



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

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**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.

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# 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 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, and religious pacifism in the third.

## Sermon Three: A New Heaven and a New Earth

Few things attract our attention like the suspense of an unresolved conflict. In every struggle the unspoken question brooding over the plot is, Who will be victorious? As we work through the Book of Revelation, particularly after a closer look at the way that the omnipotent God engages the satanic Beast, the outcome seems very uncertain, especially for the early Christians in Asia Minor. The Roman Empire was growing more antagonistic with each new Caesar. Overwhelming military, political, economic, and cultural power seemed to make it irresistible. The vast majority of the population had meekly surrendered to its sovereignty (13:4), and this mood of submission had made serious inroads into the seven churches addressed by John, all of which were struggling to survive. There was lovelessness in Ephesus (2:4), tribulation in Smyrna (2:9-10), heresy in Pergamum (2:14-15), immorality in Thyatira (2:20), spiritual death in Sardis (3:1), weakness in Philadelphia (3:8), and lukewarmness in Laodicea (3:16).

And yet the Book of Revelation exudes an attitude of confidence. Every one of these letters to the seven churches ends with a call to conquer (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). This confidence was grounded, not in some hope of future triumph, but in the fact that Christ had already conquered and was seated with his father on the throne of heaven (3:21). Because these embattled Christians could now experience in worship the glory of heaven through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the outcome of their struggle was no longer in doubt. They could fight in the certainty that the stranglehold of evil had already been broken by the death and resurrection of the Lamb.

Consider that such an incredible plot line had never been heard of in human history. Here was a tiny religious movement only one generation old, bereft of status, wealth, or legal standing, yet daring to challenge the world’s mightiest empire in a fight to the finish. Most ancient religions served to legitimate the state rather than to oppose it, but the Book of Revelation espoused a Christianity that transcended every political loyalty. How incredible that an exiled prophet on the Isle of Patmos, lacking any of the resources that make for

earthly success, dared to trace the outworkings of a victory that had already been determined in a decisive battle fought on a hill called Calvary. Unless the Book of Revelation strains your credulity to the breaking point, you have not understood the audacity of its claims. Let us, in a willing suspension of disbelief, explore how John conceived of such an inconceivable triumph over evil.

## The Conflict

The strangest thing about this ultimate struggle against evil is the insistence of Revelation that it is a war in which one side has chosen to fight without weapons. The depth of the paradox is seen in the apparently contradictory reference to “the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16). Here is at once an outraged but vulnerable Lamb pushed to its limit by the horror of evil. On the one hand, there is a wrath that expresses the divine revulsion over our human misuse of freedom. It is the Holy One’s recoil against everything we do that offends his love. There can be no easy tolerance or shallow compromise with the ways of the cosmic dragon and of his earthly beast. It should make our blood run cold to realize just how much God hates sin. But, on the other hand, we must ask what the Lamb does with this wrath, and the answer is that he allows himself to suffer unfairly in order to expose sin for what it really is. Unlike all his enemies, the Lamb is never violent, retaliatory, or vengeful. In contrast to the Caesars, whose towering rages were legendary, he is not a swaggering human despot wielding arbitrary power, but the Lamb is rather an innocent victim led to the slaughter (5:12). Like their Master, the followers of the Lamb were to abhor everything about the Beast, yet refuse to use his methods in opposing their enemies. Nor are we dealing here with mere symbolism. In the showdown precipitated by the Jewish War of AD 70, Christians in Palestine refused to become religious zealots and join their countrymen in the revolt against Rome, choosing rather the way of non-violence that left the outcome to God. This was not so much a political pacifism that refused to fight for one’s own country as it was a religious pacifism which refused to impose faith at the point of a sword as Rome was attempting to do in its growing insis-

tence on emperor worship.

In the ancient world, almost every war was a holy war pitting the god of one nation against the god of another nation. Indeed, religious leaders often led the troops into battle carrying with them sacred objects designed to ensure the favor of a partisan god. By contrast, the recipients of Revelation were being encouraged to fight as the Lamb fought, allowing evil to exhaust its strength in unavailing attacks upon the people of God. That is why John's "wrath" against Rome was expressed with words rather than with a sword. He was willing to expose evil in no uncertain terms, but not use coercion to control the outcome.

The problem with all of this, of course, is that, in our kind of world, the contest between truth and power seems always to be won by power. Lambs are simply no match for beasts, raising the specter of martyrdom which had taken the life of Jesus and was beginning to take the lives of his followers (2:10, 13; 3:2, 10). Already John's readers were questioning the fate of those who had resisted Rome to the point of death. As the martyrs cried, "How long, O Lord, before Thou wilt judge and avenge our blood" (6:10), they were immediately given a white robe (6:11) which entitled them to stand before the throne of God (7:9, 13-14). Note here the alchemy of grace: robes washed in red blood become white as snow. Note also that, even though they had made the supreme sacrifice of life itself, it was not their blood that transforms but the blood of the Lamb.

Martyrdom was not a heroic reach for sainthood, or an effort to escape into a better world, but was the ultimate form of political protest against power structures seeking to usurp the place of God. The martyrs were willing to wager their lives that Rome was wrong. In refusing to accept the claims of those in control, they named them as a fraud. The martyrs knew that the books would not be balanced either *by* this world or *in* this world, but they viewed the world above as more real than anything this world had to offer. The logic of their ultimate sacrifice was well expressed by Jim Elliott, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."<sup>1</sup>

Does not the Book of Revelation gain contemporary resonance in its emphasis on martyrdom? Never before have so many Christians been persecuted for their beliefs. Estimates run as high as 200-250 million believers living today under threat of torture, rape, enslavement, imprisonment, or even death.<sup>2</sup> Mass murders in Ambon and Indonesia, have swollen to genocidal proportions in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. Nor is our immediate spiritual family spared this carnage beginning with the recent death of our own Martha Myers of Montgomery, cut down with two others at the Jibla Baptist Hospital in Yemen, soon joined by Bill Hyde in the Philippines and fourteen year-old Abigail Little in Israel.

Even though we enjoy a remarkable degree of religious

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freedom in this country, we cannot escape the question of whether, in a showdown with evil, we would be willing to die for our faith, certain of vindication in the world beyond. The very possibility of such a choice forces the question of why God would allow martyrdom to happen. Caird answers insightfully: "Why does God not cut short the suffering of his persecuted people? Sooner or later evil must be allowed to run its destructive course to a close. The answer is that God holds his hand, not willing that any of his creatures

should perish, and as long as he does so the martyrs must suffer. Martyrdom, like the Cross, is the cost of divine patience."<sup>3</sup>

### The Conquest

In this messianic war with the Beast, John cherished no illusions that victory would come either quickly or easily. Even though Christ had triumphed over evil in his death and resurrection, and even though his followers were continuing to conquer in the witness of martyrdom, the final triumph of God's kingdom would not come until the end of history. The stages in this great conflict were seen as somewhat parallel to the exodus in the Old Testament. You may remember that when the children of Israel were allowed to escape Egypt, there followed a long period of wilderness wanderings when they were beset by many foes. The redemption from slavery that began with the crossing of the Red Sea was not completed until the twelve tribes finally crossed the river Jordan and claimed the promised land. Just so, the early Christians would have to fight against the satanic trinity of the dragon or serpent symbolizing supernatural evil, the beast or sea monster symbolizing the imperial power of Rome, and the second beast or earth monster symbolizing the cult of emperor worship before victory would finally be theirs.<sup>4</sup>

At last, in the great Battle of Armageddon (16:16), followers of the Lamb will find themselves up against all of the earthly power structures that oppose the Kingdom of God, whether they be political, economic, or religious. But there is an ironic note of hope even in this desperate struggle, for the greater the number of foes that converge upon the faith, the more opportunity that gives for faithful witness and loving sacrifice which can lead to repentance and faith. Tragically, all of the enemies of God will not choose to believe, but at least they will all have a chance to face clearly the ultimate alternatives of eternity, namely, whether humans are made for violence and enmity or whether they are made for forgiveness and reconciliation. As Paul put it (Romans 11:32), God condemns everyone who uses their freedom to serve the Beast, but he does so in order that he may have mercy on everyone who responds in faith to the witness of the faithful. His deepest desire is for a victory without any victims, however costly it may be.

If the first stage of conquest is the redemptive work of the

Lamb, and the second stage is the faithful witness of his people, then the final stage is the triumphant return of Christ to earth when truth shall reign supreme. Then all will know that the cosmos is an incubator of justice, love, and peace, that deception, intimidation, and exploitation were never meant to control human affairs. Those who have learned to love the truth will welcome the coming of Christ, while those who have built their lives on lies will find their foundations swept away.

Closely connected to the coming of Christ will be the millennium, or thousand year period, which defines that final “day of the Lord” to which the prophets eagerly looked. Then the Beast will be seen to be defeated (20:3) and the martyrs will be seen to be triumphant (20:4), a state of affairs which will usher in the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven,” for which Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:10). This symbolism provides a way of affirming that God is both creator and redeemer, that he is Lord both of this world and of the world to come, and that he will make a new earth as well as a new heaven (21:1), thereby removing the dualistic antagonism between the two realms.

It may seem strange that, when this millennium of earthly peace ends, the devil will be released and given a final chance to deceive the nations once again (20:7-8). This tells us that evil never learns anything, even if given a thousand years to brood in the prison of a bottomless pit. But, when the Beast resorts to its old bag of tricks, it can no longer prevail, even if it arouses the multitudes to fight, for the victory of the saints is now impregnable (20:9-10). In other words, Christ’s triumphant kingdom, both in heaven and on earth, is one that evil cannot overthrow even when given a second chance. Once the Lamb has finally prevailed, the Beast will never again have the upper hand. This was John’s way of saying that God’s redemption is eternally dependable!

### The Consummation

Once the millennium declares God’s determination to create a New Earth, then we are ready to be told how he also intends to create a New Heaven (21:1). When we ask what could be “new” about a heaven that is eternal, the answer is that now, for the first time since the Garden of Eden, it is in perfect harmony with God’s earth and includes all of the redeemed of the ages for whom the Lamb came to suffer and die. The only thing that surpasses John’s hideous description of evil is his beautiful description of heaven in the closing chapters of Revelation. He exhausts hyperbole to describe what God has always wanted to provide for his own. Images of precious and semi-precious stones are employed to depict a kingdom where the highest values are treasured and preserved rather than desecrated and destroyed.

In contrast to the evil city of Babylon, which was likened

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to a harlot, John describes heaven in terms of a holy city called the New Jerusalem, which will be the antithesis of Rome in his day. It has been helpfully described it as a *place* where earth is truly joined to heaven, where the *people* dwell together in harmony with God, and where they enjoy his *presence* without any of the barriers that kept the emperors at arm’s length from their subjects.<sup>5</sup>

This heavenly Jerusalem is to be open and inclusive (21:25), a place where all may gather for worship without temple walls to segregate one group from another (21:22). Supreme in this vision, as Kathleen Norris put it, is “a God who comes to be with those who have suffered the most in a cruel, unjust, and violent world. A God who does not roar and strut

like the ultimate dictator but who gently wipes away all tears from their eyes” (21:4).<sup>6</sup> No other god in the ancient world did a mother’s work of drying tearful eyes.

Most of all, heaven will be a place of life. In pride of place are the tree of life and the river of life, showing that God is the giver of life. The river of life flows through the midst of the city where all may gain access to it, and on either side it nourishes the tree of life, bearing fruit throughout the year, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (22:1-2). Here the “culture of death” spawned by sin is overcome by redeemed relationships that nourish a “culture of life” (22:3).

Looking back over this three-part series, we see that the Book of Revelation compels us to focus on one key issue: where is a power mighty enough to subdue evil yet gentle enough to leave us free? Through the centuries we have tried many solutions that did not work. War can bring victory to the powerful, but it leaves a legacy of bitterness and fear among its victims. Wealth can purchase influence and bolster reputation, but it causes jealousy to fester beneath the surface. Education can create a learned elite, but all too often the sophisticated exploit the ignorant for their own advantage. These options offer powerful temptations to America today because we are by far the strongest, richest, and most educated country in the world. Rome became an imperium mighty enough to conquer everything in its domain except evil. Let those who would turn America into a modern empire take heed!

The deepest insight of the Apocalypse is that evil can be defeated only by “the Lamb who was slain” (5:12). That is, we shall never finally subdue the Beast that ravages planet earth except by living and dying as Jesus did. That is as difficult a message in the twenty-first century as it was in the first century. But lest it be dismissed as hopelessly impractical, remember that this was precisely the strategy used by the early Christians to conquer the Roman Empire. For a quarter of a millennium, Rome did its worst to stamp out the Christian movement, accusing it of being atheistic because it

would not deify the State, yet never once did the faithful fight back with force. At last, when pomp and power, intimidation and violence had done its worst, it was the followers of the Lamb rather than the Caesars who had won! Incredible as it may seem, they won without ever lifting the sword, without ever strutting in the marketplace, without ever exploiting the vulnerable. Mystery of mysteries, the Beast really was defeated by not being resisted. What John had to believe as an audacious hope, we may now verify as a fact of history.

Doubtless there are many of us who devoutly hope that in some remote future the kingdom of Christ will vanquish the kingdom of the Beast. But John would not have it so. His times were so desperate that he was impelled by a breathtaking sense of urgency to plead for radical change sooner rather than later (1:1-3; 22:20), which was the hardest possible time for change to come. Even though Rome was in total control of his earthly existence, he dared to ask for relief then and there without delay (10:6). There was nothing that Rome could offer that he yearned to possess even for a moment. And what about us? Are we ready—right now!—for every kingdom of this world, whether it be political or economic or social or religious, to “become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, that he may reign forever and ever” (11:15)? If we are unwilling to let anything in time and space stand between us and eternity, then let us cry with the prophet of Patmos, “Even so, come *quickly*, Lord Jesus!” (22:7, 10, 12, 20). ■

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Jere Van Dyk, “A Noble Calling,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2003, W-13.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Ralph Kinney, “The Global War on Christians,” *Reader’s Digest*, August, 1997, 51-55.

<sup>3</sup> Caird, G. B., *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 295.

<sup>4</sup> Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Bauckman, 26-144.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, Kathleen, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 321.

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## Thomas Buford Maston: Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics

By Jimmy R. Allen, Former President of the SBC  
Big Canoe, GA

**Note:** This address was delivered at a chapel service in the Divinity School of Wake Forest University in which the T. B. Maston/Jimmy R. Allen scholarship was announced. The scholarship is designed for students in Christian ethics to inform this generation of students of the life and ministry of T. B. Maston.

It is a particular honor to be invited to share this message with you. Among other things, you have produced at Wake Forest University some of the outstanding leaders of Baptist life. Among them is one of the true pioneers in the field of Christian ethics, Dr. Henlee Barnett. T. B. Maston, the man on whom our attention centers today, was his long time colleague in this cause.

My first thought when asked to do this task was an enthusiastic yes. It ought to be a simple matter to speak about T. B. Maston to a generation that had no chance to know him. After all, he was one of the three major mentors of my life. I preached his funeral at his request (and with his instructions). I am chair of the T. B. Maston Foundation fashioned in his name to assist the cause of applying the principles of Jesus Christ in practical areas of life. This task ought to be easy.

However I have found myself trying to catch a moonbeam in a jar. There are so many aspects to the life of this pioneer among Baptists in dealing with ethical issues of racial justice, family life, political idealism, church-state relations, war and peace, business ethics, gender justice, and sexual ethics.

It is also amazing that he could come to be pivotal in changing the direction of the nation’s largest non-Catholic denomination while a quiet professor laboring away in the same school, living in the same house, worshipping in the same church for forty-two years.

I want to describe the man, his sense of mandate for biblical ethics, his method of meeting that challenge, and other challenges of his life, which highlight for us in this age what he called as the title for one of his books, *A World In Travail*.

The theme of his life lay in the desire described in 1 John 2:5-6, “to walk just as he walked.”

One of the definitions of *apostle* in Webster’s Dictionary is: “One who initiates any great moral reform, or first advocates any important belief or system; one who has extraordinary success as a missionary or reformer.”

T. B. Maston was that type of man.

The Baptist world in which he was nurtured was vastly different from the world he left. Foy Valentine points out, "When Maston responded to God's call to bear the Christian ethics standard as his life's work, the idea of Christian ethics among Southern Baptists existed in only very rudimentary form. No Baptist seminary had a course on the subject. No Baptist agency had published a book on the subject. No state Baptist convention had established an office to focus on the subject. No Southern Baptist Convention agency had been formed to maintain an ongoing emphasis on the subject."<sup>1</sup>

When he completed his life and work at the age of ninety-one, he had taught biblical ethics to more than 5000 Southern Baptist (SBC) leaders (some put the estimate as high as 8000). Many of these were in places of strategic leadership in Baptist life. For instance, in one year (1978) three of the four elected leaders of the SBC had earned their doctorates in Christian Ethics from him. Of the international missionaries who had earned doctorates, more had majored in Christian ethics at Southwestern than from any other department in any other Southern Baptist seminary.<sup>2</sup>

Maston's influence emerged in many ways. Christian ethics became a field of academic inquiry at every Baptist seminary. Maston helped to birth Christian Life Commissions, both on the national level and in many of the state conventions. More than a thousand predominately African American Baptist pastors and churches aligned with the SBC. Baptist congregations all over America became racially inclusive. African Americans began serving on boards and agencies and were elected as officers in Baptist Conventions. His own twenty-seven books on ethics were joined by scores of others pouring from Baptist presses. Baptist conferences on Biblical insights into social ethical issues like racial justice, bio-medical ethics, business ethics, church-state relations, ethics and justice in law enforcement, communication media ethics, family life, sexual issues, gender issues, urban development, world hunger, and HIV/AIDS increased.

Due partially to his influence, it became socially unacceptable for congregations to ignore the needs of the poor, the disinherited, the hungry and the hurting. Preaching on the "sweet bye and bye" was seen as incomplete without dealing with the "dirty here and now." The seed sown by this "Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics" has produced a harvest that affects us all.

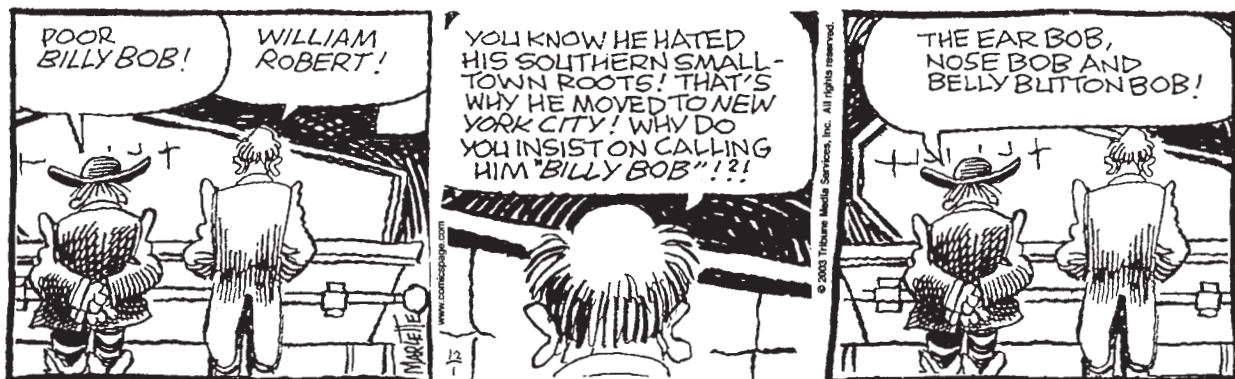
## The Life of T. B. Maston

Maston was a small man. It is hard to believe that he had been captain of his high school football team. Football was a lot different in the early 1920s in the mountain high schools of East Tennessee. He was a muscular man. His arms and upper body had strength and sinew developed from more than sixty years of lifting and caring for a son brain-damaged at birth by a physician's mistake. He was a quiet and soft-spoken man. His persuasiveness in speaking did not come from oratorical ability. It came from the intensity of his passion and the twinkle in his eye as he nailed down the challenge of whatever he was saying. He was a frugal man. He wore the same wide ties through all the changing styles of men's apparel.

He was also a gentle man. His compassion matched his courage as he dealt with friend and foe, young and old, student and teacher. He was a disciplined man. His work ethic was fashioned in a rural world where the task was not finished until it was finished. He was a biblical man. His former pastor tells of a hospital visit in his declining years after he had suffered a heart attack—in his bed he was surrounded by handwritten notes and an open Bible. When asked what he was doing, Maston replied that he was rereading the Gospels and writing down something he learned about Jesus from each verse.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Buford Maston did not look or act like a crusader. However, he deserves the designation of "Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics."

T. B. Maston was born November 26, 1897, in the shadow of the Great Smoky Mountains in Jefferson County, Tennessee. His father was Samuel Houston Maston, a raw-boned East Tennessee hillbilly who had only an eighth grade education, but also had a deep devotion to Christ and his Baptist Church. After living and working for ten years in College Corner, Ohio, Sam Maston moved his family to Fountain City, Tennessee, to be close to a Southern Baptist church. He worked hard as a section hand on the railroad, served as a deacon, and wished he were capable of being a pastor. He imbued in young Tom a work ethic and a spiritual interest that reflected his own values. It is significant that T. B. Maston sensed a call to God's service, but not to a preaching or pastoral ministry. He was licensed to preach but followed his father's advice and never was ordained. He was a layman and a faithful deacon in the Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Ft.



Worth all the years there.

He was a David not a Goliath when he captained his high school football team. When he was sixteen, one of his fellow players was seriously injured in a game in Asheville, North Carolina. On the way home on the train, he struggled with the fact that this injury could have been his and he was not ready to face dying. Under that conviction of need, he attended revival services being preached by his pastor, who was also his mathematics teacher. Later he cited that experience of commitment to Christ by saying: "I've doubted practically everything about the Christian faith as I've gone along through the years except this one experience that I had."

In 1916 he enrolled in Carson-Newman College where he also starred in athletics as well as academics. Finishing college in 1920, he and his sweetheart, Essie Mae McDonald, journeyed to Ft. Worth to enroll in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Because he was a layman, he enrolled in the School of Religious Education from which he earned a Master of Religious Education. He was to begin his teaching career as an instructor of church recreation. Mrs. Maston also graduated and taught in the same school. He became the first student to earn a Doctor of Religious Education degree in 1925.

At that time the course in Christian Ethics at Southwestern was lodged in the School of Religious Education and Maston began teaching ethics. He soon decided he needed more academic training if he was to achieve the level of excellence his nature demanded. He then enrolled in Texas Christian University (TCU) and earned his M.A. in 1927.

In 1932 he entered Yale University where he majored in Christian ethics under the renowned scholar Richard Niebuhr. Richard and his brother Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary were two of the most influential Christian ethicists of that era. Maston received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1939. He returned to the seminary campus to lead in shifting the study of ethics from religious education to the school of theology. He soon developed a graduate Doctor of Theology degree in Christian Ethics.

### Influential Factors

**H**ow did this church recreation teacher who taught ethics as a single subject become the primary pioneer of biblical ethics in the nation's leading conservative Christian denomination? Some factors were at work in the late 1920s in American religious life that made this possible.

**Tidal Wave of Social Concern.** The early part of the twentieth century saw interest in social issues sweep across the nation. When God gets ready for a breakthrough to another dimension of human experience, God plants the seeds in many receptive lives like a farmer planting wheat. Across the nation people were reacting to the Industrial Revolution's impact on their lives. Urbanization had set in motion forces that starkly revealed the injustices and injuries of the powerless and the poor. Racial discrimination remained long after the Emancipation Proclamation as those emancipated found themselves the victims of deeply ingrained and socially

approved racism. Corruption tore the inner tissue of the nation's soul as business and politics made unsavory deals and dishonest land grabs. Crusaders were beginning to emerge. The politics of despair led to anarchist movements hosting rallies in the streets. Labor was finding a strong voice in unionism.

In the Hell's Kitchen area of New York City, a Baptist preacher by the name of Walter Rauschenbusch was ministering to human need out of a pietistic and mystical commitment to Christ. He was developing a concept of the Kingdom of God which brought salvation and transformation to the corporate soul, as well as individuals. He believed that social institutions could be touched and saved. His ideas became foundational for the Social Gospel Movement.

In Detroit a Lutheran pastor named Reinhold Niebuhr was giving voice to the injustice experienced by factory workers, who were suddenly laid off work without any concern for the needs of their families. Henry Ford closed down his factories, causing all of his workers to go jobless for a year, as he changed from the Model T to the Model A Ford. Niebuhr lamented a society that could treat workers like that, without regret, drowning its conscience with the ditty: "Henry's made a lady out of Lizzie."

Niebuhr developed what was later called a neo-orthodox reaction to the Social Gospel. He perceived that evil persisted in the very nature of group behavior. His book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* established the fact that social groups will justify unacceptable actions in the name of family or business or country that they would not approve or justify simply as individuals.

T. B. Maston came as a mature man with academic credentials and experience to the campus of Yale University. More than that, he came as a Bible-centered teacher, nurtured with a respect for the authority of Scriptures. The Bible was the platform on which he stood to examine all the other disciplines of academia. He respected sociology, psychology, archeology, science, history, and all the rest. But he viewed them from a biblical perspective, relating all knowledge to the ethical ideals revealed in Scripture.

Through his colleague at Southwestern Seminary, Dr. W.T. Conner, he came to know and appreciate the strengths of Walter Rauschenbusch. Conner did his post-graduate work at Colgate-Rochester where Rauschenbusch was a leading voice. In studying under the tutelage of Richard Niebuhr, Maston also encountered the Kingdom ideas of the Neo-Orthodox movement for which Reinhold Niebuhr was to become the leading spokesman.

### The Challenge of Racism

**I**n the 1960s I was standing in line at a cafeteria with my friend and colleague, Rev. Rhett James. He was an African American pastor in Dallas. I had received word that the cafeteria owner had said he was striking down his segregationist policy. We were there to test out that rumor. As we stood in line amidst the glares of surrounding customers, he said, "Jimmy, you are fortunate. You get to pick your battles." He held out



his arm and pointed at his skin and said, "I was born with mine."

There is a sense in which T. B. Maston was born with his major ethical battle. He was nurtured in the lily-white atmosphere of the most racially segregated denomination in America. While the scriptures used to justify racial discrimination and slavery had largely been discredited, no change in behavior existed because of a carefully cultivated myth that "they like it that way." Racism touched us all. It challenged our convictions, courage, wisdom, and worship.

As early as 1946 Maston published his book, *Of One*. Long before that, he was teaching on college campuses, in Baptist encampments, and in Baptist churches and associations, the key principle of inclusion of the love of God. In 1952 he was one of the leaders who persuaded Southern Baptists in their annual session not to get on the wrong side of history in response to the Supreme Court's decision to abolish segregation in the schools.

Many of the ethics students in Southwestern got their first experience of being welcomed into an African American home in Ft. Worth, to taste its hospitality, and to be informed about their host's viewpoint because of the efforts of T. B. Maston. The emotional wrath of segregationists fell often on the undisturbed head of this gentle but persistent champion of the New Testament's teaching on the value of every human being. The time had come for the issue to be faced. In the 1960 Civil Rights movement, many of Maston's students had to decide. Some failed the test, but many succeeded in leading their people to attitudinal change. The professor had done his work. Now it was time for the students to do theirs.

### Maston's Method

**Teachers Teach.** When T. B. Maston found his voice as a teacher, he knew he had hit the stride for his life's race. Teachers teach. They teach not simply in lecture halls or public meetings. They teach wherever they are. They teach whomever they are with at the moment. They teach by being open in their search to truth. Some the most memorable lessons I carry from Maston came in casual conversations in the hallways or words in a letter. Teachers teach.

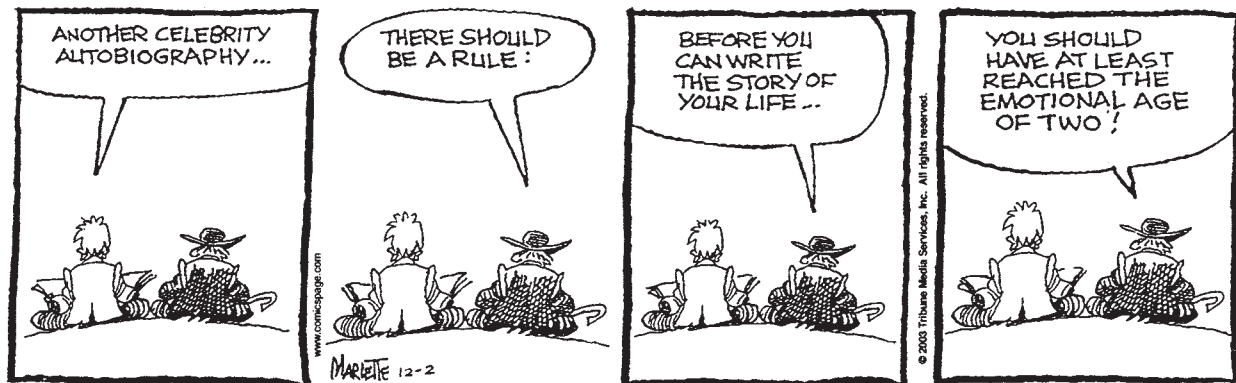
**Know Your Public.** Maston knew his audience. His mission included a world but his assignment was to reach the Baptist people from whom he had sprung. Baptists are a peo-

ple of the Book. Though in our current controversies we have become "Bible Users"—people who shout their faith in the Bible while ignoring the spirit of the one who inspired it. Baptists are at their best when they search the scriptures to discover the directions of their lives intended by God and move at God's command. Maston lamented the fact that the emergence of German Higher Criticism had come at the same time as the awakening of social conscience in America. The two were often confused, so that social concern became identified with liberal theology. He left to other disciplines the work of examining and explaining the emergence of the biblical record. His task was to ask what we are doing about applying biblical principles to our lives. In so doing he represented a conservative position about the Bible by letting it make him a progressive social actionist.

**Teach Through Relationships.** Maston taught people. The ethics professor knew that the Master Teacher whom he served did not just teach with words. Maston taught by touching lives, by demonstrating love, by commending as well as correcting, and by caring. He developed an open door policy in his home by inviting his graduate students and their spouses to periodic times of meals, fellowship, and conversation. He reminded graduate students who were their predecessors and where they were serving.

Maston carried with him a list of those students, almost one hundred at the end of his ministry. This became a prayer list and a reference point so that not one would drop off his radar screen. As some moved on to activities outside of Baptist life, they remained a part of his personal fellowship of concern. It was never surprising to receive a call or letter from him, one of concern for our struggles or commendation for our successes.

**A Sense of Timing.** Maston taught with a keen sense of timing. He believed prophets ought not to be content simply with rehashing events. They should be perceptive about what is going to happen or what should be happening. Unapologetically anchored to the Bible, the seminary teacher was unstinting in his application of ethics to the future. He contended that the inspired leader must help create future agendas by spotting the areas that need attention before they became critical. For instance he was supporting discussions about biomedical ethics, genetic research, cloning, euthanasia, and abortion questions long before they became headline news.



Dr. Maston was particularly pleased when the first woman to earn a doctorate in a Baptist theological institution was Marguerite Woodruff, who majored in his field and became head of one of the departments in Mercer University. He championed the affirmation of women to exercise their God-given gifts in a culture of male chauvinism.

He also was deeply concerned about the way materialism was seeping into religious circles and robbing us of the ethical ground for challenging its damage in society. Maston saw this danger in the lifestyle of many religious leaders. He caused great consternation when he began writing all denominational agencies to request they reveal the salaries of their executives. Interestingly, this public request stirred more of a turmoil than some of his actions on racial issues decades before! (You know the saying that the most sensitive nerve in the human body runs from the pocket book to the heart.)

Maston was concerned not just about denominational salaries, but also about the materialistic obsessions of churches, members, and Christian institutions. Losing prophetic witness in order to satisfy donors seemed to him to be a tragic betrayal of our best interests. Decades later we are in a society gone mad with materialism, betraying our faith through deceptive practices because we worship the god of greed.

Another aspect of Maston's sense of timing was his perception that healthy change happens only when tension is increased. Sometimes change is painful. Movement toward an ideal should stay in touch with the people needing to move. He often used a rubber band to illustrate this point, stretching it out to picture the tension of the ideal, but also relaxing it to reveal the lack of Christian tension. The key is to make sure that you maintain the tension without breaking the connection.

The difference between what is and what ought to be is represented in this analogy also—the “missing the mark” definition of sin is here pictured as falling short of the glory of God. Here is the arena for repentance and forgiveness from God. We ought always to be uneasy about this tension—we can create too little or too much. He loved to observe that the silence of some leaders in the face of moral evil is a moral failure: “There are times when silence is golden. There are also times when silence is yellow. We ought never as Christians be silent because we are afraid.”

**Teach Through Writing** Maston also taught through his books, articles, and other writings. While he never considered writing to be his special gift, Maston saw the need for educating his public on ethical issues. He disciplined himself to the task. He chose not to simply write for other scholars to read. His target audience was the layperson who constitutes the body of believers. Therefore, he did a great deal of periodical writing on issues. Utilizing the Baptist state papers, he wrote regular columns and articles to explain in clear terms the challenges of the gospel. His first book (*Of One*) was published in 1946, dealt with racial attitudes, and was published by the SBC Home Mission Board. After his retirement, he disciplined himself to producing books. Eleven of his twenty-seven books were written after he was sixty-five.

**Teach Through Example.** A major way Maston taught was by his example. No treatment of this “Apostle of Biblical Ethics” would be complete without describing the events that fashioned his tenderness of heart along with his toughness and tenacity of conviction. For more than sixty years he and Mrs. Maston tended to the needs of their son, Tom Mack, in their home. Brain-damaged at birth, Tom Mack never uttered an understandable word. He could not feed or care for himself. His inarticulate sounds were accompanied by a stiffening of his body. Maston mentioned in a conversation with a friend that he could not remember a night when he was not up at least six times to care for his son.

The needs of Tom Mack was a constant challenge to both of them, even though Mrs. Maston devoted her life to her son's care. Not long after Tom Mack's death, T. B. Maston died. A strong woman physically, Essie Mae Maston died recently at the age of 103. She was clear of mind till the very last day of her life.

It is obvious that the grace of God exuded from the lives of these two parents who consistently without complaint treated their handicapped son with respect, tenderness, and love. He was always included in conversations and introduced to their friends. When they traveled to other countries in their work, they always took Tom Mack along. Maston often noted that many cultures hid their damaged children. He believed it was a healthy mission for them to show other cultures that Christ's love is unconditional.

It is hard to imagine a time or season when the challenge for biblical ethics has been more crucial than it is today. “Feel Good Religion” is in and “Do Right Religion” is out!

Rudyard Kipling was not known as a theologian. However, the famed British poet hit a vital theological note in his work, *Mr Tomlinson*. In it he tells of Tomlinson's encounter with St. Peter at the Golden Gate. When asked for an account of his life, Tomlinson's reply describes the essence of T. B. Maston's life, the Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics:

“This I have read in a book,” he said.

“And this was told to me,

And this I have thought that another man thought  
of a Prince of Muscovy.”

And Peter twirled the jangling keys in weariness  
and wrath and said,

“You have READ, you have HEARD, you have  
THOUGHT

And the tale is yet to run

By the words of the body that once you had,

Give answer . . . WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?” ■

<sup>1</sup> Foy Valentine, *T. B. Maston: Shaper of Ethics and Social Concern*, The Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> William M. Pinson, Jr. (ed.), *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 67.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Gregory, “Reflections on T. B. Maston,” *Christian Ethics Today*, Summer, 2003, 10.

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# EthixBytes

## A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Oh wad some power the giftie gie us/ To see oursel’s as others see us/  
It wad frae moonie a blunder free us/ And foolish notion.”

Robert Burns, 18<sup>th</sup> century poet.

“The God so often discussed nowadays seems as dependent on the government as a welfare mother. For some reason, the Almighty needs government assistance to make his presence known. Either the schools must have prayer or government building must have a religious reminder—say, the Ten Commandments—or else, somehow, he will be banished from our lives or our consciousness.”

Richard Cohen, *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2003.

“God forbid that I should claim for our country the mantle of perfect righteousness. We have committed sins of omission and sins of commission, for which we stand in need of the mercy of the Lord.”

President Harry S. Truman.

“How could we expect to easily plant a clone of U.S. culture, values, and government in a country so riven with religious, territorial and tribal rivalries, so suspicious of U.S. motives, and so at odds with the galloping materialism which drives the Western-style economies?”

Sen. Robert Byrd (D., W. VA), on the Senate floor,  
May 21, 2003.

“Prosecutors say Dennis Kozlowski, former CEO of Tyco Int. Ltd., spent company money on his \$32 million New York apartment, including \$500,000 for handpainted wallpaper, a \$6,000 shower curtain in a maid’s room, and \$40,000 worth of drapes.”

Christopher Mumma, *Boomer News*.

“Augustine believed war is essentially an occasion for remorse. ‘The wise person will wage just wars,’ he wrote, but even the possibility of war ‘should cause humans sorrow because humans are responsible for it. . . . Let everyone grieve when he thinks about the truly shocking and cruel evil involved here, and let him acknowledge his miserable state.’ The most prominent architect of just war theory was more concerned that war lead to repentance than that it can, in some cases, be justified.”

*The Christian Century*, April 5, 2003.

“Why of course the people don’t want war . . . But after all it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy. The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.”

Hermann Goering at the Nuremberg trials  
of Nazi war criminals.

“I believe we worship the same God.”

President Bush responding to a reporter’s question in London on Nov. 20 about how he reacts to people who share his beliefs but don’t believe Muslims worship the same Almighty.

“The number of malnourished people swelled by an average of 4.5 million a year (1995-2001) and the most recent data found 840 million people, or 1 in 7 worldwide, went hungry.”

U. N. Food and Agricultural Organization Report,  
Oct. 27, 2003.

“In Iraq between 10,000 and 20,000 private contractors are paid to do military tasks, hiding the true costs of the war—the dead, the profits, and the lucrative contracts are hidden by the executives, who also funnel earnings into political campaigns. The chief military contractor in Iraq is Kellogg, Brown & Root, owned by Halliburton Co. formerly led by V.P. Cheney.”

Jim Krane, *Associated Press*, November 1, 2003.

“I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won’t have public schools. The church will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be!”

Rev. Jerry Falwell, *Seven Things Corrupting America*.

“Little boys need three things—a dog, a gun and a dad. . . . Get him a gun. Not a play gun, but a real gun. Play guns are the most dangerous guns in the world.”

Paige Patterson, President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, at the FBC, Lavaca, AR.

“If you are the type of person who likes assault weapons, there is a place for you: the United States Army. We have them.”

Presidential Candidate Gen. Wesley Clark.

“I think the SBC leaders have gotten deeply immersed in politics as partners with the Republican Party. And even if they were partners with the Democratic Party, I’d still object to it.”

Pres. Jimmy Carter, *Baptists Today*, November, 2003.

“Too many whites are getting away with drug use. Find the ones who are getting away with it, convict them, and send them up the river.”

Rush Limbaugh, *Oklahoma Observer*.

“Theodore Roosevelt would be standing up and applauding President Bush’s environmental policies.”

White House political advisor Karl Rove.

“Roosevelt created 150 national parks, founded the National Forest Service, set aside 230 million acres of public land as parks and refuges. Bush has lifted limits on logging in the Tsongass National Forest in Alaska, cleared the way for BNP Petroleum to set up a 156-foot derrick at Padre Island National Seashore to drill for gas, and laid the groundwork for dismantling protections for some 20% of the country’s wetlands.”

Response of John Buchanan to Karl Rove,  
*Christian Century*, February 22, 2003.

“The official poverty rate rose to 12.1% in 2002 from 11.7% in 2001, bringing the total number of people living below the poverty line to 34.6 million [poverty threshold for a family of four is \$18,392; for individual \$9183].”

*New York Times*, September 27, 2003.

“We have sterilized and contracepted our families down to sizes so small that the children we do have are so spoiled with material things that they come to equate the receiving of the material with love.”

Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX), on the floor of the House blaming birth control as the cause of violence on high school campuses.

“President Bush’s policy of striking Iraq preemptively represents a fundamental challenge to the multilateral system that has undergirded 58 years of U.N. cooperation. It could set precedents that resulted in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification.”

U.N. Sec.-Gen. Kofi Annan, September 23, 2003.

“The International Campaign to Ban Landmines reported that 5,695 people were killed by land mines in Chechnya in 2002, more than anywhere else in the world. Russian troops and Chechen rebels use land mines.”

“American casualties in the first gulf war were relatively few (294 dead, a little over 400 wounded), but the longer-term effects have been staggering: 221,000 veterans from that war have been put on disability . . .

[many] the result of contamination from depleted uranium (DU) used in munitions from friendly fire. The half-life of uranium 238 is 4.5 billion years; the U.S. military left more than 320 tons of it all over Iraq.”

Forensic scientist Dr. Doug Rokke in  
*The Christian Century*, April 5, 2003.

“America needs to take drastic steps to control an epidemic of teenage drinking that is costing \$53 billion a year. The National Academy of Sciences called for curbs on glamorous references to alcohol in hip-hop music and movies, harsh penalties on stores that sell alcohol to teenagers, and steep increases in taxes on beer.”

“The federal deficit will hit a record of \$480 billion next year, more than twice the level forecast just five months ago. The annual budget shortfalls will total nearly \$1.4 trillion over the next decade, a stunning reversal from the \$5.6 trillion surplus forecast in 2001.”

Congressional Budget Office, August 27, 2003.

“The number of “nones” who claim no religion has more than doubled the last decade to 30 million, from 8% of the U.S. population in 1990 to 14% in 2001.”

American Religious Identification Survey.

“The Center on Economic and Policy Research reports that the richest 1 percent of all families owns 53 percent of all stock or mutual fund shares held by individuals. The top 10 percent possess more than 90 percent of the shares. Which means that 90 percent of Americans will get little if any tax break from elimination of the dividend tax.”

*The Christian Century*, May 3, 2003.

“I was saved by a woman preaching . . . at 12 years of age, and I’m still saved. People are being saved. Lives are being changed. Big churches are growing. Are we going to tell these women, ‘You can’t do that?’”

Former SBC President Charles Stanley in response to his denomination’s stance about women serving as pastors.

“My candle burns at both ends;/ It will not last the night;/ But, oh, my foes, and oh, my friends—/ It gives a lovely light.”

Edna St. Vincent Millay, in “First Flag.” ■



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# Words of Hope For All the World

*By Dwight A. Moody, Dean of the Chapel*  
Georgetown College, KY

## The Legacy of John Paul II

Millions of people are out of work and many others change jobs every few years. But one very important person has kept his job for a quarter century and this fact alone has brought him a great deal of attention.

I write, of course, of Karol Wojtyla, better known as John Paul II, bishop of Rome, and thus pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. He is number 262 in a line of leaders that goes back, according to church teaching, to Peter.

Most popes served less than ten years, and many less than five: an astounding 46 popes stayed in office less than 13 months! Only two have served longer than the current pope: Pius IX and his immediate successor Leo XIII, covering the second half of the 19th century.

Mostly, the opportunity to celebrate a silver anniversary is a matter of age: Wojtyla was only 58 when his election in 1978 was signaled by the plume of white smoke rising from the chimney of the Vatican.

“Do not be afraid,” he said in his first public address; and for these 25 years he has practiced what he preached—mostly.

Hope has been the theme of his reign: “Crossing the Threshold of Hope” was the title of his best-selling book at the turn of the millennium.

He has been fearless in confronting both the atheism of the East and the hedonism of the West. He has faced down the Communist in his native Poland; many give him significant credit for the collapse of totalitarianism of the Soviet Union.

With enormous moral authority, the Pope has challenged the self-centered materialism of many Christianized countries, rightly calling it a contradiction of the gospel that lies at the root of our culture.

John Paul also stood against the American invasion of Iraq and has championed the cause of the Palestinian people. At the same time, he became the first pope in history to enter a Muslim mosque and pray at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. He sought better relations with Orthodox Christians in Russia and Greece, and also with Protestants in Europe and Evangelicals in America. He is a legitimate candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Perhaps only Mohammad Ali can rival the Pope as the primary global celebrity of our time. He has traveled the world, taking up the cause of the poor and advocating a con-

sistent life ethic: condemning war, abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. This has not been easy; he is a courageous man.

But the Pope is not totally without fear and these lingering fears have kept him from unleashing the kind of Christian practice that could bring a radical transformation to the world as we know it.

John Paul, it seems, has been afraid of two very important groups of believers. He fears what might happen if they are set free from the artificial boundaries that he (and most religious leaders) impose.

The Pope fears the intelligentsia, specifically the theologians whose writings explore the edges of orthodoxy and challenge the current consensus.

Time and again he has denied the right of free expression to those who dissent from his version of the Christian faith. Such restrictions on thinking, writing and speaking bring little hope to a world often dominated by ignorance and ideology.

John Paul also fears the women, writing and working to prevent women from assuming their needful, rightful place in the affairs of church and state.

John Paul’s affection for Mary and his elevation of Teresa toward her inevitable sainthood do not obscure the fact that he has resisted the chief need of our time: freeing women from the patriarchal structures that keep them everywhere marginalized.

A crusade (even led by the Pope) on behalf of women of the world is the single most effective evangelistic strategy available to Christians. It would protect women from the violence, illness and poverty that is most often their lot in life; it would extend an irresistible invitation from a religious community that embraces fully their dignity as people made in the image of God.

Do not be afraid, John Paul, to bring the full-orbed hope of Christ to all the people of the world, and in this way finish the splendid ministry by which God has blessed the world for these twenty-five years. ■

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### Justice, Mercy, and Johnny Cash

When Johnny Cash died I went right out and bought a CD of his music. It carries the subtitle, “A Concert Behind Prison Walls.”

Of course, it includes his famous “Folsom Prison Blues.” But item number three on the disc is the lesser known ballad called “Jacob Green.”

Johnny introduces it with these words: “I’ve learned one thing, that when a man is at rock bottom, when there is no place else he can go except up, that the only thing that is really important in the world to him is that somebody, somewhere cares.”

The song tells the true story of a boy who was arrested for possession one night and prior to being dumped into the holding cell was stripped and shaved by the jailhouse crew. Early the next morning, before he could be brought to arraignment, young Jacob Green hung himself in shame and despair.

The chorus is haunting: “It happened yesterday and if you turn your head away . . . it could be somebody that you love that gets done like Jacob Green got done.”

Songs and stories like this come to mind when I contemplate the recent directive of the Attorney General of the United States. He sent orders to federal attorneys throughout the land that similar crimes should have similar charges and that convicted felons should receive the maximum penalties.

“Just as the charges a defendant faces should not depend upon the particular prosecutor handling the case,” John Ashcroft writes, “so too the sentence a defendant receives should not depend upon which particular judge presides over the case.”

The first rule is about fairness. “It is important that when the law is broken in Milwaukee, it’s attended by the same consequences as when it’s broken in Denver,” he explains.

He could have illustrated his point with cases in western Kentucky and North Dakota. Recent accidents in each place featured a driver who ignored a stop sign, hit a vehicle and killed another driver. In Kentucky, the driver was charged with murder; in North Dakota, with manslaughter.

What is the difference?

The driver in Kentucky is a young black male with no criminal or traffic record; prosecutor, judge and jury were all white; he was found guilty.

The driver in North Dakota was the former governor of the state, now a U.S. representative in Washington. He has a long history of traffic violations; a trial date has not been set.

While these two cases are state procedures and therefore do not involve federal attorneys, they do illustrate why our judicial system needs an infusion of fairness. If Ashcroft’s first rule helps address such inequity it is a good thing.

But his second is not about fairness, it is about meanness.

In his memo, Ashcroft orders all attorneys general to charge defendants with maximum crimes and seek maximum penalties. It denigrates judges who give lenient sentences and directs prosecutors to avoid plea bargains that allow criminals to serve less time than possible.

This harsh attitude toward those convicted of crimes

fails to acknowledge the role of race, poverty, prejudice, power and mental illness in judicial proceedings.

Already the United States among all nations in the Free World has the largest percentage of its population either incarcerated, probated or paroled. Apparently, Ashcroft wants to make sure we do not surrender this distinction to some country whose prosecutors and judges are as quick to “love mercy” as they are to “do justice.” (See Micah 6:8.)

I for one am just glad these new rules were not in effect in the spring of 2001.

The federal judge who sentenced my son had options: from 92 months to 115 months. After rejecting our plea for “diminished capacity” he tempered his justice with the right amount of mercy and issued his order for the minimum.

Seven plus years is a long time for a father to wait for a son or a young man to wait for freedom.

But seven years is shorter than ten and the difference between them will allow the two of us more than 800 days to kick back, put on some Johnny Cash, and meditate on the difference between meanness and mercy. ■

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## The Transformation of Mr. Jabez

Evangelist and author Kenneth Hagin died on September 19th at the age of 83. What did not die with him is the gospel of prosperity he advocated in broadcasts that circled the globe and books that sold 65 million copies.

“Name it, claim it” is the phrase used to describe this doctrine of health and wealth in the name of Jesus. It swept like a brush fire through the underclasses of America then leaped the Atlantic to settle with equal success among the indigent poor of Africa.

Perhaps this explains why millionaire Bruce Wilkinson abandoned his lucrative ministry in America and embarked on an imaginative endeavor on that other continent.

Wilkinson’s money came from the sale of his little devotional book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. The volume highlights an obscure prayer in the Bible that can be summarized: “Bless me, prosper me, protect me, keep me.”

Two years in succession (2001, 2002) it was the top selling religious book in the country.

In keeping with American marketing habits, the success of the book birthed a family of Jabez-theme merchandise: posters, calendars, jewelry, even clothing, and, of course, additional books now being promoted at [www.thebreakthroughseries.com](http://www.thebreakthroughseries.com).

But there is a down side to this “me-centered” prayer and the success syndrome it asserts. At the least, it confirms the worst stereotypes of evangelical Christians: intellectually shallow, ethically narrow, and spiritually self-centered.

At the most, it raises a critical question: what has any of this to do with following Jesus?

The egocentric spirituality stands in sharp contrast to the “we-centered” version of praying and living outlined by the prayer of Jesus: “Give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us.”

But now Wilkinson and his jabez-funded ministry have

taken a turn toward redemption with impressive strategies for healing the sick, feeding the hungry and gathering the dispossessed of Africa.

First, Wilkinson put his resources into the fight against HIV/AIDS, now the world's premiere health epidemic: "It is the worst catastrophe to befall the human race since the biblical flood," he said.

He launched "Turn the Tide for Children," an initiative motivating Christians to sponsor an AIDS orphan (now said to number more than 20 million) for \$20 per month.

Second, Wilkinson moved to Johannesburg. It is a racially-charged environment, having suffered decades of church-sanctioned apartheid and now enduring the aftermath of economic and social oppression.

Mr. Jabez, as he is known, has taken up the cause of racial reconciliation, not just for South Africa, but for all of the continent.

The project is called Transformation Africa and Wilkinson is focused on Namibia. In May of this year, witnesses said more than five million Africans gathered in 138 venues "to sing, dance, blow shofars, beat drums, and pray for revival and social healing."

Finally, there is food.

Wilkinson responded to the ubiquity of hunger by embracing a locally-grown ministry which encourages people to turn even the smallest patch of dirt into a food-producing plot.

He calls them "Never Ending Gardens." This fall more than 600 such growing efforts are under way. It is a small beginning but has great promise.

It is hard to imagine three efforts that flow more naturally from the prayer Jesus (and not Jabez!), who taught us to pray: "Give us today something to eat. Forgive us our sins of racism even as they forgive us for treating them that way. Deliver us from evil, especially the epidemic of AIDS now sweeping our continent."

The feeding, reconciling, and delivering that arise in response to these prayers are God's answer to the lead petition of the same prayer: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Yes, these works of mercy are made possible in part by the enormous wealth generated by the Jabez book and its gospel of prosperity.

But more importantly they are tied to the transformation of him who once brought Jabez to the world but now brings hope and healing to the least among us, our brothers and sisters.

Therein lies redemption. ■

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## The Devastating Effects of Sexual Sin

By "Steve"

*Note: "Steve" is the pseudonym for a minister who wrote this article seven years after his moral failure, with the hope that it will help others. He added, "I have a well-marked copy of Ministerial Ethics by Trull and Carter, which I began to read about the time I was going over the line. I only wish I'd been wiser." He indicated twice a need for a "handbook": recently the Baptist General Convention of Texas has produced Broken Trust, which aids ministers and churches in dealing with clergy sexual abuse.*

I'd been with the same high-ranking denominational official a few years before, but under different circumstances. Then I chaired an influential committee. After a meeting, he asked me to stay a moment. "Steve," he said, "you know our state convention's annual meeting is coming up. Rev. Jones will be nominated for president. He's a good man, but he's backed by a group that wants to slash and burn our work. He has a hurtful agenda."

Then, looking me straight in the eye, he continued, "Steve, you're one of the most respected pastors in this state. You're a good administrator and work well with others. I believe you're a change agent, but you're not a zealot. Won't you consider running for convention president yourself?"

It was true I'd received recognition for effective ministry. My alma mater honored me as "Minister of the Year" a few months before, and choice pastorates had come my way. Though I chose not to pursue the presidency, I appreciated the official's affirmation.

Now I sat before the same official a broken man. A few days before I'd confessed to church leaders my adulterous affair and submitted myself to their direction. It became apparent I'd have to leave the church quickly. I sought an audience with this man to solicit his advice. He graciously pushed back his appointments, made time for me and became my pastor.

"Will I serve as a minister again?" I remember asking.

He assured me this was possible, though he couldn't foretell the awful months that lay ahead of me.

What happened in those intervening years between my appointments? Much of my story is crystal clear now after the passage of time, though I yet struggle with some of the "why?"

God had been good to put me in great churches. Without trying to sound too pious, I never sought out any of the churches I served (ours is a congregational system with

autonomous churches), but God brought us together. I'm a good preacher. I earned a master's degree in communication before going on to seminary. Though an introvert as I understand 80% of pastors are, I'd worked hard on people skills. And I'm gifted administratively. I saw success working with committees and task groups.

But now that my ministry lay in shambles, my counselor helped me piece together the vulnerabilities I'd had without being aware of their potential devastation.

My family moved at an inopportune time for our daughter. She was in the middle of her junior year in high school. She went to a new and larger school and became a "nobody" as she later tearfully told us. There was no good reason to move, and we should've been more sensitive to her social needs.

Susan made the worst grades of her life those years. Then she went to the local junior college and failed royally. It was only later that our doctor found abnormality in a blood test and recommended we see a thyroid specialist. We discovered Susan's Graves Disease to account for a lot of her troublesome behavior since she'd never before been a troublesome child.

We also built a house and assumed more debt than I'd ever known. I remembered some of the relevant humor of the old movie, "The Money Pit." Though it was a beautiful home, I suppose I felt some uneasiness that we had such a nice place to live. I still wrestle with these feelings; akin to what I heard Larry Burkett describe when someone gave him an expensive automobile. He got their permission to "trade down" in order to prevent criticism and be an example of moderation in materialism.

We decided to move to the new church shortly after my father-in-law's death from cancer. Diane traveled and spend several days each week with her family for seven months. The search committee's call came one week after his funeral. We probably weren't in the best frame of mind to make a major decision. Then my mother's cancer was diagnosed just after the move. She died within seven weeks.

And then, as Paul said, there was the "care of the churches," or in my case, the church.

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*I'm not a stupid person, but I was very stupid.*

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I worked very hard in the church, as I'd always done, but didn't seem to be making much progress. I was burdened with what President G.H.W. Bush called the "vision thing." I later learned through some inventories that my style had always been that of manager rather than leader. So it was normal that I chafed when people asked me so frequently, "Pastor, what's

your vision for our church?" In my previous church in a city torn by racial strife there wasn't a problem focusing on what the church ought to be. But I had difficulty now trying to discover God's will and be a confident vision-caster.

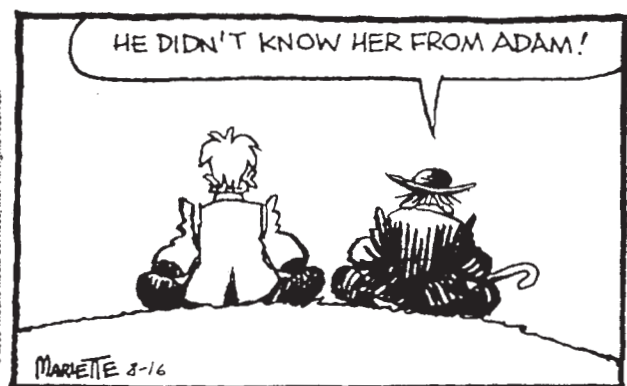
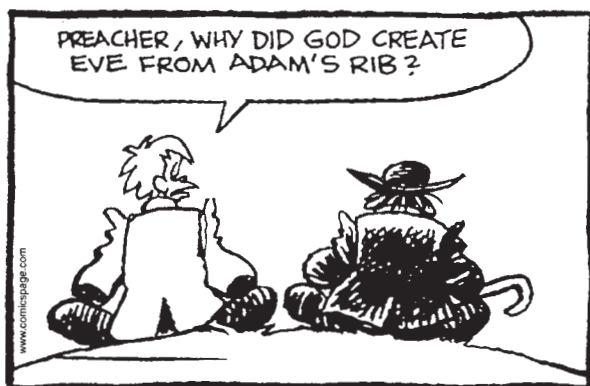
In the two and one-half years I served in the new church we went through four staff searches, requiring endless meetings with search committees and prospects, and one staff defection. One of our ministers began meeting secretly with a few members who wanted to start a "seeker" church. Our church wasn't inclined to sponsor such a work at that time, but this group made their plans over several months, then announced their intentions and asked our blessing.

It was just after we'd dealt with the unsanctioned mission that my relationship with Sherrie began. A woman our church was trying to help had rebuffed her. The shock of the lady's hostility reduced her to hysterics. Another church member brought her to my office and said, "Please talk to her." I did. Thus began a counseling relationship that brought devastation.

Over the next weeks I found I enjoyed talking with Sherrie. She was bright and funny and complimentary. Our counseling relationship became an inappropriate friendship. I fell for her like a foolish junior high schooler. I knew better. This is one of the continuing mysteries I deal with. As I've often said to friends, I'm not a stupid person, but I was very stupid.

My counselor tried to help explain my foolishness by enumerating my vulnerabilities. And he chided me for abandoning my role as counselor. "When you began to talk with Sherrie about your family problems, she became your counselor. This is dangerous."

Yes, it was. Diane and I weren't handling our family problems too well. We snapped at each other and didn't have much of a relationship. I was away most days and nights





doing church business. I was on a mission, I thought, and her mission was to take care of the house and children. I neglected my family for the benefit of my congregational family. How foolish I was!

Diane asked me later how I'd been able to stand in the pulpit week-by-week and proclaim God's word while living in immorality. I do believe pastors must proclaim the full truth whether we've achieved it fully in our lives or not. For example, we preach about anger management and forgiveness even when we have a hard time doing this ourselves. But I remember many times falling of my face before God and asking for deliverance. Why didn't it come? Was I trapped in sin or insincere in my pleas? I'm not sure. I saw this inconsistency and began talking with a vocational counselor. She was surprised that I wanted out of ministry when all my aptitude tests pointed to ministry. Of course I'd not told her the whole story.

Though Sherrie and I had broken off the relationship some weeks before, she began to talk of the affair to others. I don't know why. I called church leaders together and told them the truth. It was a tearful session and each man assured me he'd treat the revelation with confidentiality and prayer.

Twenty-four hours later the situation worsened. The chairman of the board called and asked me to meet him that night. "The full board will meet tomorrow night, and we need your resignation," he said sternly. The same man told me several days later to have my belongings out of the church by the weekend or he'd come with others and put my books on the street. This was one of the men who prayed with me and hugged me a few hours before.

What happened?

It was weeks later before I knew the story. Joe phoned our state denomination's headquarters the day after my confession. He talked with the minister whose office handled church leadership and resumes. Joe asked what the church should do. The state minister talked about love, support and restoration. "What would most churches do?" Joe asked. "Surgical separation," the minister responded, "swift and sure."

The minister himself later told me about this conversation. Whereas he insisted he was being honest, I insisted he ought to be more careful with his counsel. "Surgical separation" became Joe's mantra, and he used this often in those terrible days dealing with me. In addition to his decision about my library and office possessions, he demanded I rewrite my letter of resignation and that he read it to the church while I sat passively by.

The full board meeting took too long. In full confession mode I spoke from my heart to the men for more than an hour. It was months later that I read Gordon MacDonald's story of brokenness, "Restoring Your Broken World."<sup>1</sup> In the preface he wrote a disclaimer. It's not my purpose to give graphic details of my sin, he insisted, but only to write words

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of encouragement to others. Though I didn't give the board graphic details, I did tell them more than was necessary. I've learned that in addition to this full confession mode, I was probably in shock and not thinking clearly.

I did another foolish thing that night. Diane and I had been seeing a counselor for some time, though I'd not been completely candid with him. I saw him the afternoon before the board meeting.

"Restoration is the Christian alternative," he insisted. "If you don't bring it up, those men probably won't think about this option. But if you do, yours might be a congregation of grace."

I called a church in another state that had gone through restoration with their pastor, and got the name of a contact person from the church secretary. I gave this information to the board, but it was fruitless for me to talk about my own restoration. In my denomination, restoration is rare among pastors. I knew of only this one case out-of-state. My denomination practices "surgical separation."

Herein is another problem erring pastors face—we have no advocate. If a church member or a staff member stumbles, the pastor becomes their advocate. He can suggest a week of prayer, or that the staffer be put on leave while the board thought through possible courses of action or some other option. In my case, an untrained layman was in charge and he wanted me out pronto.

I discovered conflicting messages from my congregation in the days following. Joe told me not to come back ever again, but my children's Sunday School teachers called and told them they were welcomed and wanted. The board assured me of their love and prayers, but only one of the 21 board members came to see us in the months ahead.

A board member from our former church drove a long distance to take me to lunch and tell me he loved me. He was a man of hardened racial prejudice, and we often disagreed in the past. Strange that he would be such a caring counselor that day!

I suppose second to my shock at being an instant "leper" to the church I'd poured so much of my life into was the ostracism I felt from my fellow pastors. One pastor came and took me to lunch and offered consolation. A handful called. Most ignored me. One pastor friend told me candidly that my story was the "talk of the state." The vast majority of those talking about me never talked to me.

I saw a former professor from my college several months later. I'd had this man in churches several times for special Bible studies. "Steve," he said, "I meant to write you a letter." That's all he ever said and did for me.

I did one thing right in those days following my resignation. Three laymen in the church continued to ask me what they could do to help. I asked these three to be a support group for me and I naively asked them for six weeks. We met together for two years. They're heroes in my story, for these

men loved me, advised me, encouraged me and made reference calls for me in those months. And they did this though some in the church accused them of planning a *coup d'etat*, intending to bring me back as pastor!

There's another hero in my story—Diane. She was devastated by my confession. I offered to leave, but after thinking this over one night, she announced, "I've loved you since I was 14 years old. Somehow we'll get through this."

I learned much too late that she was the superior woman in every way.

Diane and I did disagree on moving. We put our house on the market, and she wanted to leave town. I insisted it would be foolish and disruptive for our children to move now and potentially move soon again when I found work. I won the argument, though I had no idea we'd remain for two years. I had to learn to hold my head up as a forgiven sinner when meeting former church members in the town. This was hard. It was hard for Diane, too, though she'd not messed up like I had.

For two years I worked two menial jobs, met with the three laymen and pursued two tracks of employment: the "secular" and ministry-related. I was often disappointed in both. The business world saw me as having been a pastor for 25 years, and the ministry world saw me as damaged goods.

My support group and I often joked about there being no "handbook" for us. And there wasn't. Advice from my denomination was conflicting. I adopted the practice early on to write a letter explaining the story when getting a resume request, just as one advisor suggested. Most often I'd hear nothing from those groups again. We decided later for me to try to share the story in person whenever possible. As another denominational leader said, "You need to look them in the eye and they need to see you don't have horns growing out of your head."

After some months of my "exile," the state minister who's distinguished himself by speaking "surgical separation" to Joe suggested I expand my support group by asking several pastor friends to join us. "You'll be asking them for a major commitment," he said, "but you need a major commitment from them."

It was this expanded group that saw me through to at least partial restoration. One of the ministers was a trustee

for a Christian college, and he lobbied the president to talk with me about a faculty position. Remember that M.A. in communication? It paved the way for this assignment, and the job was tailored to include one religion course each semester. I was placed on the campus worship committee, and now chair that group. It's my job to supervise weekly chapel worship on our campus.

And God gave me another congregation to serve.

After moving to the college, an elder from a church in the city met me and invited me to preach. I was a bit taken back! He explained their pastor has left a few months previous, and they'd had good experience using teachers from our school to preach. Though not a member of their denomination, I accepted and remained for nearly four years!

I met with the elders early on and told them my story, also giving them the telephone numbers of the three laymen who'd stuck by me for so long. They declined to investigate further. One elder, the one who'd originally invited me to preach, thanked me for my honesty. Then he said, "We believe you can help us here at this time, and one day I hope we'll be on your resume and can help you."

I was bowled over by this act of grace. God used this wonderful church to help me regain pulpit ministry. Now after more than seven years I'm a bivocational pastor at another church in my own denomination.

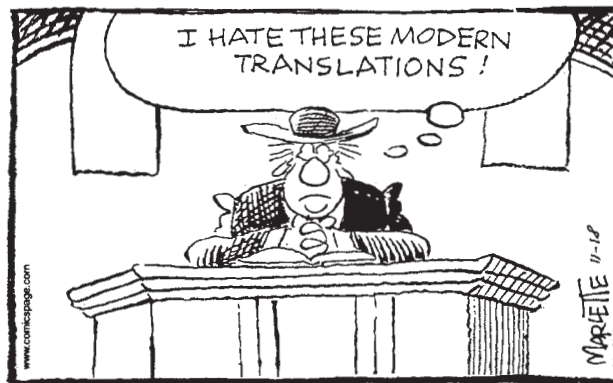
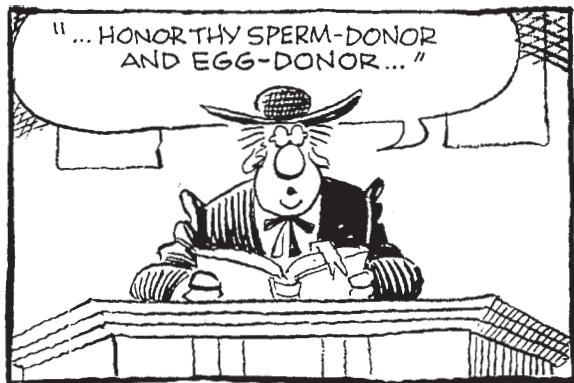
There are a number of lessons I've learned in the past several years. Perhaps these will be helpful for pastors and other ministers who read this article.

(1) Exercise care in counseling women. I was attracted to Sherrie and enjoyed talking with her. Soon she became my counselor, and the path went downhill.

Some ministers refuse to counsel women. Others insist on having a church secretary present in the office and the door open, or else limit sessions to one or two before referral. I think I could've selected one of these options and must in the days ahead.

(2) Don't neglect your family. One Christian leader insists your family members are the most important members in your church! It's so easy to ride a white horse and try to save the world and neglect our wives and children.

I realize now that so much of my time was wasted in endless meetings. I should have been wise enough to rely on the



Reagan method. One of his biographers said Reagan often told his staff, "Gentlemen, we've done all we can do today. Let's go home and enjoy our families."

And I should've recognized that the church could get by without me every now and then. I did take a week's vacation every summer, but a weekend every now and then with my wife would've helped our marriage. At the least, the church would've enjoyed hearing another preacher. At best, they'd be happy to see me back!

(3) Find a support group. Much has been written about support groups in recent years. Some find help in gathering trusted laymen in the church, while others enjoy meeting with fellow pastors. I see how valuable this resource is, and encourage every minister to meet regularly with a group for sharing and prayer.

(4) Count the cost. I heard a teacher say once that the scripture exhorts us to stand firm against all sin except sexual sin. In that instance, the Bible exhorts us to flee, not stand firm. Sexual sin has devastating consequences for years to come. The best option is to run from it.

Ministers must realize part of the cost of sexual sin is that you'll not be allowed to exercise your ministry gifts in most churches. These doors are closed, at least for a time. And many ministers, like me, find it frustrating to get connected in another vocation. There's nothing wrong with honest work, but we did not spend half our lives in school to substitute teach in public school or to flip hamburgers, especially when God called us to serve him through his church.

I realize there are differences of opinion about restoration to ministry. One noted Bible teacher insists this isn't possible since the scripture doesn't give an example of such. I beg to differ. We do many things not described in scripture: Sunday School, hymnals, Vacation Bible School, church gymnasiums, annual budgets, etc. I believe restoration is a biblical principle (Gal. 6: 1- 2), and I don't find in scripture any roadblock to God's grace (with the possible exception of apostasy in Hebrews, but that's another story!)

It's rare that the church where the sin was committed be the restorative agent, but there are other people and other congregations who can and will do this.

Of course the finest option is to remain pure and do unhindered ministry to the glory of God.

(5) Be an instrument of compassion. Henri Nouwen popularized the concept of the "wounded healer."<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it's true that those who've suffered can be the best encouragers. But even those who've not stumbled in ministry can be compassionate toward those who have. And this is desperately needed.

My denomination doesn't do a good job helping those who face involuntary termination, or who fail in the quest for holiness. That's why I've determined the rest of my life to do all I can to offer help to other ministers who hurt. I've worked with the Ministering to Ministers Foundation in several of their Wellness Retreats, and I've found this fulfilling.<sup>3</sup> I've received several invitations to tell my story to pastors' groups. I've done this once, and haven't yet decided if I want to do this in the future—in other words, to be "known" for my story. Remember that there's no handbook? Some have encouraged me to tell my story loud and often, and others suggest I close that chapter and move on. I'm still struggling with what I need to do in this regard.

This article is another step in getting a helpful word to others who face the same temptation.

My life has changed forever. "The story" is mine and will have to be shared with future employers. I'll never escape it. Diane and I still work hard at having a healthy marriage. My children don't have much interest in the church—they say they didn't see much Christian love in our church when I stumbled, though I'm sure down deep they remain disappointed in me as well.

My parting word to you is it's not worth it! All the heart-break and disappointment isn't worth the few moments of joy from a forbidden relationship. I pray that you'll continue resolute in your commitment to be "pure and faultless in God's sight" (2 Pet. 3: 14, GNB). ■

<sup>1</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Rebuilding Your Broken World* (Nashville: Nelson, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Ministering to Ministers Foundation, 2641 Cromwell Road, Richmond, VA 23235 (804.320.6463).



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# The Limits of Kindness

By William H. Willimon, Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Christian Ministry Duke University

**Note:** Although first published in *The Christian Century* on April 14, 1982 (when the author was pastor of Northside United Methodist in Greenville, SC), these words are amazingly relevant for our day.

The late Carlyle Marney was fond of saying that he had a “private Jew” whom he kept close by him to “keep my religion honest.” Fortunately for my religion, Beth Israel Synagogue is next door to my church. The other day over coffee, the rabbi was complaining about the obviously anti-Jewish statement made by one of our local politicians.

“Well,” I said, “you’ve got to remember that this man has limited education and background. I’m sure he sincerely believes that what he said was right.”

“So what difference does his sincerity make if what he did is wrong?” asked the rabbi. “Is it still possible for a Christian to be wrong, or is it now only a sin to be insincere?”

The rabbi had me there. Is it still permissible for Christians to question people’s behavior? There was a time when Christians wanted to be obedient and faithful. Lately we are content to be sensitive. Once we aspired to justice and righteousness. Our present ethical concern is that we be kind.

This insight came home to me when a group from our own denomination was preparing for our church’s General Conference. Since homosexuality was to be debated, delegates were studying the issue. But their study quickly fizzled when one delegate read a letter from the father of a homosexual son who claimed that the church’s questions about the gay lifestyle had made the young man so uncomfortable in his local congregation that he had dropped out. With that, a number of pastors urged that compassion be shown to homosexual Christians, and the discussion ended. After all, what Christian wants to be accused of unkindness?

One reason that we seemingly cannot get a good argument going, even a polite discussion of pressing ethical issues is that Christian ethics has been reduced to a matter of good intentions. We don’t ask people to think clearly anymore; we simply ask them to be sincere. The proverbial road to hell may be paved with good intentions, but good intentions are good enough for contemporary believers.

THIS ETHICAL IMPASSE has many sources. It stems partly from the sincere attempt of Christians to show the same straightforward compassion that our Lord showed people who were caught in ethical binds. We are not to throw the first stone at brothers and sisters. God is the judge, not you or I.

But let’s be honest: some of our problems stem from the human penchant to exonerate ourselves from the tough task of behaving like Christians. We do not cast stones because it’s safer that way. In the resulting melee, we might be hit. It’s

easier to be kind. Granted the appropriateness of Christian compassion, I think we must also admit the questionable motivations for our current appeals to kindness.

I have noted in myself and in other pastors the tendency to reduce all ethical questions to pastoral care questions. We cannot discuss divorce without thinking of the woman in our congregation who has finally summoned the strength to divorce her abusive husband. It is well that we put particular faces on particular ethical issues. But there’s a place, in ethical discourse, for generalization and objectification for the purpose of making balanced judgments that adhere to our dominant convictions.

How to care for Jane Smith and how to help her make her own decisions are pastoral-care concerns. Anything we say about divorce in general must be related to her specific situation. But surely part of Jane Smith’s dilemma is how her decision relates to who she is as a Christian. How are we to offer her pastoral care without some clarity about what values are at stake in her decision, what this decision will do to her as a Christian, and how this decision will affect those whom she owes Christian love?

In this instance, as I read my church’s statement on divorce, I read a masterful piece of equivocation. One of my parishioners read it, hoping to find guidance on whether to seek a divorce or not. He summed up the statement this way: “It says that divorce is not good, but divorce is sometimes good if the person decides that it is good to do.” What help is that?

Many of us were taught to conceive of pastoral care as a value-free enterprise - skillful compassion practiced in a Rogerian, value-neutral universe. We were to counsel people to find their own values, taking care not to preach or to scold. Fortunately, pastoral psychologists like Don Browning (*The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*) have recently recognized that a major source of people’s psychological discomfort is their moral confusion. Browning urges pastors to use the resources of the church’s tradition and values to minister to troubled persons seeking to find order for their lives.

Good pastoral care does not preclude ethical considerations. My personal dilemmas are often dilemmas of right and wrong rather than simple questions about my feelings. Some of us feel guilty because we are guilty. No amount of pastoral reassurance that guilt is outmoded or that I am, after all, basically nice should prematurely relieve me of my legitimate burdens.

In his *Pastoral Care in the Black Church*, Ed Wimberly indicts the value-free, narcissistic, radically individualized pastoral care that we have often practiced. Wimberly notes that it is difficult to get a black pastor to believe that any care worthy of the term pastoral can sidestep questions of what is biblically right and wrong. Kindness, Wimberly suggests to me, is one of those convenient cop-outs to avoid the burden of doing simple justice.

THANK GOD that I have more to go on than my own anguish in confronting an ethical dilemma. Consider this reconstructed verbatim dialogue from a student pastor who was asked by a parishioner, "What does out church think about premarital sex?"

Pastor: Well, the really important thing is how you feel about it.

Parishioner: I guess I feel OK. I mean, so far my experience has been OK. But I thought the church was against sex before marriage. Isn't the Bible against it?

Pastor: You've got to remember, the Bible is historically conditioned. I think you've got to take your specific situation into account.

Parishioner: So as far as you are concerned, sex before marriage is OK, depending on the situation. I've always thought that the church was against it for some reason.

Pastor: Well, the important thing is the individual relationship. Is the relationship open, loving and trusting? I'm sure that you have given this some thought.

Later, in a class discussion, students noted that the woman was asking a simple, straightforward, ethical and informational question: What does out church believe about premarital sex? The pastor refuses to answer her question. Instead he tells her that the real question is her own feelings in the matter. Then he repeats vague platitudes about the virtues of openness and trust. Without giving even the slightest nod to the church's traditional opinions on this matter, the pastor reassures the parishioner that whatever she did must be right.

This pastoral attitude is curious at a time when the church fancies itself as socially concerned. Pastors feel qualified to make pronouncements on the ethics of nuclear power, racial justice, ecological problems and disarmament, but are rendered silent when asked how two people are to behave in a bedroom. Thus Stanley Hauerwas calls us "public legalists and private antinomians." We prescribe all sorts of moral behavior for the crowd from the safe anonymity of public policy. But we have no idea what to say to a parishioner who is neglecting his children. Last month I preached sermons that mentioned the problems of world hunger, private racist schools, and increased military spending. But I quietly passed over Jesus' sermon in Matthew 19:3-9. I did this despite my knowledge that at least half of my people who talk to me about their divorces invariably mention Jesus' words on the matter. It is easier for me to condemn the sins of Washington, D.C., than those in Greenville, South Carolina.

You see, I want to be kind. Am I my brother's or sister's keeper? Besides, we're all trying to do the best we can. We're not so much deciding and acting as we are coping, we say. And who would be so cruel to suggest that I can be any better than I am? How could you know the agony, which I've gone through to justify my life, to exonerate my behavior toward other people? What would you offer me in exchange for my self-justification?

IT IS MORALLY fatal for us pastors to let ourselves or our people off the ethical hook this easily. In our weaker moments, we are fond of portraying ourselves as submissive spectators, victims of the grinding cogs of fate. Who would be so insensitive as to question our motives or the results of our actions? We're just getting by.

Without adopting a Promethean view of human nature, we can acknowledge that we do shape our destinies and ourselves through our choices. I may choose to avoid acknowledgment of the values by which I live, but I cannot ignore that these values are forming me into a certain kind of person. I must not expect coherence and depth in my life if my



only value is experience. I need not wonder why I am lonely if my only criterion of judgment is “What will work for me?”

So a responsible pastor might say to the parishioner in the situation cited above, “It’s not only a matter of right and wrong; it’s also a matter of who you want to be at age 64. It’s also the social-activist matter of ‘what type of society do you wish to live in by 1984?’”

I must be more honest about the sources of my presumed “kindness.” Pastoral self-protection may be the chief motive behind my paternalistic (or maternalistic) protection of my parishioners from ethical questions of value, means and ends. Dislocation from a particular community and that community’s dominant convictions, visions and norms keep the ethical life sealed within the safe confines of individual egos, individually derived values and individual concerns.

The ethics of kindness represents, for many of us, the slogans of our old Protestant pietism at their subjective worst: It Doesn’t Matter What You Believe or What You Do as Long as You Are Sincere.

I DO NOT KNOW whether the politician who uttered the anti-Jewish statement was sincere. I do not know whether he holds Christian convictions. I do know this: his sincerity (or lack of it) does not determine the goodness of his actions. Nor does his kindness (of lack of it) toward his actions determine the goodness of what he did. His actions, like mine or yours, are not beyond question.

Fortunately, God has not left us alone, victims of our own illusions and devices, trapped in the present moment. Nor are we the first generation to face tough decisions. Your kindness toward me in allowing me to pursue my illusions of self-interest may inflict untold cruelty on others. We are all in this together.

Our decisions either confirm or weaken the values which we hold. Our actions not only shape the world we live in; they also shape us.

Nobody told us it would be easy. Despite my best intentions, it is still possible for me to inflict great damage on other people. Despite my declarations of ignorance in many moral matters, I know more about right and wrong than I admit. Most of the time, I dare not act on what I know. The right is no less right because it costs me something. So call me to account, correct me if you can, and urge me to be bold in living out my vocation. That would be kindness indeed.

If kindness alone were enough, there would have been no cross. Jesus would have formed a sensitivity group and urged us to share our feelings, or a support group where we could affirm each other. Knowing full well the limits of humanity, the seriousness of our sin, and the depths of evil, he formed the church and charted a different way. ■

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## What Did You Say Your Name Was?

By Hal Haralson, Attorney  
Austin, Texas

I was signing books in the Rockdale Public Library on November 18. I had told stories from *Gentle Mercies: Stories of Faith in Faded Blue Jeans* to six different classes of elementary school children that afternoon.

The children sat in wide-eyed fascination as I told them the “Story of the Double Hearts” and the “Sears and Roebuck Christmas.”

Samantha entered the library tugging on her father’s hand. I recognized the beautiful ten-year-old girl from one of the classes.

She wanted a book!

Samantha’s father didn’t look too excited about this transaction. His boots, felt hat and faded jeans indicated that he spent most of his time in a pickup or on a horse. The Rockdale Public Library was not his usual hangout.

After the book was signed, Samantha went to the desk to talk to the librarian.

I struck up a conversation with Samantha’s father and told him I grew up on a ranch in West Texas. I told him the story of Jay Nixon (*Gentle Mercies*, 73) the cowboy whose prayer was laced with profanity.

He liked that and we both felt comfortable with each other.

Then he told me a story of his own.

“I was foreman on a ranch near Houston owned by Wayne Fisher.” (Having practiced law in Texas for 30 years I knew Fisher to be one of the top trial lawyers in the nation.)

“Mr. Fisher was going to a cattle sale to buy a bull and I drove the truck so we could take him back to Fisher’s ranch.

This cattle sale was really high dollar. There were two big tents filled with food and wealthy ranchers. The other tent held the auction ring where a bull had just sold for over \$100,000.

I wasn’t dressed for the occasion and headed for the barn. A pot-bellied stove knocked the chill off the air, and I stood warming myself.

A cowboy came up and began warming himself by the fire. His well-worn boots and faded jeans matched the weathered felt hat he was wearing.

He was friendly and asked where I was from

I told him I worked for the Fisher ranch and had driven our truck so we could take the bull back that Mr. Fisher intended to buy.

'How are you?' I replied.  
 'You come to buy cattle?'  
 'Nope,' was his taciturn reply, 'I live here.'  
 'Then you must work on this ranch?'  
 'Well, I guess you could say that. I own it. I didn't introduce myself. My name is Nolan Ryan.'  
 'Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ryan. I'm Jonathan Muston.'  
 We continued talking until it was time to load the truck. Ryan knew his cattle and was obviously a good rancher.  
 'How long have you had the ranch?'  
 'Bout five years. Bought it after I retired.'  
 'What did you do before you retired?'  
 'I played a little baseball.' Ryan answered.  
 I told Mr. Fisher about meeting the owner of the ranch. 'Man's name is Nolan Ryan.'  
 'You don't know who Nolan Ryan is?'  
 'Well, I know he's a rancher with some pretty expensive cattle. I just met him. He seemed like a pretty good ole boy to me.'  
 Mr. Fisher had a look of surprise on his face. 'Nolan Ryan is the most famous living professional baseball player in the world.'  
 'How about that.' I wasn't impressed. I'm a cowboy and don't spend much time reading the sports page. Must have missed him.'  
 Jesus was at home with common folks. He didn't spend much time trying to impress people.  
 He stood around a fire with some cussin' fishermen. If he had said, "Peter, I wish you wouldn't use that kind of language around me," I expect Peter's reply would have been: "This job don't pay much and there's no place to stay. I think I'll go back to fishing."  
 Jesus said, "I came to save sinners," so he ran around with tax collectors, prostitutes, and rough talking fishermen.  
 There was one group of people who didn't feel comfortable around Jesus. They were Pharisees. The religious leaders of the day. He called them hypocrites.  
 I expect Jesus would have felt right at home backed up to that pot-bellied stove with Samantha's father and Nolan Ryan. ■

## Children around the world

**11 million**

will die this year before age five

**6 million**

will die of treatable or preventable diseases

**40%**

with pneumonia will not receive antibiotics

**67**

number of deaths per 1,000 live births in the year 2000

**150**

number of deaths per 1,000 live births in Africa in 2000

Source: World Health Organization

## BOOK REVIEWS

### The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity

Thomas C. Oden. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

*Reviewed by David P. Gushee,*

Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy, Union University.

Every so often a book comes along that rattles your cage, changing not just your ideas about one thing or another but the very categories you think with. This transformational experience probably has as much to do with where the reader is "located" at the time as with the content of the book. I would like to reflect in this review on why I found Tom Oden's new book, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, to be transformational. To do so I must inevitably be a bit autobiographical. Yet I hope my comments are relevant to other people with other autobiographies.

Oden's argument is crisp and clear. He claims that the modern world is fading—and with it modernist presuppositions about truth and how it may be known, and about the human condition and how it may be healed. Amidst the collapse of modernity, religious orthodoxy is making a comeback. Both Jews and Christians (and he refers respectfully to both throughout) are returning to the roots of their faith and reclaiming ancient texts, traditions, and convictions with growing confidence.

Oden defines orthodoxy as "integrated biblical teaching as interpreted in its most consensual classic period," or, more simply, "ancient consensual scriptural teaching." For Christians this "orthodoxy" includes the canonical scriptures and the ancient ecumenical teaching of the church in its first five centuries. Oden describes this as "consensual" teaching in that it gained wide consent by the faithful at the time and has retained this consent over the two millennia of Christian history. Oden is interested in affirming the version of Christian faith (doctrine, morals, and spirituality) that has been believed "everywhere, always, and by all," making much of this ancient ecumenical formulation of how Christian conviction is to be tested and affirmed.

To the extent that *Rebirth* offers a polemic, it is aimed at modern ecumenical Protestantism, with its symbolic headquarters in Geneva (World Council of Churches) and New York (National Council of Churches). Oden was once a loyal part of this world, but he tells us in this book how he broke with it and why its regular heterodoxy in doctrine and ethics

must be opposed today in the name of ancient consensual scriptural teaching. He offers considerable attention to how orthodox boundaries are best marked, why they need to be marked, and the good fruit that can and might emerge if mainline Protestantism is re-centered around classic Christian orthodoxy. He points to numerous signs of a resurgence of such orthodoxy in mainline Christian circles today.

Those familiar with Oden's career, and his recent body of work, will not be surprised at these themes. The turn to "paleo-orthodoxy," as he calls it in this book and elsewhere, the return to authoritative Scripture and its patristic interpreters, the emphasis on the classic creeds, the rejection of a modernist accommodation of Scripture to the epistemological presuppositions of logical positivism and scientific rationalism, and a polemic against drifting mainline Christianity, are all familiar notes.

This book is more autobiographical than any other Oden work that I have seen. He devotes a chapter to his personal story, and as he tells it the reader sees quite clearly how important has been Oden's own search for roots, for a foundation worth standing on, for an anchorage point for theological and ethical reflection—and for *life*. Unlike some postmodern anti-foundationalists, he does believe that a foundation can still be found for certain Christian convictions. He finds it in ancient consensual scriptural teaching, the trustworthiness of which he believes is vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus. He is confident that after two thousand years (more, due to its common rooting with the even more ancient Jewish tradition), this paleo-orthodox Christianity has proven its truthfulness and its staying power. Oden will evaluate all formulations of Christian doctrine and ethics in light of both Scripture and the Fathers, and he strongly urges the rest of us to do the same.

I do not agree with everything that Oden says in this book. I am too much of a child of the Reformation to believe that the authority of Scripture and tradition can be woven together in the way that he seems to do here. (Though I very much appreciate the problems associated with the alternative "Scripture alone" position.) I seem to be more gravely disturbed than Oden by the times when even the finest Christian leaders erred badly, such as with the theological anti-Semitism of men like John Chrysostom, one of the eight patristic leaders Oden names as most authoritative. I think I must be more unhappy than Oden with the distortions introduced into Christian teaching by the accommodations to political power that were made by the church after Constantine. I want to hear more about Jesus and his centrality, the way his teachings stand in judgment over the words of church councils or any church Father, and how sadly even the best ancient creeds neglected the actual content of his proclamation.

However, Oden's proposal still makes a great deal of sense to me. It makes sense not just of the history of Christianity (and Judaism), but also of my own personal history. It helps me understand what I have meant when I have claimed to be an evangelical Christian, and what I should mean when I say that today. It also makes sense, in a tragic way, of the

internecine warfare that I have experienced as a Southern Baptist and of some of the strengths and weaknesses of my own tradition. And it helps me interpret the significance of the theological, liturgical, and ethical arguments still swirling in my Christian subculture today. I would like to make just a few brief comments about each.

Oden pictures a vast family of orthodox Christian faith. It includes historic Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. To the extent that groups within each of these traditions retain ancient consensual Christian teaching, they are kinfolk. *We* are kinfolk. In this sense, the Christian family is far wider, broader, and deeper than most of us commonly think of it as being. Those who can recite the Apostles' Creed with full integrity of conviction (and live out Christian moral norms, and worship in spirit and in truth) are all part of Christian orthodoxy. We are a family of faith.

Oden's classic (rather than "politically correct") inclusivism makes of the Christian family a big, sprawling, diverse-in-many-particulars-yet-united-in-essentials community of faith. He helps confirm my own sense of religious kinship with many different kinds of Christians and many different kinds of faith communities that I have encountered over the years. I feel at home in highly liturgical Catholic worship services (the tradition in which I was raised, by the way), in the embodied joy of the black church tradition, in the spontaneous celebration of a Pentecostal worship experience, in the rich expository preaching of a serious-minded Reformed congregation, and beyond. My spirit resonates with the spirit of deeply committed Christians in all of these traditions as we study, talk, pray, and work alongside one another. Oden's big-tent paleo-orthodoxy helps me understand how I can feel at home in all of these settings, and why I should have little hesitation in doing so.

But it also helps me understand why there are Christian subcultures (churches and denominations) in which I cannot feel at home. In some cases it is because they have left classic consensual Christianity behind. In others it is because they have narrowed the boundaries of Christian identity beyond what is warranted.

I remember being unable to attend worship services after the first few weeks of my time in residence at Union Seminary (New York) as a doctoral student in 1987. The reason was simply that the liturgy and proclamation were too often idiosyncratic and bizarre, well beyond the boundary lines of a recognizable Christian orthodoxy. I was not a real strict boundary-marker at the time but my spirit knew that basic boundary lines were being transgressed. I found community there among a small group of orthodox Christians (I now know what to call them) who had a similar sense of where the boundary lines needed to be drawn.

I remember a first (and only) visit to an American Baptist Sunday School class outside Philadelphia in 1990. It was near Christmastime, and my wife and I were shocked to see that the focus of the class that day was to pour derision on those rubes (like us, it turned out) still ignorant enough to believe that Jesus was born of a *literal virgin* (of all things!).

Where the inspiration of the Scriptures is rejected; where



the authority of the Bible for doctrine and life is rejected; where modernist presuppositions overwhelm historic faith in an avalanche of revision and derision—in places like this classic consensual Christianity has been lost, and there is no place for me.

For a long time I thought that this made me an *evangelical*. Evangelicals often define themselves as Bible-believing Christians, traditional Christians, conservative Christians, or some more sophisticated formulation. Oftentimes they want to evaluate thinkers and movements as to whether they are evangelical, or evangelical *enough*. Catholics and Eastern Orthodox are not counted as evangelical because they are not Protestants. Mainliners are usually not counted as evangelical because they are not conservative enough. And the historic black churches are often not counted as evangelical because they are not interested in the label.

Oden has helped me see that what matters is not whether someone is “an evangelical,” or “evangelical enough,” but whether they are orthodox biblical Christians. Evangelicalism is best understood as the name given to a variety of reform movements within historic Protestantism, beginning with the Reformation itself. These include Pietism, Puritanism, Wesleyanism, and others. What these diverse movements have in common is a desperate desire to renew Protestant Christianity along scriptural lines. In other words, they all intend a return to orthodoxy, whether in doctrine or in practice, or both. The “evangelical movement,” then, is best understood as the handmaiden of the Spirit in returning the churches to orthodox Christian faith. I now see that I want to be known primarily as an orthodox biblical Christian, not an evangelical.

But do I still want to be known as a Baptist, or even, dare we say it, a “Southern Baptist”? What does Baptist identity have to do with orthodox Christianity? As I understand the origins of the Baptists, both sides of the family tree (Anabaptist and Reformed) originally can be identified as belonging to reform-minded (evangelical) Protestantism. That makes them a part of historic Christian orthodoxy. And to this day, most Baptists retain such an identity and often a way of life to go with it. This is why I feel so at home in most Baptist churches both here and around the world.

If Oden is right, it is more important to be orthodox than Baptist, or Southern Baptist. If a Baptist body ceases to be orthodox it is important to dissociate from it and find one that is orthodox. As a corollary, those seeking to move Baptist churches (or colleges, or seminaries) back securely to orthodox Christian identity when they have drifted outside the boundaries are doing valuable work.

The great denominational tragedy we have experienced as Southern Baptists, as I see it, is that our conservative-moderate political war obscured rather than clarified the legitimate struggle to retain or strengthen historic Christian orthodoxy among us. How?

- Some institutions and individuals that remained within the bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy were treated as if they were heterodox because the vision of normative

Christianity that was imposed was far narrower than historic Christian orthodoxy itself.

- The tactics that were used to bring about the denominational transition sometimes transgressed the ecclesiological/moral standards of “ancient consensual Christian teaching,” thus creating an inevitable resentment and a political reaction that obscured the legitimate theological/ethical issues.
- This resentment made it all but impossible for orthodox reformists in some settings to make needed changes in institutions that had either drifted outside of historic Christian orthodoxy or were at risk of doing so—any effort to arrest such developments was (and is) labeled “fundamentalist,” when in fact all it is, is “orthodox”—or for that matter, biblical.

There is another level at which Oden’s account of orthodoxy speaks to what it means to be Baptist—and to a real hunger in my own heart. This has to do with our profound disconnection from the historic liturgy, prayers, calendar, hymnody, artwork, and other traditions of the broader orthodox Christian family. When Oden speaks of praying the historic prayers, singing the historic songs, participating in the historic liturgy, all I can think of is the impoverished worship experience so common in our “three songs and a sermon” Sunday morning experience. That quite obvious impoverishment has stimulated its own reaction in the contemporary worship movement. I worship and serve at such a “contemporary” church, and certainly consider it an improvement. But as one who knows how rich the rhythms of ancient worship, ancient hymnody, and the ancient Christian calendar can be, sometimes I am all too aware that in light of the riches of the tradition we are serving our people thin gruel indeed.

Then when I go to work on Monday morning, and learn that the big argument among some on our campus is whether to take a Calvinist or Arminian stance on human freedom and divine sovereignty, or whether to reform church order entirely along Calvinist lines or instead stay with traditional Baptist polity, I am struck once again by the narrowness of vision that would make these *the* make or break issues for contemporary theology and church life. As if the ecclesiological conflicts of scholastic Protestantism are the heart of what matters in the entire historic Christian tradition.

Oden is right about many things, one of them being that when we choose to dwell in the precincts of historic Christian orthodoxy we learn what matters and what doesn’t, what is non-negotiable and what isn’t, where the historic boundary stones are placed and where they are not. We are able to understand small side arguments in the grand Christian tradition for what they are—and great confessional showdowns for what *they* are. We learn to avoid the kind of “broadmindedness” that sells the faith for a mess of (post) modern pottage, as well as the kind of “traditionalism” that unnecessarily slams the door on great numbers of orthodox faithful.

I am grateful to God for the journey he has given to Tom Oden, and I commend its literary fruit to any willing to pay attention. ■

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# Change Across Culture: A Narrative Approach to Social Transformation

Bruce Bradshaw, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

*Reviewed by Ronnie Wayne Hood II,*  
Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies;  
LeTourneau University, Longview, TX

**B**ruce Bradshaw of Bethel College has brought intelligence and eyewitness experience to the forum of social-conscious Christians who are concerned with devastating social problems around the world. He proposes a more efficient and reverent way to confront “poverty, injustice, corruption, and violence” across cultures. Bradshaw, past representative of several of the most prominent international development agencies, has assisted in numerous of the most devastating social and economic tragedies. He proposes no new ethical theory but craftily and eloquently corrects western views of international social problems while overhauling and applying narrative ethics to dilemmas around the world.

The methodology of *Change Across Cultures* rests upon the idea that cultural narratives, “stories of social structures that comprise communities,” have tremendous impact upon how scripture-based ministries should approach other cultures. The cultural narratives of westerners differ from those of other cultures to the extent that tragic misunderstanding occurs often and the social arm of the western church is paralyzed. The specific culprit, according to Bradshaw, is a biblical interpretation that is bound to a western worldview and its moral assumptions. An individualistic gospel, absolutism, and economic quick fixes have resulted in numerous cultural bloopers.

Bradshaw began correcting westerners’ errors in cross-cultural ethics by illuminating erroneous perceptions of the Scriptures. Predominantly viewed as a catalogue of propositions and narratives, the scriptures must be viewed as a meta-narrative—a transportable narrative which offers central values to empower people. At this juncture, negative reactions against narrative ethics were anticipated by Bradshaw. The typical charge of “relativism” was countered. Actually, asserted Bradshaw, absolutism in biblical interpretation is more pronged to error, falling unknowingly into relativism being guided by propositions found in scripture which are actually only the reflection of the interpreter’s own “hierarchy of values” (20). Narrative ethics, Bradshaw continued, virtually removes the danger of relativism as scriptural interpretation is grounded to the cultural narrative of Scripture’s author and lifts application from central and dominant values in redemption and reconciliation.

The main trust of Bradshaw’s corrective in cross-cultural ethics is a thorough explanation of the impact of cultural narratives upon behavior. Understanding the reasons for behaviors, self concepts, basic ontology, and sources of values in a culture is the central task of an ethicist and spring from the culture’s own stories. Because social problems are often linked to a culture’s own cultural narratives, healing is delayed until ministries discover these narratives. Further, the only efficient way to bring transformation is to fully understand and carefully shift elements in their cultural narratives. Too many ministries have caused only conflict by applying absolutist principles which manytimes contradict embedded values in the stories which empower cultures.

Bradshaw illustrated the validity of his ethical theory in various cross-cultural ministry dilemmas. Agriculturalists in Africa who multiplied one farmer’s crop yield only upset the people by ignorance of limited good. Certain villagers figured that spirits had stolen from their crops to bring greater yield in the one. Another illustration addressed the AIDS epidemic in East Africa. The source of the epidemic was partly due to customs of sexual relations between in-laws and others of kin. Absolutism proved ineffective. According to Bradshaw, such social problems are addressed by allowing metanarratives of the Scriptures, especially stories of faithfulness, redemption, and reconciliation, to shift the empowering cultural narratives of these communities.

Three dominant applications follow from Bradshaw’s methodology. First, ministries must emphasize redemption and especially the ultimate power of Christ to liberate. Because many needy cultures in the world have strong, permeated beliefs in a “middle zone” of spirits, double souls, and personal spirits, attention must be given to specifying and communicating the most practical motifs of redemption found in the Scriptures. Bradshaw asserts that of four dominant salvific motifs of the New Testament (ransom, substitution, moral influence, and *Christus Victor*), *Christus Victor*, with its mixture of love and liberation is most suitable in transforming communities ridden with folk theology and resultant oppression. Second, many cultures stricken with poverty must transform age-old beliefs that goods are supplied through nature, spirit, reciprocity, and exchange. In a global economy such beliefs can lead to exploitation. The author is straightforward in lending validity to Weber’s thesis and the protestant work ethic reaching back to Calvin and the Reformation. In a global economy goods are supplied through skills and technology, along with discipline in hard work and thrift. To promote this ethic exploited peoples must facilitate Small Enterprise Development (SED), small businesses, believing that God works even in the mundane structures of society. Third, churches are safe havens from in which the needy find community, unification of the symbols of belief, and shared values and consequentially are central to cultural transformation. Oftentimes, churches alone offer the sense of protection and support while liberationists confront the powers that be.

*Change Across Cultures* is not an “easy read” but an

intensely sociological and passionately hermeneutical treatment of international social and economic problems. Certain early interpretations of Scripture, i.e., Luke 19:11-27 parable of the talents, liberationist in tone, stretch the interpretive imagine. Bradshaw's sociological acumen is impressive and shapes all the essential arguments of the book. Most alluring are Bradshaw's enlightening illustrations, most from eye-witness experience, which communicate his genuine passion for healing unfortunate communities around the world. The book is necessary reading for anyone who desires to approach transforming cultures with care and precision. Two issues could bring even greater clarity and interest: a further treatise on facilitating a "power encounter" among peoples with the "middle zone" without staging an actual "power encounter" (an itching point among missiologists for which Bradshaw offered no logical or practical direction). Last, how responsible are western countries to assist in Small Enterprise Development? How responsible are exploited souls, whether or not intentionally exploited, to pull themselves out of their predicament? These same issues in terms of justice and equality, dominant in the late stages of the American Civil Rights Movement, smolder today and may find solution in the context of cross-cultural ethics. ■

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## The Christian Right in American Politics

John C. Green, Mark J. Rozel, Clyde Wilcox, eds. Wash., DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 2003.

*By Darold Morgan,*  
President Emeritus of the Annuity Board, SBC

Simply stated, this is must reading for the Christian who is interested in politics and ethics! The galvanizing date which launched the Christian Right movement in the United States is 1973. *Rowe vs. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion, is the reason! What we have thirty years later is a major force on the American political scene, nationally and locally, and one directly related to the Republican Party.

Though this book is overpriced (\$44.95), probably due to a multiplicity of authors, it will help immeasurably the serious student of American politics to understand how this strange phenomenon was launched and also why it is such a force to be reckoned with today. The book is a survey, state by state, of the Christian Right, which is an "umbrella" term used to refer to a large group of individuals and movements. The states studied are South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Florida, Michigan, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Colorado,

California, Oregon, Washington, and Maine.

References abound to the influence in this crusade of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. The intent of the book is not related directly to these leaders, but their place in this crusade is abundantly apparent. Other names constantly appearing are Ralph Reed, Richard Vigurie, Paul Weyrich, Cal Thomas, and Gary Bauer.

Some of the organizations involved in the larger patterns of the Christian Right include the now defunct Moral Majority (initiated by Jerry Falwell), The Christian Coalition, James Dobson's Focus on the Family, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, and multiple numbers of "Right to Life" groups in these various states. It is genuinely fascinating to see how these highly individualistic groups more or less coalesce into a loosely organized national Christian Right organization. All are ultimately committed to the Republican Party (locally and nationally) with a consuming commitment to change local, state, and national policy.

Beginning with the key date of 1973 and the abortion issue, the Christian Right movement has expanded to include many other debatable ethical concerns—i.e., gay rights, school prayer, home schooling, vouchers, evolution vs. creationism, feminism, and gambling. The key concern and almost always the basic rallying point is still the "Right to Life" issue, which has produced an extraordinarily deep commitment nationwide to the ultimate reversal of "Rowe Vs Wade" by any means that will accomplish this goal.

All of the authors are professors in American universities. All of the chapters are very well researched, resulting in a veritable gold mine of primary materials for the interested student in the American political venue. It is surprising how diverse the Christian Right is state by state, and yet how unified it is on their major commitment to influence their state GOP. For example, the Kansas Christian Right has made the evolution vs. creationism issue a focal point, which of course, has turned out to be a peculiar source of embarrassment to the state. A key issue in Texas has been the choice of public school textbooks. Oregon's issue is the highly controversial assisted suicide issue. Colorado gained national awareness over gay-rights legislation, later declared to be unconstitutional. But the unifying and cohesive commitment in each state has been that of abortion. Family values, conservative political action, deep distrust of the national media, control of the local Republican precincts—all point to an exceptionally vigorous, highly effective movement. And all of this despite some blatant failures, the fragmentation engendered by local jealousies.

Some of the opponents of the Christian Right movement still do not understand how deeply committed the movement is to their announced goals for such varied questions as the abortion issue, or issues related to the gay and lesbian culture, or even questions concerning the separation of church and state. Many of those known in the Christian Right are folk whose concepts of biblical values are tied into a burning concern that their values are terminally threatened

by both a secular and pluralistic society. This has produced a profound depth of commitment to this cause. Failure to grasp this dedication is indeed a severe misjudgment of this movement.

Despite the obvious fact that the Christian Right is distinctly a minority force in an increasingly pluralistic America, and despite their record which has often includes defeat, personality conflicts, and legal set-backs, the Christian Right is perhaps more cohesive and committed to its agenda than ever before. The current Bush administration is well aware of this political force, marked specifically by Ashcroft's appointment as Attorney General. Memories of the Christian Right's not-so-subtle opposition to the first Bush's administration are alive and influential. Bush knows quite well who are the Christian Right's main supporters. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants show up at the polls more than any other voting group. And they show up with prepared voter's guides, which have been circulated by the millions, especially in conservative churches. Tax authorities have challenged this move, but it has not been stopped. Perhaps Bush's main dilemma here is found in a blunt conclusion in the book: "The Christian Right is too big for the Republican Party to ignore, but too controversial for it to endorse wholeheartedly" (p. 84).

Conclusions about the Christian Right are among the strongest values from this volume. First, don't underestimate the dedication and commitment of these who lead this movement. For them, it is almost a life and death conflict in American culture. It is not just another political struggle. Second, moderates and liberal opponents of the Christian Right must refocus on the local political structures, duplicating the major successes of the Christian Right if they are ever to regain the momentum of the middle road. It is hard, laborious "grunt" work, but it is one of the keys to the Christian Right's remarkable influence. Third, minorities in America, especially among the Hispanics (now the largest minority in the land) need to get into the political arena if their influence is ever to be felt and appreciated. How this conclusion is realized is not spelled out, but sooner or later it will happen. Fourth, the Christian Right would be far more influential if ever they could grasp the politics of compromise.

Again, simply stated, this is must reading for the contemporary student of American politics. To ignore this vivid reality puts one in serious peril! ■

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

## God With Us

*By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor*

Lovely things are things that are delightful for their charm, for their beauty, for their harmony, for their grace.

Christmas is lovely in a thousand ways and for a thousand reasons.

There is great charm about it, marvelous beauty, fantastic harmony, amazing grace.

When we think of Christmas, we think of family, carols, treats, food, gifts, celebrations, candy, fruit, nuts, decorated evergreen trees, lights, fellowship, friends, reunions, candles, fruitcake, firecrackers, music, angels, and many, many more.

Sometimes we think of poetry. There may very possibly be a lot more bad poetry in this world than there is good poetry, of course. Some of it is obtuse, some is abstruse, some is banal, some is maudlin, some is doggerel, and much of it deserves to be folded, spindled, and mutilated.

Some poetry, however, is wonderful and some of it is truly sublime. It weaves a spell. It soothes the savage beast, calms frayed nerves, inspires the imagination, and stirs the noblest of human emotions.

One of the memorable poems that I have been especially blessed by every Christmas for more than sixty years is a beautiful piece, the author of which I have never known though I have searched far and wide, but whose graphic images I have remembered with deep gratitude across the decades.

That night when in Judean skies  
The mystic star dispensed its light,  
A blind man moved in his sleep  
And dreamed that he had sight.

That night when shepherds heard the song  
Of hosts angelic choring near,  
A deaf man stirred in slumber's spell  
And dreamed that he could hear.

That night when o'er the newborn babe  
The tender Mary rose to lean,  
A loathsome leper smiled in sleep  
And dreamed that he was clean.

That night when to the mother's breast  
The little king was held secure,  
A harlot slept a happy sleep  
And dreamed that she was pure.

That night when in the cattle stall  
Slept child and mother cheek by jowl,  
A cripple turned his twisted limbs  
And dreamed that he was whole.

That night when in the manger lay  
The sanctified who came to save,  
A man moved in the sleep of death  
And dreamed there was no grave.

The poet here captures some of the wonder and beauty of Christmas in plain and simple words. There are vivid images pointing toward the grace of God, speaking of divine mercy that stoops to lift us out of the miry pit, providing insights as to how God sustains us and keeps us from falling, and flashing beautiful glimpses of the mercies of God who provides us an ark that bouys us up and bears us safely through the wild waters and daunting floods of life.

Because Jesus has come and just as the prophet Joel, speaking for God, foresaw, "It shall come to pass . . . that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). And as Isaiah exulted, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not be faint" (40:31).

Throughout this blessed and truly lovely season, then, let us be still and know that God is with us.

Let us rejoice that in Jesus Christ we have come to know that God knows our frame, remembers that we are dust, and is touched with feeling of our infirmities.

Let us wait on the Lord so that in the fullness of time our hurts get healed, our brokenness gets fixed, our dreams get fulfilled, and our prayers get answered.

Let us lay aside the stress that so easily besets us, the cares that so persistently plague us, and the sins that so tenaciously dog our feet.

In so doing, we may see the star in the sky, hear the song in the air, and be aware of the messengers of the Lord,

angels from God, who bring us glad tidings of great joy.

Please do not let all of this religious business turn you aside or turn you off. I want now to try to make the point that God is concerned not just with religion but also, and especially, with life.

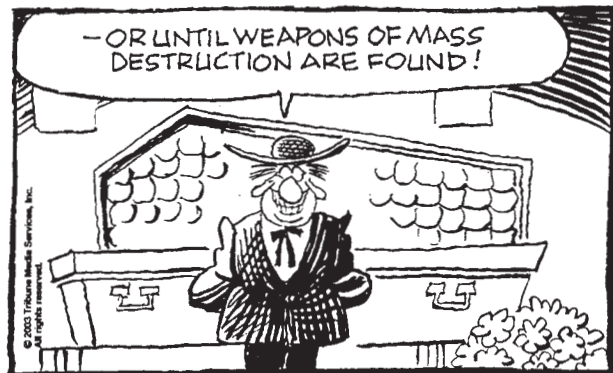
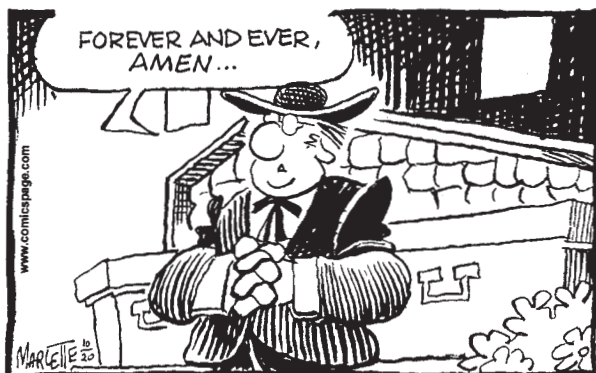
In Nanjing, China, one time I visited the Christian seminary there. Finding the famous Chinese Christian artist, He Qi (the head of the seminary's art department) in his working studio, I was warmly welcomed. He was surrounded by pictures finished and unfinished and was visibly pleased at the interest I showed in his works in progress.

There were angels, shepherds, sheep beside still waters, and decidedly religious pictures of Jesus. Looking up, however, I saw on one of his walls a stunningly impressive and strikingly beautiful oil painting of the Dalai Lama's Podala Palace in Lahsa, Tibet. "How did this painting come about?" I asked. "Oh, that," he replied. "That is a painting I made while studying art in Tibet." Obviously a little ashamed of having painted such a thing that he imagined I would find much too secular, he was astounded that I should like it as much as I obviously did. When I continued to admire it, he pointed out that he had just nailed it to the wall and that he wanted to take it down and give it to me. "Oh, no," I protested, "I could not think of your giving it to me. I will be very pleased to pay you for it." Then I proceeded to write him a check for the equivalent of four months of his salary. (He was at my hotel cashing that check by the time I could get back there myself.)

What He Qi discounted because he deemed it not religious enough, I admired and now treasure because it represents his God-given talent, his God-honoring discipline, and his God-ordained commitment to be faithful to his calling. Now I pray that he is growing in grace and a knowledge that God, who chose not to stay in heaven but to come down to be with us on earth, draws no hard and fast line between the sacred and the secular.

According to my lights, this is a big part of what the incarnation is all about.

Merry Christmas. ■



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# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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