions in education funding while military spending spiked into double digit percentage increases . . . The president was confident. The public believed. And the Democrats cowered."

The authors attribute that trifecta to Rove, the one-time nerd they cast as a political Dr. Evil. Dubbing him "co-president of the United States," they argue that he and Bush function as parts of a whole—brilliant, ruthless strategist guiding ambitious, connected son. Their book fills in the outline drawn by Lou Dubose, Jan Reid and Carl Cannon in "Boy Genius: Karl Rove, the Brains Behind the Remarkable Political Triumph of George W. Bush" which came out in January and drew a similar portrait of Rove as the mastermind who engineered the defeat of Texas' last class of

Democratic office holders.

Slater, Austin bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News, and Moore, a Democratic campaign worker and former Austin bureau chief for KHOU-TV, dig up detailed, albeit circumstantial, evidence of Rove's machinations. They tell how Rove allegedly bugged his own office, then cried scandal to distract attention from an upcoming debate between his client, former Republican Gov. Bill Clements, and Democratic incumbent Mark White in the campaign's final days. Clements won the election.

In another instance, the authors use exhibits not entered at an eventual trial as well as state and federal records, to make a convincing case that Rove worked with an Austin FBI agent named Greg Rampton to bring down Jim Hightower, former Texas Agriculture Commissioner and a rising star on the national Democratic stage. The bureau's investigation ruined Hightower politically and sent two of his lieutenants to prison.

The authors can't prove such suspicions any more than their contention that Rove almost single-handedly limits the information Bush gets. And that is a problem with both Rove books. They do what the authors accuse Rove of doing, alleging guilt by innuendo and association, while they risk minimizing the key role of players such as Vice President Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense and an ardent and influential hawk.

Rove took Slater and Moore's effort at examining his tactics seriously enough to sit down for a 4-hour interview and for follow-up telephone conversations. He obtained an early manuscript and asked for changes. The authors corrected factual errors, but Slater said they made no major revisions and did not alter the book's central assertion, one he said Rove objected to strongly, that Rove holds enormous sway with the president.

That assertion—and the uncomfortable analysis the authors offer—should force questions about having a win-at-all-costs political operative shaping White House policy as our nation moves toward war over the world's protests. ■

---

*"Whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things" Philippians 4:8*

## Trivial Pursuits

*By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor*

For most of my life, I have worked too hard, too long, and too much. I never got much into games. The more the pity. Since retirement, however, I have made it my business to set aside an hour or so after supper almost every single day to spend with Mary Louise, my wonderful wife of 56 years, for playing a rousing game of Scrabble. She enjoys it and so do I. It would be easy for me to feel guilty about this indulgence, to think that it is a foolishness that ought not to be embraced seeing that there is so much stuff that ought to be read, so much stuff that ought to be studied, so much stuff that ought to be cleared off my desk, and so much stuff that ought to be done in the house, around the house, in the garage, and to the yard. I keep playing Scrabble with Mary Louise, though, for I did not give her anywhere near as much time as I ought to have done for the first 40 or 50 years of our married life, and because I have finally found out that too much work and not enough play, as the old saying might be revised to go, "makes Jack a dull old dodder."

At the risk of offering irrefutable proof that I need to be put away in some institutional environment where I will do no harm to others or to myself, let me share with you some of the trivial pursuits that are now pleasuring me and may possibly be enriching my life. I can now take a little satisfaction in relishing things heretofore denied, put off, glossed over, rushed through, or callously rejected. (Apologies are no doubt in order to the inventors, manufacturers, and promoters of the neat game of Trivial Pursuit which our children used to play when they were much younger and still at home.)

Some of my more trivial pursuits come to mind.

- *Staring at the fire.* It doesn't even have to be very cold to relish this trivial pleasure. When you sit up close in front of the fireplace and look at the fire, glassy-eyed and with your mind in neutral, you are vaguely aware that the fire is always changing, unfailingly beautiful, and somehow deeply satisfying. Moreover, it is dependably and happily finite for a wood fire is soon spent. And in retirement and old age, *soon* comes quickly.
- *Dozing in front of the television.* This is light years ahead of watching it.
- *Dawdling over a freezer of fresh homemade peach ice cream.* Scientific thoroughness must be assigned to the task of cleaning the dasher to make sure that no melting glob of the precious substance is allowed to be wasted. Then when your bowl is filled and then refilled, the corpus of this glorious concoction is to be mincingly and meticu-

lously savored in the realization that the Olympian gods in the Elysian Fields never could even have aspired to anything quite as exquisite. Trivial? Maybe. But still deserving of a ten-gun salute.

- *Listening to a roomful of uninhibited grandchildren.* By my best estimate, I can hear only about one-tenth of what they are saying, although heaven knows that it is not a problem caused by inadequate volume on their part. I am content to catch no more than a tithe of what is being said for I reckon that I have already heard most of what they are chattering about. And to tell the truth, I don't really give a fig about all the trivia. It is the overall experience that I like. Rattle on.
- *Watching nighthawks feeding on a summer evening.* They are catching mosquitoes and high-flying insects over the brightly-lighted ballpark behind our house. The nighthawk is a marvelous creature. Some Europeans call these birds goat-suckers. (I'll tell you why some day when you have a little time.) My Daddy called them bullbats. They are astonishingly ugly, incredibly agile, and notoriously secretive. But in the summer night sky brilliantly lighted for the night ball games, scores of them present a fascinating spectacle with their soaring, turning, diving, and circling. Akin to the equally elusive whippoorwill (officially "nocturnal nightjars") these critters may be trivial, but I find them terrific.
- *Watching the lightning play at night in a distant thunderstorm.* This common occurrence has been impressively presented by Mother Nature since time immemorial. I like the infinitely variable lightning streaks but my favorite part of the show is the sheet lightning that momentarily makes a brilliant spectacle of a towering thunderhead. This sight may be commonplace, even trivial, but I allow that it offers more variety and originality than television sitcoms.
- *Looking at the river.* In more than 50 years of watching the little mountain stream on the banks of which I built a cabin in 1958, I have never seen the Red River flag or fade. It is always changing but always the same, always in a hurry yet always running at the same speed in obedience to the call of gravity that draws it down the mountain to

the same old sea. Trivial but always fascinating.

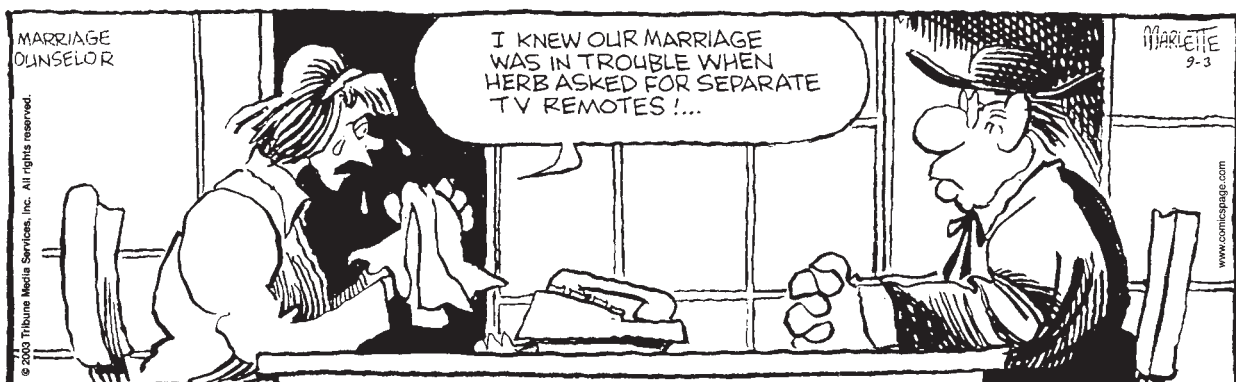
- *Doing things with numbers.* I have no idea why numbers are endlessly appealing to some of us; but certain people seem to get absolutely ecstatic when they see an automobile odometer present such a wonderful sight as 77,777.7 or 99,999.9 or 123, 456.7. In my case it calls for stopping the car and relishing the magic of the moment. I remember reading an article more than ten years ago in *The New Yorker* called "The Mountains of Pi" which told about two brothers named Chudnovsky who came to America from Kiev in Russia. These brilliant Russian Jews, Ph.D.s in mathematics, devoted their lives to what most people would consider the trivial pursuit of trying to fathom the apparently fathomless dimensions of Pi. As we may remember, Pi denotes the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. The ratio itself has a numerical value of 3.14. Those who are not mathematicians can be quite satisfied, thank you, with that number; but number theorists like the Chudnovskys happily spend their lives in pushing out the numbers not just past 3.14 to 3.14159265 but then on to the hundreds, then thousands, then millions, and then billions as they look for some pattern in this transcendental number which cannot be expressed by either arithmetic or algebra. Numbers addicts around the world, however, seem never to tire of searching with the most powerful computers on earth for the exact answer to what still seems, after thousands of years, to be an insoluble puzzle. Though I am an absolute novice in this field, I am myself intrigued by this search for exactitude, no matter how trivial the pursuit may seem to be.

These are all little things, trivial things, to be sure. Yet,

Little drops of water,  
Little grains of sand  
Make the mighty ocean  
And the pleasant land.

When you put together such little experiences, such trivial pursuits, you get a collage of memories and tap into a vast treasure trove of some of the best things in life. So . . .

Long live trivial pursuits. In a way, to use Brother Paul's word to the Philippians, "lovely," and well worth thinking on. ■



# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

## A Journal of Christian Ethics

"We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers."  
—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

### MISSION

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation publishes *Christian Ethics Today* in order to provide laypersons, educators, and ministers with a resource for understanding and responding in a faithful Christian manner to moral and ethical issues that are of concern to contemporary Christians, to the church, and to society.

### PURPOSES

- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for Christian social ethics
- Interpret and apply Christian experience, biblical truth, theological insights, historical understanding, and current research to contemporary moral issues
- Support Christian ecumenism by seeking contributors and readers from various denominations and churches
- Work from the deep, broad center of the Christian church
- Address readers at the personal and emotional as well as the intellectual level by including in the Journal narratives, poetry, and cartoons as well as essays
- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics

*Christian Ethics Today* was born in the mind and heart of Foy Valentine, as an integral part of his dream for a Center for Christian Ethics. In his words, the purpose of the Journal was "to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness."

When the Center was transferred to Baylor University in June 2000, with the calling of a permanent Director, the disbanding Board voted to continue the publication of *Christian Ethics Today*, appointing a new editor and a new Board. The Journal will continue to be published six times per year.

From the beginning *Christian Ethics Today* has been sent without charge to anyone requesting it, six times per year, "as money and energy permit." More than ever before, your financial support is "greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated."

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation is a non-profit organization and has received a 501 (c) (3) status from the Internal Revenue Service.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Dr. Patrick R. Anderson, Chair**

**Dr. Tony Campolo**

**Dr. Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler**

**Dr. Carolyn Dipboye**

**Dr. Fisher Humphreys**

**Dr. Darold Morgan**

**Dr. David Sapp**

**Contributions** should be made out to the Christian Ethics Today Foundation and mailed to the address below. Your comments and inquiries are always welcome. Articles in the Journal (except those copyrighted) may be reproduced if you indicate the source and date of publication. Manuscripts that fulfill the purposes of *Christian Ethics Today* may be submitted to the editor for publication consideration and addressed to:

Joe E. Trull, Editor  
101 Mount View  
Wimberley, TX 78676-5850

Phone: (512) 847-8721  
Fax (512) 847-8171  
email [jtrull@wimberley-tx.com](mailto:jtrull@wimberley-tx.com)

VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE: [www.ChristianEthicsToday.com](http://www.ChristianEthicsToday.com)

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY  
Post Office Box 26  
Wimberley, Texas 78676

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
DALLAS, TX  
PERMIT NO. 3648