

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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

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Should Ethics Come First?

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

I am upset. We live in a day when ethical issues bombard us—same-sex marriage, stem-cell research, war in Iraq, Enron-type corporate greed, lawsuits over Ten Commandments monuments, and even the Rev. Jerry Falwell telling Southwestern Seminary students in a chapel service how to vote.

The crisis in ethics is widespread. Roman Catholics struggle with revelations of clergy sexual abuse and church cover-up, Episcopalians react to the elevation of a practicing homosexual priest, Presbyterians and Methodists are divided over the ordination of gay ministers, and the Southern Baptist Convention prohibits women serving as pastors.

Yet, as David Gushee outlines inside, the study of Christian ethics is in decline. What disturbs me greatly is the continued minimization of Christian ethics in our churches and educational institutions.

In the opening pages of *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, James McClendon Jr. asked, “Should Ethics Come First?” Unlike most theologians, McClendon argues for the “chronological priority of ethics,” noting theologians are forever leaving ethics until last, and at times leaving ethics out altogether.

McClendon is right—ethics came first in Christian history. The first disciples of Jesus did not proclaim a new philosophy or another national religion. Rather they lived as a new community—“resident aliens” (Phil. 3:20) whose lives were counterculture to the world. The church of the first century was identified not by its theological teachings or its mystical revelations—in the beginning Christianity was a new way of life.

In a Graeco-Roman society of vicious immorality, where wealth was worshiped, life was cheap, and purity and chastity were vanishing, came a new moral influence. The extraordinary ethical life of Christians was a moral witness that astounded and attracted the first-century world. That is why the earliest disciples of Jesus were called “people of the Way” (Acts 9:2) even before they were called Christians.

In the late nineteenth-century Christian leaders in England and America cried out for reform in light of the social problems growing out of the Industrial Revolution. The mushrooming inner cities were congested with the poor working class. Economic injustices became the breeding

grounds for crime and moral corruption.

The Social Gospel Movement focused on the ethics of the kingdom of God and sought to apply Jesus’ teachings to bring social harmony and eliminate gross injustices. To their credit, these SGM leaders brought about the abolition of child labor and influenced legislation that improved working conditions and the lot of the urban poor.

However, due to the liberal theology of the SGM (optimism about human nature and the possibility of establishing the kingdom of God on earth), more individualistic Christian groups rejected both the theology and the ethics of “cultural Protestantism.”

For most of the twentieth century, church involvement in social problems such as race relations or war was labeled “social gospel” and “liberal.” Conservative churches were wary of social ethics, for fear of being corrupted by liberal theology.

The outstanding Baptist ethicist T. B. Maston helped change that idea. He began as a teacher of Religious Education. When he initiated a course in Christian ethics at Southwestern Seminary in 1943, at first it was relegated to the School of Religious Education—taught in another building and listed apart from theological studies. Even later when it was moved to the School of Theology, it was placed in the “Practical Division” with evangelism and pastoral ministry, rather than with theology, where it belonged.

Nevertheless, by the 1950s and 1960s, Christian ethics had become a major course of study at Southwestern and other seminaries, partly due to critical social issues of that period. In 1960 more than 30 doctoral students at Southwestern majored in ethics—only New Testament studies had more students. Due to Maston’s influence, ethics teachers emerged: Ralph Phelps, C. W. Scudder, Marguerite Woodruff, Bill Pinson, Guy Greenfield, Ebbie Smith, Bill Tillman, Bob Adams and a host of missionaries, pastors, and denominational leaders. (At Southern Seminary Henlee Barnette had equal influence producing scores of ethicists including Paul Simmons and Glenn Stassen.)

In 2004, has our need for teaching and practicing Christian ethics diminished? Look at the issues debated on
(continued on page 27)

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“The science of interpreting elections has a fancy name: psephology. A shorter, simpler and more accurate title for much election analysis is: fiction.”

Columnist David S. Broder.

❖
“GOD IS NOT A REPUBLICAN OR A DEMOCRAT—We believe that sincere Christians and other people of faith can choose to vote for President Bush or Senator Kerry for reasons deeply rooted in their faith. We believe all candidates should be examined by measuring their policies against the complete range of Christian ethics and values.”

A Sojourners full-page ad in the New York Times, August 30, 2004, supported by 3500 donors and 41,500 signers

❖
“For conservative people of faith, voting for principle this year means voting for the re-election of George W. Bush. The alternative, in my mind, is simply unthinkable.”

Rev. Jerry Falwell in his ‘Falwell Confidential’ email July 1, which Americans United charge breaks the law by using his tax-exempt organization to endorse a candidate for re-election.

❖
“Evangelicals should join political parties and fully express their biblical values [but] they must be careful not to equate Christian faith with partisan politics.”

National Association of Evangelicals in For the Health of a Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility.

❖
“Efforts aimed at transforming houses of worship into political campaign offices stink to high heaven.”

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in response to the Bush-Cheney campaign effort to lure churches into political activity.

❖
“The Democrats may not like it, but we’re serious as a heart attack.”

Richard Land, President of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in an August 13 Wall Street Journal story about the SBC iVoteValues.com campaign.

❖
“The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries.”

James Madison.

❖
“The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

President John Adams, Treaty of Tripoli, 1797.

“I asked them, ‘Why are you here?’ Now they have changed the regime, they have the oil. Why were they in this street?”

Yasser Matloob al-Ani, Iraqi whose 3-year old son was killed on July 5 when American troops opened fire on the family car at a temporary checkpoint.

❖
“Mississippi could be officially Baptist, and Utah could be officially Mormon. If his viewpoint ever became the majority on the high court, it would tear our country apart along religious lines.”

Rev. Barry Lynn, Exec. Dir. of Americans United, commenting on U. S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’ opinion on the Pledge of Allegiance case that the U. S. Constitution does not preclude states from adopting official religions.

❖
“In 2003, nearly 5 million people contracted HIV, more than any previous year. More than half were in sub-Saharan Africa, where the culture’s male-dominated sexuality contributes heavily to the spread of the disease.”

Kenyan National AIDS Control Council.

❖
“This year only 36 of 435 contests for the House of Representatives are regarded as competitive, a drop from about 150 in 1992. Over 90% are safe for one party or the other, due to the politics of redistricting. Smug in their safe districts, members know that their political futures depend more on loyalty to the party than on legislative accomplishment.”

The Christian Century, June 29, 2004.

❖
“We were hot and tired and terribly, so terribly frustrated with this place and these people that we would respond to even the slightest provocation with enthusiastic and brutal violence.”

Last email from 2nd Lt. Brian Smith explaining why his soldiers fired upon children who were flashing mirrors at them, days before he was killed by a sniper on July 2.

❖
“Some Christians want the Ten Commandments posted in public places, but none seem to want to do the same with the Beatitudes. ‘Blessed are the merciful’ in a courtroom? ‘Blessed, are the peacemakers’ in the Pentagon?”

Truthout, May 10, 2004.

❖
“Nearly 36 million Americans now live in poverty, the number increasing from 12.1% in 2002 to 12.4% in 2003. Uninsured Americans grew to 15.6%, now 45 million.”

Census Bureau Report in EthicsDaily.com.

❖
(continued on page 29)

Can Christian Ethics Be Saved?

By David P. Gushee,

Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy, Union University

Note: A version of this paper was originally presented at the April 2002 "Remaking the Modern Mind" Conference at Union University, Jackson, TN.

In the September/October 2001 issue of the evangelical magazine *Books and Culture*, theologian Stephen Webb opened an article provocatively entitled "Danger! Christian Ethics" with the following claims:

- Christian ethics is nothing more than simply being a good Christian.
- Christian ethics becomes just another name for Christian theology.
- What Christianity teaches about ethics is nothing different from or more than what Christianity teaches about Jesus Christ.
- Christian ethics is not only an empty idea; it is also a dangerous one.
- The study of religious ethics is one of the last strongholds of liberal Protestantism in the academy. (p. 21)

This assortment of half-truths and untruths deserves a response on numerous levels. *For now, note it simply indicates that some scholars and some academic institutions are not convinced that a discipline called "Christian ethics" exists or that it ought to exist.* Webb's claims reflect the broader marginalization of Christian ethics in the evangelical and Baptist academy. It is not an accident that so few evangelical educational institutions employ Christian ethicists or even offer courses in the subject. I believe that this marginalization of ethics is a disastrous mistake.

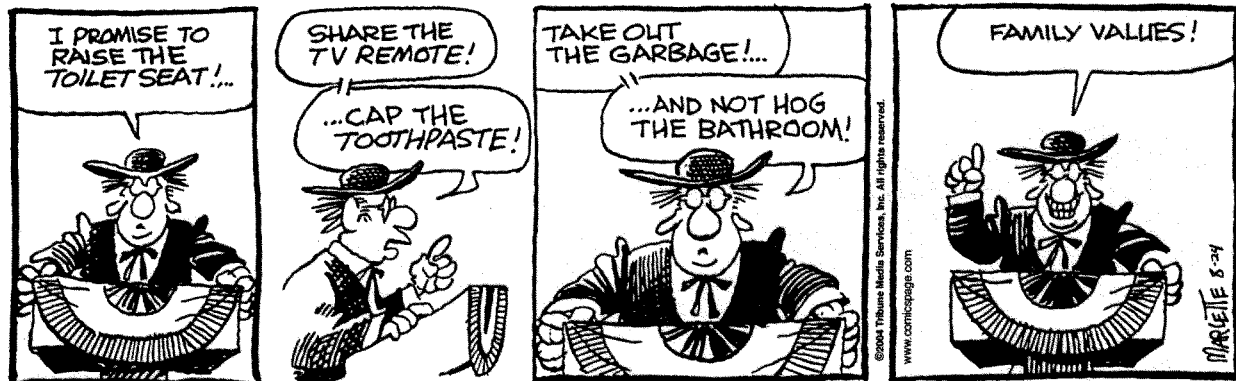
Skepticism about Christian ethics as a discipline relates, I think, to popular Christian weakness in ethical reflection and ethical living in the midst of a morally confused culture. That is the second reason for this article. Done well, Christian

ethics the academic discipline serves Christian churches and Christian people in the formation of their way of life—their own Christian ethics. The North American Christian scene is characterized by the same rampant moral incoherence and relativism that afflicts our culture. If our Christian intellectual life were characterized by the stronger academic practice of a convictional Christian ethics, and if the Christian public began to attend more closely to this work, perhaps the lived ethics of the Christian world would improve. That hope animates not just this paper, but all my efforts in Christian ethics.

The third occasion for this presentation is an honest recognition of the unsettled state of contemporary North American Christian ethics. Among the best Christian ethicists these days is Stanley Hauerwas, who teaches at Duke Divinity School. In the preface to his significant book *With the Grain of the Universe*, the compilation of his 2000-2001 Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews University, Hauerwas states:

I never dreamed that I would be asked to give the Gifford Lectures. Theologians did not have a conspicuous role in the Gifford Lectures in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, I am not even a proper theologian but a representative of the even more disreputable field called Christian ethics, and it is not clear that I am a competent worker in that "field" because it is not apparent what constitutes competence in Christian ethics (p. 9).

With characteristic puckishness, Hauerwas here manages to describe his own primary field (and mine, and about 1000 others of us) as "disreputable"—and to make the more signifi-



cant claim that there is essentially no standard for competence in Christian ethics. Hauerwas is not saying that there are no competent ethicists, but instead that there is no “center” defining what competence looks like in ethics.

As one who has studied and practiced Christian ethics for fifteen years now, I think that Hauerwas is not far wrong in his claim about the lack of clear standards of competence in Christian ethics. So one occasion for this essay is to sketch how evangelicals should define such competence as we strengthen our involvement with this discipline and in turn perhaps strengthen the discipline itself.

A fourth and final concern is my sense of both a personal and professional need to build bridges out of the evangelical/Baptist subculture to the broader church and its associated academic guilds.

At one level, this is merely personal. I am a Baptist evangelical by conviction; yet I am also a practicing member of the Christian ethics guild. Living in two worlds, I have a natural interest in building bridges between them.

But the need for bridge-building is more than personal. I think that the rather stark divorce between the vast (“red state”) evangelical and Baptist subculture and most of the leading (“blue state”) professionals who write and teach Christian ethics is bad for both. In recent years I have noticed a growing interest in dialogue and engagement with evangelical Christians on the part of these Christian ethicists. As I will attempt to show a bit later, we should rush through this open door, not only for the sake of the ethics guild and the churches it serves, but also for our own sake.

Tracing the History of Christian Ethics

When mainstream Christian ethicists say “the academic discipline of Christian ethics,” what they normally mean is: that discipline practiced by those who have earned a PhD or equivalent degree in Christian ethics or a closely related field; identify themselves as Christian ethicists; write scholarly and professional publications in the field; teach Christian ethics in college, university, or seminary settings or engage in full-time professional work that is closely related to the field; find one of their primary professional/institutional homes in the organization called the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE).

Yet, as mainstream ethicist Edward L. Long of Drew University himself put it in his 1984 history of the Society of Christian Ethics, “It is important not to equate the history of the Society with the history of an academic discipline. Christian ethics is as old as Christianity itself and even has roots in OT thought. . . . A history of Christian ethics resembles a history of Christian thought and is integrally related to it.” (*Academic Bonding and Social Concern*, 160). At one level, then, there is no discrete history of Christian ethics. It is simply the ethical aspect of historic Christian thought. Let’s call this historic Christian moral thought “Christian Ethics A” because it was here first—it can be witnessed in Scripture and every era of church history. Christian Ethics A is the church’s reflection on its own moral life and on its

engagement with society. It is a perennial activity of the church.

The precursor of modern North American Christian ethics can be found in the late 19th century. Coming on the heels of a variety of social reform movements, often spearheaded by evangelical Christians, both universities and seminaries began to offer classes in contemporary social problems in the 1880s and 1890s. This development dovetailed with the birth of the Social Gospel movement with its deep concern for the suffering and injustice created by unfettered laissez-faire industrial capitalism. The goal of the very first coursework in Christian ethics was to help students translate widely shared Christian moral principles into social action in a troubled and suffering world. The first and most influential of these classes was an 1883-84 course at Harvard taught by Professor Francis Greenwood Peabody. Let’s call this germinal moment in the development of Christian ethics as a discipline “Christian Ethics B.” Long rightly points out that the “social passion” of these early practitioners of so-called “applied Christianity” or “social Christianity” or “Christian sociology” has always been a central characteristic of the field that later came to be called Christian ethics.

Despite the steady existence of courses in social or applied Christianity in the period between the late 19th century and World War II, it was not until the 1950s that the contemporary discipline of Christian ethics began to take shape. What eventually became known as the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) was founded in 1959 after several years of preliminary meetings. Over time its agenda has evolved to include various aspects of the entire moral tradition of the Christian faith (Christian Ethics A). Yet at its heart the discipline retains the “social passion” of the 19th century “Social Christianity” (Christian Ethics B) that was such an important part of its birth as a discipline.

North American evangelical disengagement from the mainstream discipline of Christian ethics has been obvious from its very origins. This disengagement clearly was linked to the context in which Christian ethics B was born—the Social Gospel. Though evangelicals were vigorously engaged with urban social reform efforts when that movement began, theological drift in the Social Gospel movement, as well as the related fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s, sheared evangelicals away from social engagement for a long season, at least from 1920 to around 1975. This half-century, unfortunately, coincided precisely with the consolidation of mainstream Christian ethics as an academic discipline, as well as with the urgent social and moral problems of an era that included economic crises, totalitarianism, World War II, the Holocaust, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and other morally significant social upheavals.

One of evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry’s signal postwar contributions was his effort to offer evangelical reflection on both “personal” and “social” Christian ethics and to lead others to do the same. But despite his careful, even magisterial works in this area—and despite being a member of the Society of Christian Ethics—Henry’s work

did not signal either his own integration into mainstream Christian ethics or lead many other evangelical thinkers to beat a path in that direction.

In general, when most evangelical universities, seminaries, and even parachurch organizations attempted ethical analysis or instruction in ethics, with certain important exceptions these efforts were undertaken by those not trained in the field. The same pattern remains broadly true today. But ethics cannot be reduced to theology (or philosophy, or biblical studies, or worldview studies, or whatever), so the weakness of these efforts has been profound, leading to what evangelical thinker Daryl Charles has rightly called "the unformed conscience of modern evangelicalism."

As a kind of parenthesis, however, it is important to note that Southern Baptists historically have constituted something of an exception to this evangelical disdain for the discipline of Christian ethics. Both "social Christianity" and Society of Christian Ethics-type ethical instruction were introduced at Southern Seminary at the same time as they were appearing in the broader academy. Southwestern Seminary began to develop its own mainstream Christian ethics tradition with the coming of T.B. Maston in the 1940s. Even today, ethics continues to be taught and ethics professors continue to be sought at the now conservative-led Southern Baptist seminaries. Though it is fair to say that the denominational transition has been hard on the vitality of the (Southern) Baptist ethics tradition, Christian ethics maintains a presence at both conservative and moderate Baptist seminaries that generally exceeds what is offered elsewhere in the evangelical Christian world.

Mapping the Contemporary Discipline of Christian Ethics

So it is time to offer evangelical Christianity, and to some extent the various Baptist communities, a fresh introduction to the discipline of Christian ethics and those who practice it.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of this discipline today is its diversity. This diversity can be mapped in several ways, and offers a nice snapshot of the field.

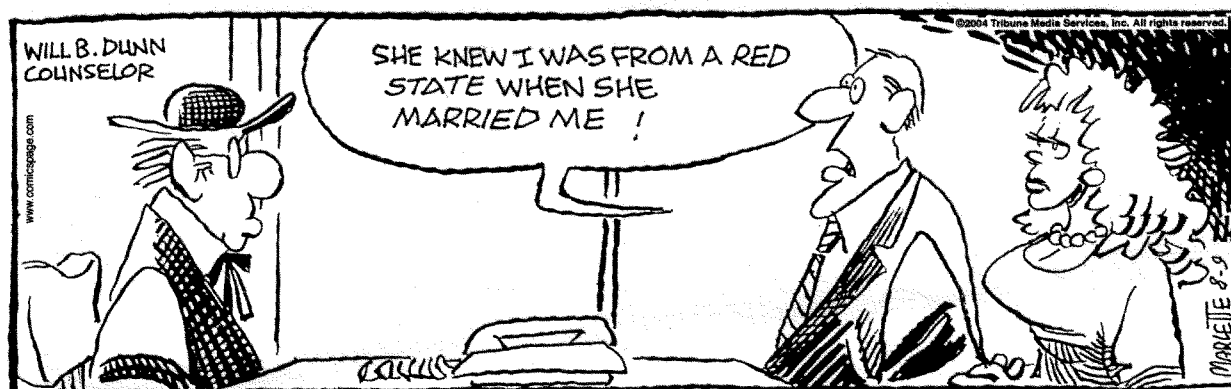
Christian ethicists are Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and nearly every variety of Protestant: Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Anabaptist, Pentecostal/charismatic,

and so on. Mainline Protestants have long played a leading role in mainstream Christian ethics, but contra Webb, Christian ethics today *cannot* accurately be reduced to a "bastion of liberal Protestantism." The Catholic voice in the SCE (31% of membership), just to name one example, is strong and quite well-represented at every level of leadership and activity. While there do exist some "religious ethicists" representing no particular confessional tradition, they are actually rather few in number. Most Christian ethicists ground their work in a recognizable theological tradition to which they retain some measure of loyalty and whose sources and methods are visible in their work.

It is certainly fair to say that the discipline of Christian ethics has tended to lean to the center-left theologically while encompassing a wide range of views. In this way it has reflected similar trends in the broader academy. Yet it is clear to me that the SCE exhibits considerable theological groundedness. Meanwhile, there is sufficient diversity of perspective within the Society to keep anyone from getting too comfortable. I believe that engagement with reasonably diverse perspectives contributes to the sharpening and self-correction that is essential both to good scholarship and good discipleship.

The last two decades within Christian ethics have seen the growth both of demographic diversity and ethical perspectives to match. The SCE was interested in racial issues from its beginning, and in women's empowerment since the 1960s. Over time the guild has helped to nurture the training, development, and inclusion of a significant number of black, Hispanic, female, Asian-American, and other scholars from previously voiceless groups. Meanwhile, from these groups has begun the emergence of contextual social/theological ethics: feminist ethics, Hispanic ethics, etc. This effort at inclusiveness is consistent with the founding vision of Christian ethics and contributes greatly to the field's richness and diversity, and makes for a stark contrast with the overwhelmingly white and male face of most evangelical and Baptist scholarship.

A major source of diversity within Christian ethics is by methodology. I have already noted the existence of contextual methodologies. These tend to emphasize engagement with biblical and theological themes and truths with careful attention to cultural and social location and personal or group



experience. Sometimes these treatments drift from Christian orthodoxy, but most of the time they do not.

Such approaches are complemented by a variety of methodological options. Various philosophical, theological, biblical, and social scientific methodologies can be seen in Christian ethics. These approaches are sometimes rooted deeply in longstanding confessional traditions; other times they represent the innovations of current thinkers. The fact is that there is no single “way” to do Christian ethics, despite various proposals that have been made over the years. This contributes to the unsettled state of affairs in the discipline and often to an overemphasis on methodological disputes at the expense of consideration of concrete moral norms.

One longstanding characteristic of the SCE is its focus on social issues. In my training I frequently heard “social ethics” used as the main term denoting what I was learning to do, and that language remains significant in the SCE. As we have seen, Christian ethics as a specialized discipline was born with industrialization and its ills. It came into its own in the mid-20th century in response to the convulsive social crises of those years. Given those roots, mainstream Christian ethics has tended to focus its gaze on pressing social issues like these, updating its issue set with the times. Thus today the issue mix includes economic globalization, the environment, family ethics, racial justice, bioethics, and so on. Varieties of professional ethics—business, ministerial, legal, medical, journalistic, etc—have also won an important place in Christian ethics. Matters of public policy are always on the agenda. Thus a key source of the diversity in contemporary Christian ethics has to do with issue specialization. Bioethics, for example, is a vast enough concern to be its own field, but other arenas of social concern also have attracted specialists who give their careers to addressing them.

Of course, it is important to note that the mainstream guild offers diverse proposals for how Christians should respond to such issues. There is certainly a left-liberal contingent, perhaps most visible on issues of sexual ethics. And yet the strong Catholic presence, as well as more conservative voices within the mainline academy (and among the evangelicals already involved in the field) keeps the discipline from becoming merely a “bastion of liberal Protestantism.” Deepened evangelical engagement would only help balance the scales all the more.

A final note here: in what may be taken as a kind of a reaction to this focus on contemporary issues, other ethicists now specialize in perennial concerns and themes in ethics, such as character, ecclesiology and ethics, the history of ethics, liturgy/worship and ethics, covenantal ethics, moral psychology, and the interpretation of the Bible for ethics, or in the work of major moral thinkers of past and present. In the resurgence of interest in such themes one sees mainstream Christian ethics going back to Christian ethics A and doing work of great value to evangelicals if we would attend to it.

Unlike what is normally the case for the other theological disciplines, Christian ethics places its practitioners in many

places of service other than the classroom. The diversity of the discipline can, in part, be found in this vocational pluralism. Certainly Christian ethicists often inhabit academia. At its origins, Christian ethicists tended to cluster in seminary settings, but by now the secular university, church-related school, evangelical college, university divinity school, free-standing seminary, and so on, all find their way onto this map. But ethicists also can be found in churches, religious orders, denominational agencies, research institutes and think-tanks, government departments, parachurch lobbying, advocacy, and activist organizations, and in hospitals, health care bureaucracies, businesses, and the military. Whatever it is that this “disreputable” profession does, there appear to be a number of institutions interested in it.

An intriguing way to map the discipline is by what might be called ethics tradition or key ethics icon. That is, since the discipline's founding it has been possible to identify traditions in Christian ethics associated with key figures either living or dead. Often these are then linked with particular divinity schools or universities where those traditions live on long after their originator has left the scene. Some of the most significant of these ethics icons and the traditions associated with them would include:

- The Reinhold Niebuhr/Union Seminary NY tradition—built around the great mid-century Protestant ethicist/theologian, with a strong emphasis on engagement with current national and international issues based on the grand themes of Protestant theology.
- The H. Richard Niebuhr/Yale Divinity tradition—built around Reinhold's more retiring brother H. Richard, this tradition has always been more methodologically rigorous and theologically focused.
- The James Gustafson/University of Chicago Divinity School tradition—Gustafson, one of the distinguished ethicists of the last generation, anchored a vigorous tradition in ethics at Chicago. The early Gustafson was a centrist Protestant of moderate Reformed leanings who engaged most of the important methodological disputes of his day with care and skill; the constructive work of the later Gustafson has been rather idiosyncratic, more theistic than Christian, but still fascinating.
- The Stanley Hauerwas/Duke Divinity School tradition—The most recent powerhouse ethicist to make this rarefied list, Hauerwas has built at Duke a tradition of Christian ethics offering a kind of neo-sectarian “Christ against culture” vision along with a strong emphasis on the retrieval of character and a focus on narrative.

These four streams of tradition hardly exhaust the list: one could also name a Dietrich Bonhoeffer tradition; a John Howard Yoder/Anabaptist tradition; an older Paul Ramsey/Princeton tradition now mainly abandoned; a Karl Barth/Paul Lehmann Princeton Seminary tradition; a Martin Luther King tradition; a Henlee Barnette/T. B. Maston Southern/Southwestern Seminary tradition, a feminist tradition that is quite collaborative but perhaps most closely identified with Beverly Harrison of Union Seminary; a strong

sociology of religion/social ethics tradition at Emory University, associated with Jon Gunneman; multiple centers for a Catholic tradition in ethics, but especially Notre Dame, Boston College, and Georgetown; the vigorous work in Christian ethics also being undertaken in several California institutions of various confessional traditions; and influential voices from Great Britain and the Continent.

While the existence of major schools of tradition centered around key figures still is a factor in mainstream Christian ethics, the impact of these schools appears to be weakening in light of the increasing decentralization of the field. Dozens of schools offer doctorates in Christian ethics and the horizon is not dominated by the kinds of towering figures once common in an earlier era. Christian ethics appears to be irreducibly diverse, but the field with few exceptions clings to its Christian identity and its social passion to address grievous public wrongs. The range of diversity certainly makes it hard to identify obvious standards of competence in the field. This contributes to the unsettling sense that various ethicists make various proposals but a methodological center for the discipline is never quite found (Long, 164). Even so, considerable sophisticated and very high-quality work happens nonetheless—much of it at some of the finest educational institutions in the world, and much of it remarkably relevant to evangelical and Baptist life.

The Necessity of Christian Ethics

In light of all of the foregoing, I would like to offer a brief defense of Christian ethics, aimed especially at an evangelical and Baptist audience. I want to claim that without attention to Christian ethics as an academic discipline, four very unwelcome things tend to happen in the Christian community; and thus that evangelical inattention to mainstream Christian ethics has contributed to the existence of these four problems in our midst today.

1. Without Christian ethics, the moral dimension of the Scriptures gets overlooked.

I usually define street-level Christian ethics (that is, the work that all of us as Christians are called to do) as *the Spirit-empowered effort of communities of Christian people to understand and to incarnate a way of life that conforms to God's will*

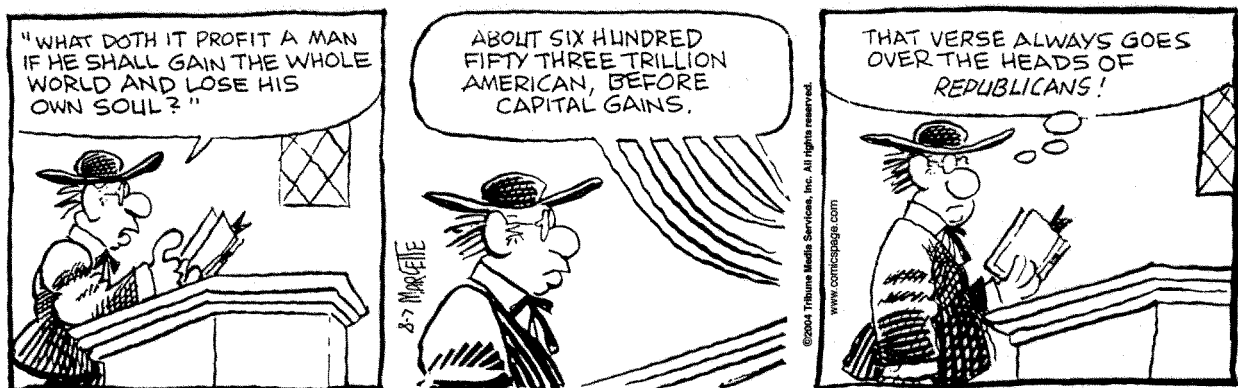
and advances God's kingdom. Christian ethics the academic discipline helps Christians do this work of moral discernment and moral living. Ethics has to do with who we as Christians fundamentally are (moral character), what kinds of decisions we make and how we go about making them (moral decision making), what kinds of goals we embrace (moral intentions), how we see the world and its possibilities (moral vision), how we characteristically conduct ourselves (moral practices), how we interact with and seek to change society (moral activism)—and more. These various dimensions of Christian character and conduct are demonstrated and worked out in various arenas: in individual life, in families, within the church, in the professions and the workplace, and in public life (culture, politics, law).

The Bible is indeed filled with moral content. But much of the time the moral dimension of the biblical message is overlooked or grossly misinterpreted. Christian ethics as a discipline helps Christians attend to and apply the moral commands, moral vision, morally significant narratives, and moral observations coursing through the Word of God. This discipline also calls our attention to the moral implications of core theological propositions of Scripture, such as the sovereignty of God and the goodness but fallenness of creation. Of course ethicists are not the only ones who do this work, and no claim to exclusivity is intended in any of what I say here. But it does seem to be the case that ethics calls the church to attend to aspects of Scripture and the doctrines emerging from Scripture that are otherwise overlooked. Evangelical engagement with Christian ethics would help ensure attention to such biblical texts, themes, and principles.

2. Without Christian ethics, the moral tradition of the church gets overlooked.

The classic theological curriculum includes study in church history and the history of Christian thought. In my experience, the discipline of Christian ethics plays a key role in keeping alive the *moral heritage* of Christian thought. Just as there is a history of Christian theology that must be remembered and transmitted, there is also a history of Christian ethics.

The moral tradition of the Christian church has two dimensions—what Christians have *believed* about morality,



and how Christians have *behaved* morally. It is important, for example, to know what Martin Luther or John Calvin or Menno Simons had to say not just about election or the sacraments but also about family, government, and economic life. It is also important to know what role they played in the fierce religious and political battles of their time, and of the legacy of their moral thought and practice for Protestant social ethics and western culture to this day. The same holds true with every other major thinker in Christian history. Likewise, a morally sensitive history of the church as a whole deserves to be attempted.

One of the salutary developments of our time is the retrieval of the heritage of the church. Tom Oden's project in patristic biblical interpretation—the Ancient Christian Commentary series—makes a great example of this. On a much smaller scale, a branch of the ethics guild is doing similar archaeology in Christian moral thought. A recent annual meeting included papers on Calvin and the emotions, John Chrysostom's treatment of marriage, Luther on the self, Schliermacher on religious experience in ethics, as well as discussions of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Karl Barth, and the history of treatment of aboriginal peoples in North America. The more we dig around in the ancestral past, the more we discover riches beyond measure—as well as painful evidence of sins and missteps worth avoiding in the future.

3. Without Christian ethics, the church's treatment of contemporary social problems is weakened.

Stephen Webb says: "What Christianity teaches about ethics is nothing different from or more than what Christianity teaches about Jesus Christ." At one level, this is a truthful statement. Glen Stassen and I have offered an introductory text in Christian ethics based on Jesus' teachings, and it has 198,000 words in it. So Jesus tells us quite a bit about Christian ethics. But of course many of those words are devoted to teasing out answers to such issues as whether an infertile couple should decide to pursue in vitro fertilization. Or what stance the church should take on poverty in American society. Or what to think and do about genetic engineering. Or what the church can do to prevent divorce and build successful marriages. The direction that Jesus offers to Christian ethics is a matter of considerable effort. It cannot simply be derived from christological formulations or, far worse, "what would Jesus do" slogans.

That effort involves interaction with other fields of study. Christian ethics—Christian social ethics, at least—is interdisciplinary. Most Christian ethics programs require training both in the classic theological/ethical canon and also in a social or natural science—sociology, economics, biology, genetics, and political science. That's because Christian ethics is more than

"just another name for Christian theology." It is the interaction of Christian theology with a fallen world on behalf of the church's efforts in moral discernment and moral action.

It may have been possible in the 16th century for the church's leading figures—Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli—to do it all. They could be theologians, pastors, ethicists, and biblical scholars. Given the scope, complexity, and rapidly changing nature of today's social problems, as well as the explosion of Christian scholarship, specialization is salutary today, even required. Ethicists tend to specialize in particular moral issues, and to work in an interdisciplinary fashion with social scientists dealing with the same issues. Somehow, again contra Webb, it will not quite do to say "Christian ethics is nothing more than simply being a good Christian."

4. Without Christian ethics, the church loses its prophetic witness.

Mainstream Christian ethics has always been struck by the example of the prophets and by the prophetic moral teachings of Jesus—perhaps the most neglected parts of the canon in evangelical and Baptist life. Our discipline has always found its heartbeat at the intersection of God's love and human misery. The prophets called Israel to return to God, to keep the covenant once made with God, to do justice and love mercy, to protect and care for the widow, the orphan, and the alien, to live out God's compassion for the poor and victimized. And the prophets did not cease to bring a fiercely critical word from the Lord to the people of God, not because of disdain for God's people but instead out of the highest kind of love.

As a discipline, we have resisted the reduction of Christian faith to the affirmation of right doctrine. We have resisted the reduction of Christian morality to the recitation of right convictions. We have resisted the reduction of Christian spirituality to the generation of individual good feelings. We have sought to keep the poor and the victimized before the conscience of the church and the culture. And we have called the church away from triumphalism and toward a teachable humility fitting for God's elect-but-fallible people. This stance certainly challenges Webb's careless claim that Christian ethics is "an empty idea"—whether it is also "a dangerous one" perhaps depends on whether one welcomes a prophetic voice or does not.

Strengthening Christian Ethics

I want to propose that rather than rejecting or marginalizing Christian ethics as an academic discipline, evangelicals and Baptists need to heighten their efforts in the field, in four ways: training more ethicists, participating more heavily in the Society of Christian Ethics, producing first-rate scholarship in Christian ethics, and allowing the broad social pas-

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sion of Christian ethics to be felt again within our churches. Doing these things will have a positive impact both on our churches and on the discipline of Christian ethics.

The dearth of evangelical ethicists has left a gap in seminary and Christian university faculties that is proving very difficult to fill. Even where these schools seek professionally trained ethicists they have difficulty finding persons with both the appropriate training and evangelical theological convictions. This trend becomes self-reinforcing. The lack of ethics instruction and highly trained ethics teachers at evangelical colleges and seminaries helps to limit the number of our students who then pursue ethics at the graduate level. Those who do pursue graduate study in ethics are then less likely to be evangelicals or be in contact with evangelicals.

The same thing needs to happen in Christian ethics as has happened in philosophy, history, theology, and sociology of religion. Young scholars of excellent academic abilities and solid theological convictions need to be trained well and then sent to the best doctoral programs in ethics that can be found. As they do good work they will find employment in excellent universities and make their mark in the profession. The door is open in ethics just as it is in other fields if evangelicals are willing to walk through it. One of my fondest hopes is to eventually place a number of my finest students in ethics doctoral programs, and to see them eventually take their evangelical vision to the Ivy League and many other unexpected kinds of places.

The Society of Christian Ethics has an Evangelical Ethics Interest Group. I have served as co-leader of this group for some time. Each year, a rather substantial number of ethicists surface for our late-night group session at the annual convention. Two years ago, when Dennis Hollinger and I presented a paper on evangelical ethics in the broader SCE setting, a large number of non-evangelicals showed up.

All of this is to say that the mainstream ethics guild both needs and welcomes the respectful but vigorous participation of evangelicals who teach and write about ethics. Within the 950-member Society self-identified evangelicals are likely no more than 5%. But someone is teaching ethics at Christian universities and in our dozens of seminaries and Bible colleges, and as far as I can tell few of these participate in the SCE. Involvement in the Society will both enrich evangelical teaching and have an impact on the direction of Christian ethics as a discipline.

The reason why scholars like George Marsden, Alvin Plantinga, Miroslav Volf, and Nicholas Wolterstorff are taken seriously by non-evangelicals is simply that they produce good work. By the canons of the disciplines in which such scholars work, they are excellent. Their work demands attention. Even in a discipline that leans center-left, certain meritocratic standards still prevail. Often evangelicals convince themselves of a vast left-wing conspiracy against us when what is really going on is that our own ghettoization has kept us from reaching the level of excellence that might get our work noticed.

If and when evangelicals produce good scholarship in ethics, we are taken seriously. Richard Mouw, John Howard Yoder, Stephen Mott, Oliver O'Donovan, James McClendon, Gilbert Meilander, Glen Stassen, and Christine Pohl are examples of evangelical scholars representing a variety of traditions whose work has earned the attention of ethicists of all stripes. We need to produce more such work, and soon.

Many fine scholars have documented both the rich early history of American evangelical social and political engagement and then its sudden abandonment in the 1920s after the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.

Evangelicals finally wised up and reentered public ethical engagement, beginning in the 1970s. Unfortunately, especially at the popular and mass activist level, we have not always done our work well. But there is unlikely to be a second evangelical withdrawal from such social engagement. Evangelicals are in the public square to stay. The issues are too important to walk away from, and faithful discipleship demands our continued engagement.

Yet even today few evangelicals (academic or otherwise) who engage public ethical issues do so in dialogue with the leading professionals of the field. As we have seen, one result of this estrangement has been some pretty shoddy ethical writing. Another has been a weakening of that passion for justice and righteousness that is so obviously biblical that evangelicals cannot forever neglect it.

But this is a new day. Evangelicals are back in the public square, and with plenty of moral passion in need of refinement and direction. And the Christian ethics guild is ready for interaction with evangelicals. For our own sake, we need to pursue that interaction. ■

Christian Citizenship

By Ferrell Foster, Dallas, TX

Note: This article originally appeared in Texas Baptists magazine, a publication of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Ferrell Foster is Director of News and Information, BGCT.

Marvin Griffin first voted in a federal election in 1944. He paid the required \$1.75 poll tax in Texas for the chance to cast that vote for Franklin Roosevelt.

"I never miss voting," says the 81-year-old pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Austin. "Too great a price has been paid. Too many people have suffered and died for the right to vote."

A constitutional amendment in 1964 and a Supreme Court ruling in 1966 killed the poll tax because it was seen as an impediment to voting, but many people still do not vote.

Voting is one of the cornerstones of citizenship in a democratic nation. And good citizenship is one of the cornerstones of the Christian life, especially among Baptists.

Both terms—Christian and citizenship—are "terms of community," says Suzii Paynter, director of citizenship and public policy for the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Jesus set forth the principle for Christian citizenship when he said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21 NKJV).

Today, however, there is no Caesar. And, in a democracy, the people rule. But the principle of one's responsibility to the broader community and to the government remains intact.

"Our ideals and principles have to be played out in our own community and in Texas and in the world," says Joe Trull, pastor of The Baptist Church of Driftwood and retired ethics professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Being a responsible citizen means a person "contributes something to make the community a better place."

Christian citizenship expresses itself in many ways, but one attitude should prevail. "To be a Christian means you're not thinking primarily of your self-interest," Trull says. "You're thinking more as Jesus taught us, you're thinking of what you can give without any thought of return."

"We don't base our Christian faith on what benefits us," Paynter says. "Our personal interest is informed by biblical principles and Baptist traditions."

That perspective can be especially foreign in the world of government and politics where multitudes of people are vying for their own interests. But that arena is where Baptists have centered most of their citizenship emphasis.

"Christian citizenship is our expression of Christian values in public policy," says Phil Strickland, CLC director. "In

a democracy, we have the unique opportunity to influence those public decisions that have a huge impact on the lives of people."

With that opportunity, however, comes responsibility. "I am responsible for what our government does, and I am not absolved of that responsibility when I ignore political decisions," Strickland says.

Christians often read biblical injunctions and seek only to apply them in their personal life. Strickland sees a broader need.

"'Love thy neighbor as thyself' is not just a command to do so directly one-on-one; it is to care about what happens to our neighbors as a result of policy decisions that are made each day in local, state and national governments," he says. "Acts of kindness are not only from one person to another person. Acts of kindness involve being aware of policies that are destructive to our neighbor."

Christians will go to great lengths to help a friend, yet too often "ignore policies that are destructive to human life," Strickland says.

"In Matthew 25, when Jesus talks about separating the sheep and the goats, he asks what we have done to respond to the needs of those who are thirsty, hungry or in prison. The way we respond to those people in a democracy is partially through public policy."

"To take a Thanksgiving basket to a hungry family is good, but to fail to notice and sense responsibility for half a world that lives on \$2 a day is to abdicate our Christian calling to care for everyone God has created," Strickland says.

Jack Hightower, a member of First Baptist Church in Austin, is one of the many Baptists who have occupied seats of influence in the government. Now retired, Hightower has served in the Texas House and Senate, U.S. Congress and Texas Supreme Court.

"It discourages me so much for people to say (voting) doesn't matter," Hightower says. "One vote does make a difference." The contested 2000 election in Florida showed "it doesn't take many people to make a huge difference."

When asked why so many people are apathetic about government, Hightower responds, "They don't think they're really represented."

Jane Nelson, the state senator from Grapevine, had similar feelings at one time, but she decided to do something about it.

"My faith played an enormous factor in my decision to

run for office,” says the member of Trietsch United Methodist Church in Flower Mound. “I felt strongly that the values and priorities of our community were inconsistent with the votes being cast on our behalf, and that is the main reason I decided to run for office.”

Of course, not all citizen Christians need to run for office; but they do need to be informed.

“I have a far deeper respect for someone who is conscientiously trying to understand public issues and disagrees with me than I do for people who pay no attention,” Strickland says.

Trull says he is “distressed that most Christians today . . . don’t really know what’s going on. They more often than not depend on one television news program or channel to keep them informed.”

As a result, people can “become convinced of things that are not necessarily true,” Justice Hightower says.

Trull encourages people to “get below the superficial level of information, get the facts.” Read newspapers, including the opinion columns; read widely; listen to debates; and watch different TV channels.

The CLC’s Paynter works closely with politicians and their staffs. “It’s very easy to be swayed by one person’s stirring remarks,” she says. To get beyond that emotion and passion, believers can use “filters of faith and filters of policy” in evaluating politicians and their positions on issues.

Those filters of faith are the starting point of Christian citizenship.

“To be a Christian citizen, first and foremost, you are to be aware of your role as a citizen of the kingdom of God,” says Trull. This means the believer should live in the world “by the virtues and values of your Christian faith.”

Using metaphors from the Bible, Trull says believers are to be salt and light. “Salt retards corruption, and we live in a

world with a lot of corruption. We are to be the saving element. We ought to be beacons of light.”

Throughout the centuries, Christians have arrived at different conclusions about how to relate to the broader culture. Some have withdrawn completely from the culture; others have virtually merged with the culture, either giving in to worldly values or seeking to force Christian values on nonbelievers. Most, however, have followed the scriptural injunction to be in the world but not of it.

As a result, believers should be both priest and prophet, especially in the political realm, Strickland says. “We must always be priest to those who are trying to make critical decisions that have enormous impact on all of us. We should pray for them and care about them. They have a tremendous responsibility.”

“But we must also be prophets who challenge decisions that are dominated by special interests, and we must call for the ideals reflected in our understanding of Christian values,” Strickland continues. “That’s why a Christian citizen’s first allegiance is never to a political party. If it is that, we have forfeited our prophetic word. We are to hold politicians accountable regardless of their political party.”

Strickland encourages believers to “approach Christian citizenship with some humility. Political decisions are always proximate solutions,” he says. “We are always short of fully understanding or implementing God’s perfect will.”

In the process of seeking to influence government and the broader society, Christians will face frustration, will wonder why nonbelievers don’t get it.

“We are shaped by the story of God and God’s work in the world,” Trull says. “We become like Jesus and we live out that story, and the world is living by another story. I don’t try to force them to live by my story.” ■



The Greatest Divide

By Martin E. Marty

In the Austin, Texas American-Statesman (July 25), Bill Bishop climaxed a series on “the great divide” between the two Americas this election year. Perhaps he expected to find that local congregations would be places where some give-and-take of theological and political debate could occur. Posit that the members are in some sort of agreement about creed and mission. They might use that basis to discuss war-and-peace, justice-and-mercy, wealth-and-poverty issues, as they are framed by the political parties this election season.

Not all. Bishop could have called his article on the churches, “The Greatest Divide.” There, least of all, do people evidence openness, humility, and readiness to hear viewpoints with which they might disagree, even when these are voiced by fellow-believers. To do our own framing, let me suggest an experiment for those who attend worship (non-attenders can easily get reports from experimenters). In the polite company of fellow-believers, on church premises, whisper words such as “Bush” or “Kerry,” “Democrat” or “Republican.” Thereupon, if you are not met with spite or spit, go on to the second part of the experiment: voice support for one party or candidate and reject the other. The custodian will clean up your broken glasses or other debris left over from the smashing that will follow.

I exaggerate a bit, but only a bit. More common than such brouhahas is the evidence of avoidance. In order to keep peace and quiet, members pass each other in the corridors or pass on to other topics than religion-and-politics.

So much for framing. Bill Bishop and his fellow-staffers went on to find a different situation. There are few such

encounters for the simple reason that more and more congregants choose congregations that match their styles and ways of life, their secular tastes and commitments. A church building will not have a sign out front: “This is a Republican congregation” or vice versa. But when the Republicans go trolling for votes by asking for membership lists, or ask pastor for formal endorsements, they know exactly which congregations in any urban or town and country setting to approach. And Democrats, should they also go pushing the edges of I.R.S. regulations by asking tax-exempt churches to go partisan and support a candidate—as some do especially in the case of African-American congregations—they know better than to walk down the aisle of “the other kind” of church and bid. “Regardless of denomination,” writes Bishop, “churches have attracted new members by appealing to cultural and political similarities.” Churches have increasingly become astute marketers.

In one survey, we read, “Overwhelmingly, people said the people they met in church were extremely homogeneous with them politically.” That being the case, there is less need for avoidance of the topics or bopping of “the other” than my earlier paragraphs pictured. Members of religious bodies can lean back and enjoy their own kind, protected from the voice of “the other” and, perhaps, from the word of judgment or mercy that they associate with the word of God. ■

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A Fight For Souls, Votes[®]

By Eileen E. Flynn, Religion Reporter
Austin-American Statesman, Austin, TX

Note: This report written from the Southern Baptist Convention was published in the July 25, 2004, Austin-American Statesman and is printed with their permission.

Like a staccato drumbeat, the images flashed on a giant screen before a convention hall filled with 8,000 ardent Baptists.

“We are at war” exclaimed one burst of text interspersed between photos of Osama bin Laden, Tim McVeigh, Bill Clinton wagging his finger and George W. Bush praying. “Evil will be great on the earth,” the messages continued. “We are at war for the souls of men, and they are counting on us.”

The promotional video, shown at last month’s meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, was meant to inspire support for missionary work. But its political subtext was unmistakable in this presidential election year.

There is a war raging, for souls and for votes. By convention’s end, the Southern Baptists were dispatched with a mission as much political as religious: Rally the faithful, seek converts and turn out the vote for candidates who oppose gay marriage, abortion and embryonic stem cell research.

Candidates, in other words, such as Bush.

Not since John F. Kennedy’s Catholicism came under attack during his 1960 race against Richard Nixon have religion and politics fused so tightly in an election year. America’s faithful are divided, its secular feel under siege, and theological battles have crossed into the political arena.

Major denominations are cleaving over issues such as gay marriage and the war in Iraq, and fault lines between Democrats and Republicans—churchgoers or not—are as much about policy as spirituality.

Candidates, in turn, are scouting for opportunity and advantage in the schisms.

So blurry has the line between church and politics become that last month the Internal Revenue Service felt compelled to send the major political parties a letter reminding them to heed the legal boundary between partisanship and the pulpit.

Values are often rooted in faith, and appealing to them is a political strategy that the right is particularly eager to push, said Michael Goldman, a former Democratic consultant who lectures on media and politics at Tufts University near Boston.

Candidates are telling voters, “What you should be voting for is the guy whose values you most care about, and that’s me,” Goldman said. “This is not a bad strategy.”

That strategy, and the eagerness of some religious factions to embrace it, has spawned America’s new holy war. The presidency is its grail.

For churches, the wages of partisanship are taxes, as the IRS reminded the Democratic and Republican parties in an unprecedented letter sent June 10 warning them not to entice tax-exempt religious organizations into raising money for campaigns or endorsing candidates.

Driven by faith

Wooing voters with blends of faith and politics is time-honored in American politics, and the line between church and state has been closely trod before.

The religious right gained influence in the 1980s with organizations such as the Christian Coalition, which generated grass-roots activism on issues championed by the Republican Party. Many of its activists moved on to positions within the GOP, said John Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.

Now, former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed is the Southeast region director for the Bush campaign. And with Bush, quoted as saying God wanted him in the Oval Office, conservative evangelicals have a Republican in the White House reflecting their beliefs.

Faith, Bush says, infuses almost everything he does. A United Methodist by denomination, he fashions himself spiritually and politically as a born-again evangelical, a marked distinction from the high church reserve of his Episcopalian father.

Democrat John Kerry is a Roman Catholic, less vocal about faith, whose support of abortion rights prompted calls by some bishops to turn him away from the communion line. In this election, both candidates recognize that there is little distinction between their political and theological brethren.

An oft-quoted statistic that the faithful vote for Republicans and the secular back Democrats is misleading, said Green, whose study of voting patterns in the 2000 presidential election shows that the political chasm is more nuanced, running not between the religious and the nonreligious but between traditional and progressive churchgoers.

The split holds true with Jewish voters, where Bush fares well among conservative Jews who share his views on abor-

tion and marriage but where Green's research shows that 75.8 percent of likely Jewish voters plan to vote for Kerry.

Eager to capitalize on the intensity of the new religious right—whose numbers might well determine the election—Bush's campaign is aggressively recruiting conservative evangelicals, a growing cadre of conservative Catholics and the traditionally Democratic black churches where Bush's stance opposing gay marriage resonates.

In June, the Washington-based religious liberty group Interfaith Alliance discovered that the Bush campaign had identified 1,600 "friendly congregations" in Pennsylvania to mobilize. The campaign also sought church directories to suss out potential supporters, a move that alarmed even some of Bush's most loyal constituents.

"I'm appalled that the Bush-Cheney campaign would intrude on a local congregation in this way," said the Rev. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "I suspect that this will rub a lot of pastors' fur the wrong way. Many pastors may consider this a totally inappropriate intrusion by a partisan campaign into the nonpartisan voter education and voter registration ministries of local churches."

The Bush camp defended its actions, saying the effort adhered to IRS rules.

Cries of partisan Christianity also rang out when Bush was endorsed by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, a Southern Baptist preacher who formed the Moral Majority that twice helped elect President Reagan. Falwell said he made the endorsement on a Web site not affiliated with his church.

The Republican National Committee includes Catholics as a target for outreach, recruiting Catholic "team leaders" to rally people in their communities across the country and pitching Bush's platform as "in sync" with church doctrine. During a Vatican visit last month, Bush petitioned Pope John Paul II to rally more American bishops against gay marriage, according to the National Catholic Reporter.

Though Kerry's immersion into the religious waters has been slow, mostly quoting Scripture at black churches on the campaign trail, he is beginning to answer criticism that he is not religious enough by targeting progressive congregations.

Kerry has hired Mara Vanderslice, a liberal Christian who previously worked for primary rival Howard Dean, to lead the campaign's religious outreach. Recently, the campaign launched a People of Faith for Kerry Web site, which exhorts voters to "support the man who shares your values."

The Kerry camp may be taking a cue from the Bush strategy, Green said, noting "there are lot of people in the Democratic Party and the Kerry campaign who have been arguing that the Democrats need to find a way to reach out to congregations that are friendly to them."

United by morals

Though, by law, congregations cannot engage in partisan politics, some conservative church leaders have made their political preferences clear by decreeing certain issues—gay marriage, abortion, embryonic stem cell research—as

non-negotiable.

For instance, the Catholic bishops who questioned the fitness of Catholic lawmakers who support abortion rights to receive communion did not speak out against officials who part ways with the church on other key teachings, such as the death penalty or war in Iraq.

"I think it ends up being endorsing a candidate, and I think that's the purpose of it," said the Rev. Frank Ruff, a Kentucky priest who works as a liaison between the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and the Southern Baptist Convention. "And I think what happens is that some people just get so wrapped up in an issue that they lose sight of the broader Catholic teaching."

Those non-negotiable issues, as opposed to theology, have helped create a new religious right: an emerging political convergence of evangelicals and Catholics.

The most insistent evangelicals believe Catholics are going to hell and the pope is the Antichrist. Some Catholics have tended to regard evangelicals as born-again, Bible-beating zealots. But for the moment, politics has united them.

"There's always been an uneasy relationship between evangelicals and Catholics," said James Penning, a political science professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., who has written about evangelical participation in politics. "There's an element of mistrust there. It's a marriage of convenience."

Abortion and other moral issues unite conservative Catholics and evangelicals, Penning said, but theological chasms remain.

But Land argues that Catholics and Baptists have forged stronger spiritual ties in recent decades, their political agreement springing from shared morals. "I've got more in common with Pope John Paul II than I do with Jimmy Carter," Land said.

The new Christian right is also finding inroads in traditionally Democratic black churches by espousing the moral corruption of liberalism, particularly gay rights. Recently, the Traditional Values Coalition, a conservative Christian association of some 43,000 congregations, held a news conference with black pastors.

"They're the ones who are going to win (the election)," said coalition president the Rev. Lou Sheldon. "If we win this issue, it's because African Americans step up to the plate."

Some African American pastors resent arguments that gay rights battles are a philosophical twin to the civil rights struggle.

"I was a part of the civil rights movement, and I marched, I protested," said the Rev. William Sheals, who leads the 18,000-member Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church in Norcross, Ga. "It is not a sin to be born black. It is not a choice to be born black. I believe it's a sin to be a homosexual because the Bible says so. And I believe it is a choice."

Critics say religious leaders such as Land, Sheals and Sheldon are GOP mouthpieces. But they have a ready retort: They are neither Republican nor Democrat. As Sheldon says, "We are on the word of God."

Voting for values

Churches have a long history of involvement in politics. Ministers and preachers played a large role in the civil rights movement, for example. “You can’t accuse the white evangelicals of introducing religion into politics,” said Martin Marty, University of Chicago Christian scholar. “Nobody can be elected mayor of Detroit or Chicago or Philadelphia if he didn’t show up in the black churches.”

This election year, the political fire is flaring mostly on the right, among conservative Christians who feel a sense of urgency. It’s crucial, they say, to motivate voters, especially the estimated 4 million evangelicals who did not vote in 2000.

A key Southern Baptist Convention leader has launched a national voter registration drive called I Vote Values. “Southern Baptists are as motivated and as activated . . . than I’ve ever seen them,” Land said. “I can tell you why: same-sex marriage. I’ve never seen an issue which has energized Southern Baptists more, even the abortion issue.”

At the Indianapolis meeting, Bush addressed messengers via satellite. The Indiana Convention Center shook with thunderous applause when the president promised to push for a constitutional ban on gay marriage and so-called partial-birth abortion.

Moments before Bush’s speech, the Rev. Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, delivered a prayer characterizing Bush as more of a religious leader, like the biblical King Solomon, than a secular one.

“Through (Bush) and through those who preach your word, may our nation turn back to God. May we see the

sweeping revival that we so desire,” Patterson prayed. The Baptists passed a resolution calling for political participation, both by voting and running for office, and using biblical principles to guide both pursuits.

Standing before a giant screen that showed the words “One Nation Under God” superimposed on the U.S. Capitol, the Rev. Steve Gaines, an Alabama pastor, bemoaned the country’s loss of Christian values. “Our spiritual walls in America have crumbled because as a whole we have turned our backs on the Lord Jesus Christ,” Gaines told messengers.

The left is scrambling to respond. Liberal religious organizations are fending off moral issue attacks from the right by identifying moral concerns of their own.

Faithful America, a Web site for “progressive people of faith” run by the National Council of Churches, recently ran an ad in the Arab news outlet Al-Jazeera in which American clergy decried U.S. military abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization, is one of many liberal groups organizing people to vote while pushing anti-war and pro-gay rights positions.

The election promises to be close, based on virtually all recent polls. The closer it is, fears the Rev. Welton Gaddy, the greater the risk that individual churches and whole denominations might be weakened by polarization. “Religion and religious institutions at their best are advocates for reconciliation,” said Gaddy, president of the Interfaith Alliance. “If religious organizations are as politicized as the rest of the institutions of society, then religion is a loser and the nation is a loser.” ■



TWO ESSAYS ON THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

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

The Power of Public Theology

With similar emotion and energy, we pledge our allegiance to the nation and confess our faith in the one true God. Whether these two loyalties collaborate or collide is a matter of utmost importance and never more so than when a nation is at war.

It is therefore a good time to remember the Barmen Confession of 1934.

It was promulgated, not by gathered synod or official delegates, much less by patriarch or pope. On the contrary, the good work was done by ordinary ministers assembled on the banks of the Wupper River in northwest Germany where it converges with Belgium and the Netherlands.

“Theological Clarification of the Present State of the German Evangelical Churches” is the official title. Remember that in Europe “evangelical” is used differently than in these United States. It is simply a synonym for “Protestant.”

Clarification was needed because the Christian community was falling in line—lock, stock and barrel, so to speak—with the new nationalist regime of Adolph Hitler.

From our vantage point of seventy years and untold suffering it is hard to understand why Christian people would fall for the racist oratory of Hitler.

Their silence in the face of the demagoguery of “Nation, Race and Fuhrer” is today considered a sad chapter in the history of twentieth-century civilization. Few resisted Hitler and fewer still risked life or limb to halt his Third Reich.

Some did and thereby became legends in our time.

Corrie Ten Boom hid Jews beneath the wooden floor of her father’s house. Today in Jerusalem there is a tree with her name planted along “The Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer plotted to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested and sent to Flossenburg concentration camp where he was hanged eight days before the camp was liberated. This past year a movie about his life played to rave reviews around the country.

Martin Niemoeller left behind what may be the single most compelling witness of the world war era: “First they came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.”

Karl Barth launched a journal with the title “Theological Existence Today.” In its pages he criticized the German Christians who advocated a synthesis of German National Socialism and the Christian Gospel.

While others took afternoon naps during the conclave at Barmen, he wrote the text of the most important Christian document of the decade.

“Jesus Christ is the one word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death.” Thus begins the first of six short articles of faith.

It was two things at once: a clarion call to the Christian community to repent of their fascination with a nationalist regime; and also a clear statement to the wider human community of the social and political relevance of theology.

Today we call it public theology.

It is to be distinguished from the irrational ranting of street preachers and the emotional appeals of televangelists. Public theology is the hard, heady stuff of a first rate intellect infused with a passion for the things of God and a conviction that such mental and imaginative work can not be confined to the church.

God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology is the nicely-titled

book by a spiritual descendent of Barth, Jurgen Moltmann.

He is one of many who take their platform, face the population at large, and present a version of gospel truth that interacts powerfully with the issues and events of our time.

Like the late James McClendon, Moltmann issues a call for such theological work to be done not only in the public square but also in the public university.

*Sometimes the truth
must be told straight,
and never more so
than in times of war,
when loyalty to God
and loyalty to
country are most
severely tested.*

None surpass the eloquent work of Pope John Paul in this regard. He has taken his fearless pulpit to every corner of the globe, ignoring the clever admonition of Emily Dickinson to “tell the truth but tell it slant.”

Sometimes in life and death, on any continent, in any century, the truth must be told straight, and never more so than in times of war, when loyalty to God and loyalty to country are most severely tested. ■

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Three Degrees of Separation

In 1893 a preacher came to town and stirred up folks against liquor. In his wake they prohibited church people from drinking, of course, and also from selling any form of alcohol.

They went further, refusing membership to those who rent property to a saloon, who deposit money in a bank that loaned money to the liquor business, who sell insurance to any person in the liquor industry and, finally, “who live in part or in whole on money collected from any person directly or indirectly connected with the whiskey business.

Even that was not enough: they chastised “any Mayor or Common Council or other Officers that grant license to any person engaged in the manufacturing, buying or selling of intoxicating liquors.”

In the end, their policy of tracking those complicit in the forbidden practice led them to excommunicate “any person who buys or sells cattle, hogs, or other stock to be fed in part or in whole on distilled slop.”

It was a policy of separation unto the third degree.

That split the church, of course, because liquor was the leading product of the town and among church members were landowners, insurance brokers, and the town mayor.

It was a wonder anyone was worthy of communion!

I know all this because exactly one hundred years later I was pastor of the congregation that has descended from these tee-totaling, sin-denouncing, straight-living Baptists.

I think about this when I read of recent efforts to separate the people of God from the vices of the world.

In the current case, the sin is not alcohol but abortion. The authorities are not evangelists but bishops.

The penalty, however, is the same—excommunication from the life of the congregation.

It began as a warning to a very public figure, one who aspires to the presidency of the country.

Exclusion stares him in the face because he is separated from the sin by only two degrees: securing the abortion is the sin; providing the abortion is one degree of separation; and funding those who provide the abortion is two degrees of separation.

Now the policy is being taken to the third degree: voting for people who provide the funds to pay those to do abortions constitutes the third degree of separation.

This means those who touch the “wrong” key in the voting booth are thereby complicit in the sin, and thus fall under commendation.

There is a serious public issue here: should church officials seek to influence—through opening or closing access to religious rituals—the voting patterns of both elected officials and the electing population?

How does such a practice affirm or deny the separation of church and state?

But my immediate concern is more religious than political.

If all who are connected to meanness, injustice, and outright wickedness by indirect and/or unintended ways are thereby banished from the sanctuary of God who, pray tell, will remain to worship the Lord?

All of us are no more than three degrees separated from any (and perhaps, every) sin—including pride, prejudice, and sexual assault.

The pension fund manager of another religious group said as much. Pious investors charged that their monies had purchased stock in the parent company of a cruise line which, in turn, was assisting a travel agent in booking a vacation package for a lesbian group.

Was the retirement fund, then, supporting homosexuality? Not directly and intentionally—unless you trace three degrees of separation.

She replied to the accusation (and here I paraphrase): “I suppose funds invested in any retirement fund would have this long distance connection to things we denounce” (which included such as liquor, tobacco, gambling, pornography or abortion).

And this “long distance connection” is precisely my point!

If we begin making the connection between every sin and any saint, we will soon disqualify every believer, including the Baptists and the Bishops. And then who will remain to stand and sing the old gospel song that reminds us of the humility and hope that constitutes the core of the Christian soul: “Not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” ■

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Separation of Church and State

By John M. Swomley, Professor Emeritus of Christian Social Ethics
St. Paul School of Theology, St. Louis, MO

After the War of Independence from Great Britain in 1776, the Constitution created by the new United States was specifically a secular document which stated that “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” It also prohibited mandatory oaths.

The First Amendment provided that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In 1948, the Supreme Court in *McCullum v. Board of Education*, U.S. 333, applied the Establishment Clause to invalidate a state law.

Perhaps the most forceful explanation of the First Amendment is in the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court in 1947 in *Everson v. Board of Education*: “The Establishment of Religion Clause of the First Amendment means at least this:

Neither a state nor the Federal government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion over another. Neither can favor or influence a person to go to or remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance.

No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institution, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal government can openly or secretly participate in the affairs of any religious organization or group, and vice versa.

In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law is intended to erect a “wall of separation between church and state.” All of the state constitutions support the church-state principle.

President George W. Bush, however does not believe the Constitution or other legislation applies to him. Although he has not publicly declared himself above the law, he has operated, despite the law, to provide Federal money to churches that cooperate with him.

According to the June 13 *St Petersburg Times*, “There are now ten separate federal agencies with offices devoted to directing tax money to faith-based groups. In a report issued in March, 2004, the White House Office of Faith-based and

Community Initiatives boasted that in five of those agencies alone, \$1.7 billion was awarded to religiously affiliated groups in fiscal year 2003.”

Republicans in Congress are supporting a bill that would allow religious denominations to support candidates. The “Safe Harbor for Churches” provision would reduce tax penalties for a set number of political endorsements from the pulpit and eliminate them if the endorsement was “unintentional” (Ibid.)”

Bush’s re-election campaign is organizing “friendly congregations” to serve as recruiters and advocates for Bush and particularly to marshal voter registration drives.

“The Bush Administration issued at least \$1.1 billion in grants last year. More than a thousand religious leaders, out for federal money, attended a recent White House conference organized by the White House on Faith-based Initiatives that Bush has created. . . . The President on the one hand, is holding out the promise of billions of tax dollars to eager clerics and congregations, but on the other hand enlisting them in his re-election campaign,” stated a copyright report of the *Daily Camera* of Boulder, Colorado.

President Bush, working through the Republican National Committee, has asked Catholics to give parish directories to him for use in voting campaigns and has also asked Southern Baptists and members of some other denominations for similar directories of their church memberships. It is stated that this is for non-partisan voter registration drives, but any normally intelligent person would realize it is for partisan Bush re-election purposes. Both Catholic and Southern Baptist leaders have condemned this, but no one knows how many churches have complied.

In June the Bush campaign emailed Pennsylvania churchgoers to get 1600 “Friendly Congregations” where people can register to vote and pick up political information as the election nears.

Bush, who claims to be a Christian and member of a Methodist church, refused to meet with Methodist bishops prior to the invasion of Iraq, knowing that the bishops would try to persuade him not to go to war. He prefers to use the churches to promote his personal and partisan principles or aims. Bush has addressed the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Conference for three consecutive years. ■

TWO RESPONSES TO SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Note: In response to last month's articles on "Same-Sex Marriage," two of our readers/writers have contributed the articles below to increase our dialogue on this subject. As noted at the bottom of page two, *all articles express the views of the authors and not necessarily the views of CET or the editor.*

A Pro-Marriage Amendment to the Constitution

By R. Hal Ritter, Jr., Ph.D.

Licensed Professional Counselor, Waco, TX

In the last hundred or so years, the United States has been strangled by sexual issues. In the first half of the twentieth century, decent folks were taught to speak in sexual euphemisms. As a post-war child growing up in the 1950s, I inherited this propensity from my southern culture.

I remember the first time I used the word "pregnant." I was quickly told not to use that word, but to say the girl was "p-g." If someone filed for divorce because of an adulterous spouse, we said that the person had "biblical reasons" for divorcing. It was a very self-righteous and self-justifying to be "biblically" correct about one's divorce.

In the 1960s, our country went the other way with the "sexual revolution" and "free love," which meant that people now talked openly about what had, in fact, been going on for millennia.

In the 1970s, a Frenchman named Michel Foucault wrote a book titled, *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault is a rhetorician, and in this work he describes the Victorian influence in culture, and how language promoted the attempted elimination of all sexual discourse from society.

One Victorian example that comes to mind is the high collar, long sleeve, full length dresses that women wore. Looking more like something dictated by the Taliban, women covered themselves as completely as possible. And they also wore hats to cover their heads.

I recall my mother telling me how, as a girl growing up in rural Georgia, she went swimming in a dress. Girls did not wear shorts or swimsuits.

As a teenager in Colorado, I remember attending church youth camp where the boys and girls had separate times for swimming. It was a rule that youth were to have "no mixed bathing."

So now we have an era in the twenty-first century that continues to be dominated by sexual issues as a culture. It is not Victorian euphemism, but neither is it free love and sex. However, the public discourse is interesting; sexual themes continue to dominate. The list is quite complex.

For example, the current sexual interest is in a constitutional amendment to define marriage as heterosexual—a euphemism for banning gay marriage. Then there is the interest in having the Supreme Court reverse the *Roe v. Wade*

decision, which grants a woman the right to an abortion.

And there is the issue of sex education in schools, where students can be taught all about AIDS and STDs and pregnancy, but never taught protection and prevention—other than abstinence.

If we give our fine young people birth control information, they will use it, immediately. If we withhold the information, they will never need it.

Many people object to sex education in the schools. They say sex education belongs in the home and in the churches and synagogues and temples and mosques. However, I do not know how many religious organizations are currently teaching a sex education curriculum to their teenagers. And in my work with teens, I do not find many who have "had the conversation" with mom or dad.

And there is the issue of pornography in the media and on the internet. We are outraged by Janet Jackson's costume malfunction at the Super Bowl. Congress needs to act now to limit such things on television.

So what do all of these sexual issues say about us as a people? I am concerned that we become so focused on sex and sexual issues, that we ignore some other vital concerns in our country such as poverty and civil rights and health care and corporate governance and education.

Somehow, we seem to feel that the moral climate of the country is sliding downward, and that a constitutional amendment will fix the problem.

Family values have been so redefined and compromised, that we need a constitutional amendment to get us back on track. In the leftover euphemistic language of the Victorians, we need to "define marriage." Like alcohol prohibition, we think if we pass an amendment, people will do the right thing and stop what they are doing.

Family values in the United States have not changed because there are homosexual people who want to get married. Family values have changed because heterosexual people now take such a casual attitude toward marriage—and divorce.

With half of first marriages ending in divorce, and two thirds of second marriages ending in divorce, and numerous children being reared by single parents, what's the point of

getting married? Some say they will “give it try,” but if it “doesn’t work out,” they’ll just quit.

Our concepts of marriage and family have been seriously infected by our instant gratification, microwave mindset. For many people, if they get married at all, it seems to be little more than an advanced level of “going steady” and “breaking up.” It is a junior high school approach to marriage commitment. It’s like getting a job. If you do not like it, you can quit and do something else.

So, if we really want to take a biblical stand for righteousness and define what marriage is for all people in the United States, then I propose that we have an amendment which says that marriage is between a man and a woman, till death do us part. No exceptions, unless one has proven, documented, “biblical reasons!”

Incompatible? Then you work hard and figure it out.

Conflict? Then you learn some basic skills about being a human being and living with others.

Intimacy? You learn how to manage closeness—and anger.

For us to continue to hammer on one limited part of the biblical text for a marriage amendment, and not use the full textual discourse, is a disservice to marriage and an affront to scripture.

If we are going to do it, then let’s do it right! No exceptions—except, of course, for “biblical reasons.” ■

Baptist Ethics and the Marriage Amendment

By Tarris D. Rosell, DMin, PhD

Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Ethics
Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, KS

Just across State Line Avenue here in Kansas City, on the Missouri side of a metropolitan area still divided along other historical lines, history has been made once again. Tuesday, August 2nd, was Election Day for party primaries and miscellaneous regional matters. In Missouri, this traditionally low-turnout election also included on the ballot a yes-no question regarding the state’s constitutional definition of “marriage”. The nearly 71% “yes” vote will result in the constitution’s amending to define “marriage” as follows: “To be valid and recognized in this state a marriage shall exist only between a man and a woman.”

In Kansas, not known as a bastion of liberalism, a similar proposal failed to get on the ballot this year for lack of a two-thirds majority in the state’s legislative House. Christian conservatives vowed to make this a campaign issue and bring it back for passage next legislative session.¹

Although Missouri was not the first state to vote for constitutional change in this regard—Alaska, Hawaii, Nebraska, and Nevada voters had done so previously—its action has

been hailed by marriage amendment promoters as history-making for its first occurrence following recent Massachusetts judicial decisions legalizing same-gender marriage there. In a general election season, the overwhelming majority vote in Missouri also garnered attention for another reason, both of elated conservatives and others less so. Counting down the days until November’s first Tuesday decisions, there were either hopes or fears that the “bellwether” state’s August decision would be a precursor of things to come.

I work both sides of State Line; and as an ethicist, I often find myself working both/all sides of controversial issues, looking for clear resolutions to thorny dilemmas and finding very often only more complexity and questions instead. The matter of amending “marriage” is a case in point.

From a perspective of classical Baptist ethics, I wonder if there may be something fundamentally suspect and maybe wrong-headed about any movement to define marriage via politics. As Christians residing within the free-church tradition, we Baptists adamantly defend the principle and practice of church-state separation. We are not apolitical, but are politically engaged as individual citizens with emphasis on the government’s role as protector of religious freedom and individual civil rights.

Yet Baptists seem to be flocking to polls in Missouri and elsewhere to vote for a measure that would induce government to restrict individual civil rights and to define for the church what we still call “holy matrimony.”

Ironically, it took an Episcopalian and a Presbyterian to point out to me the logical and practical inconsistency of some Baptists when it comes to church marriage and our relationship with the state.

I sat next to the Episcopal brother, seventy-eight year old retired Bishop Otis Charles, at a public forum on same-gender marriage. He and his male domestic partner were in town following ecclesial censure in the wake of undesirable publicity accompanying their April 2004 wedding.² In private conversation, we compared traditions regarding marriage rites. The Right Reverend Charles noted that he never claims to officiate marriage vows “by the authority vested in me by the State of” Whatever. Even within the historically state church Anglican tradition, in his ritual role the former bishop makes sure he does not cross boundaries of church and state. In contrast, this free-church tradition officiant of “holy matrimony” sheepishly acknowledged that I nearly always do.

Presbyterian layman and newspaper columnist Bill Tammeus attended that forum also. His published reflections suggested a wonderfully Baptist way of looking at marriage amendment initiatives. In sum, Tammeus argued that the state’s only interest in marriage should be to ensure its legal availability to all who are willing seriously to enter into such a commitment. The government’s role is to protect individual civil rights, inclusive of “civil marriage,” or what we might just term “civil unions.” The church, on the other hand, retains the freedom to define “sacred marriage” (holy matrimony) under God any way the church deems fitting,

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the benefits—socially, emotionally, financially, educationally, spiritually—that accrue to children of parents whose union is legally sanctioned. Given that an estimated 200,000 children in the U.S. are raised in same-gender parental families, Presbyterian Tammeus' proposal might look to be not only baptistic but rather pro-family and pro-children. One could ask of pro-amendment advocates what is "pro-family" about denying those same-gender family kids the benefits that come from having two parents legally bound together rather than two who merely live together and one of whom does not have legal rights and responsibilities under the law?

It might be noted also that, gender aside, monogamy surely is a valid concern of the state. Non-monogamous serial sexual relationships arguably contribute to any number of societal ills, particularly epidemic sexually transmitted disease. To the extent that civil unions encourage monogamy it is to the good of society at large. In a free society influenced by free church principles, the church may choose to restrict holy matrimony in accordance with various biblical interpretations and along gender lines. It is hard to see how the state derives societal benefits by doing likewise via constitutional sanctions.

If it is claimed that marriage, whether "civil" or "sacred," is essentially for the purpose of procreation and the continuity of a civil society, a Tammeus approach might offer rejoinder. In fact, marriage is valued as a societal institution for other reasons every bit as important as that of procreation. The partnered years during which child-bearing is biologically feasible are few relative to the potential duration of a covenanted life-long relationship. Even the child-rearing

inclusive of gender specificity. Tammeus' resolution of the marriage debates would be to leave sacred marriage/matrimony to the church and civil marriage/unions to the state.³ Sounds baptistic, does it not?

To take this further and argue definitively against limiting civil marriage by gender, Tammeus would need to show that the state really has no interest in doing so. That might be attempted by noting

years, for those couples who do procreate, are potentially just a fraction of the total years spent together as spouses. Clearly, the value to society of marriage exceeds that of the procreative potential.

It is also important as a societal institution for companionship and mutual caregiving. So the Preacher-poet states in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NRSV), without gender specificity:

Two are better than one,
because they have a good reward for their toil.
For if they fall, one will lift up the other;
but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not
have another to help.
Again, if two lie together, they keep warm;
but how can one keep warm alone?
And though one might prevail against another,
two will withstand one.

Because of these sorts of value in the relationship of two faithful partners, we utilize this scripture routinely in marriage ceremonies. Beyond sexuality and procreation, what matters in a committed relationship mostly is *caring* for and *being there* for one another—both in friendship and surely in those special friendships sanctioned societally or ecclesially as a marital union.

It is not surprising then that social-scientific studies indicate, on average, married folk live longer than single folk; and probably this is due in large measure to having a live-in, long-term caregiver. What value to society is there in denying or even discouraging such relationships on a gender basis?

Neither my Episcopalian nor Presbyterian interlocutor drew out all of these implications of a free-church approach to the marriage amendment for which Missourians recently asked. Some issues and questions are occurring to this Baptist ethicist only in retrospect. And I continue to ponder apparent inconsistencies in what we church-folk, in some states, have done. ■

¹ Michael Foust, "Kan. Amendment Fails, Pro-Family Groups Plan Strategy," Baptist Press (*BP*)*News* (5 May, 2004).

² Rona Marech, "The Battle Over Same-Sex Marriage: Gay Bishop Proves It's Never Too Late to Fall in Love," *San Francisco Chronicle* (29 April, 2004). Rona Marech, "The Battle Over Same-Sex Marriage: S.F. Episcopal Church Cuts Off Bishop Who Wed," *San Francisco Chronicle* (11 May, 2004).

³ Bill Tammeus, "Breathe, Then Talk Same-Sex Marriage," *Kansas City Star* (3 July, 2004).

How the Painted Bunting Was Created

By Hal Haralson, Austin, TX

I met Marcus and Lucy Rogers during Creative Week at Laity Lodge this summer. I smiled. God has not lost His touch when it comes to creating beauty! He pulled out all the stops when He made these two.

Marcus, an attorney from San Antonio, was the artist/instructor for bird carving class. He is dark, lean, and muscular, and about 45 years of age. He works out in the gym three times each week. He is “First Assistant” to God—Bird Division. If you have seen one of Marcus’ birds you wonder whether Marcus did it or God did it.

Lucy is a tall, willowy, strawberry blonde . . . astonishingly beautiful. She radiates beauty and love. She is a perfect “10.”

Adam and Eve could not have graced the Garden of Eden with more beauty than these two.

But this is about the painted bunting. . .

My favorite place to walk is on County Road 302, two miles west of Kingsland, Texas. This sandy road runs four and one-half miles north from State Highway 1431 and dead ends at a 100-year-old ranch house.

Judy and I walked its hard-packed sandy surface for an hour as the sun rose yesterday. A fawn came within 10 yards of us before it turned and ran. I walk an hour every day, usually alone. Yesterday I was feeling really good . . . decided to go all the way to the ranch house. The round trip took two hours and ten minutes to cover eight and one-half miles. Not bad for a 69-year-old!

CR 302 has hills that are covered with oak and mountain juniper (cedar) to the south and open fields to the north. Piles of brush give birds additional cover.

We saw mockingbirds, cardinals, a crane, bobwhites, and two painted buntings. Their songs comprised a symphony . . . “Morning has broken, like the first morning . . . Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird . . .”

I focused my Leopold 10 x 50 hunting binoculars on one painted bunting. He was only 25 yards away. It seemed as if I could almost touch him when I found him with the binoculars.

He was no larger than a sparrow . . . but it was as if God had taken all of the colors of the spectrum and had flung them on one small bird . . . red, orange, blue, green, yellow . . . unreal! If you have never seen one in the wild, you should buy a bird book!

The species is very secretive. Few people ever get far enough out into the woods to see them.

How was the painted bunting created? Perhaps it was like this:

God had been painting birds all day.

Brilliant colors . . .

Red . . . the cardinal

Green . . . the green jay (in South Texas: green to char- treuse, with a head of black and blue)

Blue . . . the jay

Yellow . . . the golden-cheeked warbler

Orange . . . the brilliant scarlet tanager

Day is ending. Brushes must be cleaned; a separate brush was used for each color.

God says to Marcus, “Hand me a sparrow.” It’s the smallest, most common of birds. No color.

Red—Blue—Green—Yellow—Orange. Brush by brush, color by color, God transfers the remaining paint from each brush onto the feathers of the humble creature in His hands. The sparrow is transformed into a splendid *painted bunting*.

We are all “sparrows” until we give our lives to God, the Master Painter, and let Him do THE COLORS. ■

Dedicated to Marcus and Lucy Rogers.



Book Reviews

Hobson's Choice

Nathan Brown, Edmond, Greystone Press, 2002.

Reviewed by Marvin Harris

Professor Emeritus of English, East Texas Baptist University

Nathan Brown has said, "I want my poetry to *matter*, at least to me. I want to be a part of activating change within a culture that is decaying into a terrifying apathy" (Introduction). In *Hobson's Choice* he has done just that as he writes creatively, insightfully, and with refreshing simplicity about religion, social issues and events, fatherhood, childhood memories, and ordinary everyday experiences. Even those who tend to shy away from poetry will find this volume a book to recommend to friends as a "must read."

Besides piquing one's interest, the title defines Brown's angst regarding a compelling urge to be a poet philosopher. Thomas Hobson was a seventeenth century English liveryman who required those who wished to lease a horse to take the one nearest the door, regardless of the horse's condition; hence, Hobson's "choice" was no choice at all. Brown concedes that whatever else he may do in life, he experiences a Hobson's choice to pen his poems, to be a poet prophet. The choice is not his to make. He writes in the Introduction, "I'm sick to death of the postmodern . . . fallout that engulfs my generation. It's a seemingly terminal condition in which nothing can be allowed to be 'all that interesting.' . . . I want my poetry to *matter*, at least to me. I want to be a part of activating change within a culture that is decaying into a terrifying apathy" (14).

But he struggles with literary authority. A product of an untroubled upbringing in a stable middle-class white family, he is apprehensive about his right to write. He says in "Hobson's Choice," the poem that echoes the volume's title

and lists his advantages ("blessings"), "I have / lost no child / fought no war / committed no crime/ no license / to write." A too-harsh self-critic, he admits to himself "...gotta write a poem" even if it may not be world shattering; so "...move on .../ ...500 poems / 'n a few good lines." In "Rhetoric" Brown freezes in a moment of dread that he may not achieve his soul-wrenching purpose: "I hope in some way / somehow, someday / before the rolls are read / to think of a new thing / and someday say something / for nothing's already been said."

The sixty-eight poems in the five sections headed "Carp," "Chit," "Din," "Moot," and "Rumi" exhibit a wide range of topics and emotional levels. Some are playful, as the enjoyably succinct "Las Vegas: Pair o' dice/ Lost." And everyone can relate to the frustrating problem of lost socks in the washing machine. The humorous twist at the end of "Lucky Sock" brings a chuckle: "I just don't believe it! I heard him say / 'I JUST threw your matching sock away!'"

Several poems treat fondly of innocent childhood or nostalgic memories of calmer, pleasant days before the 9/11 societal change. He is moved from apathy toward traditional holidays as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas to renewed meaning by his sixteen-month-old daughter in a poem fittingly titled "Revived." "3 Quarters" relates the touching story of a poor woman who uses her last two dollars from her welfare check to buy the breakfast special then spends the three quarters of change playing the jukebox—Rosemary Clooney, the Beatles, and Sinatra ('Ol Blue



Eyes”). The scrambled eggs and pancakes fed her body; the nostalgic songs fed her soul.

Brown addresses the modern disregard for environmental concerns in “Whispers.” It bears citing in full: “Father Culture / whispers in my ear, / spitting out seed onto concrete / ‘Take it— / the planet was made / for you.’ // Mother Earth / whispers an older story / that reeks of lost truth, / seeps in through pores— / an ancient reminder— / ‘only so much . . .’”

Poems about religion paradoxically evoke a bemused smile mingled with painful regret. Decrying the world’s penchant for war, especially in the Middle East, “The Wailing Wall” reverses the expected stance by having the Wall wail for “my murdered children.” The poems dealing with religion, especially those about the Southern Baptist Convention, are less polite. Satirically, in “All Hayell!” Brown unabashedly reveals his contempt for recent actions of the SBC. The poem begins with a pair of plain-spoken, irreverent couplets:

All hail! The Southern Baptist Convention
O blessed brotherhood of rectal retention
A Christian majority A moral coalition
A liberal purging of all moderation

He continues bemoaning the group’s “defeminization,” “devout duress” to “amass congregations,” shameful behavior to “disprove evolution,” and “infallibration.” To gain their will, they engage in “Consuming the lost in mass conflagration.” No less impiously, “May Day” recalls a religious zealot pulling a black rubber-wheeled cross down I-35 with a sign dogmatically proclaiming that God wants prayer back in school. Brown ends by saying, “and I’m thinkin’— / Jesus didn’t get a wheel.”

Quite striking is Brown’s style, which impresses through its unconventionality at times. Poets seek to convey ideas succinctly, packing expanded meaning into words through connotations, metaphors, similes, imagery, etc. Professor Frank Baxter’s definition of poetry is classic: “Poetry is the attempt of man to put into little much that he has experienced.” That is, a poem compresses expression of what is felt and known. To this end, Brown is especially proficient in the use of metaphor. In the earlier mentioned “Whispers,” for example, much is said about modern culture’s replacing sod with concrete—“spitting out seeds onto concrete” (that does not afford germination). A similar image is that of Jews arriving in the Holy Land where their “tears soak oily pavement / sprouting grace [not grass] through cracks.” The double meaning is powerful. The simile of families sticking together “like day-old-steamed-white-rice” is indelicate, but effectively descriptive. More warming is the memory of a walk through a cool creek and feeling “rich melting chocolate / oozing up between toes” (“Cool, Cloudy”).

Another technique employed by Brown is the use of space and shape to convey meaning—another means of accomplishing succinctness and ideas “rendered into little.” To create the image of a Boeing “whale” opening its doors, Brown says the anxious passengers “wait for the mouth to y a w n.” In “To-From” the poem begins with words crunched together

without spaces to suggest the stressful hustle and bustle of frenetic city life, but as the poem progresses, moving the reader to the quieter, unhurried wilderness, the words become discrete with ever-widening spaces until in the middle of the poem, which depicts the wilderness, each line consists of just one word. Then, as the poem moves back to the urban setting, the lines again become long and the words are compressed without spaces, just as is life in a busy city. Again, one can visualize the slow swishing of a cat’s tail simply by the arrangement of the words in “Ben Yehuda Street”:

her
tail
moves
slowly
back
and
forth

Shape is also employed to good advantage in “Jericho” by gradual increasing line length from short to long to suggest a descent—as when one goes “down to Jericho.”

Brown also utilizes conventional forms as well, notably the haiku and even the most difficult villanelle, which he cleverly titles “The Villainous Nelle.” His forte, however, is in unrestrained form, powerful metaphors, compelling imagery, and evocative space and shape.

Some who read modern poetry question whether the poems are truly poetry or mere prose arranged to suggest verse. Poems they are, but a distinction must be made between *verse* and *poetry*. The former is a structure; the latter is a quality (whether in verse or prose), and a poem may be either. Some poems are devoid of any *poetry*, while some prose is replete with *poetry*. Brown’s *Hobson’s Choice* is packed with pure poetry.

The poems are poetry, not mere verse.

Hobson’s Choice is a remarkable first book of poetry for this minister, college professor, entertainer, musician, and recording artist. Surely more superb works are to come from his creative mind. ■

The Wounded Minister

Guy Greenfield, Baker Books, 2001.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

One doesn’t get past a page or two of this book until he taps into an intensely personal current of angry and wide-ranging emotions that surge all the way through. There is passion, frustration, naiveté, catharsis, and finally a measure of healing that comes from this skilled and mature counselor and psychologist, pastor and teacher, who relieves an excruciating experience of being severely mauled and

wounded by what he calls, “clergy-killers.” After a very successful career in teaching and writing, the author took a pastorate in his early sixties, literally to end his career in one last challenging venture of service. He discovered tragically the presence of “pathological antagonists” in the church who eventually ruined his efforts at ministry.

You must work through the initial impression that the author is venting his spleen against his unnamed opponents. When that problem is somewhat muted, one then becomes aware that the author slowly but wisely moves from the bitterness and negatives of his personal experiences to the key contribution and strength of the book. Simply stated, that is how to help people who have similarly been treated, and equally important, how to help individual churches handle this difficult problem of troublemakers in the fellowship!

Lest some casual reader think this is an isolated problem, permit the reviewer a personal word. In my years at the Annuity Board, few days ever went by without an anguished call from a terminated minister. These came to us because we administered their pension plans. These distraught people needed money immediately simply to pay bills and to get by. Few of these people ever received adequate support when these brutal acts occurred. Many were cut off without a dime and most lost their health insurance. Then and now, there are uncounted hundreds even thousands of these painful, ugly incidents. The costs in human suffering, embarrassment, guilt and grief, and church unrest are incalculable.

By using a wide-ranging source of contacts, the author draws upon some riveting experiences with many other ministers who have had devastating encounters with these pathological antagonists in their churches. Dr. Greenfield clearly delineates between the problem of the antagonists and the equally sad situation of termination brought on by ministerial failures. And there is a major difference between these. There are these events of failure, which brought termination to a sad climax because of faulty judgments, moral misbehavior, and pathetic skills in preaching and administration. The author speaks to this in his chapter, “Ministers Who Invite Attacks.”

Dr. Greenfield writes about a tragic and often unreported facet of the “Wounded Minister” who suffers persecution and termination from senior ministers in a large church setting, and even from denominational executives. Here is the

raw exercise of power through one’s position. Far too many women and men have suffered when they have challenged, wisely or foolishly, the authority of senior leaders in these settings. Abusive pastors and denominational leaders do exist, but there is a peculiar inability often to prove the existence of this abuse of power because there is a lack of necessary paper trails, which could point to the problem. A great need is apparent for a revival of solid Christian values and ethical behavior in this relationship.

A concurrent strength of this book is reflected in Greenfield’s scholarship as he uses multiple quotations from experts in the fields both of Christian ethics and church administration. These are scholars like Lewis Smedes, Wayne Oates and Brooks Faulkner. All of these join with the author suggesting that somehow there is a place for psychological training and testing both for embryonic and experienced ministers. Additionally, there ought to be a way found for similar assistance to be channeled to these pathological antagonists whose repetitive behavior causes so much anguish.

Here is a forceful contribution to a neglected area of church life, an area that is nationwide in its scope and depth, crossing all denominational lines. It deserves a wide reading, and perhaps a by product of reading these difficult pages might lead to some unexpected but needed haling of a “Wounded Minister.” ■

Speaking My Mind

The Radical Evangelical Prophet Tackles the Tough Issues Christians Are Afraid To Face

Tony Campolo, W Publishing Group, 2004,
www.thomasnelsonson.com.

*Reviewed by Dan Riley in Baptists Today
and reprinted by permission.*

Campolo does it again. Steering his newest book right down the road of religious controversy! As he did 15



years ago in *20 Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid To Touch*, Campolo prods Christians into thinking about controversial but critical issues. Readers should not expect this book to comfort troubled Christians, but rather to “disturb and trouble the comfortable.”

Outspoken Campolo, criticized as being too liberal by some evangelicals and too conservative by others, chooses to tackle issues of today that many preachers and writers sidestep because they polarize the Christian community. For example:

- What has happened to mainline denominations?
- Is evangelicalism sexist?
- Are evangelicals handling the gay issue all wrong?
- Is there a second chance for those who die without Christ?
- Is Islam really an evil religion?
- Is the war with Iraq a just war?
- Can Christians and Muslims be reconciled?
- Should Christian parents pull their kids out of public schools?
- Are evangelicals afraid of science?
- Is evangelicalism headed for a split?

Campolo does not claim to have all the answers. Rather, he writes as a “struggling Christian” who is certain about only one thing: Jesus. He believes, however, that Christians are compelled to work through the questions he raises “if we are to speak relevantly and helpfully to a world that is growing increasingly suspicious of Christians and feel threatened by much of what we say and do.”

Campolo’s consuming passion for the church and those to whom it ministers in the name of social justice can become contagious. Both individual readers and group study participants will be inspired to seek—with Campolo—what is truly right and wrong within the community of Christians. ■

NEEDED

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Should Ethics Come First?

(continued from page 2)

CNN or discussed on Oprah or Dr. Phil: war, capital punishment, corporate scandals, church-state dilemmas, surrogate parenting, and politricks!

In a day when ethical issues are numerous and complex, what is our response? Churches seem to avoid ethical questions. So concerned with “Growth” and “User Friendly Congregations,” many modern church leaders opt for neutrality—take no stand on anything that is controversial, just confess belief in patriotism, the American way, and bottom-line success.

I agonize with church and denominational leaders who are trying to keep their ship afloat. Yet, isn’t the kingdom of God bigger than being Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or even the inoffensive No-Name Church that is obsessed with neutrality? My how we need prophets today like Micah, Amos, and Isaiah.

And now the punch-line—my own grand obsession! If ethics came first in Christian history, if the first-century world was turned “upside-down” by the moral witness of Jesus’ disciples, if the need for Christian ethics is widespread in our morally confused culture, then why in heaven’s name are we minimizing Christian ethics in the classroom and in pulpits? Why are we retreating? Why are we so reluctant to be honest with the teachings of Jesus?

Have we been corrupted by our culture? Are we so intent on church success that we have sacrificed the “hard sayings of Jesus” in order to be *numero uno*?

Consider this contrast. A few SBC seminaries are increasing their ethics department to ensure an ultra-conservative, political agenda. In response, our three largest moderate seminaries not only do not have a Professor of Christian Ethics, they also offer a CE course only as an elective—which means low enrollment. We are graduating hundreds of seminary students who have not studied Christian ethics—and please don’t tell me (as one teacher did), “We include it with theology.” I know what that means—it’s left till last, and then usually left out (as McClendon noted)!

I am grateful for Bill Tillman at Logsdon Seminary, Dan McGee and John Wood at Baylor, Paul Sadler at Wayland, Jeff Holloway at East Texas Baptist and Dave Gushee at Union University to name a few exceptions to this trend. Check your school’s catalogue. Talk to the Dean. Insist that Christian ethics teaching be a vital part of the curriculum. In a world with too much decay and darkness, we must keep the “salt and light” of Christian ethics primary, as did Jesus in his life and teachings (Matt. 5:13-16). ■

What Next?

By Leon Slaughter, Legacy Publications

Edgewood, TX

Peace, prosperity, a balanced budget, liberty and justice for all. Maybe!

A newborn baby is lying peaceably in its mother's arms. Suddenly it starts crying unstopable. The frantic mother cannot find what is wrong. Could it be the little fellow just found out about the enormous debt with which he was born? Before we add in our present over \$500,000,000 current national deficit, our national debt was \$6,399,900,075. How much is that for every man, woman and child? You figure it out; this is giving me a headache.

Leading economists agree that the United States has, for several years, dominated the world's economy, but now our economic domination is over. Globalization is now the dominating force. Because of our enormous and growing national debt and our growing dependence on imported resources such as oil controlled by a global oil cartel, we are mortgaging our future. Foreign investments from countries such as Japan, China, other East Asia countries, and the European Union is fast gaining control of our economy.

The fear that has plagued blue-collar workers for a long time that they might be "down sized, laid off, not needed, or fired" has now reached the middle income white collar workers. Now if you call almost any national company or organization about almost anything, you will likely talk to someone in India, China, or who knows where. Outsourcing has put

much of our middle-income workers in competition with workers overseas who will work for a fraction of the wage scales here.

The theory of free trade is good for everyone involved if everyone is on the same level playing field. It lets the economic law of comparative advantage work, which produces a win-win situation for everyone. However, we are not playing on a level playing field. The countries we are outsourcing to and moving plants to have no minimum wage, safety laws, environmental restrictions, and a high unemployment rate. Our government must negotiate some controls on these concerns with countries before we open our gates to them for free trade with no tariffs, taxes or restrictions.

Where does our effort to develop alternative sources of energy rate in our nation's priorities? I am afraid it is not high enough. All energy somehow came or will come from the sun. We must develop more efficient methods of harnessing it and freeing ourselves from the oil cartel and other monopolies.

Many middle class American families are living from payday to payday with the man and wife both working and struggling to pay bills. Most are just one paycheck missed or a medical emergency away from bankruptcy. Thank God for the pill. There is a growing resentment in the working class at the widening difference in their income and that of the wealthy and upper management. The salaries of CEOs have



gone from 40 times the average worker's just a short time ago to 400 times today.

That plus the behavior or management at Enron, World Com, Tyco, Global Crossing and others is just too much. Add to that the fact that most of the Bush tax cuts went to the wealthy top 10% income group. Then too many of our corporations rent a post office box on some little island and pay no income tax.

Why do drugs cost so much more in this country than just across the border in Canada? And, why is our government trying to stop our buying the same drugs we have been buying here much cheaper in Canada?

Is our hope for peace based solely on the concept that we have the largest and most efficient war machine ever developed? What is the real purpose of this world wide military power as seen by our nations leaders? Fifty-seven years after World War II we still maintain occupation forces in Germany and Japan. After fifty years we are still in South Korea. In addition we have ten bases in seven European countries, also bases in Guam, Okinawa, Taiwan, Kyrgistan, Uzbekisten, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. We also have bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Behrain Quatar, and four new bases in Iraq. Why haven't we invaded North Korea? Is it because they have no oil? When did policing the entire world become our responsibility?

"The leaders of the country determine the policy for war. The people can always be brought to the bibbing of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifist for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country." A statement by Herman Goering at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals.

After the war in Afghanistan we were told and insisted that we had to go to war with Iraq because they were aligned with al Qaeda and they were producing weapons of mass destruction. None of which proved to be true. While this was happening the Bush Administration in June 2002 withdrew the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and ask Congress to lift a ten-year ban on research, development, and production of "smaller" nuclear weapons. Smaller, but still powerful enough to kill thousands, cripple many thousands more, and devastate the environment.

We are living in the most wonderful country in the world by any measure. Why do so many people in other countries hate us? Two-thousand years ago Rome owned, controlled or dominated all of the then known world. It collapsed. Are we being directed toward a policy of attempting world domination both militarily, and economically? Sure we need to have military power second to none but used only when we are attacked or about to be. Otherwise around the world we will be considered a bully as we are now in some places.

What can you and I do to help our great country survive and continue our Founding Father's dreams of liberty and justice for all? We should keep ourselves informed and vote. When we can, vote for someone who we believe has not already sold his or her vote to the highest bidder. ■

EthixBytes

(continued from page 3)

"I think that evangelicals are so concerned with the unborn—as we should be—that we have failed to pay enough attention to the born—to those children who do live and who are being left behind by a system that has gone in favor of corporate interests and big money."

Tony Campolo, in beliefnet.com.

"The total amount owed—by consumers, businesses, governments and financial institutions—totaled \$34.4 trillion at the end of 2003, according to the Federal Reserve. The economy produced 11.3 trillion of output. That makes the nation's debt triple its gross domestic product."

The Miami Herald.

"He said they are like dogs, and if you allow them to believe at any point that they are more than a dog, then you've lost control of them."

Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, describing how she was ordered to treat inmates at Abu Ghraib by the current Iraqi prison chief Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, formerly in charge of detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

"All these atrocities continue in spite of the fact that we now have the 'right' people in places of power. Indeed, the occupant of the White House is a professing Christian. The U.S. attorney general is believed to be a devout Christian. 'Conservatives' control both Houses of Congress, and Republican presidents appointed seven of the nine Supreme Court justices." ■

From the ChristianExodus.com website of a religious right group.

MOVING?



If you've moved or are planning to move, please let us know.

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

Change

By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

Dallas, TX

I have a couple of friends who wake up every morning trying to think of things to change that day. No matter how well things have worked in the past, no matter how smoothly things are running now, and no matter how the status quo is humming along, their nostrils flare with the prospect of changing everything. Today if possible. If not today, then tomorrow for sure. Certainly no later than Friday of this week. Just run over anybody who gets in the way, or fire them, whichever comes first. But do get on with the change.

Me?

I just hate change.

One of the best things about God, it seems to me, is caught in a wonderful old hymn, "Abide With Me," one stanza of which closes, "O Thou who changest not, Abide with me."

And one of the many good things about the Lord Jesus Christ is that he is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

A little change is permissible, I suppose, if it comes slowly. For instance, the transition from one season of the year to the next is quite nice. The growth of a child from stage to stage and from year to year is about right. I also liked the really imperceptible growth of a great old spruce tree that grew by the side of our cabin in the mountains. This tree was at least 100 years old and 200 feet high when I built the cabin by the river in 1958. Then the dreaded bud worms

moved up the valley and killed that grand old tree. When we cut it down, I counted the tiny growth rings, one for each year of its life, on the stump and found that it had averaged growing less than an eighth of an inch in diameter for each of its 124 years of age. Watching it grow for the forty years I knew it was sort of like watching paint dry. Not all that dramatic. But quite satisfactory.

As I mentioned, I really do not like change, especially fast change or sudden change.

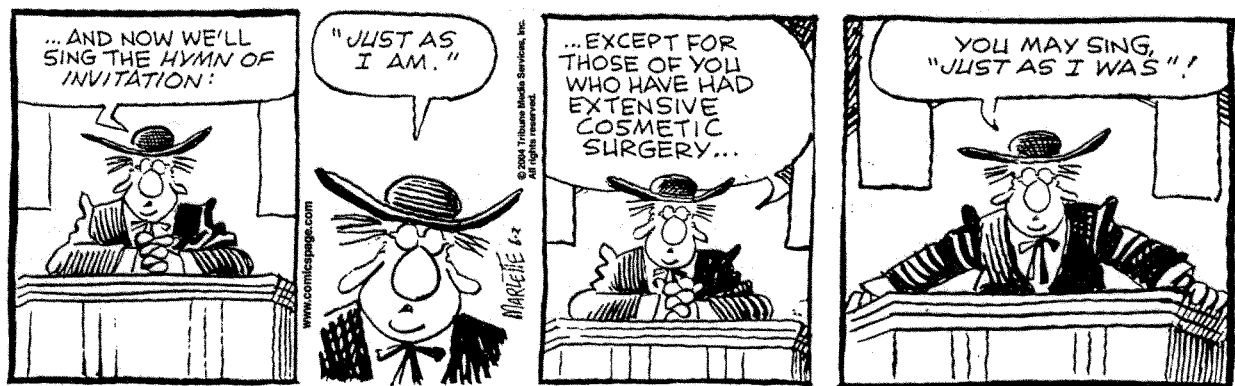
Whether we embrace change or resist it, however, change happens.

Adam is purported to have said to his wife as they left the Garden of Eden, "Well, Eve, we live in an age of transition."

In spite of my own aversion to change, I have hammered out a reasonably satisfactory way to deal with it.

When change comes, I try to fall back on Romans 8:28. "All things are everlastingly working together for good for them that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose." At the time of unwelcome change, I have often felt in my bones that Brother Paul may have just blown it when he wrote that. But time and perspective have a way of validating it, time and time again.

Sometimes it is not possible to perceive any good in the change wrought by cruel fate. At such times, I have been known to fall back in mute despair in the realization that we live in a fallen world. Things simply do not always work out



right. Troubles come as surely as the sparks fly upward. As a wise and wonderful grandmother I know said recently to a coddled grandchild who was whimpering because he had skinned his knee a little, "Get over it." There may be nothing else to do but to get over it.

Not many things in life are more solidly satisfying than old shoes. Old hats please me. Old and threadbare clothes move me to signs of contented satisfaction. No less an eminence than Thomas Carlyle has observed that you should never trust the heart of a man for whom old clothes are not venerable. Old clothes, old hats, and old shoes, however, do wear out. I mean plumb out. Like my good neighbor's dearly loved old dog with massive arthritis and metastasized cancer so that she simply could not get on her feet any more and was mercifully put to sleep by a sympathetic veterinarian, old clothes, too, pass their point of no return. Change is required. The new things are not really as satisfactory as the old. Given time, however, they too can become venerable.

Change can be the occasion for gratitude. Old age inevitably brings the loss of loved ones and old friends as it has been doing with unwelcome frequency to me in recent years. I have therefore often been moved to express deep gratitude to God for the many good times and the innumerable blessings extended to me by those who cared for me. As my vision dims, I am all the more grateful to God for all the beauty I have been privileged to see in days gone by. As hearing loss creeps up on me with little cat feet, I am moved to thanksgiving to God for marvelous whispers heard in the past, and for fine music's nuanced intricacies which I cannot now catch. As worldwide travel and glorious adventures are now not welcome or even tolerated, I am now doubly appreciative to the Giver of all good and perfect gifts for those incredibly good times in the past when I have been there and done that.

Change is a reminder that though the mills of God grind slowly, they grind exceedingly small. God's people, his kind of folks, may be perfectly confident in the knowledge that all creation, though now groaning and in travail, is tending toward a fruition, a fulfillment, a consummation that is far better than anything we now know or think.

Furthermore, and to dredge up a modicum of honest candidness in what has been something of a diatribe against change, I vigorously affirm change as being sometimes greatly needed. I think of human slavery, the systemic abuse of women, child labor, political corruption, economic oppression of the poor, rape of the environment, genocide, religious persecution, the trashing of the public schools, rampant gambling, the coddling of alcohol and tobacco profiteers, and family disintegration. Indeed, I have spent the last fifty years of my life focused on this motto, "Helping changed people to change the world." That engraved motto rests prominently on my desk today.

Yet, I do hate change.

Except when it is the most important thing on earth to do. ■

Ice a Jesus

*By Al Staggs, Chaplain and Performing Artist
Bedford, TX*

Ice a Jesus and Ex a Jesus.

Ice a Jesus is a cold reading of the texts

And it's a good one to have

If you are the Klan or the Nazis or Us.

Finding an appropriate text is needful

To fashion our xenophobias

And make us righteous soldiers of good

Against all that we deem evil.

Take a text and the life of Jesus\And mold it to your whims.

It helps to have a church

And willing crowds to hear\and add hymns and prayers

And ice a Jesus can be done.

Ice a Jesus has served many a good cause

Slavery, racism, apartheid, fascism, sexism,

Anti-Semitism, nationalism

Just to name a few.

Great causes require moral authority.

Ex a Jesus requires

Painstaking skill,

Sensitivity to the Spirit\And the possibility of reform.

These would never further our cause.

So ice a Jesus will serve us just fine. ■

The Patriot

By Floyd Emmerling, Bee Branch, AR

The patriot must love the whole wide world

If in his own country he would be safe

He takes pride if old glory is unfurled

When Uncle Sam behaves with love and grace.

Preemption might be paranoid

Don't say it is for oil!

Deceit might breed more terror

Don't you think?

It is false patriotism that

So disregards another people's worth

If all men are created equal then

The patriot must love the whole wide world. ■

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 in 1995, 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, 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 bi-monthly.

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

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