

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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I Told You So . . .

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

No one likes to say, "I told you so." But if it were not so sad, I would. Or maybe I just did!

First, Louisiana College (Baptist) president Rory Lee ordered two books removed from the college bookstore—Scott Peck's *A Road Less Traveled* and *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines. Evidently some students found "objectionable materials" in the books (reportedly curse words and a sex scene), used as supplemental reading in a values course. I've not read Gaines' book, but half the preachers I know have read and quoted Scott Peck in their sermons. What's next? Chaucer? Hemingway? Certain parts of the Bible?

This event led the LC trustees on last December 2 to establish a policy change, requiring approval of all textbooks and supplemental reading by department chairs and the vice president of academic affairs. Although the President and Trustees are putting the best "political spin" possible (an election year helps) saying they were trying to provide "accountability," the truth came out in the fine print.

Trustee Fred Malone said the new policy "falls in line with the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message." When asked to quote chapter and verse, officials noted the statement in the BF&M called for "proper balance between academic freedom and responsibility." It then states the freedom of a Christian teacher is limited by "the preeminence of Jesus Christ, the authoritative nature of Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists." Duh! When you use a creed as a club, you don't need to make it sensible.

There it is. I told you . . . no, I'm not going to say it.

In almost all institutions of higher education (as was true at LC), each professor is responsible for developing course content, selecting textbooks and reading material, and determining other requirements. As professional educators, their training and research prepared them for that. And, they are responsible. Academic freedom meant administrators and trustees should not interfere and control the teaching process. Why? Because their limited knowledge of the subjects taught and their political bias would inevitably lead them to ban any books or teaching that was contrary to their own likes and dislikes.

The faculty at LC, by a vote of 48-8 responded: "We regret and disagree with the recent effort by the board of trustees to establish a policy of censorship of the LC faculty. Such a practice violates the current college policy of academic freedom, limits the education of students, damages the reputation of the institution, hinders recruitment efforts, . . . inhibits the ability of the college to function, demeans the faculty, students, and the administration, and is inconsistent with the American tradition of higher education."

The Religious Right has inordinate influence over most conservative churches in Louisiana. It has manipulated the majority of Southern Baptists into believing that the only way to restore conservative values is through coercion, manipulation, and control. Thus, a document is created which can force conformity to "traditional values," thus restoring an idyllic age of the past which really never existed.

Editor To Visit Campuses and Communities

During 2004 and 2005, the editor is planning to visit colleges, seminaries, and communities to promote the Journal. At the schools he will speak to classes and chapel services on Christian ethics subjects such as ministerial ethics, clergy sexual abuse, the gender debate among Baptists, etc. He will also distribute *Christian Ethics Today* to students and professors in order to increase readership of the Journal.

The visit will include discussion about the Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition of *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, published this month by Baker Academic of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Co-authored by the editor and James E. Carter, the book has become a standard text in the field.

The editor also hopes in these communities to meet with pastors and lay leaders who are supporters of the Journal. One goal of our Journal is to enlist 40-50 churches who will give \$500-\$1000 annually to the budget of *Christian Ethics Today*, which would underwrite one-half of our present budget of \$65,000. Your prayer support for this endeavor is requested and appreciated. ■

Editor: Joe E. Trull

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Our worst enemies here are not the ignorant and the simple minded, however cruel—our worst enemies are the intelligent and corrupt.”
Novelist Graham Greene.

“The primary reason people do not act like Jesus is because they do not think like Jesus. Although most people own a Bible and know some of its content, most Americans have little idea how to integrate core biblical principles to form a unified and meaningful response to challenges and opportunities of life.”

A Barna Research Group report that only 4% of U.S. adults base their decisions upon a “biblical worldview.”

“There are known knowns. These are things we know we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don’t know that we don’t know.”

Sec. of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,
clarifying U.S. policy on the war on terror.

“Americans are full of misperceptions about the war and, in particular, about three issues—the link between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the existence of weapons of mass destruction, and the nature of world opinion. Why? . . . their misconceptions are closely related to their news sources.”

William R. Fore in response to a recent poll that revealed where Americans get their news: 19% from newspapers and 80% radio and TV.

“An estimated 61.1 percent of the Medicare Drug Benefits legislation dollars that will be spent to buy more prescriptions will remain in the hands of drug makers as added profits, an estimated increase of \$139 billion over eight years.”

Report by Boston University School of Public Health.

“While headlines continue to tell us how great the economy is doing, states across the U.S. are pulling the plug on desperately needed health coverage for low-income Americans, including about a half-million children. The cruel reality is that Americans at the top are thriving at the expense of the well-being of those as the bottom and, increasingly, in the middle.”

Bob Herbert, *New York Times*, January 9, 2004.

“The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.”

Sen. Hubert Humphrey’s Last Speech.

“What does flipping pancakes have to do with how they are going to govern? Our job is to show how government and politics affect people’s lives. The concentration of ownership of the commercial networks has put journalism at a disadvantage . . . The people who run the networks do what they do at the expense of democracy. The mainstream media has been neutered, and it’s a travesty.”

Bill Moyers of PBS “NOW With Bill Moyers”
interviewed by Dianne Holloway.

“Greenspan’s comments [about new jobs replacing lost ones] are the view of a central banker who is much more focused on the benefits of flexible economies and shallow recessions and much less focused on the lives of working families.”

Jared Bernstein, Economic Policy Institute, Washington, D.C.

“A scathing new report published by the Army War College broadly criticizes the Bush administration’s handling of the war on terrorism, accusing it of taking a detour into an ‘unnecessary’ war in Iraq and pursuing an ‘unrealistic’ quest against terrorism that might lead to U.S. wars with states that pose no serious threat.”

The Washington Post, January 12, 2004.

“Two years after President Bush declared he could combat global warming with mandatory controls, only a fraction of the thousands of U.S. companies with pollution problems—only 50—have signed up and only 14 have set goals. The General Accounting Office concluded in October that Bush’s plan would reduce overall emissions only 2% below what the nation would achieve with no federal program whatsoever.”

Guy Gugliotta, *The Washington Post*.

“The mid-range estimate is that 24% of plants and animals will be committed to extinction by 2050. We’re not talking about the occasional extinction—we’re talking about 1.25 million species.”

Ecologist Chris Thomas, University of Leeds,
who led a 19-member international team studying
the effect of global warming in five regions.

“When feminists first made this demand [equal pay for equal work] in the mid-60s, women were paid 69 cents for every dollar a man made. After 30 years of struggle and hard work, we now make 74 cents for every dollar a man makes. At the rate of five cents every 30 years, we can expect to achieve equal pay sometime in the 22nd century. Except of course, for black and Hispanic women, who are now making 63 cents and 54 cents for every dollar men earn.”

Molly Ivins, syndicated columnist. ■

Familia: Family in Hispanic Culture

By Dr. Albert Reyes, President

Baptist University of the Americas, San Antonio

Note: This article is adapted from an address delivered on February 10, 2003, at the First Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, at the annual conference of the Christian Life Commission of Texas.

Let me start by sharing some about my family. I am a third generation, native Texan, born of Mexican descent. My wife is a fourth generation native Texan, also born of Mexican descent. We are Tejanos, Americanos, and Mexicanos. We speak both English and Spanish and have relatives that currently live in Mexico. We live in two worlds at the same time. We have three boys who were born in El Paso just about two miles from the US-Mexico border. We continue to redefine our *mestizaje*, our journey of cultural identity. Hispanics have three distinct strands that converge to provide their cultural heritage: The Spanish (European), the Amerindian, and the African. When these cultures came together they formed a *mestizaje*, which means “mixed” or “hybrid.” In 1519, when Hernan Cortez landed in Vera Cruz, Mexico and marched into Tenochtitlan on lake Texcoco and met Montezuma and the Aztecs, the combination of these two races gave birth to a hybrid culture, the Mexican race, which continues with a 500 year history. This was a biological *mestizaje*. So I am part Spaniard and part Aztec as a Mexican. But I am also American. Beyond the biological *mestizaje*, I am a product of a socio-political *mestizaje* as a Tejano and American citizen.

The gospel came into my family in the early 1930s when my grandfather, Jose Maria Reyes and his wife Francisca Reyes (and their children) were working near Snyder, Texas as migrant workers. At the time the family was picking cotton on a ranch near Snyder in the Panhandle. My grandparents and their nine children worked in the fields all day and then returned to a small pick-up truck for the night. I fondly say that I had a “cotton-pickin” grandpa. He lived to the ripe old age of 92 and his wife passed away while my dad was a small boy. One day while the family was working in Snyder, an itinerant Texas Baptist evangelist by the name of Edward P. Gonzalez came to the ranch and gathered the workers to preach to them. My grandmother heard the simple gospel message for the first time and prayed to receive the forgiveness of sins and began her relationship with Jesus Christ. She was baptized that day in the water trough used for watering the horses and cattle. Then one by one, each member of her family, including my grandfather, became believers. The oldest of the children, my uncle Joe, married the preacher’s daughter who was named Eva. My aunt Eva still lives and has recounted this story to me many times. By the time I was

born in 1958 my parents, including my mother who was a former Roman Catholic, were members of the First Mexican Baptist Church of Corpus Christi, my father’s home church. By the time I made my profession of faith we were members of Memorial Baptist Church in Rialto, California. My two brothers also became believers, our wives are all Baptist Christians, and just a few months ago, our youngest, Thomas, became the last of our family to profess faith in Christ. The gospel has reached and transformed our family now, even to the fourth generation.

My understanding of discipleship in the context of the family is defined by my understanding of *familia*, or family. So, I would like to consider the meaning of *familia* in Hispanic culture and then reflect on how that meaning informs our vision to form biblically authentic families and followers of Jesus.

Now, let’s try something. I have been talking about my family and about the concept of family in Hispanic culture. Let’s take a minute and talk about your family. Turn to someone at your table that does not know you and tell at least one person about your family. You only have three minutes.

OK, let’s reflect on what you said. Who did you talk about when you talked about your family? Did you start with your immediate nuclear family? Did you talk about your kids? Did you start with your extended family? Chances are, unless you are Latino, you did not start with your extended family.

***Familia* in Hispanic Culture**

You might be wondering why we would need to learn about the meaning of family in Hispanic culture. Why not Euro-American, Asian, or African contexts for the meaning of family? Well, I know Hispanic culture best but I think we will find some similarity in other third-world cultures. Additionally, an exploration and understanding of Hispanic culture in contrast to Euro-American culture will be beneficial to those of us interested in impacting Hispanic families in our communities, especially in light of demographic trends we have been hearing about. We already know that by 2015, every other Texan will be Hispanic and we have heard lately that Hispanics now comprise the largest minority group in the United States. After all, we are now standing on ground that was once known as Mexico and has become known to us as Tejas. Our context lends itself to an explo-

ration of the meaning of family in Hispanic culture and our future demands that we understand this meaning if we desire to be effective in it for the sake of the Kingdom.

I will be using the term Hispanic to refer to a large and diverse group of people who share a common background and history to include peoples from South, Central, and North America. I may even use the term Latino in the same fashion. Hispanics and Latinos can refer to first, second, third, or fourth generation Hispanics who are bilingual, bicultural and share varying levels of acculturation to mainstream American culture.

In Hispanic culture, *familia* is the basic unit of identity. *Familia* is the centerpiece of Hispanic culture. It is the basic group and context for living. *Familia* can really only be understood in the context of a collective worldview. That is, Hispanics tend to understand and view the world through the lenses of a larger group. Personal identity is defined by the collective grouping. In fact, a Hispanic person really does not have personal identity outside of his or her place in the family or larger group. In order to really understand the identity of a Hispanic person, one must locate their relationship to a given group, such as the Reyes or Garcias, Primera de Corpus, or some other grouping. A collective worldview as opposed to an individualistic worldview expresses itself in a family, a gang, a congregation, a community, or any other venue where a group exists. It is in this group context that the Hispanic individual finds the nearest thing to family.

The family is the most important unit in life, and individuals are likely to place the needs of the family over the their own. The home becomes the first and most important school of human relationships and the family is considered to be the main foci of social identification. Each family member is a walking symbol of his family.¹ The family is where basic values are learned such as loyalty, honesty, and trust; loyalty to one's family is extremely strong.²

The notion or basic definition of family in Hispanic culture is different from other cultures. In Hispanic culture, *familia* means extended family, grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts rather than just the nuclear family as we often think in Euro-American culture. To that definition you may also add the *compadres*, those chosen usually from the extended family or close friends who become co-parents chosen by the parents at the birth of their child. *Compadres* are selected on the basis of social status in order to influence someone that would normally be out of reach of the immediate family.³ A *compadre*, who may not be related through the bloodline or by marriage, becomes part of the extended family when he or she becomes a *compadre*. Families within the extended family are held together by common loyalty to each other, to their family name, and to the relationship they enjoy as distinct to the outsider.⁴

I remember meeting the president of a non-profit Christian organization who was a Euro-American brother. We had worked for months to carve out some time where we could visit and talk about a joint venture. We started off the conversation, as you normally would inquire about each

other's families. He asked me, "So Al, tell me about your family." This is what I said, "Well, I have two brothers who are in ministry and my folks are still living and serving in ministry too. My oldest brother is married and has three kids. He is a consultant for ethnic evangelism and my younger brother is married with two kids. He works . . ." My newfound friend interrupted me and said with an impatient look on his face, "What about you, are you married? Any kids?" He wanted me to tell about my family, and I thought I was telling him about my family. I was getting to my wife and kids but I wanted him to have an idea of my extended family in order to make sense of my nuclear family. I could tell early in the conversation that we were in two different worlds. So I quickly answered the questions he asked and then we moved on to business. But I felt like he was not really interested in me because he was not interested in my total family.

I think the principle of connectedness is important to mention at this point. Hispanic people tend to see life as connected versus disconnected. Everything connects in life and cannot be compartmentalized. Compartmentalization is really an Aristotelian concept foreign to Hispanic culture. Life is seen as parts to a whole much like the Hebrew worldview that saw Jehovah related to all of life. To talk about my brother, pastor, or cousin is to talk about my group. To speak of our church or facilities in a negative way is to talk about me. The two are seen as connected. So if you say, "Don't take this personally, but your brother is a real pain in the neck." You have just insulted my brother, my family, and me.

Basic Structure of Hispanic Family

The basic structure of the traditional Hispanic family is composed of an authoritarian father, a submissive mother, and mutual acceptance of male superiority. Now, keep in mind that I am describing the traditional Hispanic family and am not attempting to prescribe normative or even biblical reference points for the family. The children are expected to obey their parents and to submit to their authority.⁵ A clear hierarchy exists in Hispanic families. The father is the source of the mystery, the eldest son replaces the father in his absence, and the women exist to serve the needs of the men and the household. The mother often becomes an institutionalized mediator who is dedicated to softening conflict between members of the family. It is her role to reconcile the children who have attempted rebellion.⁶ The foci of authority rest in the hands of the father. When he has made a decision, he expects that decision to be carried out.⁷ The role that each parent plays produces a different way the parent is viewed. The father is to be obeyed and the mother is to be adored; yet both are entitled to a great deal of respect.⁸ Elders are respected and revered in the Hispanic family. Hispanics place a high value on age. This is evidenced in the way a younger member of the family addresses the parent or grandparents. There are two words for "you" in Spanish, one for the equal (*tu*) and another for a superior (*Usted*). Parents demand the latter from their children. Respect, dignity, the

use of titles and the formal *Usted* are commonly employed in the context of a Hispanic family. To fail to understand and know how and when to use these basic courtesies is to demonstrate a lack of education. I am not talking about degrees earned but basic rules of engagement for those in the family.

Even with “Machismo” (the masculine characteristic associated with dominance, strength, virility, and sex), the Hispanic is commonly known as a matriarchal society. The mother or wife appears to be submissive, but we all know who calls the shots. She influences the husband and often leads him behind the scenes. We just look like we are in charge if you know what I mean. While American Hispanics tend to adapt and acculturate to mainstream practices, they do not Americanize family patterns.

Toward Becoming Biblically Authentic Families

I would like now to talk about forming biblically authentic families. When I say “Biblically Authentic,” I am referring to the kinds of relationships found in families that reflect the message of Jesus in the Gospels and the implementation of Jesus teachings in the early church. Rodney Clapp, editor for InterVarsity Press, in 1993 wrote a book called *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options*. He contends the idea that the family is the first and foremost institution for God on the earth is really not a truly biblical hermeneutic on the family, if indeed we interpret the scriptures through the life and work of Jesus. Whether we are talking about singles, single-parent families, or traditional families, Clapp suggests that the church is the first and foremost institution of God in the earth. It is the church, the family of faith that is at the cutting edge of redemptive history, not the family. Our families are then subject to the teachings of Jesus as represented in the Bible and lived out in the church.

Jesus created a new family, a family of followers. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8:29 that Jesus is the first among many brethren. Clapp contends that allegiance to the Kingdom of God precedes allegiance to the family. Jesus did not destroy the family, he came to affirm it. Jesus once again leads the way as he develops his family of followers and even

refers to his family as “whoever does the will of my God is my brother, sister and mother” (Mark 3:34-35).

In the same fashion the Apostle Paul held the family of faith in high regard. The Apostle Paul used the phrase “my brothers” 64 times in his letters and referred to the family of faith as his children.⁹ The Apostle Paul referred to the church, “which meets in your house.” He referred to a house or household when thinking about how the gospel would impact families in the first century (Acts 16:31). “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household (*oikos*).” A household in the first century could hold up to 50 or 60 people.¹⁰

Dr. Thomas A. Wolf, futurist, author, missional strategist, and missionary has developed the notion of household or *oikos* after an extensive study of the Greek term. After consulting sociologists at major universities, Wolf has crafted a universal definition for household/*oikos*. He says that an *oikos* is your circle of influence composed of family, neighbors, coworkers, and friends—or your biological world, your geographical world, your vocational world, and your volitional world. You can abbreviate it even more by calling it your Bio, Geo, Voc, and Vol world. In fact, Wolf says that most sociologists agree that whether you are talking about urban or rural, rich or poor, all relationships in life can be categorized into these groupings. In the first century, the household included the nuclear family, extended family, slaves, workers, travelers, and foreigners, a kind of collective view of the household and family, a grouping of people. Rodney Stark, in his book *The Rise of Christianity* says that this was the secret of the rapid growth of the early church. There were simultaneous conversations about Jesus among open networks of relationships already in place. Dr. Wolf has noted that the average person has about 70 people in his or her *oikos*. Take the number of people in your church, multiply by 70 and you will get an idea of the existing relationships impacted by your ministry through the *oikos*. If this was a conference on evangelism, we would spend the rest of the time talking about how this concept plays itself out in your community and what you can do to naturally spread the supernatural message of Jesus through the webs of existing relationships.



Biblically Authentic Families and Transformation

I would like to spend the rest of the time talking about how we experience discipleship through families and how the Hispanic concept of family might flavor our view of biblically authentic families.

I start with the premise that you cannot make a person better without Jesus. After 14 years in the pastorate, I don't know how to make a better dad, mother, marriage, or child without Jesus' power to transform. Romans 12:2 reads that we should "Not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds." The word pattern is *tupos* in the original language, meaning a "type of something." He said we should not continue to conform to the "type of" person related to this world. Rather, we are to be transformed (*metamorphao*). This Greek word is the derivation of our word metamorphosis—we often learn it when we study the caterpillar and its transformation into butterfly.

Transformation is the hallmark of the Jesus' experience. Once we come to know Jesus, our Lord begins to transform everything about us to conform to the image of God. This is why the Philippian jailer's conversion in Acts 16 was so dramatic. Some authorities note the saying, "Roman soldiers never die, they simply retire at Phillipi." This jailer was probably a veteran of the Roman Army. He had hacked his way through enough humanity to live to tell about it. He was a worn, experienced, tough, mean, kind of guy. He was a bad dude, the kind you don't want to meet in an alley at the wrong time of the day. Dr. Luke tells us that the jailer took Paul and Silas to his home so the rest of his family and all those gathered at his home could hear the gospel. His transformation was more earth shattering than the earthquake. The man who was proficient at inflicting wounds was now tending to the wounds of Paul and Silas.

I am envisioning the typical Mexican household, with a courtyard and plaza with a fountain. Then, if that was not enough, his family came to faith in Jesus and they baptized them right there in the fountain or pool. Now, by this time it is probably 1:00 AM. How could his family come to faith in Christ and be baptized so soon? Because they saw the transformation in their father. They might have thought, "Wait, the old man has beaten me lots of times but I have never seen him try to patch up wounds!" And then the jailer served Paul and Silas a banquet. I am thinking fajitas, beans, rice, and tortillas at 2 or 3 AM? Why not? Do you see the transformation? It is unstoppable. Transformation is the unstoppable power of the Gospel. I am reminded of the song we sing in our churches that causes us to remember the difference that Jesus has made in our lives.

"What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus came into my heart!
I have light in my soul, for which long I had sought,
Since Jesus came into my heart!"

Second, Latinos are inclined and perhaps predisposed to defend and protect the unity of the family of faith.

When thinking about making disciples, nonbelievers have two major problems. The first problem is that they do not know a believer. This is a problem of *Information* that can be solved by *Transportation*. We just need to get the believer and the non-believer together. The second problem is that they do know a believer. That is a problem of *Reputation* and can be solved by *Transformation*. So the first hallmark of a biblically authentic family is transformation.

Dr. Wolf is currently completing his PhD at Andrews University on the topic of "Replicating the Imago Dei of the First Century into the Twenty-First Century." His study expands his lifelong work on what he terms, the Universal Discipleship Pattern. I first heard him explain this concept with a set of questions: "How could the Apostle Paul go into a city for a few days, a few weeks, on the short end, and two to three years on the long end, share the gospel, gather the converted, teach them some basics, and then later write back to the church in that city? Did Paul have a pattern of teaching or a set curriculum he could transfer easily? The answer is that he did have a pattern of teaching. This pattern or *tupos* of teaching was fairly uniform. It was the ethical teaching of Paul found in Ephesians (the encyclopedic version), and in Colossians (the Cliffs Notes version). You can also find this body of teaching reflected in James and 1 Peter.

The second hallmark of discipling in the family, given the principle of transformation includes mutual submission and respect, love, patience, intentional parenting, training and instruction. We are challenged to reprogram our minds with the pattern of family found in Paul's teaching.

Let me close by making a few observations concerning how *familia* might inform the development of disciples in the context of biblically authentic families.

First, the concept of *familia* teaches us that when we become believers we belong to the collective family of faith. First to the local church we connect to, then the larger Baptist family of churches we relate to in our association and state. It is in this family that Latinos expect to find respect, dignity, identity, and our rightful place. We often say *hermana* or *hermano* for sister and brother before a person's name. It is a spiritual expression, but it is also a loving expression we call *carino*, which denotes we are part of a family. When I call you brother or sister, what I really mean is that you are in my family. It is not just a nice greeting with the connotation of deference. There are theological implications to that title of respect. The Texas Baptist family is not a collection of strangers but a grouping of family. Our family is Anglo, Hispanic, Asian, African, and a host of other cultural groups. In Christ we are becoming a new family, a new people. I think the meaning of *familia* could help us redefine what the family really is in our congregations. Listen, people are looking for ways to connect, they are looking for *familia*

in your church. They are not looking for programs or “touchy feely” homilies. They want to know if they will be invited to your table.

Second, Latinos are inclined and perhaps predisposed to defend and protect the unity of the family of faith. I know Latinos are well known for our ability to fight. What I am saying is this . . . once you form a spiritual family, Latinos are usually ready to go down with you. Loyalty, unity, and a common sense of purpose folded into this meaning of *familia*. If my congregation becomes *familia* to me, you will not find a more fierce and loyal follower. I think we could use a greater sense of loyalty, unity, and oneness these days as we consider discipleship in the context of the family. Among Latinos, unity is like honey for the soul.

Finally, Latinos are used to a *mestizaje*, or identity. That is, we are used to pursuing our emerging identity sociologically, geo-politically, and economically. We are open to a new identity in Christ. We bring with us our Catholic heritage (now over 500 years old) and the richness of our culture, to the idea of becoming part of the Jesus family. We are ready to critique our culture against the teaching of Jesus and emerge with a new cultural identity that is not Hispanic or American, but more like Jesus. It is at this precise place that we struggle to develop new disciples in the many choices we make daily.

How does *familia* inform our effort to develop biblically authentic families? By moving toward a collective worldview and emphasizing belonging to people who are disconnected. By valuing loyalty and unity in community. And finally, by advancing the emerging identity we have in Christ. ■

¹ William Marsden, *The Mexican-American of South Texas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston 1964), 44.

² John Condon, *Good Neighbors: Communicating with the Mexicans* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press), 24.

³ Marvin K. Mayers, *A Look at Latin American Lifestyles* (Huntington Beach, Ca.: Summer Institute of Linguistics 1876), 57.

⁴ Ibid, 56.

⁵ Marco A. Espinoza, “Pastoral Care of Hispanic Families in the United States: Socio-Cultural, Psychological, and Religious Considerations,” (DMin Project, Andover Newton Theological Seminary 1982), 126.

⁶ David T. Abalos, *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1986), 66.

⁷ Mayers, 53.

⁸ Madsen, 52.

⁹ Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press 1993), 81.

¹⁰ Ibid, 82.

My Hope For Baptists In 2004

President Jimmy Carter,
Plains, GA

Note: This article first appeared in *The Baptist Studies Bulletin*, published online January 15, 2004, at their website: www.mercer.edu/baptiststudies/.

A few years ago, I invited about a dozen moderate Baptist leaders and an equal number of more conservative ones to The Carter Center, including ten men who had been or would be presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention. My hope was that the two groups might be reconciled enough to work together harmoniously. There was no acrimony during two extended meetings, and we produced a positive public statement at the time.

Unfortunately, subsequent events have erased much of the good will we expressed, and we now find ourselves separated—or fragmented—over a few secular issues despite our common faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Mission work suffers and our reputations are tarnished as a great portion of our attention is focused on the adoption of what some consider to be imposed creed and others a necessary expression of common belief. There are sharp divisions over the “submission” of women or their equal treatment in church affairs. Some have exalted the sinfulness of homosexuality to the highest pinnacle of importance, while others point out that Jesus never mentioned this issue and it is a genetic or innate inherited trait that should not exclude gays from Christian fellowship.

It has become increasingly obvious that we cannot ignore or minimize these disagreements. I don’t have any authority and lack the influence and objectivity necessary to initiate another reconciliation effort, but my hope for the New Year is that the differences might be relegated to a completely secondary status as we Baptists consider our obligation to work in harmony to fulfill the mandate given to us by Jesus.

There is a notable precedent for Christians to absorb strong differences and still work together to further God’s kingdom. Some believers in the early church were convinced that the path to salvation had to lead through the adoption of Jewish religious customs including circumcision. Others thought that the eating of meat sacrificed to idols was very important, and there were divisive debates about whether Jesus could be both fully human and also the Son of God.

The church survived when the fundamentals of our faith offered an adequate bond to unite the fallible and argumentative Christians. Perhaps, once again, Baptists might be reconciled through emulating the actions and teachings of Christ, based on justice, peace, humility, service, forgiveness, and unselfish love. Is it too much to hope for this kind of miracle? ■

Walking as Jesus Walked—In Our Neighbor’s Shoes

By Bill Jones, Lay Leader

Hunters’ Glen Baptist Church, Plano, Texas

I recently watched two movies that I hadn’t seen in several years. One was an Oscar winner—*Driving Miss Daisy*. The other was a lesser-known, but no less powerful film, titled *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*.

Driving Miss Daisy, you may recall, tells of the unlikely friendship that develops between an elderly white Southern woman and Hoke, the black man that her son employs to drive her wherever she needs to go—especially to the church and the sto’ (as Hoke pronounces it).

The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter, on the other hand, focuses on the life of a deaf mute—played by Alan Arkin—as he “listens” to others’ hurts and tries to heal them, yet is unable to communicate his own deep sense of loneliness. This film also takes place in the South.

Each film contains scenes graphically depicting the inhumanity that some people have routinely visited upon others whom they perversely consider to be “beneath” them. Two scenes, in particular, moved my soul simultaneously to compassion and guilt.

In *Driving Miss Daisy*, the aging black man and the elderly genteel Southern white woman are stopped by Georgia state troopers who are suspicious of such a couple. They first question Hoke, whom they address as “boy.” Then they ask Miss Daisy (who is Jewish) about her last name, Werthan, which she explains as being “of German derivation.” Satisfied, they permit the pair to continue their journey. As the troopers return to their patrol car, watching Hoke and Miss Daisy drive away, one says to the other, “an ol’ nigger and an ol’ Jew-woman takin’ off down the road together. That is one sorry sight!”

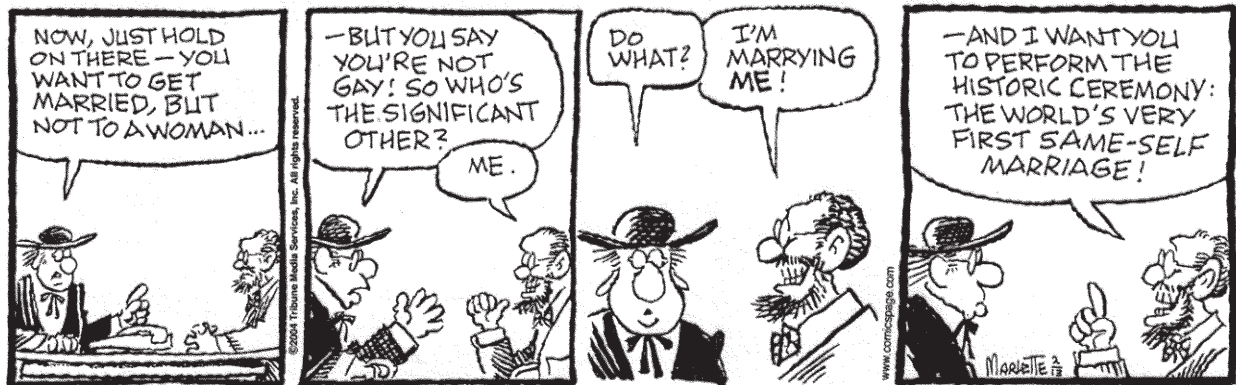
In *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, Portia, the daughter of a local black doctor, and her husband Willie, board a carousel at a local carnival. As the carousel begins to turn, Willie reaches out to break the fall of a white woman who has lost her balance. After the ride, as Willie and Portia are making their way

down the midway, the white woman’s husband shoves Portia to the ground in retaliation for Willie “grabbing” his wife. Then he and a couple of friends attack Willie. One of them pulls a knife. In the ensuing scuffle, Willie takes the knife away and seriously wounds one of his attackers. Willie is then arrested for attacking him. While in jail, Willie is placed in leg irons, one of which is so tight that it causes his leg to contract gangrene, requiring amputation.

When Portia’s father goes to the courthouse to protest his son-in-law’s inhumane treatment, an officer advises him to wait until the judge can see him. The doctor waits in the courthouse lobby throughout the morning and most of the afternoon. Finally, he asks the officer when the judge will be able to see him. The smirking officer informs him that the judge left several hours earlier. Then the officer and his friends laugh derisively as the doctor leaves, his protest unheard.

In December 2002, Washington was transfixed by the spectacle surrounding Senator Trent Lott (R-MS), who was ultimately deposed as Senate Republican Leader. During a 100th-birthday celebration for Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Lott gushed that he was proud of his state’s support of Thurmond’s presidential candidacy on the Dixiecrat ticket in 1948, saying that the country wouldn’t have had “all these problems” if Thurmond had been elected. After a furor developed over his comments, he tried to explain them away as a mere slip of the tongue. However, his “apology” was belied by a history of such comments, appearances before groups notorious for discriminating against blacks, and his oft-stated admiration of Jefferson Davis. Besides, segregation was the sole reason for the existence of the Dixiecrats in 1948. There could have been no reason, other than support for segregation, for Lott’s continued support of that ticket.

However, by focusing on Trent Lott, we have missed the point. By the same token, if we focus on specific political



stances, such as segregation (or “states’ rights,” its euphemistic substitute), we have likewise missed the point. Finally, if we focus on an emotionally-charged word such as “racism,” we have certainly missed the salient point.

In the 21st century, few will admit to being racist. When incidents such as this occur, civil rights apologists trot out that word accusingly against all who support the perpetrator. The offender’s supporters are just as quick to deny such charges.

In other words, “racist” is a label that has lost its power. Labels tend to lose power over time, because they take complex issues and try to simplify them, and even trivialize them, if truth be told.

So what is the issue here if it isn’t racism? The real issue is love—agape love, the quality of love that Christ taught and exemplified. Christ loved us by living among us and identifying with us. He loved us by living as one of us and understanding the trials that we experience. He loved us by being sensitive to our hurts and our needs, and then taking action to meet those needs and make us whole.

Do we white folks really understand what black folks have experienced? Have we truly identified with them? Do we honestly care about making them whole?

When threatened with the loss of his job, Trent Lott ostensibly underwent a remarkable conversion. A senator who has consistently voted against affirmative action, he suddenly went before a largely black television audience and proclaimed his support for such programs. However, Christ went before hostile crowds and challenged them for lacking justice and mercy. Christ, as a Jewish man, dared to speak and minister to a Samaritan woman in love and concern for her needs. His actions defied the mutual hatred practiced by Jews and Samaritans of his day. Jesus also commanded his followers, if they owned much, to share with those who had little. Christ insisted on justice for all, especially the poor and otherwise disenfranchised, long before the U.S. Constitution. However, unlike the Constitution, he regarded all people—those of color like himself and those at the margins of society—as fully human persons, entitled to a full measure of dignity and justice.

Why? Christ fully understood the worth of every person to the Father, and he insisted that his children treat all people as possessing equal worth and dignity.

I’ll grant that most white folks today, even in the South, have accepted black folks as friends and co-workers. However, those black friends and co-workers know better than to dredge up the stories of segregation, lynchings, and cross-burnings. Many Anglos insist that such indignities and suffering are of another era; therefore, they aren’t personally responsible. From their perspective, these horrific stories are irrelevant to the present.

But the past is never irrelevant, especially to the victim. If we ignore our history, we risk perpetuating indignities in other forms, such as fewer and inferior job opportunities, and inferior pay for equal work. It is easy for white persons to now insist on a “color-blind society” while they still have blacks at a dis-

advantage. At this point, “color-blind” college admissions and employment opportunities merely harden the cement that encases minorities on the bottom rungs of the ladder.

No, we of European ancestry don’t understand what African-Americans have experienced, but we should make every effort to do so. These two movies are a good start. *To Kill A Mockingbird* is another excellent example of both a novel and a movie that graphically depict the sufferings and indignities that descendants of slaves have experienced at the hands of descendants of slave owners. Perhaps we can’t all do as John Howard Griffin did, in researching his classic book, *Black Like Me*, physically walking in their shoes and their skin—experiencing firsthand the sufferings and indignities. But we can certainly strive to learn about the history of African slaves in America so that we can better understand their pain.

We need to understand that we still have a responsibility to redress the wrongs of the past and ensure that they never happen again. We must realize that the wrongs of the past have not been fully overcome in the present. As long as there are Trent Lotts who long for the days of the Dixiecrats, there will still be white persons who consider blacks to be inferior, uppity, dangerous, unclean, lazy . . . and other such stereotypes.

Yes, there are still many who are either ignorant of, or refuse to be moved by, stories of “Bull” Connor unleashing his police dogs on black marchers; state troopers brutally killing three civil rights workers in Mississippi; white supremacists bombing a black church in Birmingham, killing three little girls; and random lynchings of blacks too numerous to count. Whites kept blacks out of hotels, restaurants, and even churches; restricted them to separate restrooms and water fountains; and relegated them to the back of the bus. These are all remnants of the segregation for which Trent Lott so publicly pined.

After Trent Lott’s “apology” and subsequent forced resignation as Senate Republican Leader, he blamed his “enemies” for his fate. According to him, they had “trapped” him, because they don’t like Christians. In the end, Lott used Christ to excuse his unholy attitudes. His “apology” rang false, because he ultimately cloaked himself in the name of Christ and dragged that holy name through the mud of his unholy behavior.

But Trent Lott is not alone. We in the majority are all in need of a deeper understanding of the hurts of our black brothers and sisters. We Christians are all in need of a deeper understanding of the love that our Lord has given us and demanded of us. Let us seek to understand the hurts and indignities suffered by blacks at the hands of our white forebears and then, in the spirit of Christ, act to heal them and make them whole. ■

Contributions By African-Americans

By David Watkins, Camelot Reader

Little known facts in American history include many contributions made by African-Americans. Here are a few:

1. Alexander Mils invented the elevator.
2. Richard Spikes invented the automatic gearshift.
3. Joseph Gammell invented the Super Charge System for internal combustion engines.
4. Garrett Morgan invented the traffic signal.
5. Elbert R. Robinson invented the electric trolley.
6. Charles Brooks invented the street sweeper.
7. John Love invented the pencil sharpener.
8. William Purvis invented the fountain pen and the hand stamp.
9. Lee Burridge invented the Type Writing Machine.
10. W. A. Lovette invented the Advanced Printing Press.
11. William Barry invented the Postmarking and Canceling Machine.
12. Phillip Downing invented the Letter-Drop.
13. Joseph Smith invented the lawn sprinkler.
14. John Burr invented the lawn mower.
15. Frederick Jones invented the air conditioner.
16. Alice Parker invented the heating furnace.
17. Lewis Latimer invented the Electric Lamp.
18. Michael Harvey invented the lantern.
19. Granville T. Woods invented the automatic cut-off switch.
20. Thomas W. Steward invented the mop.
21. Jan E. Matzlinger invented the Shoe Lasting Machine.
22. Walter Sammons invented the comb.
23. Sarah Boone invented the ironing board.
24. George T. Samon invented the clothes dryer.
25. John Standard invented the refrigerator. ■

Reprinted from the *Oklahoma Observer*, February 2002.

A Quiz On Islam and An Opinion

By John Scott, Attorney
Dallas, TX

Note: After a distinguished law career, John Scott retired in 2001 as senior vice president and general counsel of an international oil company and he now teaches business law and servant leadership as an adjunctive professor at Dallas Baptist University.

“If we are going to win the Muslim world to Christ, we cannot make stupid statements about their religion . . .”
(Tony Campolo, *Christian Ethics Today*, February 2003, 3).

I spent a lot of time on business in a Muslim country over a twenty-year period. I was surprised to find that much of what I “knew” about Islam was wrong.¹

When I mentioned this to a friend, he asked me to teach a lesson on Islam to his Men’s Sunday school Class. I began by giving them a quiz. The quiz only covered a few basic facts, but all except one member of the class missed almost all the questions.

I have since been invited to speak on Islam to other groups, and I always begin by giving them this quiz. Public interest in Islam has increased since September 11, 2001, but most people still miss most of the questions.

The quiz below is followed by the answers. As you will see, the quiz covers facts, not opinions. But I’ll follow the answers with an opinion on how a handful of famous Christian preachers may be helping Islamic terrorists, albeit unintentionally.

The Quiz

1. What percentage of Muslims are Arabs? (a) 20% (b) 50% (c) 80%
2. What percentage of the world’s population is Muslim? (a) 5% (b) 10% (c) 20%
3. Muslims are a majority in how many countries? (a) 16 (b) 36 (c) 56
4. Which of the following countries has more Muslims than any other country in the world? (a) Iran (b) Iraq (c) Indonesia (d) Egypt (e) Saudi Arabia
5. What is the fastest growing religion in the world? (a) Buddhism (b) Christianity (c) Hinduism (d) Islam (e) Judaism
6. Which is the fastest growing religion in the United States? (a) Buddhism (b) Christianity (c) Hinduism (d) Islam (e) Judaism
7. What is the largest religion in the world? (a) Buddhism (b) Christianity (c)Hinduism (d) Islam (e) Judaism

8. As a *practiced* faith, which is the largest religion? (a) Buddhism (b) Christianity (c) Hinduism (d) Islam (e) Judaism
 9. When was Muhammad born? (a) BC 1570 (b) BC 570 (c) AD 570
 10. What are the literal meanings of the following words? *Islam, Muslim, Allah, Quran, Kaaba, and Jihad?*
 11. Why did the leaders of Mecca plot to assassinate Muhammad before he escaped to Yathrib (now called Medina) in AD 622?
 12. What are the “five pillars” of Islam?
 13. Which one or more of the following passages come from the Quran?
 - (a) “Blessed is he who repays you for what you have done to us, he who seizes your babies and dashes them against the rocks.”
 - (b) “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
 - (c) “Do not kill or destroy yourself.”
 - (d) “There must be no compulsion in matters of religion.”
 - (e) “Whoever kills an innocent human being, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind.”
 - (f) “None of you is a believer until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.”
 14. Like the Bible, the Quran refers to God’s wrath and vengeance, but also to God’s compassion and mercy. Which does the Quran refer to more often, (a) God’s wrath and vengeance, or (b) God’s compassion and mercy?
 15. The Quran says that Christians and Jews are enemies of Islam and are going to hell: (a) True (b) False
 16. According to the Quran, which one or more (if any) of the following statements about Jesus are true? (a) An angel told Mary that she would give birth to Jesus who would be the Messiah; (b) Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus; (c) Jesus lived a sinless life; (d) Jesus performed many miracles; (e) Jesus was taken to Paradise to be with God; (f) Jesus will someday return and fulfill his role as the Messiah by bringing peace to the world.
 17. Islam is mostly divided into two sects (somewhat as Christianity is divided into Catholics and Protestants). What are they called and which is larger?
 18. Quran says that if certain conditions are met, a man may have up to four wives. In actual practice, how many wives do most married Muslim men have? (a) 4 (b) 3 (c) 2 (d) 1
 19. At their zeniths, which was larger? (a) The Roman Empire (b) The Muslim Empire
 20. Which was more advanced? (a) The Roman Empire (b) The Muslim Empire
4. (c) Indonesia, where estimates put the Muslim population between 185 and 200 million. Rounding out the top ten are (2) Pakistan 145 million, (3) India 125 million, (4) Bangladesh 112 million, (5) Turkey 67 million, (6) Egypt 67 million, (7) Iran 65 million, (8) Nigeria 64 million, (9) China 40 million, and (10) Algeria 32 million. Iraq is 14th with 24 million, and Saudi Arabia is 17th with 21 million.
 5. (d) Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world.
 6. (d) Islam is also the fastest growing religion in the U.S. It is estimated that there are already 7 million Muslims in the U.S., and that Islam soon will be the second largest religion in the U.S.
 7. (b) Christianity, with 2 billion followers, is believed to be the world’s largest religion. Islam is second with 1.3 billion. (These are estimates as Christianity is the only major religion that attempts to gather such data about itself.)
 8. Some claim that the answer is (d), i.e., that Islam is the largest *practiced* faith. No scientific study confirms that, but it is widely believed that the gap between Christianity and Islam would close dramatically if the count were limited to those who regard their religion as highly important in their lives.
 9. (c) AD 570, or 571. Islam is the youngest of the major religions.
 10. *Islam* is the name of the religion itself. It means “submission to God” with the connotation of achieving peace. A *Muslim* is a follower of Islam. The word *Muslim* means “one who submits to God.” *Allah* is the Arab word for God (even Christian Arabs say *Allah* when referring to God). The word *Allah* is a compounding of the article “the” and the word “God”—literally, “The God.” The *Quran* (also spelled Koran) is Islam’s holiest book. It is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament. Muslims believe the *Quran* was revealed from God to Muhammad by an angel over a period of about 23 years. Muhammad could not read or write, but he could remember and recite. The word *Quran* means “The Recital.” The *Kaaba* is the most sacred shrine in Islam, known as “the House of God.” It is a cube shaped building in Mecca, about 45 feet tall. The word *Kaaba* literally means, “cube.” The word *Jihad*, as used in the *Quran*, means “struggle,” and refers to the inner struggle in every person between right and wrong. However, terrorists have hijacked the word *jihad* to refer to a “holy war” to advance their versions of Islam.
 11. The leaders in Mecca plotted to kill Muhammad because his teachings were a threat to their power and wealth. He said there is only one God, and that their 360 gods were bogus. That posed an economic threat to those who made money from festivals and other activities related to those gods. Muhammad also taught that

The Answers

1. (a) Only 20% of Muslims are Arabs.
2. (c) One of every five people in the world is a Muslim.
3. (c) Muslims are a majority in 56 countries. This does not

there is going to be a final judgment and that those who do not help the poor are going to hell. Some speculate that he got this idea from the similar teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 25:31-46, but Muslim scholars say that both Jesus and Muhammad obtained it from the same source, God. In any event, the local leaders didn't like charity because they felt that their riches were evidence that they were pleasing to the gods; so they exploited the poor instead of helping them. They also disliked Mohammad's prohibition against drinking alcohol.

12. The "five pillars" of Islam are not a list of beliefs; they are things to do. They are: (1) Bear witness to the fact that there is only one God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. (2) Follow a certain ritual of prayer and worship at five specified times each day. (3) Give 2½% of ones *net worth* (not merely of one's profits) to the poor each year. (4) Fast during the month of Ramadan on the Muslim calendar. To "fast" means to refrain from all food, liquids, and sensual pleasures from the very first, to the very last, light of day. (5) At least once in your life make the *Hajj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca and the Kaaba. The *Hajj* involves extensive preparations and rituals and many Muslims call it a life-changing experience. Exceptions to some of these pillars are prescribed for the sick, nursing mothers, soldiers on the march, and others.
13. (a) is from Psalm 137 in the Old Testament, and (b) is from Matthew 10:34 in the New Testament. These two passages, among others, were used by some Christians to justify their horrific acts during the Crusades. The next three—(c), (d) and (e)—come from the Quran, and (f) comes from the sayings of Muhammad. These latter four passages obviously prohibit what Islamic terrorists do. But the terrorists cite other passages from the Quran out of context to justify their actions, much as many Christians did to justify what they did to Muslims during the Crusades.
14. (b) The Quran refers to God's compassion and mercy 192 times, and to God's wrath and vengeance only 17 times.
15. (b) False. The Quran says Christians and Jews are "people of the book" who are going to Paradise on the same basis as Muslims. Muhammad said that Muslims should treat Christians and Jews with affection.
16. All of the above – (a) through (f). The Muslims also believe that Jesus was one of the only three "Messengers," the other two being Moses and Muhammad (which, interestingly, includes a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim). All three are also called prophets, but there have been many prophets (including Abraham, John the Baptist, and others). Only three prophets became "Messengers." A Messenger is one whose teachings were revealed in the form of scriptures.
17. Almost all Muslims are either Sunnis or Shiites (also called Shia). From 85% to 90% are Sunnis. The "Sufis"

(mystics) are sometimes referred to as a third sect, but they are found among both Sunnis and Shiites. Widely divergent schools of thought and practices are found among Sunnis, Shiites, and Sufis (much as among Christians).

18. (d) Most married Muslim men have only one wife. In many Muslim countries, the laws prohibit having more than one. And it is a common practice for marriage vows to include a pledge to have only one wife.
19. (b) The Muslim Empire came after the Roman Empire and was larger. The last vestige of the Muslim Empire did not fall until the late 1920s.
20. (b) The Muslim Empire was the most advanced civilization in history up to that time. It established many public hospitals and universities, and built major highways. It permitted religious freedom and allowed Jews and Christians to hold important positions in government, commerce, and education. It excelled in science, mathematics, art, and literature. Some present-day scholars feel that much of the unrest in the Middle East can be traced to their desire to return to such greatness and to their resentments toward the West for dominating (they would say oppressing) Muslim countries following the fall of their empire.

An Opinion: How Some Preachers Are Helping Militant Muslim Fanatics

Islamic fanatics and terrorists are leading many Muslims down a deadly detour. That detour actually leads away from the teachings of their own scriptures. The suicide bombers violate the Quran's express prohibitions against suicide and murder, and Mohammad's version of the Golden Rule (see Q&A 13). Muhammad specifically instructed Muslims to treat Christians and Jews with affection (See Q&A 15).

If you point this out to a well-educated mainstream Muslim, he will most likely agree with you. However, he may point out that Christians have also taken some deadly detours. He may remind you of the seven Crusades (including the horrific Children's Crusade), during which Christians killed Muslims by the thousands. He could cite the example of the Inquisition during which church officials tortured, burned, and disemboweled thousands of Jews, Muslims, and fellow Christians, *alive*. He could talk about the Thirty-Year War, and the execution of 300,000 innocent women as witches in Europe, and still more in Salem, Massachusetts. He might give the more recent example of slavery, followed by segregation, not to mention the way Catholics and Protestants have been killing each other (and innocent bystanders) in Northern Ireland.

This dark side of Christian history is still being taught in many Muslim schools. Their young people are being told how Christian Crusaders, in just one day, slaughtered tens of thousands of men, women, children, and babies and then boasted, "Muslim blood ran knee deep to our horses in the streets of Jerusalem."

Of course these regrettable detours have, at long last,

been abandoned and condemned by responsible officials throughout Christendom.

Now the question is: How long will it take Muslims to do the same?

Let us pray that it will not take the Muslims as long as it took the Christians—almost seventeen centuries.

Meanwhile, some famous Christian preachers have made matters worse by making highly inflammatory statements about Muhammad and Islam.² Such preachers have not stopped at criticizing Muslim people and their politicians and clerics; they have vilified the religion of Islam itself, and their revered prophet. Imagine how we would feel if a Muslim not only criticized the U.S. and Christians, but called Jesus himself unspeakably horrible names, which of course no good Muslim would do (see Q&A 16). Such profane statements about Islam and Muhammad deeply offend *all* Muslims, including those who *oppose* terrorism. And Islamic fanatics and terrorists use those statements to incite more Muslims to hate us and to join them. One in four Muslims is below the age of 15. That adds up to more young “prospects” for terrorist recruiters than the total population in the U.S.!

Such provocative pronouncements by Christian preachers are, at best, unnecessary and work against what our Christian missionaries are striving to do.

Jerry Falwell had the courage and decency to apologize for saying what he said about Muhammad. Perhaps those other preachers will follow his example if they just pause long enough to consider, deeply and prayerfully, the self-evident truth spoken by Tony Campolo: “If we are going to win the Muslim world to Christ, we cannot make stupid statements about their religion.” ■

¹ Nothing in this article should be regarded as the views of any prior, present, or future client, employer, or associate of the author.

² Although such statements have appeared in the press, I will not repeat them here. I was tempted to quote them just to show just how deeply offensive they are. But that might violate the Golden Rule, as such statements are hurtful to all Muslims, including those friendly to the U.S.—indeed, including those who are good and faithful citizens of the U.S.

Where Were You When . . . ?

By Hal and Judy Haralson,
Austin, TX

Some of us were around on November 22, 1963 when the assassination of President Kennedy took place. We have answered that question for years. Where were you?

December 7, 1941? This really reaches back into history. Pearl Harbor. Where were you?

How about September 11, 2001? My friend looked at me and blushed . . . “You aren’t going to believe this.”

“I have a small television in my bathroom and when I stepped in and began my shower, all was right with the world.”

“When I opened the shower door, all hell had broken loose.” In that short period of time, the world was overturned.

What do you want to say to the world, to your family? What were your feelings that moment?

As I wrestled with these questions, Judy (my wife of 45 years) showed me the message she had sent to members of her family on her I-Mac machine. This profoundly simple message really touched my heart. With her permission, I share it with you.

This week has certainly brought home how important all of you are to me. I am awed at the power of evil to completely devastate and bring me to my knees. I am even more awed and amazed at the power of God (good, creative, redemptive) to assure and raise me up. My prayer has been and will continue to be “through the night with the light from above.” Thank you all for being family with me and loving me and each other the way we all do.

So often, I have heard comparisons made to Pearl Harbor. I was in Abilene visiting my other grandmother “Annie” that December day—actually it was evening—when we were listening to the radio in the middle sitting room of her house, which was also her bedroom. I think mother and daddy had gone back home, but anyway just she



and I were there. I remember her being upset, and I remember President Roosevelt's deep voice, but I had no idea what was happening. It was a long way away and not affecting me in any kind of immediate way.

The time I do remember was D-Day. Again, I was in Abilene. This time I was visiting Mamma. We were in the kitchen listening to the radio. I don't remember anything about what was said, but Mamma was crying. I asked her why and she said, "So many of our boys have died." I so much wanted to comfort her and didn't know how. By that time I had a little understanding about what "war" meant and I was afraid. I remember the three families that lived with Mamma and Pappaw when Camp Barkley was so full. I remember savings bonds, air raid drills, metal and rubber scrap collection, news reels at the movies, songs and posters and Victory gardens. I remember when President Roosevelt died my mother cried and was sure that we would be invaded and lose the war. By then my belief in America, Uncle Sam, and *The Stars and Stripes* was unshakable. I knew we would be alright.

Another thing I remember about those times is that every night I prayed that God would "bless the Germans and the Japs," because Jesus said to pray for our enemies. I am afraid I have a more difficult time as an adult praying for terrorists today, but they really are not that different from the enemies my childlike faith was trusting God to handle. I just pray that my adult responsibility, reasoning, awareness, accountability, reality, etc. can also be flavored with a little bit of childlike faith trusting God to handle it. These are hard times.

I love you all and hope this hasn't been too much. Another thing I have been so much more aware of this week is that a certain 65 year old, adult, grown-up, grandmother, professional counselor, me—misses my mommy. Judy

We all need some of Judy's childlike faith in God . . . and in the Stars and Stripes. ■

THE SBC, THE GOP, AND W. E. B. DUBOIS

A Marriage Made In Heaven?

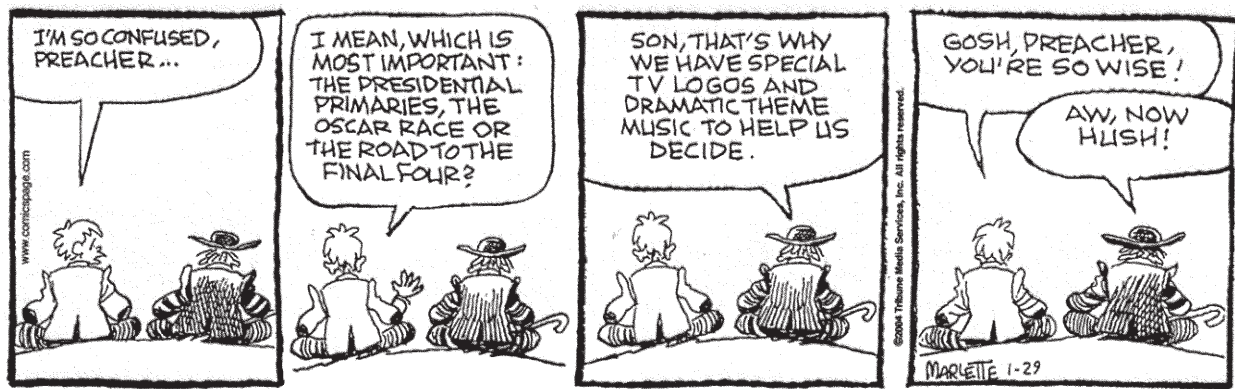
By Al Staggs, Chaplain and Performing Artist
Bedford, TX

That the Religious Right and the Republican Party are political allies is incontrovertible. The strong ties between these entities began to emerge during the late 1970s, the last years of Jimmy Carter's presidency. By the summer of 1980, during the height of the presidential campaign, leaders of the Religious Right were making public statements regarding their collective political views. At a meeting of the Religious Roundtable in Dallas that summer, evangelist James Robison stood before a large number of well-known pastors and introduced Ronald Reagan as "God's Man" for the nation. The Republican Party, its platform and candidates were thus ushered in as the "moral party" for America.

The wedding ceremony was completed and it has been a blissful and harmonious marriage during the intervening twenty-three years.

Today the Religious Right exerts powerful political influence in this nation, and Southern Baptists make up the bulk of that organization. The two bodies have almost become synonymous. One of my long-time friends remarked years ago that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) should understand that the word "God" is spelled GOD and not GOP. When one studies the platform of the Republican Party during the last two decades and compares it with the stated moral concerns of the SBC there is an amazing similarity.

The SBC leadership and many churches have virtually dismissed the Democratic Party and its candidates. This assertion can best be seen in the *Voter Guides* that appear in many SBC churches just prior to major elections, in Jerry Falwell's TV promotion of the book *How to Beat the Democrats*, and in the



book *Other Subversive Ideas* by David Horowitz.

A close examination of the *Voter Guides* reveals an obvious bias for the Religious Right and for Republican candidates and ultra-conservative positions. What is noticeably absent in these guides is any reference to economic justice, racial equality, and a Christian view of war and peace.

The fact that these issues are seldom raised in Southern Baptist sermons, convention resolutions, Baptist Press news stories, and voter guides can most certainly be attributed to a recent shift in the SBC view of morality. During the last two decades the denomination's ethical emphases have focused on personal morality, coupled with a growing silence regarding racial issues, lingering apartheid, anti-Semitism, nationalism, ecology, economic justice, and war and peace.

Nothing is more demonstrative of the political marriage between Southern Baptists and the Republican Party than the tax cuts proposed by President Bush and the war on Iraq. It is common knowledge that George Bush's tax cuts favor the wealthiest Americans while overlooking the poor. Leaders of some Christian denominations have expressed dismay over this economic injustice. Where do Southern Baptists stand on tax cuts? Apparently they stand with the Bush administration, for their silence regarding this inequity speaks volumes. Not to speak is to speak.

What is so pernicious in moral statements set forth by Religious Right leaders—pastors, SBC executives, key churches, convention agencies, resolutions committees—is that their statements are accompanied by an air of biblical authority. It seems the SBC deems certain issues to be of primary importance to God, while other issues are not worth God's or their concern.

Do the SBC leaders, agencies, and key pastors speak with biblical authority? It is certainly difficult to find any references in SBC statements to the Hebrew prophets' concern for justice in the courts and in the marketplace. Have Baptists ever asked how Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah might prophesy against our nation's growing disparity between the rich and the poor? In addition, one would be hard pressed to hear a sermon on Matthew 25:31-46 (the passage in which Jesus identifies with those who are thirsty, hungry, naked and sick) from many pulpits. Although most Baptist churches have small scale mission projects that benefit a few of the needy in their communities, the SBC regularly endorses political candidates

whose goals are to drastically cut or privatize government programs that are vital to the poorest Americans. What would Jesus say about preaching and practices that fail to address the needs of "the least of these" among us?

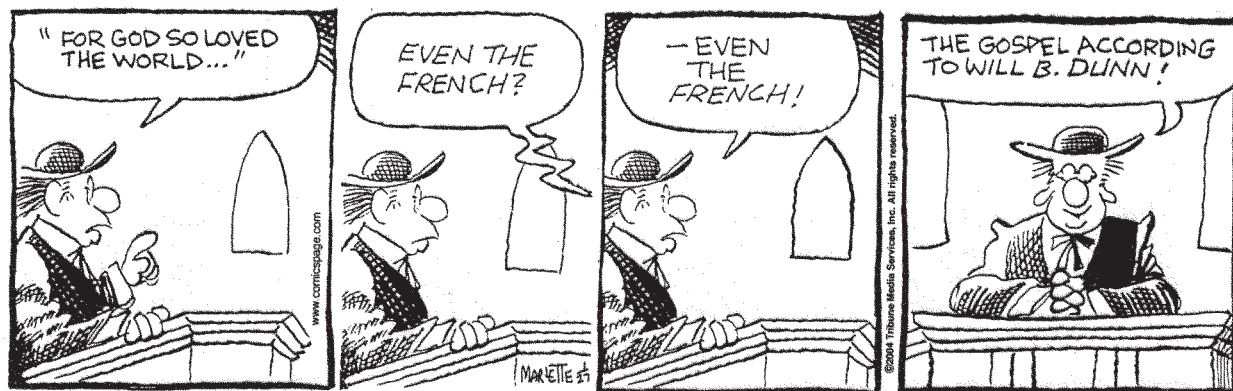
Clarence Jordan, co-founder of Habitat for Humanity, was once admonished by a Baptist minister about his outspoken views regarding economic justice. The minister complained, "Why, if I said the things you are saying, I would lose my influence!" Jordan retorted, "It's not your influence that you're concerned about, it's your affluence that you're mighty concerned about losing."

For example, regarding the war on Iraq, SBC President Jack Graham and ethics concerns executive Richard Land gave their wholehearted endorsement of the attack on Iraq in March. Indeed, the SBC was the only major Christian denomination to lend support to this policy. Now the Bush administration's proclaimed justification for the invasion of Iraq is in serious question since no weapons of mass destruction have been discovered to date. The issue of misinformation does not seem relevant to these Southern Baptists, as they now have changed their tune to comply with that of the administration and assure us that the "liberation" of the Iraqi people was sufficient justification for the invasion.

While some might commend the SBC leaders for their sudden beneficent interest in the welfare of Iraqis, their statements in this regard are, at best, ambiguous. They, like the Bush administration, blithely ignore the fact that over 5,000 Iraqi civilians have thus far perished as a result of the war (www.iraqbodycount.net). Thousands more sustained injuries and/or lost their homes and employment, to say nothing of the tens of thousands of Iraqi children who have died as a result of the twelve-year sanctions. The SBC concern for Iraqis also does not apparently extend to the thousands of young soldiers who were killed, although they had not committed a first aggression against our nation. Nor has there been any concern expressed about the devastation being caused by the multitude of unexploded cluster bombs and other munitions, "souvenirs" of the invasion that continues to kill and maim the Iraqi people—mostly children—who are unfortunate enough to come in contact with them.

And what about our American troops who remain in grave danger and are still dying in the occupation of Iraq?

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the main result of



the war is going to be the necessity for a prolonged occupation of Iraq by American forces, with the price tag for such occupation continuing to soar. This is more bad news for the neediest of our nation, who comprise a majority of our troops. One consequence of the war, combined with the tax cuts, will shake down to ever greater reductions in social service programs.

Tolstoy stated, "And the misdeeds of our rulers become our own if we, knowing that they are misdeeds, assist in carrying them out." Southern Baptists stand morally culpable for their support of policies which have destroyed the lives of over 500 American troops and thousands of Iraqi citizens and economic policies in this nation which have created a living hell for those who are desperately trying to make ends meet. ■

Can This Marriage Last?

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

Half of all marriages end in divorce, we are told, and that bodes ill for one particular union: namely, that between Republicans and Evangelicals.

Evangelicals comprise roughly one-third of the American population: mainly Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, and a motley mixture of believers whose brand of Christianity does not fall into these large denominational categories. Evangelicals study the Bible, testify to a born-again experience, and embrace a mission to convert other people to their way of thinking and living.

By a three to one majority these evangelicals identify with the Republican Party. They support George Bush, the war, and the effort to interject religion into public policy.

The roots of this romance go back to Ronald Reagan. He once spoke to a gathering of evangelical ministers. "America is in the midst of a spiritual awakening and a moral renewal," he said, and called upon them to "use the mighty voice of your pulpits and the powerful standing of your churches" to advance this cause.

In that same speech Reagan referred to the Soviet empire as the "evil empire," but many in his audience then and now preferred to see the empire of evil as none other than the shadow side of the American society. Christians, they thought and said, are engaged in a great culture war which setting traditional religious values against an emerging secular order.

Thus the Republican search for political power met with the evangelical call for cultural influence. And there came to be this (apparently) happy union of two powerful players in American life.

But will it last?

Each brings to the union certain intractable characteristics that make a long and happy marriage very unlikely.

Republicans, for instance, have a preference for the rich rather than the poor, for business rather than labor, for white

rather than color. Not all the religious rhetoric in the language, however carefully construed by campaigning politicians, can compensate for this tendency.

Can evangelicals live with such preferences, given their historic tendencies in the other direction, toward the lower classes, the less affluent, those on the margins of power and privilege?

Some say evangelicals have moved up the social ladder; have abandoned their humble roots; have become so prosperous, so important that they feel more at home with the upper-class values of the Republican Party.

Perhaps so; but there is the distinct possibility that the aforementioned spiritual awakening will enable evangelicals to rediscover their vocation as advocates for the less fortunate and in so doing become disenchanted with a political party that sees things in another way.

One thing Republicans like at this time is the rather narrow vision of Christian morality espoused by evangelicals, which can be summed up in one word: sex. I am not the first to point out how all of the issues near and dear to the newly-married evangelical mainstream have some connection to sex: pornography, abortion, homosexuality, gender roles, and certainly sex education in schools.

With its indifference to war, poverty, race, and environment, this is a truncated approach to Christian morality. It may fit well with current political agendas but can it sustain an ecumenical vision capable of gathering to the Republican Party a wider religious constituency? Will Republican leaders awake to discover that their marriage to this particular member of the clan has strained their friendships with the larger Christian family?

In other words: is the particular Christian vision of American evangelicals in the long-term best interests of the Republican Party? And equally important, is the political agenda of the Republican Party in the best interests of the evangelical movement?

Perhaps their current romance is simply a marriage of convenience, soon to dissolve when either fails to meet the political needs of the other?

Time will tell; but I for one shall not be surprised if the preacher and the politician, so enamored of one another, do not soon come to realize that the mission of each has been severely compromised by their confusing, if consensual arrangement. ■

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One Hundred Years Ago

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

One hundred years ago: two brothers took their new-fangled flying machine for a North Carolina ride; both the Buick and the Ford motor companies were born; Niagara Falls slowed to a drought-induced trickle; and Harry C. Gammeter patented the multigraph duplicating machine.

That same year William Edward Bughardt DuBois burst upon the cultural scene as a writer of courage, elegance, and erudition. He did so with the publication of a collection of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*.

"It struck like a thunderclap," someone said; and another described it as "the only Southern book of any distinction published in many a year." Its only rival for influence within the black community was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

From the day of the book's publication until his death in 1963, DuBois was an intellectual and literary star with few peers.

I picked up a centennial copy of the book some weeks ago, published by "The Modern Library of the World's Best Books." The introduction alone was worth the price, a biographical and literary preface written by David Levering Lewis, Pulitzer Prize winning historian of Rutgers University.

Here's what I learned. At age 20, DuBois entered Harvard, eventually becoming the first black person to earn the doctor of philosophy degree from that university. At age 34, while a professor at Atlanta University, he published the aforementioned book. At age 42 he was instrumental in establishing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At age 66, he broke with the NAACP, returned to teaching, and in the following years, published four books.

That's not all. At age 76, he served as advisor to the founding of the United Nations. At age 83, he ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the Senate then was indicted by a McCarthy-era grand jury, leaving him disillusioned with American democracy. At age 90 he was honored by both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Finally at age 95, he died a citizen and resident of Ghana.

Here's what Lewis thinks: "DuBois wrote of the genius, humanity, and destiny of people of African descent with a passion, eloquence, and lucidity intended to deliver a reeling blow to the prevailing claims of the day of black inferiority."

Along the way, DuBois criticized the then-dominant, technical-school philosophy of Booker T. Washington, advocating instead the long-term necessity of liberal arts and professional education for African-Americans.

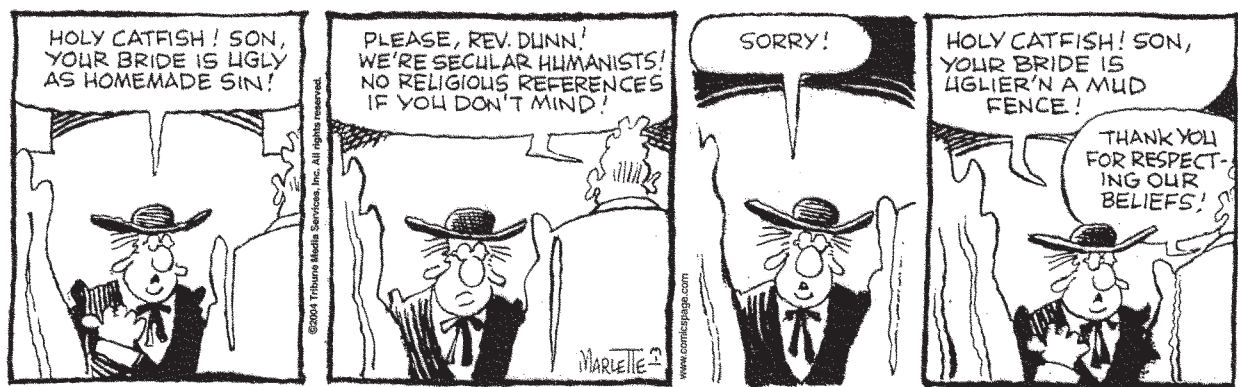
Du Bois introduced the hyphenated description "African-American" and preferred the phrase "people of color" to the word Negroes. He pioneered a sociological analysis based of close observation and description, first in Philadelphia and then in Georgia. He understood, long before others, that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."

He spoke of "the Veil" that separates the black from white; and of his own first-born son: "And thus in the Land of the Color-line I saw, as it fell across my baby, the shadow of the Veil. Within the Veil he was born, and there within he shall live, seeing with those bright, wondering eyes that peer into my soul a land whose freedom is to us a mockery and whose liberty a lie. I saw the shadow of the Veil as it passed over my baby."

W. E. B. DuBois asserted that "the music of Negro religion is that plaintive rhythmic melody with its touching minor cadences, which, despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil." He would not, therefore, have been surprised at the numerous offspring of this music; with names like jazz, rhythm and blues, gospel, rock and roll, and soul.

"But back of this," he observed, "still broods silently the deep religious feeling of the real Negro heart, the stirring unguided might of powerful human souls who have lost the guiding star of the past and are seeking in the great night a new religious ideal. Someday the Awakening will come, when the pent-up vigor of ten million souls shall sweep irresistibly toward the goal, out of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where all that makes life worth living—Liberty, Justice, and Right—is marked 'For White People Only'."

A work of prophecy and also of powerful prose: no wonder this book was deemed worthy of a centennial edition; it certainly is worthy of another generation of readers. ■



A Wound Incurable: The Laments of Jeremiah as a Resource for Ministers in Crisis

*By Jeph Holloway, Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics
East Texas Baptist University*

The laments of Jeremiah bring to light some of the darkest expressions of agony, and pathos found in Scripture of a man struggling on all fronts. They reveal “a spirit locked in life-and-death combat with Yahweh, with the worldly powers, [and] with his own volcanic moods.”¹ The value of these laments for negotiating ministerial crisis can best be seen when we understand them for what they are. While sometimes called “The Confessions of Jeremiah,” these passages, interspersed between Jeremiah 11-20, are better recognized as laments, in many cases following the form and style of the laments found in the Psalms. I stress this comparison to the Psalms of lament in order to highlight features of laments that can be of help in times of crisis in the life of the minister.

Claus Westermann describes a three-dimensional character of conflict and distress reflected in the Psalms of lament: there is a social dimension—trouble from some outside source; there is a theological dimension—complaint is made against God; and there is a personal dimension—the internal crisis of the lamenter. “Whatever the suffering lamented, the whole of one’s being comes into expression in these three dimensions”—social, theological, and personal.² These dimensions are clearly present in the Laments of Jeremiah as he makes use of an important resource for negotiating crisis—the lament form made available from his own heritage and participation in the worship of Israel. In what follows I want to describe the character of the crisis Jeremiah faced in terms of these three dimensions, and then to see how it was that Jeremiah endured. For endure he did. As bitter as are these laments, as shattered of a man as these laments reveal, one of the last scenes we have from the Book of Jeremiah concerning the prophet is of someone still faithful to his task (chapter 42). How do we get from “O Lord, you have deceived me and I was deceived” (20:7) to the life of ongoing faithfulness and service?

What forces were at work spelling crisis for the prophet? The social dimension of lament for Jeremiah includes a wide variety of figures and groups arrayed against the prophet. God informs Jeremiah of the identities of some of his antagonists. To his dismay Jeremiah learns of plots against his life on the part of those of his home village Anathoth (11:21-23). Worse yet, God warns Jeremiah, “Even your brothers and the household of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you” (12:6). Theories vary as to why those of his hometown and family turned against him. One issue is clear, the

antagonism arose in response to Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry: those in Anathoth were saying, “Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, that you might not die at our hand” (11:21).

God warns Jeremiah not to trust those of his own household: “Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you” (12:6). Jeremiah will extend this counsel further when he discovers that not just family, but also those who present themselves as friends were not to be trusted: “All my familiar friends, watching for my fall, say, ‘Perhaps he will be deceived so that we may prevail against him’” (20:10).

In 15:17 Jeremiah speaks of “the circle of merry-makers,” from which he was excluded. The passage does not merely indicate that Jeremiah had become a social leper, left off the guest list of routine social gatherings. The likely reference is to a group familiar to village life in the Mediterranean world—“the circle of men of standing in the community . . . who discuss the affairs of the community, and gossip, and make decisions, and who carry on the traditions of the community.”³ The merry-making in this circle was not simply good-natured fellowship and amusement. “One senses that the merry-makers . . . were making merry at Jeremiah’s expense, or at the expense of his message.”⁴ Jeremiah speaks of those who mock him, denounce him, deride him, and see him as the fool (20:7-10). One could visit Jeremiah’s hometown and hear the gossip, the jokes, the outrage, and the plots of family, friends, and community leaders united in the common effort of ending, in whatever way necessary, the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah.

Matters were not any better in Jerusalem. For instance, after his temple sermon (7:1-12), “the priests, the prophets, and all the people,” demanded the death sentence for his challenge to the most sacred symbol of God’s favor toward Judah (26:7-11). King Jehoiakim made the point nicely that prophets of Jeremiah’s ilk would not be tolerated in Jerusalem when he had Uriah son of Shemaiah extradited from Egypt and executed by the sword (26:20-24). He made the point personal when, having had the scroll of Jeremiah’s preaching read to him, the king cut it in pieces, pitched the fragments into the fireplace, and ordered Jeremiah’s arrest (Jeremiah 36).

Jeremiah’s challenge to the religious and political establishment meant that all those who wielded power in Jerusalem saw the prophet as a threat to be nullified: “They said, ‘Come

and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet! Come and let us strike at him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words” (18:18).

Brothers, cousins, uncles, neighbors, village elders, priests, wise men, prophets, princes, officers, rulers, kings—all saw Jeremiah as a threat; all did what they could to circumvent his impact on Judah. While the intent was common, the strategies were various. There was whispering, mockery, and derision. There were plots, traps, and accusations. Their devices ranged from ostracization to threats on his life. The hostility was total: “Every one curses me” (15:10). The onslaught was comprehensive: the phrases “everyone” and “all day long,” name the parameters of his conflict (20:7). I am reminded of an old blues tune: “Nobody loves me but my mamma, and she might be jivin’ too.”

What accounts for this antagonism? The explanation is simple as far as Jeremiah was concerned: “For me the word of the LORD has resulted in reproach and derision all day long (20:8). The men of Anathoth confirm the connection: “Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD that you might not die at our hand” (11:21). What word did Jeremiah speak that evoked such a response? A brief description of features of contemporary American Christianity might provide a window into circumstances addressed by Jeremiah.

In their recent work, *Heal Thyself*, Joel Shuman and Keith Meador discuss what they say is the distortion of the Christian faith into a device for personal benefit.⁵ Christian faith is recommended, not because it is true, but because when practiced surgery recovery accelerates, cancer remission rates improve, and life expectancy increases. In this environment Christianity has absorbed features of a wider cultural context characteristic of late modernity: radical individualism, narcissism, and the therapeutic quest.

I suggest that this account of contemporary American sheds light on the conflict between Jeremiah and his contemporaries. The breakdown of the social demands of the covenant between God and Israel illustrates the rampant individualism of Jeremiah’s day. The prophet searched the streets of Jerusalem in vain in his attempts to find one person doing justice. Instead, he discovers a dysfunctional society in which the wealthy live by deceit and enjoy their advantage at the expense of the vulnerable (chapter 5). In his Temple sermon he calls for self-satisfied worshipers to “practice justice between a man and his neighbor” (7:5) and warns that oppression of the alien, the orphan, the widow will eventually bring ruin on the house called by God’s name (7:6-11). The fragmentation of social relations can be seen in the violation of the basic social demands of the Law of Moses. Temple devotees “steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely” (7:9), all the while confident that the Temple serves as a prophylactic against any disaster.

The admission of 18:12 provides almost a classic expression of narcissism: “It is no use!” the people of Jerusalem will say to Jeremiah, “For we are going to follow our own plans,

and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.” Parallels between 18:12 and 18:18 suggest that the plans of evil hearts and the plans of priests, sages, and prophets to silence Jeremiah reveal a relationship between the pursuit of unbridled self-interest and a religious, institutional framework that provided ideological support. J. David Pleins relates social decay and corrupt religious practices, arguing that at the heart of Jeremiah’s “prophetic critique stood fierce opposition to the cherished beliefs and ritual practices that functioned to support the exploitative lifestyle of the urban establishment.”⁶ As in our own day an individualistic, narcissistic lifestyle sanctioned by a religion of self-fulfillment threatened the calling and task of the people of God. Jeremiah’s calling was to confront such a state of affairs with the word of judgment.

Matters were not helped by the apparent lack of fulfillment of Jeremiah’s threats of judgment. Decades passed between his initial warnings of divine judgment and eventual fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile. His antagonists delighted in taunting Jeremiah on the issue of his credibility (17:15; 20:7, 10). Given the test for the validity of a prophet and its prescription for false prophets (Deut. 18:20-22), challenges to Jeremiah’s credibility were tantamount to threats on his life.

Jeremiah confronted the moral decay of the covenant people. He insisted their worship had been compromised. He challenged the corruption of the guardians of the religious status quo. He threatened a judgment that seemed to be only a phantom menace. And he has to ask, “Why is my pain unceasing and my wound incurable?”

But this is not the whole story and his anguished questions require fairer treatment. Yes, he is surrounded by threats on every side. The social dimension of lament comes through loud and clear. But it is the theological dimension that is really the great source of confusion and crisis for the prophet. Jeremiah’s bigger problem is with God.

Certainly Jeremiah’s God is the God to whom Israel prays, whom Israel is to serve and worship, and before whom Israel lives. Jeremiah makes use of the lament form from Israel’s common worship, and in doing so voices basic convictions maintained by Israel concerning the character of God. God is “Yahweh of hosts, who judges righteously” and the one who “tries the mind and heart” (11:20). God knows and evaluates the intent of every heart in light of God’s own standards of righteousness and exercises divine sovereignty in upholding that righteousness (20:12). Jeremiah believes God hears prayers, promises deliverance, and is the defender and champion of those who rely on him in trust (11:18; 15:20; 20:11). These convictions reflect many of the traditional beliefs of Israel as expressed in the Psalms of Lament.

Jeremiah also believes he has a peculiar relationship with God as God’s prophet. God reveals crucial information to him about enemies (11:18, 21-23). Yes, God knows and tries every mind and heart, but Jeremiah prays specifically, “Thou knowest me, O LORD, and Thou seest me; and Thou dost examine my heart toward Thee” (12:3). Jeremiah has known

a call as prophet that sets him apart from others and provides him with delight and joy as he feeds on God's word; as a bride is known by the name of her husband, so Jeremiah says, "I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts" (15:16).

Jeremiah's web of beliefs was formed by a tradition he had inherited and personalized. Tradition and experience provided the framework through which he read the world and God's actions within it. And yet at this intersection between affirmed tradition and experience stands an intolerable contradiction. For Jeremiah also experiences the hatred of family, the enmity of strangers, the opposition of religious power-brokers, and the apparent lack of fulfillment of God's word of judgment on those who have despised the prophetic word. In light of deeply held convictions about God as righteous and just, and in the face of fierce hostility, Jeremiah raises the obvious questions: "Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal treacherously at ease" (12:1)? Why, indeed? If God "presides over a morally coherent creation," then the prosperity of the wicked can only be at God's discretion.⁷ Or so Jeremiah thinks (cf. 12:2).

While these questions sound like the abstract questions of theodicy, for Jeremiah the theoretical had become personal. The personal investment Jeremiah has in these questions surfaces as we note the intensity with which he raises these issues. The laments contain some of the most troubling language with reference to God found in Scripture. If Jeremiah believes God is just and righteous, he is more than confused that the violence of his attackers seems to slip past God's attention unchecked. As James Crenshaw puts it, "It is apparent to the prophet that the righteous judge is not keeping proper hours."⁸

Jeremiah is haunted by the suspicion that God cannot be trusted. "Wilt Thou indeed be to me like a deceptive stream, with water that is unreliable" (15:18)? In his preaching Jeremiah had scolded his contemporaries for having forsaken "the fountain of living waters to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (2:13). Judah had rejected Yahweh as the faithful and steadfast source of life and sustaining care for the illusory security promised by the fertility religions. But now Jeremiah accuses God of being for him "like a brook to which the thirsty traveler comes in search of

life-giving water, only to find it has run dry. . . . If Jeremiah had said in so many words, 'God you have failed me,' he could have said no more."⁹

The accusatory tone is even more direct in 20:7: "O LORD, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived; Thou hast overcome me and prevailed." Interpretations differ on the character of the deception Jeremiah believes God to have perpetrated. Some hear sexual overtones and think Jeremiah basically accuses God of rape.¹⁰ Others note parallels with the account in 1 Kings 17 of God's commissioning a "spirit of deception" via false prophets to send King Ahab to his demise.¹¹ Does Jeremiah think he is a false prophet as some accused him of being? One wonders if there were occasions when in mid-oracle Jeremiah ever thought to himself, "Do I really believe half of what I am preaching?"

Another interpretation suggests that Jeremiah gives voice here to "his sense of entrapment between a compelling word from an insistent God and a stubborn and derisive people."¹² On the one hand is an overpowering word that Jeremiah cannot evade. On the other hand is a resistant people incapable of positive response. The dual use of the verbs *patah* ("deceive") and *yakol* ("prevail") in 20:7 and 20:10, with God first as the subject of the verbs and then Jeremiah's opponents, suggests for Terence Fretheim that Jeremiah unexpectedly finds himself between a rock and a hard place. "Whether or not God intended to dupe him, Jeremiah feels that he has been drawn into a vocation that is much more intense and difficult than God had led him to believe."¹³

Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that Jeremiah is in a bad place. Yes, Jeremiah casts his fortune into the hands of God, and yet he expresses uncertainty concerning God's reliability. His confidence based on personally affirmed traditions collides with God's apparent failure to keep his end of the bargain. I believe this is a crisis far more troubling to Jeremiah than any opposition he faced from his contemporaries. As Robert Davidson puts it, "What happens if you reach the point where what you have been most confidently preaching to others about the reality of God, no longer makes sense in your own experience? Accept cognitive collapse, pack [it] in . . . or what?"¹⁴

Between the rock of an insistent God and the hard place of a resistant people stands a prophet in turmoil. The social and



theological dimensions bear heavily on the prophet and issue forth in laments that reveal the personal dimension of conflict. In viewing the personal dimension of Jeremiah's lament we better understand the nature of the wound incurable these laments describe.

An overriding theme of lament in general and of the laments of Jeremiah in particular is that the suffering lamented is unjust. Jeremiah insists that he does not deserve the treatment he receives. His opponents are "those who deal treacherously" with him (12:1), not justly. "Should good be repaid with evil?" he asks God, contrasting his beneficent ministry of proclamation and prayer to the evil plans devised by his antagonists (18:20). Jeremiah has acted with integrity toward others: "I have neither lent, nor have men lent money to me, yet everyone curses me" (15:10). He has done nothing that merits contempt, though contempt is what he gets.

If anyone should understand that Jeremiah is getting the shaft, it should be God. God is the one who knows and tries the prophet's heart (12:3). Jeremiah has responded faithfully to the prophetic task; and while not delighting in proclaiming a word of judgment and destruction, Jeremiah has nevertheless fulfilled his responsibilities in ways fully open to divine review (17:16). Indeed, God knows that it is precisely because of Jeremiah's faithfulness and integrity that he suffers insult and disgrace. If God's focus has wandered, Jeremiah is bold enough in his innocence to reclaim God's attention: "Thou who knowest, O LORD . . . know that for Thy sake I endure reproach" (15:15). These are not the words of someone attempting to discover where he went wrong in his ministry. Jeremiah insists that he faces treatment that he does not deserve.

Along with protestations of innocence, we also see in the laments a prophet totally immersed in his calling. His conflict is so fully embracing because Jeremiah is fully embraced by his task. Jeremiah knows that he has been called from birth to the prophetic role (1:4-5), a call that could be avoided only if he had never been born (20:14-18). To be called from birth means that there is no Jeremiah apart from his role as a prophet.

But since his calling is to proclaim an insistent word that meets only with stubborn resistance, he is immersed not only in his role as a prophet, but in conflict as well. Indeed, he sees his life as defined by conflict. His mother bore him "as a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land" (15:10). As far as Jeremiah is concerned, he came forth from the womb, not only as a prophet, but also "to look upon trouble and sorrow, so that my days have been spent in shame" (20:18). So identified with his task is Jeremiah that the fate of the word—reproach and derision—is the fate of the prophet.

Will Willimon cites the wisdom once given a group of ministers. "You don't have to be courageous as a preacher. All you have to do is get down behind the text. You can say, 'This is not necessarily me saying this—but I do think the text says it.'"¹⁵ Jeremiah was not afforded this luxury. There is no distance between Jeremiah and the word preached—no gap between prophet and message. For Jeremiah the word

preached has become as part of him as his evening meal (15:16). Jeremiah is fully immersed in a prophetic task that places him between an insistent God and a resistant people. Because of this immersion, he suffers an incurable wound.

Further, the space between God and people is a lonely one. Jeremiah is immersed in a task that brings him isolation. Davidson suggests we should expect nothing else for such a prophet: "You do not openly attack the temple . . . and get invited to the priests' fraternal; you do not walk through the streets of Jerusalem advocating desertion to the enemy and then go for a drink in the officers' mess."¹⁶ But Jeremiah's isolation is more than just the end result of an abrasive message. It is not just occasional; it is vocational.

Called by God to avoid all the normal activities of village life (e.g., marriage) as an indication of the end of normalcy for Judah (16:1-9), Jeremiah complains, "Because of Thy hand I sat alone, for Thou didst fill me with indignation" (15:17). His isolation is a feature of his immersion in his message. The prophet's life correlates with the prophetic word. If God has become estranged from Israel, as a husband divorced from his wife (3:1) or as a stranger in the land (14:8), Jeremiah's life "was shaped in such a way as to conform to the shape of the life of God toward Israel at this particular moment."¹⁷ His isolation stems directly from a call that claimed his entire existence.

Jeremiah complains of an incurable wound and ceaseless pain (15:18). What are his injuries? A prophet offers a burdensome but truthful word to a people who respond with fierce antagonism. In the face of undeserved suffering that consumes his life he feels God has failed to sustain and uphold him in the task. Thorough immersion in his task means personal embodiment of a word of anguish and travail. His ministry has left him lonely and isolated, cut off from family and friend. And, most disturbing of all, even though God is fully aware of his situation and hears his prayers, Jeremiah struggles with whether or not God offers any resolution to his trouble. The social, theological, and personal dimensions of Jeremiah's complaints reveal what Berrigan calls "a trinity of anguish and lamentation."¹⁸ Is there any palliative care for the ceaseless pain of a conflicted prophet? Does it even make sense to speak of a remedy for an incurable wound?

As bitter as are these laments, though, and as shattered of a man as these laments reveal, one of the last scenes we have from the Book of Jeremiah concerning the prophet is of someone still faithful to his task, still a person of prayer, still someone of conviction and courage, and still a prophet unalterably committed to the will of God (chapter 42). How do we get from "O Lord, you have deceived me and I was deceived" (20:7) to the life of on-going faithfulness and service? By what means did Jeremiah endure his incurable wound? But first, what remedies were forbidden?

James Dittes observes, "There are two ways to swallow grief dumbly, both ways making it more poisonous than nutritious. One can deny the life that was lived . . . or one can deny the death. . . . The minister can swallow grief either

way: death triumphant or death denied. . . . That is, the minister can flee the ministry, either by actually resigning from the church payroll or by becoming resigned to a visionless, partnerless occupation, by becoming jaded and 'professional,' mechanically going through the motions."¹⁹

Both of these options pulled at Jeremiah. First, Jeremiah, at least on certain occasions, wanted out. He attempted a retreat from the prophetic task and discovered instead the presence of "an inner compulsion that will not allow him to give up the enterprise" (20:9).²⁰ There is no escape for a prophet called from the womb. Awareness of this leads him to lament his birth (20:14-18). Jeremiah knows that the only way he could have avoided the prophetic task is if he had never been born at all. He wants out; but the only way that could have happened was if there had been no Jeremiah to begin with.

An alternative to the total abandonment of costly ministry is its domestication. How can this happen? "When vocational identity—call—is uncertain or under challenge, then it is especially tempting to don the role expectations of others, especially when these are . . . firmly entrenched in habit and culture."²¹ Examination of one of God's responses to Jeremiah's laments suggests that Jeremiah was at least subtly tempted in this direction.

After his implicit accusation concerning God's faithfulness, God calls Jeremiah to repent and gives a conditional reaffirmation of Jeremiah's call: "If you return, then I will restore you—Before me you will stand. And if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become my spokesman" (15:19). Many detect here a rebuke of the prophet for "having transgressed the mysterious boundaries of divine sovereignty."²² The worthless words would be those that question God's dependability. But, "If Jeremiah ever heeded the admonition to muzzle his festering complaints, at any point in his life, these prayers offer no evidence of it."²³

That Jeremiah continues to raise serious issues with God, and that God continues to use him as a prophet, indicates that the conventional interpretation is inadequate. The last bit of 15:19 clarifies the situation. "They for their part may turn to you," God says, "But as for you, you must not turn to them." To "turn to them" would mean for Jeremiah to "back off from the word he is called to speak."²⁴ It would mean for Jeremiah to adapt the content of his prophetic message to the expectations of his contemporaries. Was this actually an issue for Jeremiah? "Is it possible that when opposition and misunderstanding were at their fiercest, he was tempted to ease his troubles by trimming his message to make it slightly more palatable?"²⁵

Jeremiah preached to a people who saw religion in utilitarian terms (see 44:15-19). Do his laments hint at a Jeremiah struggling with his obedience to God in terms of a cost-benefit relationship? I believe this is the focus of the warning that Jeremiah receives in 15:19. The prophet is warned not to allow prevailing views on what counts for a successful prophet to shape his preaching. Jeremiah cannot escape his prophetic task by failing to speak the divine word. Neither,

however, can he avoid the cost of ministry by conforming that word to the expectations of others; even, or perhaps especially, those expectations firmly entrenched in habit and culture.

How, then, does Jeremiah negotiate his crisis? If the laments reveal the character of Jeremiah's crisis, they also indicate the means by which he endured. What they indicate is that in making use of the lament form 1) Jeremiah avails himself of an identifiable tradition of Israel's worship that includes him in the heritage of a contested but resolute faith. If he cannot sit in the circle of the merry-makers, and because of the hand of Yahweh has to sit alone, at least Jeremiah knows that he participates in a fellowship that has long taken the issues of costly obedience seriously.

But it is not simply that misery loves company that makes this participation significant. Participation in the lament tradition is participation in a mode of faith that 2) gives permission for intense and candid prayer that exhibits true and vigorous partnership with God. Lament enables Jeremiah to engage God in arenas of life beyond those that simply evoke praise and thanksgiving. "Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being."²⁶ If Jeremiah is permitted only praise, then God is refused admittance to much of his life, or simply becomes a projection of Jeremiah's immature narcissism, Feuerbach's deity of wish-fulfillment.

Jeremiah's use of lament actually testifies to an integrity and depth of faith that is willing to take risks with a God who seeks genuineness in relationship. While the sharp questions and accusations of his laments illustrate profound disturbance, they also illustrate profound confidence. Miller insists, "It is the one who trusts God who complains to God. . . . It is only the person who truly believes that God can and will help who dares to challenge the Lord so forthrightly."²⁷

Can protest and faith exist together? Or better put, is protest integral to faith? In his *Wounds Not Healed By Time* Solomon Schimmel refers to the teachings of Rabbi Kalonymous Kalmon Shapira, the Hassidic rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto. In the rabbi's teaching concerning the biblical and rabbinic tradition of protest to God, "We find . . . two apparently different responses to catastrophe: an attitude of radical and unconditional acceptance on the one hand, and a spirit of protest, confrontation, even outrage on the other. . . . Expressions of protest and challenge are quite proper when directed toward God as part of an ongoing relationship with him. . . . the two attitudes—submission and challenge—are in no way contradictory; they are two complementary aspects of a full and healthy relationship between human being and God." Schimmel notes that it was difficult to find an atheist in the Warsaw Ghetto.²⁸ Jeremiah endures because he practices in lament a vibrant faith that sees all of life in relation to God.

In appealing to the lament tradition, Jeremiah also appeals to 3) a strategy for world-making. The content of his laments indicates great disorientation, the collapse of coherent boundaries between good and evil, and bewilderment at

God's indifference. Jeremiah repeatedly asks "Why?" "Why has the way of the wicked prospered" (12:1)? "Why is my pain unceasing" (15:18)? "Why did I ever come forth from the womb" (20:18)? These questions are never answered and God seems inattentive to their seriousness; but they suggest that Jeremiah is now working without a net. He himself had warned of the cosmic consequences of Israel's refusal to embrace the ways of the Creator. "I looked on the earth and it was formless and void" (4:23). Things do fall apart when the Center does not hold. And now Jeremiah's own center has been shaken. Lament, however, provides a means for finding formfulness in the context of formlessness.²⁹

Walter Brueggemann helps us understand the significance of having available the lament form for expressing grief. With the possibility of prayer that includes complaint, petition, and expression of trust there is a means for voicing how a prior perception of reality, one's basic orientation, has been displaced (complaint), how in a situation of disorientation God *must* be at work (petition), and how there is anticipated the gift of a new world in place of what has been lost (expression of trust).³⁰ Brueggemann argues that use of the lament form is vital in the experience of disorientation as it "serves to maintain and reassert the life-world of Israel as a valid symbolic context in which experience can be healingly experienced." It is a means by which "the community asserts that life in all its parts is formful and therefore meaningful."³¹

Jeremiah's adaptation of the lament form raises the question of whether he achieved the sense of meaning and healing that Brueggemann suggests the form promises. The last lament moves from petition to praise as an expression of confidence (20:12-13). But the Book of Jeremiah then moves to the darkest expressions of despair found in Jeremiah's laments (20:14-18). Perhaps the use and break with inherited form here indicates the extremity of Jeremiah's situation. His appeal to the lament form demonstrates his search for order as a bearer of the faith of Israel. By his adaptation of the form, he demonstrates his struggle with the possibility that that faith will have to find new ways of endurance. The content of his laments indicates experience of great disorientation; that he employs the form of lament indicates that his effort, however incomplete at achieving a new orientation, is a vital strategy for survival in his chaotic world.

One final feature of Jeremiah's use of lament is important for understanding how he negotiated his vocational crisis. Jeremiah's use of the lament suggests 4) his awareness that the issues at stake were larger than those merely of his own personal well-being. Clearly he is concerned for his own well-being; but Jeremiah is at least as concerned with the larger issue of the justice of God. Lament articulates the issue of justice, pressing the point that life is not the way it should be and pressing the point with the only One who can make a difference.³²

The language of justice appears regularly in the laments and Jeremiah is bold enough to state to God, "Indeed, I would discuss matters of justice with Thee" (12:1). And it is the concern for justice that drives what are for many the

most unpalatable features of Jeremiah's laments—the pleas for divine wrath on his opponents. The language of 18:21 is most shocking: "Give their children over to famine, and deliver them up to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widowed. Let their men also be smitten to death, their young men struck down by the sword in battle." Jeremiah has grown weary of God's patience with his people and wants him to get on with the job: "Deal with them in the time of Thine anger" (18:23).

There are hardly any more violent words than these in the Bible. And I am not at all suggesting that we duplicate these prayers in the context of our own crises. But it is important for us to note two things. First, Jeremiah brings the issue of justice to God and does not seek to take matters into his own hands. "The crucial thing," Miller states, "is that the prayer is lifted up to God. The predicament is placed in God's hands."³³

Second, we must note that Jeremiah here simply echoes the language of God (see 6:11-12; 15:7-9) and that "Jeremiah's strong language against his adversaries is precisely correspondent to God's announcement of judgment."³⁴ Jeremiah's laments are driven by his mission to announce the judgment of God and his perception that God was slack in executing God's own program. The delay of judgment raises the legitimate question of God's justice, particularly when the delay occasions contempt for the divine word (17:15; 20:7-8). Jeremiah's participation in lament expresses his concern for the larger issue of God's justice among God's people and in God's world. Commitment to a concern larger than himself is the occasion for Jeremiah's lament as well as a driving force that sustains him when lament seems unanswered.

Jeremiah's use of lament demonstrates the availability to him of at least four crucial strategies for negotiating his vocational crisis. It joins him to a tradition that taught him to pray in specific ways. It permits and gives display to a vigorous and profound faith. It provides a way to at least attempt to find some measure of order amidst chaos. And it places his life and crisis in the larger setting of wider concerns and issues.

There is one more feature of the laments, however, that is apparent in reading the Book of Jeremiah that Jeremiah might not himself have perceived. The question of the function of the laments in the present form of the book has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. A widely held conclusion is that the laments presently serve, not a biographical interest, but the book's argument justifying God's judgment of Judah. By highlighting the authenticity of the prophetic message rejected by the people in their rejection of the prophet, the laments reinforce the occasion for God's judgment. One important feature of this emphasis, however, is the presentation of Jeremiah as one who embodies in his own person the troubled relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Jeremiah is presented as one who both knows the suffering of God's people and knows the suffering of God, so that "in and through the prophet, the people should be able to see how God has entered into the anguish of their situation and made

it his very own.”³⁵

The Book of Jeremiah makes clear the connections between Jeremiah's laments, a people who face anguish, and a God who suffers the anguish of his people. In the laments themselves Jeremiah nowhere indicates that he recognizes that his suffering is, shall we say, representative. The laments testify to his suffering but fail to yield any measure of meaning in it. “There is no ‘however’ remaining, no consoling postscript, no final redeeming victory.”³⁶ We wish that Jeremiah could have heard, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). We wish Jeremiah could have said, “Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Cor. 4:10).

But we err if we believe that we are sustained only by those truths of which we are conscious. Whether he understood it as such or not, Jeremiah knows the suffering of the people of God, and he knows the anguish of a God who suffers with his people. But as his suffering arises from his immersion into this covenanted world, so will his endurance. Jeremiah suffers “as sign and symbol of Israel's relationship with Yahweh.”³⁷ Because that relationship is troubled, Jeremiah suffers an incurable wound. But because even that troubled relationship will endure, so will Jeremiah; whether he knows it or not. ■

¹ Daniel Berrigan, *Jeremiah: The World, The Wound of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 60.

² Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. by Keith Crim and Richard Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 267-68.

³ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 459.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Joel James Shuman and Keith G. Meador, *Heal Thyself: Spirituality, Medicine, and the Distortion of Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶ J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, (Louisville: WJKP, 2001), 289.

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 1-25*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 113.

⁸ James Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 43.

⁹ John Bright, “A Prophet's Lament and Its Answer,” in *A Prophet to the Nations*, L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 330.

¹⁰ E.g., Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 165.

¹¹ E.g., Patrick D. Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 726.

¹² Terence E. Fretheim, “Caught in the Middle: Jeremiah's Vocational Crisis,” *Word and World* 42/4 (Fall 2002): 353.

¹³ Ibid., 354.

¹⁴ Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1983), 132.

¹⁵ William H. Willimon, *Calling and Character*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 26.

¹⁶ Davidson, *Courage to Doubt*, 124.

¹⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 239.

¹⁸ Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 72.

¹⁹ Dittes, *Re-Calling Ministry*, edited by Donald Capps (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 20.

²⁰ Miller, “Jeremiah,” 727.

²¹ Dittes, *Re-Calling Ministry*, 55.

²² Balentine, *Prayer*, 159. See, e.g., Bright, “A Prophet's Lament,” 336 and Miller, “Jeremiah,” 698.

²³ Ibid., 161.

²⁴ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 242.

²⁵ Davidson, *Courage to Doubt*, 134.

²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Lost of Lament,” chapter in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 102.

²⁷ Miller, “Jeremiah,” 730.

²⁸ Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds Not Healed By Time: The Power of Repentance and Forgiveness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135.

²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief,” chapter in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 84-97.

³⁰ See his essay, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” chapter in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 11-13.

³¹ Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief,” 96.

³² Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 104-07.

³³ Miller, “Jeremiah,” 718.

³⁴ Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 276-77.

³⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 160.

³⁶ Gerhard von Rad, “The Confessions of Jeremiah,” in *A Prophet to the Nations*, L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 347.

³⁷ Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts*, SBLMS 42 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 64.

Book Reviews

Must Christianity Be Violent? Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology

Kenneth R. Chase & Alan Jacobs, Eds. Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2003.

Reviewed by John A. Wood,
Professor of Religion, Baylor University

The issue of violence and religion has taken center stage since 9/11. Both Muslims and Christians have probed deeply into the relationship between violence and Islam, and books regularly appear in both scholarly and popular venues. However, the issue of Christianity and violence has been a topic of concern for Christian thinkers for centuries. They have sought to respond to incessant charges by non-Christians that although Christian ethics claims to be an ethic of love and service to others, it has in fact been used to subjugate and to kill.

The Crusades of the middle ages and the Nazi Holocaust in particular have called for Christian thinkers to explain how their faith could have been so closely related to these horrific events. One such recent effort to deal with this subject from a Protestant, evangelical perspective occurred at a conference sponsored by The Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College on March 15-17, 2000. This book is a collection of papers delivered at that conference, although some of the chapters have been updated by the presenters to include references to 9/11.

The Introduction by Kenneth Chase notes that the arguments mounted against a Christianity that is supposedly characterized by peace fall into two broad categories: the pragmatic argument and the inherency argument. The pragmatic argument says that although not all Christians are violent, the right circumstances will cause Christians to expose their claws and reveal their true nature. History, it is claimed, reveals that Christians all too often act violently. The inherency argument claims that the core elements of the Christian faith inherently lead to violence because its exclusivist claims to truth link evangelism with a struggle between good and evil, and because the sacrifice theme inevitably leads to an undesirable dependence on bloodletting, substitution, and suffering. The following chapters address these two arguments in various ways. The tone of the chapters is generally non-defensive and the writers seek with humility to come to grips with these serious charges.

Joseph Lynch examines the Crusades and concludes that they emerged out of long-term theological developments that changed the way Christians viewed war and warriors. Some Christians adopted the concept of holy war in the Old

Testament through allegorical interpretative methods whereby the crusaders saw themselves as the new Israel fighting for territory under God's leadership. Furthermore, the crusades were also unimaginable without the transformation of medieval knighthood into a *religious* calling.

Luis Rivera-Pagan views Latin American Christianity, as well as Latin American cultural identity and national consciousness in general, as a result of a clash between two paradoxical sources: the "messianic providentialism" guiding the violence of the *conquistadors* and the prophetic indignation reacting against them in the name of the biblical God of mercy and justice, seen most vividly in the writings of the remarkable Bartolome de las Casas.

Dan McKanan provides an insightful analysis of the theology of the antislavery movement, and is especially helpful in his treatment of Lincoln whom McKanan says opted for a "providential theology of divine violence." That is, the war was so big that it had to be, in some way, a manifestation of God's will. Furthermore, Lincoln's assassination functioned as a sacrificial death for the nation.

In examining the Holocaust David Gushee refuses to accept the view that Christianity was *the* cause of the Holocaust, but also owns up to Christian complicity in the Holocaust. In his treatment of Christian rescuers of Jews he asks how a faith could motivate some Christians to risk their lives to save Jews while seemingly motivating other Christians to murder the same people their brothers and sisters were trying to save? He concludes that then, as now, there was no Christian faith, only Christian faiths. In various social contexts and historical circumstances, the Christian faith is taken in different degrees of seriousness and modeled differently by Christian leaders, leading both to healthy and to aberrant versions of Christianity. In a later chapter Victoria Barnett calls the complicity of German Christians during the Nazi era as a "damning failure," but arrives at a conclusion similar to Gushee's.

In an excellent chapter historian Mark Noll tries to answer the question: "Have Christians done more harm than good?" He confesses that the indictments of Christianity as a malignant force in history have not arisen out of thin air; the historical record speaks for itself and should lead to shame

and repentance. Having admitted this however, Noll offers not exonerations but mitigations of these charges. For one, Christians, like Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and other religions have engaged in periodic bloodletting, indicating that these evils are part of the human condition rather than distinctive features of Christianity. Second, however nasty some of the fruits of Christianity have been, often explicitly anti-Christian religions or substitute religions have been worse (e.g. Bolshevik murders, Stalin's Great Terror, Mao's Great Leap Forward, Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, etc.). Third, without the legacy of Christianity the West would never have possessed the trajectory of moral critique that could lead to an indictment of Christianity for its moral failings. After offering historical examples of the good that Christians have done, he concludes the Christian faith has been a plastic force in history. It has obviously inspired to great goodness, but it has also obviously been used for great evil.

James Juhnke's chapter on "How Should We Then Teach American History" is alone worth the price of the book. Rejecting the extremes of the super-patriotic "triumphant nationalism" and of negative cultural criticism, he proposes an alternative of "constructive nonviolence." He proposes that we honor nonviolent aspects of the American experience such as: (1) the survival and strength of native American cultures (e.g., the nonviolent chief Massasoit and the prophet Handsome Lake), (2) nonviolent alternatives that were proposed but rejected (e.g., Philadelphia's nonviolent "Tea Party," Joseph Galloway's bold proposal of how to change the British constitution, William Jennings Bryan's arguments against WWI, and alternatives for the use of the Atomic Bomb on Japan), (3) the human conscience against killing (published interviews with soldiers), (4) the role of voluntary communities (the struggles against Indian removals in the 1830s), and (5) the opponents of total war (the challengers of the prevailing military mythology throughout American history). Juhnke makes a compelling case against the dominant master narrative of American history that sacralizes both the state and the fruits of its violence.

Glen Stassen summarizes the good work he has done in recent years in just peacemaking theory. Drawing on the Bible and on contemporary thought he demonstrates that nonviolent conflict resolution is both Christian and possible in the real world of international conflict.

Richard Mouw tries to defend the Reformed tradition of the substitutionary atonement of Christ by insisting that the nastiness that has often characterized Calvinism flows more from their general picture of a distant and angry God than from their understanding of the meaning of Christ's death. A reader can commend Mouw's effort while also concluding that the time has come to explore alternate ways to explain what Christ's death means to the violent world we live in.

The book concludes with the irrepressible Stanley Hauerwas' provocative defense of his and John Howard Yoder's understanding of pacifism combined with an attack on John Milbank's view that violence is not necessarily always

wrong for Christians. Milbank follows with an essay scolding pacifists for simply "gazing" at violence and doing little to counter it; he thinks that the impulse to protect the innocent is rooted in human nature and not a "fallen" impulse.

This is a timely book for a world engulfed in violence and for a world which cries out for genuine peacemaking. Christians, whether pacifists or just war defenders, will be helped in their efforts to obtain guidance on how to live as Jesus' disciples in a hostile world. All of the chapters are useful, although readers pressed for time might concentrate on the chapters by Noll, Juhnke, Stassen, and Hauerwas. ■

Putting Women In Their Place: The Baptist Debate Over Female Equality

Audra E. and Joe E. Trull, Editors and Contributors,
Smyth & Helwys, Macon, GA, 2003, \$17.

Reviewed by Elizabeth and Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

The Trulls have done thinking Christians everywhere a genuine service in this fine book which brings a balanced and necessary approach to a timely and sensitive subject. The peculiar creedalism, obvious in official actions of the Southern Baptist Convention, has declared that women are subservient to men, and that women pastors are forbidden in Southern Baptist pulpits. These mandates have emerged from the restatements of *The Baptist Faith and Message* in 1998 and 2000.

Despite the statistics which conclude overwhelmingly that woman pastors in SBC churches are all but non-existent, here is a theme which has become a major noise in hyper-conservative circles, resulting in division and misunderstanding. With churches and denominations facing such massive challenges as nuclear proliferation, world-wide terrorism, economic injustices, environmental stewardship, pornography, legalized gambling, the crisis in medical care, just to mention few of these burning issues, it is genuinely disturbing to wonder why the "Baptist Debate over Female Equality" is on the front burner.

Regardless of where you are theologically with reference to the subject of women and ministry, you will profit from reading carefully this timely book. Read it with an open mind. Read it with the hope you will get some fresh and stimulating insights about a very important aspect of Christian ministry today.

What the Trulls have done is put together some excellent-

ly written essays from both women and men, all of whom possess exceptional qualifications to write about the subject. Granted there will be some wide divergences today on this subject, but it will not go away despite one-sided votes in denominational actions. Here is a book that eloquently testifies to the rationality of continued and balanced debate.

To the reviewers, some of the highlights included Fisher Humphrey's essay on "Women in Christian Ministry." It is replete with an effective view of Scripture and logic that is both convincing and helpful. William Hull's overview of "Women and the SBC," likewise frames this entire issue in such a way that its importance and seriousness comes through sensibly with some strong guidelines of permanent value.

The reader will take away some permanent memories from this primer. Gladys Lewis and her pilgrimage in Colorado and Oklahoma, Julie Pennington-Russell and her pastoral challenges, and biblical insights from Ruth Ann Foster, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Sheri Adams, Karen Murray, all collectively bring some urgently needed insights to the table. They need to be heard. These are not radical feminists, but genuine, balanced, experienced women whose opinions will help individuals who are searching for guidance in this troubled field of thought.

The Trulls' contribution to this book is timely and helpful. They bring not only editorial skills, but both are also to be commended for their research and writing. What a price they paid for daring to write positively about women in ministry. Peculiarly pressured into early retirement, their experiences testify to the absolute necessity of strong biblical thinking and application in this area.

One inevitably concludes, not just from the Trulls' book nor alone from the Bible, that God goes on calling women into ministry. In spite of all this confusion, remarkable things are happening to and for women in Christian service, business administration, political advancement, and personal fulfillment.

Personally, the reviewers wish the publishers had come up with a better title and a more attractive book cover. One of the sub-titles, "The Baptist Debate Over Female Equality" is more to the point, even though perhaps inadequate. Don't let these minor flaws, however, deter you from looking seriously at this meaty material that abundantly aids in this ongoing debate. ■

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

Fire: The Joy of Stoking and Poking

By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

Winter's grip has been firm again this year. It usually is. I deal with it grudgingly and sometimes grouchy. One of my best but not very clever or innovative ways of dealing with it is by building a good fire in my big wood-burning fireplace in my blessed study.

Just today I have been contemplating my blessings while sitting in front of this fire which I have kept stoked and poked since very early morning. Some of these blessings have not exactly overwhelmed me but have instead slipped up on me, sidling in, dropping down, and even creeping up from behind. Some may be worth sharing.

1. *The fire itself.* Since time immemorial fire has been one of our most treasured human possessions, one of life's most basic necessities, about as rudimentary as food, clothing, and shelter. Our ancestors, of course, did not invent fire. After lightening would strike a tall tree or after a volcano would erupt with a fearsome flow of red hot molten lava, I suppose our forebears readily enough found that they were significantly more comfortable with the fires that had been started than they were without them. Then I suppose they began to tend the fire, to nurture it, and to guard it. When the weather was cold neighbors would share a few live coals with which their friends could rekindle their own fires that had inadvertently been allowed to go out. Early on, ingenious persons around the world devised ways and means of starting fires, using sticks rubbed together, flint rocks, or twirled points in a bed of dry moss. Matches were not invented until very recent times. The Encyclopedia Britannica says that the first practicable friction match was marketed in 1827. That is when my great grandfathers and grandmothers were already grown young men and women. My particular fire before which I am now sitting was started with an ingenious little propane torch costing about \$3 which, when triggered lights a natural gas starter which in turn quickly catches my wood on fire. Presto. I have fire in my fireplace.

Hearth and home have long gone together. In the old days home without a hearth would hardly have been imaginable. When I was growing up 75 years ago, my mother, on a bitterly cold winter day when it was simply too cold to fire up the kitchen stove on the north side of our drafty two storied house, would prepare a big black iron pot of hominy which she would cook for a very long time over a

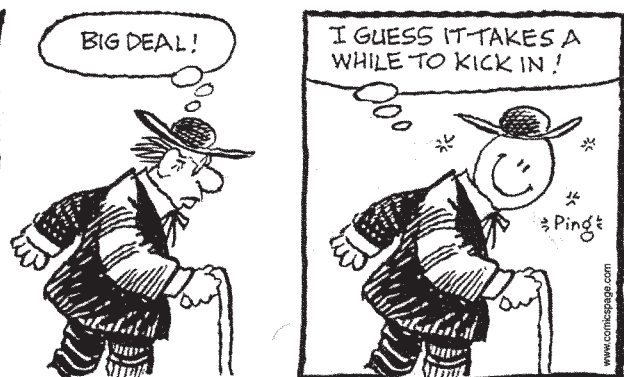
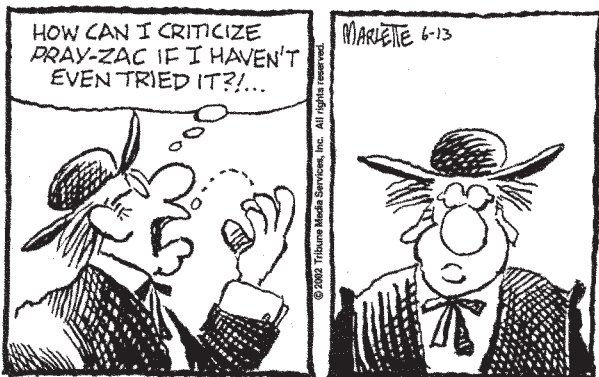
big bed of hot coals raked out from the fireplace in our living room to the edge of the hearth. Then at supper-time when the hominy was deliciously tender she would rake out more live coals onto the hearth and on these would cook a hoecake, biscuit dough formed into one big, flat portion. When fully cooked and beautifully browned, broken into pieces and generously buttered, it became with a hot hominy, a meal fit for the gods. Ah, hearth and home, indeed.

Thank God for the fire itself.

2. *Warm feet.* Once the fire is going, there is nothing more delicious on a really cold winter day when there is a heavy cloud cover hanging low overhead, than to prop your feet on the raised hearth, happily built of rough sandstone to about fifteen inches in height, and there leave them until they are toasty warm. Even when I was a boy, I remember how much I liked putting my feet, as often as not wet and cold, in front of the fire and leaving them there until the numbness of the cold was all gone and the warmth of my newly blessed feet had osmosed to the rest of my happily thawing self. Now that I am old, the former pleasure of really warm feet seems to have been multiplied exponentially. So, thank the Lord for warm feet; and may your own feet be warmed by whatever fire you can relate to when winter's fierce blasts come your way.
3. *A warm back side.* Nothing, absolutely nothing, is more profoundly satisfying than backing up to a good, warm fire on a really cold winter day. City slickers who grew up with space heaters, floor furnaces, or central heat can always be identified by their unseemly awkwardness in front of a winter fire. They seem incapable of grasping the elemental importance of *backing up* to the fire instead of *fronting up* to it. (There is a downside to this stance, however. If a body has a big, older brother, he can come up and catch the front part of your britches and pull them smartly so that the inordinately hot pants legs next to the fire are brought into painful contact with the tender calves of both legs. This unholy maneuver requires a little time and a good deal of grace before fraternal relations can be smoothed out and the fire can once again be backed up to.) It is my belief, based on long observation, that real men and women will always spend about as much time backed up to a fire as they do facing it. I just think you can

trust the heart of a man who backs up to a fire.

4. *Flickering firelight.* The dancing flames of a fine wood fire are authentically lovely, nothing short of truly beautiful. The aesthetic value of the fire is one of its primary benefits. A fire is admirable in its early stages when the flames are just beginning to lick the logs and get hold of the wood which they mean soon to devour. A fire is more wonderful still when it moves toward its maximum blazing and is coming to the zenith of its marvelous powers. Then when it has passed the height of its blazing, the fire comes to what is to me its most exquisite stage with a full complement of glowing coals, red hot, some almost white hot, with just a little white and gray ash beginning to form as the embers prepare to fade away and finally die. The whole life cycle of a fire is a thing of beauty and a joy forever, a phenomenon to wax lyrical about.
5. *Aroma therapy.* On two occasions lately, I have been in shopping malls where I have walked up on aroma therapy salons. I gather that these enterprises are trying to make money by hawking scents, perfumes, sprays, smells, odors, and sundry aromatic offerings. Good idea, I suppose. Actually, however, I can think of few things that could be more pleasing to the olfactory nerves than the delicate odors of burning wood. One of the main reasons for having a wood fire is to enjoy the delicate cachets of different kinds of wood as they burn, pinyon being a prime example. A smoking fireplace is, of course, an abomination. When a poorly built chimney does not draw properly, smoke pours out into the room, burns the eyes, offends the nose, and antagonizes the whole household. I am thankful that the builder of our house used an experienced and knowledgeable subcontractor to build the two wood burning fireplaces in our house for they are constructed in such a way that neither of them has smoked a single time in the sixteen years that we have lived here. When a wood fire is burning, however, a delicate, unobtrusive, but splendidly pleasing aroma can be detected. It is therapy.
6. *Little sounds.* Separation from God is sometimes spoken of in the Bible as being cast into outer darkness and Jude calls the ungodly "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." One thinks of silence. Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher, theologian, and mathematician, has spoken of the eternal silences of the



infinite spaces. There is a certain profundity about silence. Sound, however, is profounder still. God Himself is Word according to John 1:1, reason expressed in a language that humans can understand. God communicates with us through spoken words, through sung words, and through written words in his special Book. Do not judge me to be out of touch with reality now if I put forward an opinion that the little sounds made by a good fire may be heard by those with ears to hear as one of the languages of heaven. When there is green wood burning, a very special spewing, blowing, or even whistling can be easily heard. A piece of green hickory wood which has been coaxed to vigorous burning by several pieces of dry oak and a couple of small pieces of dry ash is capable of producing marvelous little musical notes which are beautiful and gloriously unique. A certain amount of dignified small popping is quite welcome, also. I especially enjoy the phenomenon called “popping snow” which can occasionally be heard. The churlish, raucous popping of fir, green or dry, however, is to be avoided if at all possible because it will both scare the living daylight out of you and wake up your wife in the nearby bedroom where she is trying to catch another little nap in the early morning when you have braved the elements by dawn’s early light in order to get the fire going to drive the chill away before breakfast.

Mostly though the little sounds speak comfort, peace, happiness, and warmth, at least to me.

7. *Reverie.* A comfortable chair in front of a nice fire blazing away in a good fireplace is the quintessential matrix for reverie, which I understand to be the art of being lost in thought. It is near to being a lost art, of course; but I reckon that reverie is one of the fundamental building blocks of a healthy psyche. In these times we are so hurried by agendas that are too full, so harried by assignments, obligations, tuggings, and deadlines that we are hard pressed even to pause long enough to draw a deep breath. Sabbaths are not kept. Sleep is deprived. Rest is denied. Reverie is hardly in our vocabularies.

To sit alone in front of a good fire is to encourage contemplation. To stare at the coals as the fire burns down is to inject into the day’s experience a solid quietness. To grow warm by the fire is to aid and abet the inclination to be still and know “that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). To doze a little in the company of a warm fire is to relax in the deep knowledge that things are working together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

The ancient Greeks thought that fire was a very special possession of the gods and that it could be shared only grudgingly with mortals. With a different take on it, however, I understand fire to be one of God’s good gifts, a not inconsequential component of his gracious provision for the abundant life.

And if all this doesn’t light your fire, maybe your wood is wet. ■

May Day

Saturday – May 1, 1999

black Nike Airs set a quick pace
 untanned calves flash in sunlight
 a saffron robe with brown tasseled belt
 flaps down the side of I-35
 wire-frame glasses struggle to support
 a concerned cro-magnon brow
 brown bushy hair tires
 to cover the shiny cue ball.

a stoic shoulder
 harnessed with a nine foot cross—
 black rubber wheel attached to the bottom—
 Wal-Mart special.

a sign on the back of the cross roars at traffic
 coming up behind:

GOD WANTS
 PRAYER
 BACK IN
 SCHOOL.

and I’m thinkin’—

Jesus didn’t get a wheel

Southern-Fried Sundays

Mine was a
 Sunday-after-church-fried-chicken-childhood.
 Cornbread-n’-squash-casserole-afternoons gave way
 to mandarin-orange-Jello-salad-sunsets.
 Sweet-potato-evenings by roasted-marshmallow-fires
 always left time for devil’d egg-stories
 n’home-made-ice-cream-tunes.
 guitars were the nuts n’ chocolate sauce
 of unenforced bed times.

It was a mythical age when fam’lies stuck together
 like day-old steamed white rice.
 And laughter was as simple as a tipped-over-lawn-chair
 and ashes on the end of a burnt hot dog.

Baptists’ll tell ya’ “*church* is everything.”
 But they all know without saying—
 God is in the food
 and licked fingers
 of a Sunday after noon.

*By Nathan Brown in Hobson’s Choice
 (Edmond, OK: Greystone Press, 2002).*

Financial Report For 2003

From the inception of *Christian Ethics Today* in 1995, the Journal has been sent free of charge to anyone requesting it. The annual cost of about \$25-30 per subscription for over 3200 readers is underwritten by the voluntary contributions of supportive individuals and churches.

During last year, 504 contributions (an increase of 50 over 2002) were given totaling \$67,894. These gifts ranged from \$10 to \$1500, with one challenge gift of \$5000, completing the \$15,000 matching gift offer in 2002. The majority of supporters sent \$25 to \$30, which paid for their subscription.

Our heartfelt gratitude to every person or church who supported the ministry of *Christian Ethics Today* in 2003. Without each of you, the Journal could not continue. Because of your support we are able to send the Journal to hundreds of students, colleges, seminaries, and churches.

Special Thanks to the "Valentine Supporters"

Our special gratitude to those supporters who have honored the dream of our founding editor Foy Valentine by providing major support of \$1000 or more in 2003:

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Gifts By Foy Valentine's Bible Class

In honor of their teacher's 80th birthday, the Bob Glaze Sunday School Class taught by Foy Valentine at Park Cities Baptist Church gave \$3605 to the ministry of CET: Robert Addison, Sparkey Beckham, Kenneth W. Coleman, David F. Davidson, W. Richard Davis, Gene E. Diskey, Keith Drummond, Robert O. Feather, Robert E. Glaze, W. P. Martin, John Phillips, Homer Rader, M. D. Sampels, John Scott, H. N. Shannon, J. R. Tomlin, Wes Westbrook, Perry W. White, Hugh Williams, and Rex M. Winters.

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Trinity Baptist Church, San Antonio, TX	Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, TX

Note: If just thirty churches provided \$1000 annually from their budget or gifts, this would provide a financial base of one-half (50%) of the CET annual budget.

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2003

Balance on Hand 12/31/02:	\$18,513	Expenditures 2003:	\$62,870
Gifts/Income 2003:	\$67,894	BALANCE 12/31/2003:	\$22,995
TOTAL: \$86,407			

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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