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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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Financial Report For 2004



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Breakfast At The Elite Café—November, 1963

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

The year was 1963. The 175th year of our nation's life. President John F. Kennedy was beginning his second term in office.

Abroad our country was engaged in a "cold war" with the communist-bloc countries, including Cuba just ninety miles away. Thousands of American soldiers were massed along the 39th parallel that divided North and South Korea guarding an uneasy truce. The United States was escalating its involvement in the war in Vietnam with 25,000 advisors.

At home other battles were waging, many focusing upon basic civil rights for African-Americans. Racial segregation in the public schools was still common, as well as other forms of separation in public places—especially hotels and motels, restaurants, transportation, bathrooms, and even water fountains! Black Americans found voting very difficult in many parts of the country. In 1963 the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his famous "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" after the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in that segregated city. Tensions between the races were escalating.

I was living on the field of my student pastorate in southwestern Oklahoma. The year was a unique one for our family, as my brother Don was setting records as an All-American quarterback for the Baylor Bears. He led the nation in passing and total yardage, and was runner-up behind Roger Staubach for the Heisman trophy.

I listened to every game with pride. One Saturday in November was designated R.A. day, a special afternoon at Baylor stadium when all the young boys in Baptist churches, along with their sponsors, could attend the game at discount prices and root for the Bears.

At FBC, Roosevelt (a farming community) we had about ten young boys in our R.A. group. Our basketball and baseball team won almost every game, mainly due to two of our group who happened to be black (not a problem in our small rural community).

On Friday afternoon we left for Waco, riding in a "wheat-harvest" bus one of the men used for his work crews. Inside were enough bunk beds for us all, and the seats were OK.

When we stopped for gas in Jacksboro we heard the first report: "The President has been shot in Dallas." When his death was announced over the networks, I called Don. He was uncertain

if the game Saturday would be cancelled, but since we were not too far away, he urged us to come ahead with our ten R.A. boys.

That evening, as we prepared to bed-down in our harvest bus, Don came by to tell us the game was cancelled. "Tomorrow, after we meet for breakfast at the Elite Café, I will take all of you for a tour of the campus, including visiting the bear pits where our mascots live." The trip would not be a total loss, and the boys were enjoying the adventure.

Don called the manager of the café, whom he knew well, and told him of his brother's visit and the group of R.A. boys and sponsors who were coming to eat. "Sure Don," he said, "Bring them by and we will be sure they get a real Texas breakfast they won't forget." I knew we would be treated royally, for in the fall of 1963 my brother was the town hero, leading the Baylor football team (along with several other star players) to nationwide prominence.

As our group walked in the door, we were greeted and led to tables prepared for us. I noticed the waitress seemed startled—a bit nervous about our group. She disappeared, and soon the manager came out. As Don introduced us and he welcomed us, I noticed his eyes kept moving across our group. He then walked back toward the waitress and mumbled, "Let's serve Don's group." I began to sense something was wrong.

As we departed after the breakfast, the manager came up to me and said, "Your boys were the best-behaved group of young people we have ever had. But preacher, I need to tell you something else. All these years we have had a policy of not serving colored people. Your colored boys are the first ones we have ever served in this café."

He continued, "Don is not only our hero, but a good friend. I promised to serve his brother's group, and we did. And yesterday our President was assassinated." The manager paused, then looked me in the eye and said, "I guess it's time we changed that policy."

As I walked toward the bus, I thanked God for several things—that the boys had followed our instructions to be at their best in the café, that we had decided to come on to Waco even knowing the game might be cancelled, and the sequence of events that led us to eat breakfast that somber November day in the Elite Café.

The café is still there, near old 35 on the Circle that winds to
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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
Maya Angelou

“One would have thought after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, that the need for credible news and opinion, reliable and verifiable, would have found an answer from those who could supply it. . . . You [the public] keep reminding me that the quality of journalism and the quality of democracy go hand in hand.”
Bill Moyers during his sign-off from public television December 17, 2004.

“The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary.”
H. L. Mencken.

“There is no crisis in Social Security—payments are funded through 2042, after which 80% funding will be available. The real crisis today is with the 45 million children who do not have health care.”
Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass), on Meet the Press, 1/30/05.

“The federal government this fiscal year will spend about \$368 billion more than it took in, \$20 billion more than it projected last September. But additional war spending this year will push that spending to a record \$427 billion for fiscal 2005, making it harder for President Bush to fulfill his pledge to cut the budget deficit in half by 2009.”
Congressional Budget Office Report, 1/25/05.

“The rise of political Christianity—a coalition of white born-again Christians, conservative Catholics, conservative African Americans and conservative Hispanics—is concerned with more than gay marriages and abortion rights. Political Christianity seeks to breach the wall of separation between the church and state and wishes to make this country a Christian nation.”

M A. Muqtedar Khan, in the National Catholic Reporter about the ultimate design of the Religious Right in the U.S.

“To think that way demeans the Christian movement. We are not anybody’s special interest group.”
Charles W. Colson, born-again former aide to President Nixon warning evangelical conservatives not to list demands to the President or to other elected officials.

“In this plentiful land there are 36 million who are poor, 45 million who are without health insurance and 25.5 million

who are hungry. ‘Read the book,’ urged [Jim] Wallis, One out of 16 verses of scripture is about poverty—one out of nine in the synoptic Gospels.’ [James] Forbes added, ‘nobody gets to heaven without a letter of reference from the poor.’”
John M. Buchanan in The Christian Century.

“The current system is rigged to benefit the interest of those in office—not of those who put them there.”
California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his State of the State speech calling for an independent panel of retired judges (not the State legislature) to apportion congressional seats, of which none of California’s 53 seats changed parties. Nationally only 13 of the 435 congressional districts saw a political flip, 4 of those from the gerrymandered Texas map.

“It is still possible that most Iraqis will come out of the war better off than they were before. . . . The question is whether the U.S. will be a better place after years of fearmongering, military abuse, erosion of civil liberties, and a constant stream of political propaganda that distorts America’s proudest legacies.”
Ian Buruma, author of Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies.

“All institutions, every last single one of them, are evil; self-serving, self-preserving, self-loving; and very early in the life of any institution it will exist for its own self. . . . never trust them. Never bow the knee to them. They are all after your soul. Your ultimate, absolute, uncompromising allegiance. Your soul. ALL of them.”
Novelist Will Campbell in an interview for Baptists Today.

“The only way lawyers can make a case for keeping ‘under God’ in the pledge is by emptying the phrase of theological meaning.”
Rodney Clapp in The Christian Century.

“The constitutional amendment we are debating today strikes me as antithetical in every way to the core philosophy of Republicans. It usurps from the states a fundamental authority they have always possessed, and imposes a federal remedy for a problem that most states do not believe confronts them.”

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), on the proposed amendment to ban same-sex marriage, which he and six Republicans helped block.

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”
Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Pilgrim in a Racist Land

By J. Randall O'Brien, Professor and Chair Department of Religion
Baylor University, Waco, TX

The story did not begin with me. And long after I am gone, the story will journey on into the ages. But the caravan did come by here. And I climbed aboard.

*Ohhh, dat Gospel train's a comin'
I hear dat whistle blowin'
Yassuh, dat Gospel train's a comin'
Gonna ride it t'glory.*

The Gospel was the hope of Negroes in the segregated South when I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in Mississippi. Negroes looked forward to the day when that "Gospel Train" would spring their sweet escape from a racist "hell on earth" and land them in the celestial bliss of a peaceful, just, eternal heaven. Some of us Whites dreamed too.

I reckon all who climb aboard God's Freedom Train understand that the train departs from Egypt always and journeys long through the wilderness before arriving in the Promised Land. Six years after my birth in 1949, the United States Supreme Court handed down an historic decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case on Monday May 17, 1954, ruling that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. In response to the Supreme Court's decision, Thomas P. Brady (Circuit Court Judge of the 14th District of Mississippi) published a book entitled *Black Monday*, in which he wrote, "The Negro purposes to breed up his inferior intellect and whiten his skin and 'blow out the light' in the White man's brain and muddy his skin." Continuing his tirade the racist Judge hissed,

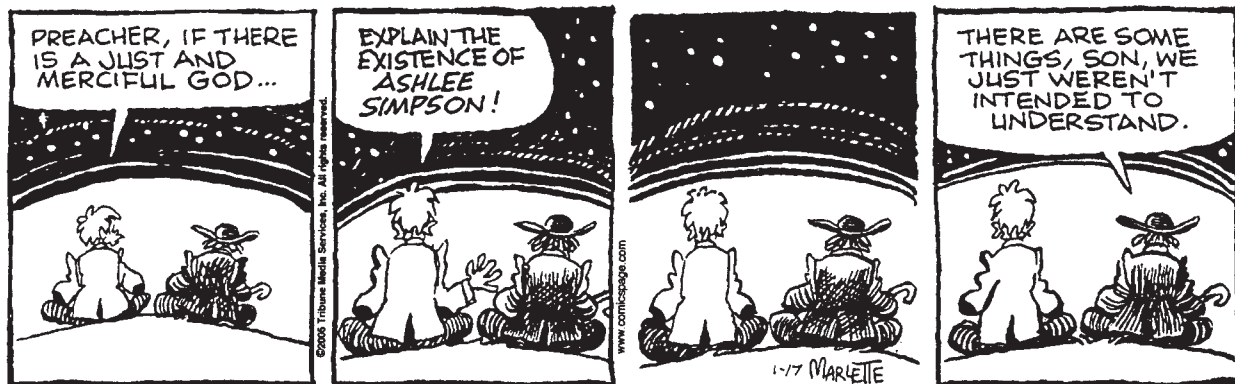
You can dress a chimpanzee, housebreak him, and teach him to use a knife and fork, but it will take countless generations of evolutionary development, if ever, before you can convince him that a caterpillar or a cockroach is not a

delicacy. Likewise the social, economic, and religious preferences of the Negro remain close to the caterpillar and the cockroach.

In 1963, Judge Brady was awarded a seat on the bench of the Mississippi Supreme Court.

Within two months of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision the White Citizen's Council (which came to be known as "the white collar Klan," or "the reading and writing Klan") was formed on July 11, 1954, in Indianola, Mississippi. Two years later the Mississippi Legislature established The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to maintain segregation. How vividly I recall the "Freedom Rides" undertaken by Negro and White activists in 1961, who dared to travel on Trailways and Greyhound buses from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana for the sole purpose of testing federal integration laws in bus stations throughout the South. I was eleven years old when the "Freedom Riders" or "Friction Riders" as they were called in the Jackson, Mississippi press, were severely beaten in Jackson and in my hometown of McComb, Mississippi.

The first direct action for integration in Mississippi by *Mississippians* occurred in my hometown on August 26, 1961, when two local young Negro men, Elmer Hayes and Hollis Watkins, sat-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter. For their trouble they were harassed, arrested, and jailed for 30 days. Four days later, another sit-in took place at the bus station in McComb. Two Negro high school students, Brenda Travis and Isaac Lewis, were jailed for 28 days. Soon thereafter, on October 4, 120 Negro high school students, including Brenda Travis, marched through the streets of McComb to the steps of City Hall. The teen-age Miss Travis was sent



away to Reform School for one year.

On September 30, 1962, riots broke out at the University of Mississippi when James Meredith became the first Negro student to enroll at the school. Two persons were killed in the melee and 60 U.S. Marshals were injured. Less than one year later, on June 11, 1963, NAACP Field Secretary in Mississippi, Medgar Evers, was murdered in the driveway of his home in Jackson, shot in the back with a high-powered rifle fired by Byron de la Beckwith of the White Citizen's Council. The long, hot summer of 1964 lay just around the corner.

The Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964 was a well-coordinated civil rights campaign, which brought to the State hundreds of college student volunteers and other civil rights activists from the North and California to work for racial equality. More than 200 volunteers came to Mississippi on June 20 to establish Freedom Voter Registration, Freedom Schools, and Freedom Medical and Legal Clinics. By June 21 three of the civil rights workers had disappeared. The bodies of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were found August 4 outside Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Civil rights workers and Mississippi Negroes suffered horribly in the long, hot summer of 1964. Included in the litany of evils suffered by the innocent were 1,000 arrests, 80 beatings, 35 shootings, 35 church bombings, 30 home bombings, and 6 murders. The list may not even be complete since it includes only crimes that were reported!

My hometown of McComb, located in Pike County in Southwest Mississippi, became known internationally in 1964 as "The Dynamite Capitol of the World" for its 20 acts of violence and 16 bombings of churches and homes in defiance of civil rights advances. Is it any wonder Martin Luther King, Jr. described to United States Attorney General Robert Kennedy the evil in McComb as a "Reign of Terror?"

Shame covered the city like dirty smog. Our churches fell silent; our preachers developed laryngitis. The body of Christ looked nothing at all like Jesus. No tables of racism were overturned in the temple. No ministerial anger cried out against bigotry, hatred, or murder. Along with the Finance Committee, Fellowship Committee, and Youth Committee my home church formed a "Ni-er" Committee, composed of the biggest and meanest men in the church, who met each Sunday on the steps of the church with one job and only one job: while the pastor stood in the pulpit preaching about a God who loved everyone, a certain race of people must NEVER, EVER get through that door! Where had all the prophets gone?

In the early 1960s fewer than 2% of Mississippi's Negro population were registered to vote. Some counties did not have a single registered Negro voter! Yet White supremacy and segregation, twin Southern traditions proudly inherited by each new generation through paternal bloodlines and ingested through mother's milk, were being threatened. "Ohhh, dat Gospel train's a comin'; I hear dat whistle blowin'."

The moment a Southerner surrenders his life to Christ

for a lifetime of Christian ministry a crisis strikes. In the area of race relations shall he follow a course of continuation or compensation? Shall he follow Christ or culture? Will there be a transfer of allegiance? Whom shall one now seek to please, earthly father or heavenly Father? Shall the minister follow society or Scripture? Which will it be: family or faith? The choice is hard. *Religion would be much easier if ethics were not involved.*

Kay and I concluded there was no choice after all. Either Christ was Lord or He wasn't. Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, expresses our own dilemma and decision:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
and sorry I could not travel both
and be one traveler, long I stood
and looked down one as far as I could
to where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
and having perhaps the better claim,
because it was grassy and wanted wear;

....

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this one day with a sigh
somewhere ages and ages hence:
two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.

"The Road Taken" led us to minister in the ghettos of New Orleans in the 1970s while I was in seminary. Soon we had joined an African-American Church in the inner city as its only two white members. In time Kay was asked to serve as Sunday School Superintendent and I was invited to serve as Associate Pastor. Our families tried hard to understand our calling to minister in this setting, and I believe they were successful in doing so. Their love and support blessed us.

When my ordination was scheduled in Kay's home church in the Mississippi Delta, the church fellowship and our families seemed pleased. When we revealed, however, that we wanted our Pastor, the Reverend Andrew W. Gilmore of Christian Love Missionary Baptist Church in New Orleans to preach my ordination sermon, celebration turned into chaos. A negro preach in the pulpit of an all-white Mississippi Delta church? In the very town in which the White Citizen's Council was formed? And wouldn't other Negroes want to make the trip from New Orleans as well?

Although my ordination in Roundaway Baptist Church in Sunflower County, Mississippi created no small crisis, we remain very proud of the way in which the Deacons and the church membership responded to the collision of segregation and Scripture. When Kay's father, a deacon in the church, delivered a passionate appeal to the church on behalf of right, the church followed the leadership of the Holy Spirit beautifully. The ordination service provided a glimpse of God's True

Church where all believers are one in Christ Jesus.

We could not have known what awaited us in our first pastorate on the Mississippi-Louisiana State Line. Rather than reveal the name of the church I prefer the pseudonym "Southern Baptist Church." Moreover all names are fictitious except in cases where a person lines up on the side of right. I am proud to make known the identities of the faithful.

"Are you going to Homecoming this weekend?" I asked Doug Taylor one Tuesday afternoon in October of 1979, as we walked across the campus of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Doug and I had graduated from Mississippi College, he in 1978 and I in 1975. "I'd love to, but I don't have a car," he lamented. "Hey, that's no problem," I said. "Kay and I are going and you are more than welcome to ride with us."

"For real?" he asked. "Absolutely!" I said. And so the drama began innocently enough.

Kay and I planned to drive from New Orleans to Clinton, Mississippi, Friday afternoon, attend homecoming festivities at the college Saturday, then motor Saturday night to the church field where I served as Pastor. Sunday we would worship morning and evening, then return to New Orleans late Sunday night. We never even thought about the obvious. Then it hit me! "Hun," I said, "I never once thought about this, but Doug is black and Southern Baptist Church is white. We've got a problem."

"I never thought about it either," she said, "what are we going to do?" "Well, maybe this is what God wants, even though we didn't think about what we were doing," I mused. "Let's talk to Doug, explain the situation, pray about it for a couple of days, and see what we think we should do," I suggested.

"Doug, I've got to explain something to you," I began. With that I told him that a black person had never, ever been in the church, not even to cook or clean, and that the church sat in the heart of Klan territory, but that the invitation was still on the table. We agreed to pray. Thursday evening the three of us met in our home to finalize our plans according to God's guidance through prayer. One by one we reported that our sense was "All Systems Go!" We had not intentionally plotted to integrate Southern Baptist Church. Despite our naivete, or maybe because of it, we felt providentially chosen by God for this historical act. If it is possible for fear and peace to coexist, those two polar neighbors seemed to find a home in our hearts.

Sunday morning arrived. Doug, Kay, and I, along with Eric Holleyman, our Associate Pastor for Music and Youth, prayed together at the parsonage then drove to the church. Word traveled fast. As soon as Sunday worship concluded, Sammy Wilson ran up to me and exploded, "Ed Earl wants to see you right now! He said to tell you to get your *^%#! over to his house the minute church is out!"

Ed Earl was a church member who attended church every leap year. I suspected he was a Klansman, but I had no way of knowing. In order to present the false impression that

I was not frightened, I ate Sunday lunch first rather than rush right over. Eric insisted on going with me. When we arrived at Ed Earl's, Jimmie Lou met us at the door and ushered us into the room where Ed Earl sat waiting. Jimmie Lou excused herself, closing the door behind her. Ed Earl said nothing for the longest. Then he began.

"Got a little visit this mornin'," he said. "The boys came by, tearin' into my driveway in their pick-up trucks, slingin' gravel everywhere, blowin' their horns, slammin' on brakes, throwin' rocks, and hollerin'—'Ed Earl, git out here quick!' Well, I went outside and said, 'What're you boys up to?' They said, 'Git in the truck, Ed Earl!' I said, 'Where you boys goin'?' They said, 'Git in the *%^#! Ed Earl! We're goin' to git us a nigger 'n a preacher!'"

Then they told me it was you! I was so mad I could *%^#! But I told 'em, 'I'm gonna have to ask you boys to turn around and go back home.' 'What!' they said. 'You heard me boys. Lemme handle this one; I owe that preacher one; he's taken up a lot o' time with my boy, huntin', playin' ball. But I tell you what I'm gonna do. If it ever happens again, you won't be pickin' me up. I'll be pickin' you up! Now go on home. I'll take care of this one.'

Ed Earl paused as he spoke—eyes watering, face beet red—then he looked me square in the eye, voice quivering, and threatened, "If it ever happens again . . ."

Ed Earl never finished his sentence. He didn't have to. I understood. My life was being threatened. "Ed Earl," I managed meekly, "what are you asking me to do? To stand in that pulpit and preach about a God who loves everybody, but put a sign in front of the church saying 'No Negroes Allowed?' I can't do that, Ed Earl. You've gotta decide what you've gotta do; I've gotta do what God tells me to do." Ed Earl stared daggers through me. I felt I was peering into the face of death.

"It better not happen again!" he warned. "Does tonight count?" I asked. "Because I can't tell a man who wants to worship God that he can't come in the church. I'm not going to do that, Ed Earl."

That evening before Doug, Kay, Eric, and I went to church we prayed, placing ourselves and the witness of that day in God's hands. The evening crowd nearly filled the sanctuary, which was unusual. Standing before the congregation I reminded the worshipers that we had the right to choose the color of carpet for the church, but not the color of skin of worshipers. God had already decided that.

The less I said that night and the more God said the better things would go, I felt. Two biblical texts stuck in my mind: Joshua 24:15, which reads, "Choose you this day whom you will serve . . . , but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," and 1 John 4:20 which warns, "If some one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar."

Standing floor level in front of the Lord's Supper Table, upon which rested a suitcase-size Pulpit Bible, I turned, took the massive Bible, held it before the people, and charged, "Let us choose this day whom we will serve, Christ or culture. But let us be truthful. Let us have a Bible that we will

live by. If you choose *culture* over Christ this day then I want you to come tear out this page that says we are to love one another, wad it up, and throw it away. If you choose to please your earthly father instead of your heavenly Father then come rip out this page that reads, 'If some one says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar.' Let's tear out and throw away all these pages we don't want in our Bible. Let's not be hypocrites. Let's make a Bible we will live by."

The sanctuary fell silent. "On the other hand," I continued, "if this day you choose *Christ* over culture, I want you to come up here, take this pulpit Bible from me, and seal your commitment by reading from this Book before God and this assembly. Choose you this day!"

With the charge complete, I sealed my own commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by reading from 1 John 4:7-8: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Eric Holleyman walked forward, took the Bible from me, faced the congregation and began reading where I had stopped: "By this the love of God was manifested in us . . ." He read until Kay marched down the aisle, received the huge Book from Eric, and read, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Doug Taylor followed Kay. What a sight to behold it was! A black man holding the pulpit Bible of Southern Baptist Church in 1979! "And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also," this child of God read.

Revival broke out! 'Miss' Elsie Smith, one of our oldest widows, waddled forward and whispered in my ear, "Hun, I can't read; would you read for me?" Together we held the Bible as I read for her. Others came. Soon almost everyone had publicly declared their intentions to live according to God's will rather than man's ways.

Leon Johnson was the exception. Leon sat frozen on the back pew, a mask of hatred glued to his face. He rushed out into the night.

After everyone had left for the night, Kay, Doug, Eric, and I turned out the lights, locked up the church, and head-

ed out the door. Before walking out into the black southern night, not knowing what or who might be awaiting us, we prayed.

Relief! Crickets, not Klan, greeted us as we opened the door. We drove to the parsonage to change into casual clothes for the drive back to New Orleans. As we prepared to leave the parsonage, fear gripped us. Who would be waiting outside in the dark? We prayed together, then opened the door. Nothing! Praise the Lord, no one was there! Driving down the deserted country roads which carried us toward I-55 miles away, our pulse quickened each time headlights hit our rear view mirror. Not until we drove into the bright lights of New Orleans did we feel safe.

When Eric, Kay, and I returned to the church field the next weekend we were shocked! Southern Baptist Church was a ghost town! The Klan had reached the members during the week. Almost no one dared attend church! Kenny Joe Cobb, the leading tither in the church, said he'd never give another nickel as long as I was pastor of the church. Elmer Newton, the oldest deacon in the church swore he'd never darken the door of the church as long as I was there. Despite our best efforts to shepherd the flock, visit the church families, preach the Word, love the unlovely, visit the sick, the widows, and those confined to nursing homes, and pray, pray, pray, nothing worked. Our days at Southern Baptist Church were numbered.

After doing everything we could to re-build the fellowship, unsuccessfully, I resigned as Pastor of Southern Baptist Church. Six months of painful struggle came to an end. Kay and I simply felt that if the church were ever going to have a chance to heal and grow again, we needed to go. The loving thing for us to do was to leave.

I am told the first question the Pastor Search Committee asked each new pastoral candidate was, "What do you think of niggers in the church?"

And so it was in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

But this is a new millennium.

Or is it? ■



Dr. King's Kitchen

Charles Marsh, Professor of Religious Studies
University of Virginia

Note: This article is based on the author's forthcoming book, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice* and was revised from a lecture at Messiah College, Grantham, PA.

It has been a difficult year for the Christian witness in the United States. In fact, it's hard for me to imagine a period in my lifetime when the integrity of the Christian faith has not more compromised or threatened—and I grew up Baptist in the Jim Crow South! The widespread misuse by religious and political elites of the language of faith and the “philosophy of Jesus Christ” is absolutely heartbreaking; no doubt the integrity and mystery of the faith has been cheapened in our zeal to be Christian patriots. Perhaps we should heed Dietrich Bonhoeffer's sobering advice in his letters and papers from prison that at such times a period of holy silence is in order.

Over the past, I have been trying to complete a book about the civil rights movement and the American search for “beloved community.” Throughout this year of writing and solitude, my thoughts have returned time and again to Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermon at Riverside Church in New York on April 4, 1967, delivered one year to the date of his assassination in Memphis. King's sermon is haunting in its fierce urgency and righteous anger. With the nation unhinged by riots and uprisings and by the rising specter of Vietnam, with the dream fast becoming *a nightmare*, King's sermon came as a lament for the soul of a nation, and I think as tellingly, as a lament for the Christian church, reeling like a drunken man between political expediency and self-serving ambition.

“It is midnight in our world today,” King said, “We are experiencing a darkness so deep . . . that we can hardly see which way to turn.”¹

When Dr. King gave voice to a glimmer of hope, it was not hope in military power or political might. “Our only hope today,” he said, “lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. . . . Let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter-but-beautiful struggle for a new world.”² This is the “calling” of the children of “the living God.”

It strikes me as a very good time for us take to another look at the path of Dr. King's calling to public discipleship, to consider his understanding of that “new world,” a new world that has transformed the old order in the great event of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; an event which hap-

pened decisively in the past, but must be claimed anew in every age as the vision that animates God's people. Let us take a journey to a place and time that many students may regard as ancient history, but which in the intensity of our historical moment is alive with import and meaning. A journey to Dr. King's kitchen.

Students are often surprised to learn that when Dr. King arrived in Montgomery in the fall of 1954, two years before this speech on “the beloved community” (not to mention the practices of non-violence which he thought considered an inseparable part of this vision)—these were the last things on his mind. Civil rights activism was not part of his agenda. King came to Montgomery because it offered a great salary, a comfortable parsonage and a highly educated congregation. Dexter Avenue Baptist Church had no interest in racial crusading either. Church members had long prided themselves on their access to white elites and their own relative social privilege; certainly they shared a common hope of a future without Jim Crow, but they were not going to ignite the fires of dissent.

In fact, Dr. King actually had to be talked into accepting the leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association when the organization was formed the day after Rosa Parks refused to move from her seat in the front of the bus. King accepted only after being reassured, or perhaps cajoled into thinking, that the boycott would be over in a day. In his first list of demands as president, King made clear that the protest was not about challenging segregation. *Did you get that? Not about challenging segregation.* The NAACP refused to endorse King's list.

King was no fan of nonviolence either. Glenn Smiley, a white staff member visiting Montgomery with the Fellowship of Reconciliation claimed to have discovered “an arsenal” in the parsonage.³ “When I was in graduate school,” King said, “I thought the only way we could solve our problem . . . was an armed revolt.”⁴

By the end of the second month of the bus boycott, King had fallen into despair about his leadership and the direction of the protest, which was in a state of disarray. On a gloomy day in late January, 1956, certain that he was a complete failure, King offered his resignation as the president of the MIA. The resignation was not accepted, but his doubts about his

own abilities as a pastor and organizer remained real and unabated.

The next week, King returned late one night to his parsonage after a long day of organizing and planning session. He had also just endured his first arrest and wanted nothing but to climb into bed and surrender to a good night's rest. But then the phone rang, and on the other end of the line rushed a torrent of obscene words, and then a death threat: "Listen, nigger, we've taken all we want from you; before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery."⁵ King hung up without comment, as had become his custom, but hopes of much-needed rest were gone. Threatening phone calls had become a daily routine throughout the weeks of the protest. In recent days, though, the phone calls had started to take a toll, increasing in number to thirty or forty each day and becoming much more menacing.⁶

Unwelcome thoughts prey on the mind in the late hours, and King felt himself overcome with fear. "I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. I had heard these things before, but for some reason that night it got to me."⁷ Stirred into wakefulness, King made a pot of coffee and sat down at his kitchen table. He felt his emotional balance—maintained throughout the preceding weeks of the boycott with a kind of willful unreflectiveness—slide abruptly out of balance. "I was ready to give up. I felt myself faltering," he said.⁸ It was as though the violent undercurrents of the protest rushed in upon him with heightened force, and he surveyed the turbulent waters for a way of escape, searching for an exit point between courage and convenience—"a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward"—and he found none.⁹

King thought of his little girl Yoki sleeping in her crib, of her "little gentle smile," and of Coretta, who had sacrificed her music career, according to the milieu of the Baptist pastor's wife, to follow her husband south.

Alone now in the midnight kitchen, with the silences of the Alabama night masking the great tumult in his soul, King grasped, for the first time, the utter and complete seriousness of his situation, and with it the inescapable fact that his fam-

ily could be snatched away from him at any minute, or more likely he from them.¹⁰ King felt his soul "melted because of trouble," as the Psalmists said, "at wit's end." "I couldn't take it any longer," King said. "I was weak."

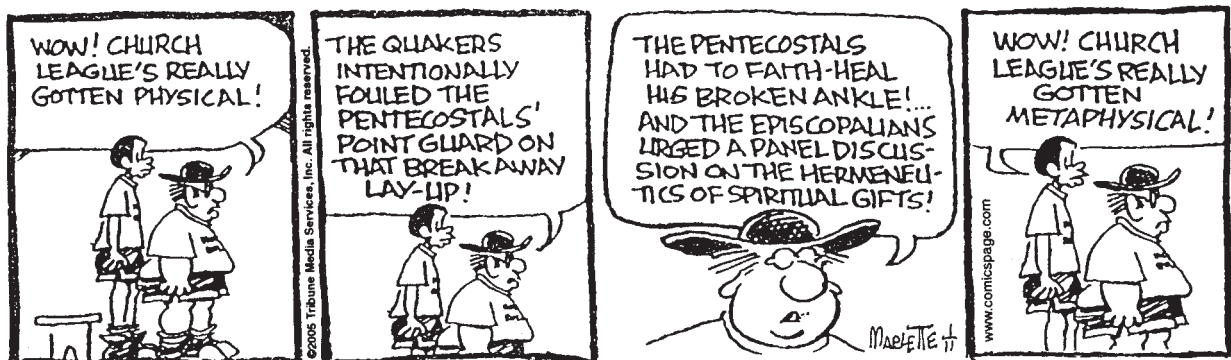
Sitting at his table sipping the coffee, however, his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a notion that at once intensified his desperation and clarified his options. "Something said to me, 'You can't call on Daddy now, you can't call on Mama. You've got to call on that something in that person that your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way.'"¹¹

With his head now buried in his hands, King bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I still think I'm right. I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now, I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage. Now, I am afraid. And I can't let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone."

With his prayer enveloping the midnight room and house, King heard a voice: "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you. Even until the end of the world."¹²

King testifies, "I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone." And as the voice of Jesus washed over the vile words of the caller, King reached a spiritual shore beyond anxiety and despair. "I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before," he said. "Almost at once my fears began to go, . . . My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything."¹³

In a seminary class years earlier, King had written an autobiographical essay on his own religious formation. The paper is distinguished not only by its intellectual posturing—



the sort you might expect of a brilliant and ambitious young graduate student—but also by its complete lack of moral and spiritual intensity. King described his “early environment” as “very congenial,” one in which he was always able to think of God as a benevolent being presiding over a friendly and happy universe.¹⁴ He said he’d never had anything like a crisis moment; his upbringing in the faith had been comfortable and wholesome.

In his Montgomery kitchen in January 1956, King experienced his crisis moment, and it burned away pretensions even as it fortified courage for the difficult times ahead. Faced with the possibility of death, he could not turn to his Daddy for consolation (besides his Daddy wanted him out of Montgomery). Faced with the gathering force of white resistance, liberal platitudes failed him. Notions of essential human goodness and perfectibility—these seemed empty now.

Dr. King may have been schooled at Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University; but in Montgomery, *King was called*, and the calling propelled him into the crisis that would define his life and legacy. In his Montgomery kitchen, he decided to follow Jesus into “the new world of God” and go the distance on peace.

Three nights after the kitchen vision on January 30, 1956, King stood at the pulpit of First Baptist Church, addressing a standing-room only audience, when word reached him that the parsonage had been bombed.

By the time he arrived home, a large crowd had already begun forming in the street and front yard. Memories of the size of the crowd vary greatly; some say hundreds, others thousands. King felt the undercurrents of rage that had run strong for years in the black community swelling into the immediate threat of violence. Many in the crowd were armed and ready to fire. King felt the shifting of sentiment away from peaceful negotiation to militant conflict.

Inside the house, with the front window shattered and a hole blasted into the porch, King was relieved to find Coretta and Yoki safe and in good spirits. The Mayor of Montgomery, along with police commissioner Sellers, the fire chief, and newspaper reporters, assembled in the dining room and proceeded to make official declarations of regret. Meanwhile, the crowd outside, still collecting newcomers from all corners of the block, continued to press forward against the police barricade. King realized he had to address

the people, and he walked onto the porch and called for order. His words, reminders to his fellow travelers of their basic spiritual obligations, formed an arch from the First Baptist Church meeting to the gathering of the church militant, now milling about the house at 309 South Jackson Street. The words extended the Gospel from the sanctuary to the parsonage and wrapped the whole expanse of the violent Montgomery night in a sheltering story of peace.

“Now let’s not become panicky,” King told the crowd from the damaged porch after offering reassurances that Coretta and Yoki were unharmed. “If you have weapons, take them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence. Remember the words of Jesus: ‘He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.’ Remember that is what God said.”¹⁵

A “respectful hush” settled over the crowd, as church leader Jo Ann Robinson recalled. Even the police grew still and listened to King’s words.¹⁶

“We must love our white brothers,” King continued, “no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: ‘Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you.’ This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love.”

“Remember, if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. Go home with this glowing faith and this radiant assurance. Go home and sleep calm. Go home and don’t worry. Be calm as I and my family are . . . and remember that if anything happens to me, there will be others to take my place.”

Throughout the Jackson Street crowd, a scattering of “Amen’s” and “God bless you” and “We are with you all the way, Reverend,” created a new momentum, as the threatening Jackson Street crowd became a worshipping congregation. King looked out over the audience and saw tears rolling down the faces of many people. Some hummed church songs.

King knew all too well that this gathering could have turned into the “darkest night in Montgomery’s history,” with hundreds—some said thousands—of angry and long-frustrated African Americans surrounding the middle-aged mayor and his three sidekicks. But “something happened” to



avert the disaster, King said. "The spirit of God was in our hearts, and a night that seemed destined to end in unleashed chaos came to a close in a majestic group demonstration of nonviolence."¹⁷ In fact, church happened, and the reluctant man who had been called to "stand up" for God's righteousness, justice, and truth, saw the evidence of their rarely tested power. King emerged from the Montgomery bombing with a single-minded theme, the transformative power of love.

In the final jubilant days of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in December, 1956, with the United States Supreme Court decision of November guaranteeing the African-American protesters a victory over the segregated city laws, King spoke at a week-long Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery. Reflecting on the tumultuous year that had passed, King tried to put the extraordinary experience in theological perspective. "It seems that God has decided to use Montgomery as the proving ground for the struggle," he said, and "our church is becoming militant, stressing a social gospel as well as a gospel of personal salvation."¹⁸ Then he spoke with greater theological attention to the lessons learned: "We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization. There is still a voice crying out in terms that echo across the generations, saying: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.'"

Although King believed a boycott was necessary in Montgomery to bring an end to discriminatory laws, the church people in the movement must ever be mindful that a boycott and its essential legal achievements do not represent the goal of their struggle. But, as King said in words that burn themselves into our minds and hearts with fierce urgency: "The end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community."¹⁹

What a beautiful notion he gave voice to in this address: the beloved community. One of King's young associates, John Lewis, described it as "nothing less than the Christian concept of the kingdom of God on earth." Lewis said the first time he heard Dr. King speak of the beloved community it evoked in his mind a lush and embracing vision of redemptive community and gave voice to all that he was working for as a young civil rights activist, devoted as he was to the task of applying the teachings of Jesus directly to social existence in the South. For a while even, the pursuit of beloved community gave to the civil rights movement a unifying spiritual vision.

However, in that rage-drenched 1967 sermon at Riverside Church, the hour has grown late, and the dream has given way to disillusionment. King's questions strike with arresting power on his hearers, both then and today. What if the people of God have already crossed the line from confessing Jesus as Lord and yielded their hearts to great violence? What if those who call themselves Christians have already turned their back on the "Jesus who walked the streets of Jerusalem" and bowed down to gun? *Then* there must be a time of repentance, a

time of rededication, and a time when the followers of Jesus speak out clearly and boldly about the call and its decisive costs.

"We are confronted," King reminds us, "with the fierce urgency of now."

So, how do we today share a cup of coffee in Dr. King's kitchen? Silence may tempt us, and certainly holy silence has its place, but now is not the time to be silent as the Cross is turned into an emblem of national ambition, and the wonder-working power of the Lamb—the precious blood of the Lamb—becomes just another way of talking about the personal benefits of consumer culture. In this moment we are called upon as Christians to reclaim our citizenship in a "world-wide fellowship," beyond tribe, race, class, and nation, in the kingdom of God, the beloved community, disciples of the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them.

It is my hope that a young generation of Christian men and women will take inspiration from Dr. King's life and his commitment to public discipleship. With King we need to reclaim the truth of the power of the Cross and Resurrection in contrast to those who insist that the paradigm of violence is the way to peace. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., dare to dream. Dare to change the world. Dare to live boldly for Christ. ■

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., cited in Marshall Frady, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 189.

² Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break Silence," *A Testament of Hope*, 243.

³ Clayborne Carson, "The Boycott that Changed Dr. King's Life," *New York Times Magazine*, 7, 1996.

⁴ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 121-22.

⁵ King, *The Autobiography*, 77.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸ King cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ King cited in Garrow, 59.

¹¹ King, *The Autobiography*, 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁴ King, "An Autobiography of Religious Development," *The Papers*, volume I, 361.

¹⁵ Cited in *The Papers*, volume III, 115.

¹⁶ Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 132.

¹⁷ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 138.

¹⁸ King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, volume III, Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Peter Holloran, and Dana L. H. Powell, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 452.

¹⁹ King, *The Papers*, volume III, 136.

The Minister as a Star-Thrower

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Note: This sermon was delivered on May 31, 2003, as the Commencement Address at The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia.

Several years ago a tramp comedian named Bilbo was a genius at pantomime. His audiences loved him. He always finished his act with a pair of oversized yellow shoes with big toes sticking out under the stage curtain. All the audience could see from behind the closed curtain was Bilbo's big yellow shoes, with a spotlight shining on them. As long as the spotlight was on the shoes, the audience continued to applaud.

When Bilbo thought the audience had applauded long enough, he would step on stage in his stocking feet and take a bow. The audience realized that they had been fooled by him, and they loved it. Unfortunately, Bilbo's life had a sad ending. He was booked at the Hammerstein's Theater on 42nd Street and Broadway. It was the palace theater of its time. Bilbo opened on Monday and was never better. He had a heart condition but no one knew it. At the end of the performance, he stepped out of his shoes, as he had at every performance, but this time had a heart attack. The audience was wildly applauding his shoes but Bilbo never came back for his last bow. The star performer was dead.

Acknowledge Your Humanity

Although most clergy would not like to admit it, there is a star factor in ministry. Like Bilbo many ministers end up being performers in a spotlight before their congregations. Like the star comedian, some kill themselves in pushing too hard and in seeking applause. Unfortunately, too many ministers seek to be a "star" instead of following the high calling which brought them into ministry in the first place.

Many ministers are unwilling to acknowledge their own humanity. They have fallen into this "star" trap by yielding to a "God-complex." All of us suffer from the basic sin of pride that Reinhold Niebuhr calls our "God Almightyness . . . the effort to usurp the place of God."¹ Some ministers seem to have taken second or third helpings of such a dish.

Congregations often put the minister on a pedestal and expect him or her to walk on water. Ministers themselves often assume that they are not supposed to be sick, express emotions, or have time for their family, or for themselves. This attitude often leads to burn out and to what I would call the "ministerial shooting star" syndrome.

At the annual church night at Hampton Baptist Church

in Hampton, Virginia, where I am serving as Interim Pastor, I was asked to put on a superman shirt with a big S in the center under my shirt and coat and enter the congregation through a phone booth that had been placed on the stage. At the particular moment, as I was introduced as the Interim Pastor, I burst through the phone booth pulling my coat and shirt back to reveal the superman S in the middle of my chest and I yelled to the people, "I have come to save Hampton Baptist Church." The congregation broke out both in laughter and applause. This, of course, was all done in good fun, but unfortunately many churches really do expect their minister to be a superman or superwoman to save them from all of their problems, struggles, difficulties, and to answer all of their church problems.

But no minister can solve all of the church problems or challenges that are before them. No minister can be everywhere at once. Believe it or not, you cannot really walk on water. Every minister needs to have a reality check. We need to make the distinction between our role and reality. Our identity and our identification are not the same. We are ministers by calling and profession, but our identity is male or female, married or single, husband or wife, mother or father. We are not fully what others say we are or think we are. Our robes, stoles, and clerical garb do not fully define who we are internally. These trappings indicate who we are as ministers, but they do not remove from us our humanity, our emotions, feelings, instincts, and drives. The question looms within us, "Who is this I/me/he/she/you/they?" We are pulled in many directions. We are more than we think we are and yet less than we think we are.

All Christians Are Called To Minister

Ministry is not for a selected few star performers, but is a community of faith serving the One who is the Bright and Morning Star—Christ, the Light of the world. You and I are called, Paul says, "to help equip others in ministry to build up the body of Christ." As we share all of our gifts, whatever they are, we seek to minister in the name of Christ. Every single Christian in a congregation is a priest. Each has a ministry. All have gifts and there is a great diversity. No one expects the dean of a medical school or law school or seminary to do all of the work. He or she uses one's own gifts and

helps train and equip others to minister effectively. That is one of our leading roles as well, to equip all persons to serve Christ more effectively.

The Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., affirms in their membership statement that the Church of Christ is the ship on which “there are no passengers, all are crew members.” Every Christian needs to be engaged in ministry. If we are members of the Church of Christ, a member of any congregation, then we seek to find what our gift is and commit that gift in service for Christ. Karl Barth, the noted German theologian, wrote a number of years ago that within the church there are many different functions, but the preacher does not stand any higher than the elders, nor the bell ringers any lower than the professor of theology. Because there is no member of the church who is not the whole thing in his or her own place. There are differences of functions but each offers his or her gifts to Christ.² And you offer your gifts, and as a minister you seek to equip others to utilize theirs.

Ministering Outside the Church Walls

There are many essential functions that need to be carried on within the church: worship, training, Bible study, equipping church members for ministry, comforting, celebrating, and others. But we need to be aware that we have been called to minister outside the walls of the church and not to remain merely within the church walls.

Bill Jones, that noted New York preacher, tells about a time when he was a small boy and visited his grandfather's farm. He had grown up in the city and so was unaware of all that one needed to do on a farm. His grandfather got him up early and they went out and fed the chickens, milked the cows, fed the other animals, and after spending a lengthy period of time doing this, they came back to a bountiful breakfast. As a small lad, whose eyes were beaming with enthusiasm and excitement, Bill Jones said to his grandfather, “Granddaddy, we have really worked hard, haven't we?” His grandfather looked back at him and said, “Son, what we have been doing are just the chores, the real work is out in the fields. That begins now.”

Do not forget that Christ has called all of us to authentic evangelism. To share the good news of Christ with others in the world and to seek to minister to all of hurting humanity who are within the world around us. Many are looking for meaning, purpose, and hope. We need to share our faith through words and deeds unashamedly. Let the banner of your faith proudly wave in the winds of change and struggle that come all around you. Travel your journey of faith joyfully as you share your faith with Christ. Respect all religions and traditions. Acknowledge that every person has the right to religious faith or to deny it, but do not be ashamed of the Gospel that you proclaim. Proclaim it boldly with the assurance that the living Christ is with you.

As you continue to minister, always remember the importance of your family and friends. Have special times and ways of being present to them and with them. Don't lose your family's soul while ministering to others.

We Are Called To Serve

The One who is the Bright and Morning Star has called you and me to serve and not to be served. We are not performers, but servants. One of my favorite writers is Loren Eiseley, the anthropologist. I love one of his stories where he writes about walking along the beaches of Costabel. As he walked an hour before dawn, he could see flashlights gleaming in the distance along the shore. As he made his way around the altered edges of the cove, he saw a stooping figure moving along in the gloom or rain. On the sand he saw long-limbed star fish strewn everywhere as though the night sky had showered down. He noticed the figure of a man in front of him. He saw the man stoop down and fling an object beyond the breaking surf. Eiseley moved toward him to see what was happening.

In a pool of sand and silt he saw a starfish, its arms up stiffly. “It's still alive,” Eiseley ventured. “Yes,” the man said. With a gentle movement he picked up the star, spun it over his head and flung it out into the sea. It sank into a burst of spume and the waters roared once more.

“It may live,” the man said, “if the off shore pull is strong enough.” “Do you collect,” Eiseley asked the man? “Only like this,” the man said softly gesturing, “and only for the living.” He stooped again, oblivious of Eiseley's curiosity, and skipped another star neatly across the water. “The stars,” he said, “throw well. One can help them.” Eiseley said, “I turned and as I neared the bend in the coast and saw him toss another star, skimming its skillfully far out over the reving tumultuous water for a moment in the changing light. The sower appeared magnified, as though casting larger stars upon some greater sea. He had, at any rate, the posture of a god. “He is a man,” I considered, sharply bringing my thought to rest. “The star-thrower is a man, and death is running more fleet than he along every beachhead, every sea beach in the world.”

Eiseley continues: “On a point of land, as though projecting into the domain beyond us, I found the star-thrower. In a sweet rain-swept warning, that great many hued rainbow still lurked and waved tentatively beyond him. Solemnly I sought and picked up a still-living star, spinning it far out into the waves. I spoke once briefly ‘I understand,’ I said. ‘Call me another thrower.’ Only then I allowed myself to think. He is not alone any longer. After us there can be others.”³

Eiseley's account of the star-thrower reminds me that every minister is called to be a star-thrower. We are to reach out to help those who have been washed ashore in the currents of sin, depression, conflicts, hopelessness, and the endless other struggles of living. We reach out as a “wounded healer,” as Henry Nowuen has reminded us. We are to assist, to care, to listen, to support, to love, give attention, give a shoulder on which a person can cry, give encouragement, offer tolerance, render comfort, guidance or whatever the need may call for.

As star-throwers we seek to serve. Last night at your banquet, you were each given a towel. This towel symbolizes that you are a servant. You are called to minister. When a minister puts a stole around his or her neck, that stole is a symbol of

the towel. That was the original significance of the stole. It is the recognition that we are all servants. As Jesus said, “the greatest of all is the servant of all.” He said, “He had come to minister and not to be ministered unto.” And you and I have come to model and serve the One who is the greatest servant of all.

Our Learning Is Never Complete

As a star-thrower you are still en route educationally. I hate to break the news to you, but your education is not completed with your diploma today. You have a lifetime journey before you. No one ever arrives educationally. The pop theologian, Charles Schulz, in one of his comic strips depicts Lucy and Charlie Brown engaged in conversation about school. Lucy asks Charlie Brown, “Are you smarter this afternoon than you were this morning?” “Yes, Yes,” Charlie Brown replies, “I think I am a little smarter.” But are you a whole lot smarter?” she ask. “No,” he responds, “Just a little smarter.” “See?” Lucy exclaims. “See what?” Charlie Brown asks. Lucy then asserts, “There are serious flaws in our educational system!”

There are indeed many serious flaws in any educational endeavor. The biggest flaw of all, however, is to think that one has arrived educationally. It is a lifetime process. Paul says we are always reaching toward the maturity of faith and for deeper knowledge of Christ. The psalmist has reminded us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but this awe and mysterious encounter and relationship is a lifetime journey in which we are seeking to grow. “To think and to think hard,” Hegel reminds us, “is a religious duty.” William James asserts, “I like tender hearts but I also like tough minds.” Down through history there have been great thinkers who have given their minds as well as their hearts in service to God and truth. Christians like Paul, Augustine, St. Teresa, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley and thousands of others have believed that to love God with all of one’s mind is not separate from what it means to be Christian. To be a believer is not divorced from being a “thinker.” To love God with one’s entire mind is indeed a sacred duty.

Be Open To Truth

Our education is always in process. We are reaching toward “maturity” to measure ourselves by the stature

of Jesus Christ, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:13. Continue to study, read, learn, observe. Sit, stand, walk, and run by the doorways of the past and present and listen to the voices that are whispering to you their continuous wisdom. Our minds, spirit, and soul are dead when we cease to hunger for more knowledge and insight about life and its meaning.

Remember that we are on a quest; we are voyagers, adventurers, seekers, and dreamers—like Joseph, and the Magi—seeking to follow the Star wherever it may lead. Walk near the edge of heresy as you seek truth. Be open, flexible, and unafraid of truth wherever it leads. Creeds, Affirmations of Faith, or Statements of Belief are only individual or group renderings where persons have attested to their faith in any given moment or age. Drink from their wells of inspiration but do not see these statements as binding, final, or inerrant. We follow a living Lord who goes before us to open new pathways, new insight, new truths, the One who gives a new birth and a new heaven. He is the Lord of the living not the dead, the future not the past.

We are all in the process of becoming, being, and learning. The true believers will want to live with God at our elbows, directing us to the next step, phase, direction, insight, and the challenge to realize that learning is ever before us and beyond us. When we reach toward Christian maturity, we sense that whether our study is religion, math, science, literature, medicine, psychology, physics or any other endeavor, we have not arrived. Something or Someone is ever pulling us toward the not yet realized.

Nurture Your Own Spiritual Life

As a star-thrower, a servant of the Bright and Morning Star, you will have to continue to nurture your own spiritual life. Open yourself through personal meditation and prayer to the numinous Other—the mysterious presence of God. No one ever reaches spiritual maturity. We always need to be open and continuously growing. How can anyone dare say that he or she has reached “the stature of Jesus Christ” and measure up to Him?

There is an old story about a woman who got religion at every revival meeting. She would be challenged to repent and exclaim, “Fill me, Lord, fill me!” But after hearing this for about twelve years, an older member of the congregation called out, “Don’t do it, Lord,” she leaks!



But so do we all. No one is ever fully filled, spiritually. Remember to set aside a quiet place for reflection, Bible reading, and prayer. Read and meditate on the scriptures, the great devotional classics, and selected contemporary writings. Persons who have been meaningful to me have been Harry Emerson Fosdick, Leslie Weatherhead, C.S. Lewis, John Killinger, Elton Trueblood, Barbara Brown Taylor, and Joyce Rupp. Jot down your thoughts, prayers, ideas, questions or longings that are stimulated by your reading. In your praying, focus on God's greatness, confess your sins, accept the forgiveness of God's grace, and spend some time listening for God's voice. You may do this in a quiet place at home or a walk in the park or the woods.

One of the persons who modeled the quest for intellectual and spiritual growth for me was John Baillie, the Scottish theologian and Principal of New College at the University of Edinburgh. In his study there were three objects that symbolized his faith and ministry. One was the desk on which he did his theological writing, the second was a chair where he did his reading, and the third was a cushion near a window and bookcase where he would kneel, meditate, and pray. This great theologian knew the importance of developing the inner life and never assumed that he did not need to spend quiet time in worship before God. Each of us has that same challenge.

Continue to Respond to God's Call or Vision

Remember as a star-thrower, you must follow the Bright and Morning Star wherever it leads. Like Paul, "You do not want to be disobedient to your heavenly vision." You came into ministry out of a sense of call, a vision, a pull, an urge, and a drive that could not be satisfied without making a commitment. You are here because of that vision. Down through the centuries men and women have felt pulled toward God. They have climbed mountaintops, crossed deserts, sailed vast seas, have marched down familiar avenues at home, have taken strange routes in foreign lands, have struggled inwardly and followed lighted paths and agonized gropingly down dark ones to understand and to know the love of God. Paul's vision gave him a faith that endured. Each of us needs to have a vision that will enable us to endure.

Have you ever thought what the world would be without vision? Everything that has come into existence has come because somebody had a dream or a vision. Columbus had a dream of a new world, and he set sail. Galileo had a vision of a new scientific approach. Edison had a dream that sound could travel over a wire and that electricity could produce light. Ford had a vision of a horseless carriage. The Wright brothers dreamed that men and women could fly. Von Braun believed and dreamed that men and women could go to the moon and beyond.

What would religion be without vision? Abraham followed his vision of God and went looking for a city without foundations. Moses saw God in a burning bush. Jacob wrestled with God at Peniel. Ezekiel had a vision of God at Cheban. Isaiah had a vision of God high and lifted up in the

temple. Esther had a vision of how to save the nation Israel. Ruth had a vision of how to save her family. Elijah experienced God in the sound of gentle stillness in a mountain cave. Paul had a life changing vision on the Damascus Road. Augustine had a vision of "the city of God." Luther had a vision of a reformed church. Wesley had a vision of a church revived. Albert Schweitzer had a vision of reverence for all of life. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that all men and women could be brothers and sisters together. Mother Teresa had a vision of the church's concern for the poor and the out-cast of society.

What would the church be without a vision? Without vision the church would cease to exist. It has been said, "Without vision, the people perish." Only when men and women dream dreams, see visions, formulate plans, follow stars and prophesy do we see real living. Christ has summoned us out complacency into adventure, from apathy to enthusiasm, from the settled to the pioneer, from safety to risk, from comfort to danger, from death to life. The singer in *The Man of La Mancha* has declared that we are "to be willing to march/into hell for a heavenly cause/. . . to reach the unreachable star."⁴

So live with expectancy, wonder, mystery, hope, faith, and love as you follow that vision and star. Continue to go back, at least in your mind, to that meeting place where you were first surprised by God's presence.

A number of years ago in England a man stood reading a plaque on a church door. It read: "Here God laid his hands on William Booth." The man stood there awhile looking at the plaque. Finally the custodian came over and said, "I'm sorry Mister, but it is time to close the church. You need to move on." The man said, "Give me just another moment, please."

"Okay," the custodian said, "Just another moment." The man read the plaque again. "Here God laid his hands on William Booth." The custodian suddenly realized that the man reading the plaque was William Booth himself, the founder of the Salvation Army. Then he heard Mr. Booth praying, "Oh God, do it again. Do it again!"

In some place, quiet or noisy, God laid the divine hand upon your life, and you committed your life to God. That is not the only time that God will touch your life. You need to pray, "Oh God, do it again and again."

Continue then on your journey of faith but come back and warm yourself again and again in the light of the Bright Morning Star so that you will know how to be a star-thrower. ■

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 179.

² Karl Barth, *The Universal Church in God's Design*, quoted in the *Realm of Redemption* by Robert Nelson (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1951), 145.

³ Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1969), 67 ff.

⁴ "The Impossible Dream," *The Man of La Mancha*, Lyrics by Joe Darion, Cherry Lane Music (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1965).

Responsa from the Rabbi

By Jeff Jacoby, Columnist
The Boston Globe

Though few will concede it, there is more than one way to fight evil.

The order to kill every pregnant Jewish woman had been issued that morning. So when a Nazi guard patrolling the Jewish ghetto in Kovno noticed a pregnant Jew walking past the local hospital, he shot her at point-blank range. She died on the spot.

Hoping to save the baby, some passersby rushed the dead woman into the hospital. An obstetrician determined that she had been in her last weeks of pregnancy, and said that if surgery were performed immediately, her baby might be rescued.

But could such surgery be squared with Jewish law, which is stringent in its concern for the dignity of the dead? If the baby didn't make it, the mother's body would have been mutilated for nothing.

The question was put to Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, a young rabbinical scholar. He didn't hesitate. "When saving a life is involved, we are not concerned with the desecration of the dead," he ruled. Besides, if the murdered mother could speak, wouldn't she welcome the "desecration" of her body if it would assure her baby's survival? He ordered the operation to proceed at once, and the baby was born alive.

Then came a horrifying postscript. "The cruel murderers . . . came into the hospital to write down the name of the murdered woman. . . . When they found the baby alive, their savage fury was unleashed. One of the Germans grabbed the infant and cracked its skull against the wall of the hospital room. Woe unto the eyes that saw this!"

This case from May 1942 was one of many that Rabbi Oshry was called upon to decide during the Nazi occupation of Kovno, Lithuania's second-largest city. He recorded the heart-rending questions that were brought to him in brief notes on scraps of paper, then buried the scraps in tin cans. Someday, he hoped, those scraps might be found evidence that even in the midst of the Nazi inferno there were Jews who clung to their God and His law, refusing to abandon Him even as they must have wondered whether He had abandoned them.

More than 90 percent of Kovno's 40,000 Jews were killed in the Holocaust either by the Germans or by their Lithuanian collaborators. Rabbi Oshry was one of those who survived. After the war he retrieved his notes and began writing them out as full-length rabbinical rulings, or *responsa*. These were ultimately published in five Hebrew volumes; in 1983 a book of excerpts in English, *Responsa from the Holocaust*, was published by Judaica Press.

I read *Responsa from the Holocaust* soon after it came out,

and found it deeply moving. With the approach of Holocaust Remembrance Day, which occurs this year [2004] on April 19, I took it down from the bookshelf last week and again found it powerful and affecting. The questions laid before Rabbi Oshry can reduce you to tears, but what is really extraordinary, I saw now, was that anyone would care enough to ask such questions in the first place.

In October 1941, "one of the respected members of the community" asked Rabbi Oshry if he could commit suicide. His wife and children had been seized by the Nazis, and he knew that their murder was imminent. He feared that the Nazis would force him to watch as his family was killed, and the prospect of witnessing their deaths was a horror he couldn't bear to face. He begged for permission to take his own life and avoid seeing his loved ones die.

Later that month, the head of another household came to Rabbi Oshry "with tears of anguish on his face." His children were starving to death and he was desperate to find food for them. His query was about a bit of property that had been left behind by the family in the next apartment. The entire family had been butchered a few days earlier, and there were no surviving relatives. Under Jewish law, could he take what remained of their belongings and sell them to raise cash for food?

Next to such questions, answers seem almost superfluous. (The rabbi did not permit the suicide; he allowed the neighbors' property to be taken.) What is stunning is that men and women in the throes of such hideous suffering and brutality were still concerned about adhering to Jewish law. In the lowest depths of the Nazi hell, in a place of terror and savagery that most of us cannot fathom, here were human beings who refused to relinquish their faith who refused even to violate a religious precept without first asking if it was allowed.

Violence, humiliation, and hunger will reduce some people to animals willing to do anything to survive. The Jews who sought out Rabbi Oshry like Jews in so many other corners of Nazi Europe were not reduced but elevated, reinforced in their belief, determined against crushing odds to walk in the ways of their fathers.

Some Jews fought the Nazis with guns and sabotage, Rabbi Oshry would later say; others fought by persisting in Jewish life. In the end, *Responsa from the Holocaust* is a chronicle of courage and resistance and a profound inspiration to believers of every faith. ■

Note: This article first appeared in The Boston Globe and is published by permission of the author.

Evolution Of Faith

By Al Staggs, Chaplain and Performing Artist
Bedford, TX

Salvation came for me
On a hot summer day in Arkansas in 1956
During Vacation Bible School.
When I walked the church aisle to profess my faith in Jesus,
I wanted to be saved
And I didn't want to go to Hell—
Which is where we were told all unbelievers go,
Where they will spend eternity writhing in agony and torment
From Hell's inextinguishable flames and unimaginable heat.

There was faith and there was also fear in that early decision.
The draft of September
Caught up with me
And I was thrust into schooling
For war.
I learned the use of the M-14, M-60, bayonet, 3.5 rocket
launcher
And the grenade.

Learning the havoc these could wreak on human flesh
Created in me a revulsion for any weapon that lasts to this day.

This was a period of living and training with African-
Americans,
A people I had not known in my segregated world as a child.
Those associations and the memory of the image of Martin
Luther King
In 1963 in Washington
Preaching like no one I had ever heard,
Convicted me of my racism
And the racism of my white southern Christianity.

Encountering psychology as an undergrad
I read works of Carl Rogers and other pioneers
Who delved into the mystery of human behavior.
Their wisdom shed light on my own story
And brought understanding
To the chaos of my childhood,
The depression of my mother,
The addictions and fury of my father,
And the baffling nature of my own behavior.

It was a measure of salvation that I found
That did not run counter to my religious belief.
I began to hear the whispers of Grace
In this 'study of the spirit.'

It was none to soon to learn these lessons
As parenthood came in 1974.
I did not want to pass on the rage
Of my father.

Death became my teacher
In the gloomy month of March of 1978,
The time my mother gave up on life
And left us with the dregs of grief.

My faith, my theology
Abruptly shifted
From easy answers
To unanswerable questions.

The gravity and mystery of suffering
Now required more than mere cursory readings of scripture.

There was the year of clinical internship
In the context of Baylor's sprawling medical center,
A far cry from the sanitized environment of seminary
And local church life.

Suffering was now all around.
Those who guided us were unrelenting
In their demand that we come clean
Regarding the frailties and the woundedness of our lives
And the motives that lay behind our pursuit of ministry.

Psychology and theology were now fused
In conjunction with a strict and sometimes severe supervision.
Ministry to the sick would now encompass far more
Than perfunctory prayers or citation of scripture.

A student mission trip to the barrios of Monterrey, Mexico
In 1982
Resulted in the belief that I was not only carrying
A message to the poor of that land,
They were carrying a message to me,
That I was entitled,
That I was rich,
That I needed humility
And repentance
From any notion of moral superiority.

1983 was an epochal year,

A year of study at Harvard Divinity School.
And there I met, Henri,
Father Henri Nouwen.

As a young Baptist I had been told
That Catholics weren't saved.
And here, in this marvelous man,
I would see an embodiment of Jesus,
A heart of compassion,
A wounded healer
Who taught that we do not need to deny our woundedness,
That these frailties are the basis of our understanding of Grace
And the real strength of our ministry.

This was the year,
I was introduced to Gustavo Gutierrez,
In the texts of his work on Latin American Liberation
Theology
And it caused me to go back to the familiar biblical texts
And rediscover the profundity of the Bible
In matters of politics and economics.

I was again convicted regarding my sense of entitlement
As a citizen of my nation, a great nation to be sure,
Yet a people who had conducted and condoned terror
In the name of national interests.

America suddenly became for me, Rome and Babylon.
This was the year, 1983
When first I heard a woman speak from a pulpit.
The witness of Rosemary Radford-Reuther
at Old Cambridge Baptist Church
Was a message for the likes of me,
A man.

It was a message that soul work was needed,
That education, conversion was needed.

My tutor, Harvey Cox,
Introduced me to the paradox
That it was possible to be both particularist
In one's faith,
And a universalist.

That one could embrace wholly one's view of truth
And yet affirm and respect the truth of the other.

What became apparent is that judgment is up to God
And that we are held by God's grace and we have no
Right to consign any soul to Hell.

It was Harvey who introduced me to that beautiful life
Of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
Whose life and testament remind us
That the most pernicious of evils
Present themselves in the cloak of piety.

Bonhoeffer railed against the church of his time
For her silence in the face of oppression
For obeying the State
And disobeying her God.

Reflecting on his life and deeds,
I imagine that he would equally take the American church to task
For her love of power, money
And her unwillingness to stand for the oppressed.

Bonhoeffer would lead me to Archbishop Romero,
To Walter Rauschenbusch
And to Clarence Jordan
Whose words, along with Bonhoeffer's,
Possess the veracity of scripture itself
As though the canonization of truth was ongoing.

Throughout these years,
I have befriended gays and lesbians
And have found them not to be the demons
They are so often made to be by preachers
Who are convinced that these people will
Lead to the decay of our society.

The accent and the tone of these ministers
Resemble the accent of preachers
I have heard in former years
Who were certain, on biblical grounds,
That African-Americans, women, foreigners and Jews
Were second-class citizens.

In these last few years,
My Christian faith has been dramatically challenged
By the horrors of the Holocaust

And the realization that what happened in the death camps
To millions of Jews
Could not have occurred without the complicity of churches
in Germany.

How are we superior, morally?
What is it that Jews need from Christians?
What do we say now about the place of Jews in the purposes
of God?
And what do we say now about all those texts that demonize
a people
Who spawned our faith and gave us Jesus?

I have not over the years
Given up the faith of my childhood.
Greater truth has continued to seek me
And to find me
And compel me to continue
The process of my conversion. ■

Thou Shalt Not Kill

By Austin W. Buff

Veterans for Peace, Santa Fe Chapter

Note: The author is a veteran of the first Gulf War and the son-in-law of regular poetry contributor Al Staggs. The article reveals the anguish some in the military face when the reality of war becomes very personal.

What follows is an account of the moment that I became a conscientious objector. About eighteen months after this, I was honorably discharged as an objector. To this day, the logic of war baffles me, especially among those who claim they follow a man of peace. For me, it came down to what seems to me to be one of the easier commandments to follow: *Thou shalt not kill* (Exod. 20:13).

Thou shalt not kill. Strange how formal we've made something so fundamental. Perhaps it's the formality that allows us to so easily disregard it. It's the same with war, I guess. For me the formality was eliminated on a very hot afternoon in February of 1993. The war ended two years ago.

Where I was it was hot even in February. Sitting in front of a large computer monitor. Dark. It was so dark. How can it be so hot and so dark? The trailer was hastily darkened by duct tape and cardboard. Our eyes must be sharp. "The better to see you with, my dear."

Here are the photographs from before. Split screen. Here are the photographs from after. Click. Zoom. A building that was once whole now is a hole. Click. Zoom. The SAM site was partially destroyed. We'll have to go back for more mayhem. Note longitude. Note Latitude. Click. Zoom. That crater is surrounded by black flecks. Sweat drips from my nose on to the keyboard. Is the AC unit working at all? It's making enough noise. Click. Zoom. That crater is larger on my screen now. What are those things scattered. It's next to a refinery tower, I wonder if it's oil or something. Click. Zoom. The flecks seem to be faintly recognizable now, more shades of grey, not just black. Click. Zoom. Oh, dear God, what have I done? Click. Zoom.

Count Bodies. Need for reports. 1, 2, 3, 4, Click. Zoom. Dear God, when will the sun go down? I'm going to be here all night. 121, 122, 123, Click. STOP. These men aren't soldiers. These men are refinery workers. They'd say that these men were supporting critical infrastructure. But, I know different. Fathers were supporting families. Families who won't eat tonight. Families who will now be burying their providers

as I count them. 153,154,155. Mothers, wives, children starving for a little cold rice. They sit in their living rooms, drink their beer and tell me I am killing enemies. They go out to their restaurants, order another bottle of wine that costs enough to feed one of these families for a month and tell me they are proud of me for protecting their freedom. Why now does the sweat on my cheeks pour harder. The sweat on my face drip, dripping on to the keyboard. Why now do these enemies look human. Why Now? Click. Zoom.

Thou shalt not. Oh . . . Sorry God. We must have misunderstood that one. Given its ambiguity and all. You know, You really should make those commandments a little easier to understand. AARGGH. The *heat* . . . I thought it was supposed to be February.

The evening is coming and the breeze is bringing the ocean with it. I am glad I'm not at sea. I need a little earth right now. The artificial bright lights glimmer like hope against the tragic beauty of a smoke infused sunset. Blackness drifts south from Kuwait like plague. Those fires have been burning for two years. I guess they stick around like the heat. Smoke. Heat. Sand. Unclean. That's what I'm afraid of becoming.

Man, I'm good at my job. I get promotions. Now is *not* the time to start having a moral crisis. *Thou shalt NOT* . . . I mean, God couldn't have meant under ANY circumstance. How would that work? Anyway, it's not like I pulled the release button for those bombs. I just analyzed the intelligence and helped develop the target package. Target package . . . what a cop out.

Target package. Guys trying to make a living. Critical infrastructure. Yeah . . . Critical for a decent life and a little self respect. Where is CNN now? Oh . . . Right.

I am 20 years old. I am too young for this. What do I tell my family? What do I tell my friends? What do I tell myself? What if my helicopter goes down? STOP!

"What If" is not a game you play here. ■

The Parable of the Bowl of Soup—Part I

By Hal Haralson, Austin, TX

The phone message said, “Hal, this is Elton Moy. I’ve been thinking about you. Call me at 505-462-XXXX.”

Area 505 is New Mexico—out of my territory. The name Elton Moy was vaguely familiar. Toward the end of the day it came to me.

There were four of us standing by an open grave in the cemetery in Kenedy, Texas. The year was 1995. I read the twenty-third Psalm and said a prayer. We buried 90-year-old Lennie Pierce. The four were Mr. and Mrs. Moy, their son Elton, and I. We buried the “Bag Lady” from San Antonio.

I returned Elton’s call. “I’ve moved,” he said. “I no longer live in San Antonio. I sold my restaurant and moved to Taos, New Mexico, where I manage the Taos Inn.”

I was excited. “Elton, I’ll be in Taos in two weeks for a four day writing conference. Let’s get together.”

Two weeks later at the Taos Inn I asked, “Elton, how did you come to know Lennie Pierce?”

Over a glass of tea, Elton unfolded this story:

“I stepped into the alley behind my restaurant in San Antonio to empty some trash. It was barely light enough to see. An old woman was going through one of my garbage cans. She did not see me and I remained very still and watched.

She would take leftover food from the garbage can and take a bite of it. If it passed the ‘taste test’ it went into her bag for later consumption. If it did not pass, she threw it on the ground.

Her clothes were rags on top of rags. Her outfit looked like Joseph’s ‘coat of many colors.’

As I looked at her sad condition I made a decision that started me on a journey, which eventually led me to you at that cemetery, and now here five years after that graveside gathering.

I said to the old woman, ‘Would you like to come in and

have a bowl of hot soup with me?’ She was startled. She bent her entire body backwards so she could see me. I looked into riveting, beady eyes that were filled with distrust and hatred. No one had offered her anything in many years. She was estranged from her family and obviously had no funds. I figured her to be at least eighty years old.

Her first instinct was to escape, but the offer of hot soup was just too tempting. She came through the door and into the kitchen. After laying her bag on the floor she slowly lowered herself into a chair. She slurped up the soup. Not a word was exchanged. She left.

So began a ritual that would last for over five years and affect my life forever. Each morning when I opened the door she was waiting. ‘Would you join me for a bowl of soup?’

Gradually the hostile glare began to soften. On a morning six months later she uttered her first words, ‘My name is Lennie Pierce.’

‘I am Elton Moy.’

Her story came slowly—bits and pieces. She was seventeen years old, living with her family in East Texas. ‘No, I can’t remember the name of the town,’ she said. ‘It’s been so long.’

‘They said I was *acting funny* and needed to see a doctor. They said they were taking me to a hospital for a few days so I could get help. It was in San Antonio.’

‘They said good-bye and left. I was put in a large room with twenty other women. There was a bed and three meals a day.’

‘I waited. No one came to get me—no one at one week, one month, many months. No letters came from my family.’

‘A year passed . . . then two. Eventually I realized they weren’t coming back. I spent my days exploring the grounds of the hospital. There were fruit trees and pecan trees. I got



Styrofoam cups from the cafeteria and watered the trees. As I walked the boundaries of the fifty acres an idea began to form.'

Segments of the story came faster now. Lennie even smiled when the back door to the restaurant was opened each morning.

She continued: 'Ten years passed, then twenty and I lived my life within the fence that surrounded the San Antonio State Hospital for the insane. I spoke to no one. I watered plants and picked up pecans and fruit. I stole bread from the table at mealtime and hid it in my pocket. I rolled it into little balls and sat in a chair on the porch and thumped bread balls to the birds. It was my most exciting time of the day.'

'One day the attendant came in and said, Lennie, your doctor said you can leave. You are free to go!'

'It had been forty-two years, since my family left me.'

'I walked out that day to live in what they called a *group home*. It was small but clean. The five women I lived with didn't bother me.'

'I continued doing what I had done for the past forty-two years. I walked . . . wandering aimlessly around the city of San Antonio.'

'I got a bag and picked food out of garbage cans and ate it when I became hungry.'

'Sometimes people threw clothes in the garbage cans. I put them on.'

'I spoke to no one. My world was within me. It wasn't so bad.'

'Then one day my world changed. You invited me in for a bowl of soup. It was hot . . . and very good. You asked for nothing. You didn't ask questions. I learned to trust you. You are my only friend.'

Elton continued, "After about three years Lennie informed me that she wanted to leave the group home and live in the country. 'Will you take care of that for me?' she asked, as though she had just hired a real estate agent.

Kenedy, Texas, is a small town about sixty miles southeast of San Antonio. My parents live there. In Kenedy I found 20 acres of land, which already had electricity and could be connected to city water. The property could be bought for \$2,000. In San Antonio I found an old house, which had been condemned for a right-of-way. There would be no charge to acquire the structure; however, it would cost \$5,000 to have it moved to Kenedy.

I told Lennie and she got excited.

'Where do we get \$7,000?' I asked.

I was stunned at her next move. She looked in her bag, pulled out a checkbook and wrote me a check for \$7,000!

The property was bought and the house was moved. Lennie lived in one room and used one bathroom.

She began putting seeds in the soil of her yard and watering them from a Styrofoam cup."

Elton Moty laughed as he completed this saga about his relationship with Lennie Pierce. ■

(To be continued in the next issue)

Good News; Bad News

(continued from page 30)

(Acts 21:9)—*gasp* . . . prophetesses, attesting to God's evenhandedness at the point of gender. No, Almighty God is no respecter of persons.

In these latter days I have become increasingly convinced that the much touted concept of the priesthood of all believers brought into world-changing flower by the Reformers and the Reformation needs to be buttressed and fulfilled, rounded out and completed, by a recovery of the profound spiritual insight encompassed in a doctrine of the *prophethood* of all believers.

When the spirit of God "rested on" the seventy elders in the Jewish exodus from Egypt, "they prophesied." And when the spirit of God rested also on Eldad and Medad who had remained behind, they too "prophesied in the camp." A young man ran to Moses and told on them. Aaron said to Moses, "Forbid them." Moses responded, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11:24-30).

This passionate prayer of Moses found its answer in the Messiah's advent. Peter said in the most famous Christian sermon ever preached, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams . . . and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:16-21).

As Christians have learned to glory in the priesthood of all believers, so we can come to glory in the *prophethood* of all believers for when

The Lord God has spoken,
Who can but prophesy? ■

EthixBytes

(continued from page 2)

"If the husband does not want his wife to work outside the home, she should not work outside the home."

Richard Land, SBC Ethics Commission, on Meet the Press.



"From affirmations of the 'conservative resurgence,' to demands for loyalty to the SBC's creed, to professor-presidents, to rebukes of whatever the SBC condemns, the noose of conformity is tightening. The 2004 [state] meetings illustrate an important truth: SBC fundamentalists won't rest until they control a convention in every state."

Marv Knox, Editor Baptist Standard.

Fundamentalism Will Never Bring Peace

By C. Truett Baker,
Branson, MO

The core belief of Fundamentalism is the conviction that we are right and everyone else is wrong. Because of this compulsion about truth, it becomes essential that everyone else share the same beliefs. It has been this religious conviction that has brought about the greatest bloodshed in human history. This is at the heart of the Catholic-Protestant war in Ireland and the Jewish-Arab wars in the Middle East. Perhaps the ugliest expression in recent years of this mentality is the Nazi Aryan Supremacy movement which resulted in the death of millions of Jews. Even today, it seems inconceivable that the nation that produced scores of theologians, musicians, artists, and scientist, could produce such an evil movement and evil man. And the underpinnings of these atrocities were religiously based! This is Fundamentalism at its worst.

Closer to home, this egocentricity, both in the political and religious venues, is tearing churches and nations apart as it has done for centuries. There will be no peace in our hearts or in the world until we have the grace to accept differences in others. It should be humbling to realize that we are American, Iraqi, Egyptian, African, Chinese, Christian, Muslim, Jew, by the accident of birth.

Fundamentalism is insidious in that, like alcoholism, it is wrapped in denial. Those who rigidly hold to their belief and want to impose them upon others, feel gratified that they are “uncompromising” and “true to the faith.” This rigidity of belief more often than not leads to irrationalism and inconsistency. People captured in this mental prison pick and choose their beliefs and then search high and low (and in the Bible) for justification to support their beliefs regardless of logic or consistency. For example, take the “Right To Life” movement. Think of the logic of killing abortion doctors in the name of the “Right To Life.” If the issue in abortion is the right to life, what about the right to life of women and children we burned alive in Vietnam and Korea. Or for that matter, what about the right to life of our enemies or convicted criminals. Strangely enough, many who feel so strongly about protecting the lives of fetuses are perfectly willing to

kill our enemies and execute criminals. This is an example of how rigid beliefs force inconsistencies.

I knew a Baptist minister who canvassed several members of his church one Sunday morning when he discovered the supply of unleavened bread was gone. When someone suggested they use regular bread, he declined on the basis that it had to be unleavened in order for the Lord’s Supper to be authentic. However, he had no problem using grape juice for every Lord’s Supper. When questioned about this, his indignant reply was that “my Lord would never put alcohol to his lips.” (The limits of credibility were sorely stretched in a later discussion on the subject with this minister about Jesus’ turning water into wine and the parable about putting new wine into old wineskins).

Fundamentalism is dangerous because it will stop at nothing to get its way. How much difference is there in the Muslim who martyrs himself and kills others for Allah and the abortion protester who blows up a clinic killing medical and other people inside. Think about the logic in the term, “fighting for peace!”

In a world of warmongering, rebellion, and bloodshed, Jesus taught peace and asked that His church continue that mission. Instead, the Church today has lost its moral leadership in peace making because of its own divisions, rigid dogmas, and territorialism. Our creeds and covenants are exclusive and designed to foster an artificial unity. Pluralism and inclusiveness are ridiculed while inerrancy and baseless convictions are embraced in the name of orthodoxy and truth.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Democrats, Republicans, Liberals, Conservatives, Hawks, Doves and all others: WAKE UP! Life is about love and not hate. It is about acceptance and not rejection. It is about peace and not war. It is about unity and not division. If we can’t accept that, we are surely doomed to an Armageddon of our own making. The Prince of Peace gave us an alternative. ■

Reflections By An SBC Refugee

*By Zarrel V. Lambert, Emeritus Professor of Marketing,
Mebane, NC*

Note: From 1967–1970 the author taught at the University of Texas in Austin and faithfully served as a member and deacon in the Crestview Baptist Church, when the editor was the pastor.

A common practice of politicians and religious proponents, who lack confidence that their actions and pronouncements can withstand thoughtful scrutiny, is to label and stigmatize others who question their assertions. Common examples of labels used in this way include the adjectives anti-Christian, anti-god, atheistic, godless, heretical, liberal, non-biblical, satanic, secular, ungodly, and unpatriotic. A deceased southern governor who campaigned as a candidate for the U.S. presidency several years ago demolished and silenced many who were inclined to criticize his actions and policies by labeling them “pointy headed intellectuals.” Sometime back, right-wing religious figures often destroyed the credibility and relevance of those with differing views by labeling them as advocates of social gospel, as humanists, and more horrifically as secular humanists. If the reflections that follow fail to elicit a label in the above vein, such failure will probably reveal a disappointing amount of impact.

It should be noted at the outset that this refugee can not legitimately claim to have learned expertise in theology, in the history of Christianity, in history more generally, or in the field of ethics. But then many current religious elites in the Southern Baptist Convention, and affiliated state and local associations, fail to display these same qualities. If these knowledge bases are possessed, many proponents of right-wing religious ideology appear to place little importance on logical consistency, or what is commonly referred to as intellectual integrity. Is this not an ethical shortcoming?

A refugee by definition is from some other place. What is this refugee’s homeland?

About fifty years ago, my high school sweetheart invited me, or maybe I invited myself, to go with her to the church in which she had been active all her life. Lacking a Baptist background, my discoveries included GAs, RAs, Training Union, and that the church was considered Southern Baptist because it contributed to the Cooperative Program. The church had a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere, and did not exclude persons from various positions due to a failure to sign statements of so-called beliefs or faith.

The pastor, who appeared to be in his 50s or 60s, was insightful, thoughtful, intellectually dynamic and inquisitive, firmly in touch with, if not part of, the “real world.” For

example, as the prospect of space exploration was entering human awareness, he saw this possibility as a marvelous opportunity to develop a better understanding of God and God’s creation. Some members of the ministry at the time asserted that such exploration would violate God’s plan and will. In deeds and words, the pastor of this church was concerned about human needs and inequities in the community and the broader society. He gave away much of his small church salary as he encountered families and persons in need. So how were his household and wife supported financially?

His wife independently owned and ran a successful business in the community. She supported the household and him. If they were alive today, they would be excluded from participating in many Southern Baptist organizations because neither would have acquiesced to the assertion or mandate of female inequality and subservience to males, husbands or otherwise.

To continue the story about my homeland, this pastor baptized me, and I was perceived by others and myself as a Southern Baptist. Following my marriage to the sweetheart mentioned above by this same pastor, my professional career took us to numerous locations in the U. S. With each move, we became members of a Southern Baptist church in our new community. In one case, it was a new church started a short time earlier and supported by the Home Mission Board. To my knowledge, there was not another Southern Baptist church for hundreds of miles around. In our progression of moves, my wife and I served on various committees and in various church roles such as Sunday School teachers, youth workers, and in my case, an ordained deacon.

Parenthetically, she manifested far more qualities of a Baptist deacon, and to a much greater degree, than I ever did. What a loss to God’s service during those years! After we became refugees, she was elected and ordained as an elder on the governing board of a church in a mainstream denomination, which benefits from the services of numerous female pastors.

In my homeland more than 20 years ago, it was noticeable to me that a closed-minded, dogmatic ideology was developing and spreading within the Southern Baptist Convention. This ideology contrasted sharply with my understanding of God acquired in the Southern Baptist

churches of my religious homeland.

From my layman's vantage point, the concepts of ideology and theology differ sharply, although it is not my purpose to enter into a debate over semantics. Theology, in my unlearned view, results from a continuous effort to better understand God, God's creation in its entirety, and God's desires for that creation. Thus, human understanding of God's revelation, if not revelation itself, evolves and expands over time. A wholistic view of the Old and New Testaments indicates that such evolution and expansion is a central, if not explicit, theme in these scriptures.

God as creator endowed the human species with cognitive reasoning and critical thinking skills, imagination, abilities to conceptualize, and a thirst for increasing amounts of knowledge and information, all of which seem to be attributes superior to other forms of life in God's creation, or so some of us humans wish to think. The endowment of these attributes implies that God intended for them to be utilized to develop an expanding and improved understanding of God, God's creation and desires, and how humans should relate to one another. Is the parable of the talents not applicable to mental capabilities as well as to other gifts such as money? Or, was this endowment of mental abilities an idle gesture on God's part or a subversive machination by some quasi deity? Theology, although ultimately a belief system, is continually informed by increases in knowledge and understanding gained by researchers and scholars in all behavioral, physical, social, and religious sciences.

By contrast, religious ideology, from my vantage point, is a closed, dogmatic system of beliefs; one that adherents and religious elites strive to make impenetrable to new knowledge, information, insights, and understanding. Is the gospel so uncompetitive that "spreading the gospel" can not be done successfully in an environment where information and understanding from all sources are unfettered? Such religious ideology typically implies that God is fragile, weak, and therefore must be protected by self-proclaimed religious elites or moguls who as males act as if they have a monopoly on "knowing" God's truths, word, and will. A closed, dogmatic system of religious ideology can lead, indirectly if not directly, to ethical shortcomings? For example, is it in essence deceptive and ethically questionable to claim for oneself, or

for like-minded individuals to claim reciprocally for each other, an exclusionary ability to discern unambiguously and with complete certitude all of God's communications with the human species throughout all time?

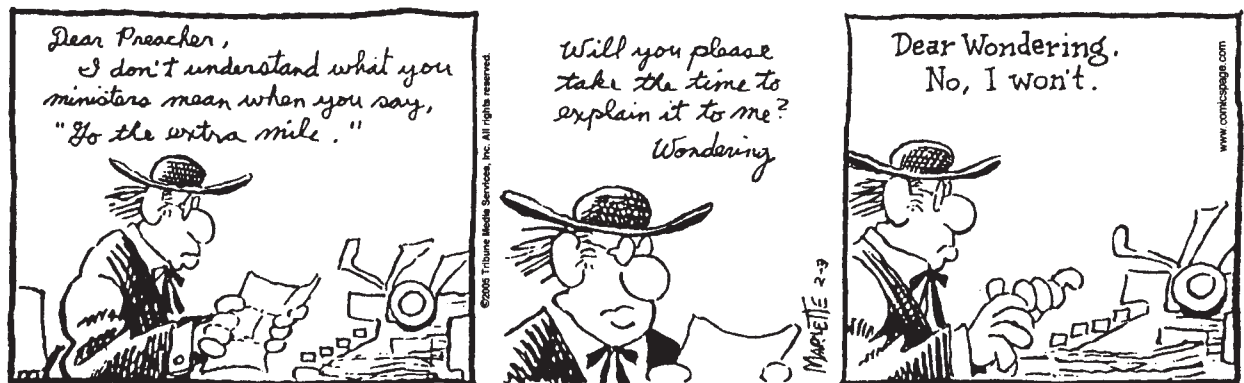
The actions and assertions of a dogmatic religious ideology in Southern Baptist circles and elsewhere are indicative of men, as defined by gender, who seemingly seek to acquire and exercise power over people. In religious settings, such power comes from cloaking themselves as an unquestionable source of God's revelation. That is, God's truths are only what these men say they are! Such monopolistic and authoritarian claims characterize the elevated elites in numerous religions, cults, and sects throughout human history, including Roman Catholicism (at least prior to the Reformation), and now in the Southern Baptist Convention, so it seems to me.

Ethical and thoughtful evaluation of the actions and assertions of religious elites have been seen by them in earlier times as threats to their power. These threats to power have been commonly considered so potent that, throughout history, persons who posed cogent questions, offered contradictory information, or voiced differing opinions were effectively eliminated by one means or another.

In the political realm, the twentieth century witnessed these types of behaviors by numerous totalitarian states. Persons who were suspected of failing to adhere to the party line espoused by the political elites were eliminated by one means or another. Individuals whose thoughts were imputed to not be in total agreement with the powerful political elite were purged from administrative and governmental posts, from faculty positions in educational institutions, from the military, and from cultural and scientific organizations.

Has such totalitarianism and stifling of thought occurred in Southern Baptist educational institutions and seminaries, organizational structures, and outreach endeavors such as home and foreign mission programs? Is there any validity in reports that entire churches have been expelled because they failed to subjugate females to males, or failed to cast out persons who exhibited the honesty, some might say ethics, to reveal feelings of being attracted to others of their own gender?

The common justification for such banishments and purges in the political realm has been that the eliminated



individuals were a threat to national security. Many Americans upon hearing this justification by totalitarian states have interpreted it to mean that the individuals so accused were seen as threats to the power of the political elites.

When religious denominations engage in similar banishments and purges, is the motivation similar; i.e., to eliminate perceived threats to the power of the denominational elites and moguls? To argue that such purges are undertaken to protect God, or to prevent the corruption of God's teachings and word, or some similar contention, is to argue (in my judgment) that God, and God's teachings and word are so frail that self-appointed humans, usually male religious elites, must intervene to provide protection. If such implied frailty is the case, is protection worthwhile? If God is all powerful and everlasting, then the justifications given by the religious elites and moguls are deceptive, and thus an apparent breach of ethics.

In my former homeland, the concept of a "priesthood of believers" was emphasized. This concept, as I understood it, permitted and encouraged individuals to expand and deepen their understanding of God and God's will for their lives by utilizing the mental abilities endowed by God their creator and by accessing all sources of knowledge, information and insight available to them. If my memory is correct, considerable criticism was directed at authoritarian, hierarchical religious organizations, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. These organizations were ones in which hierarchical elites were said to assert and act as if "the Bible says what they say it says," and no probing questions and differing interpretations were allowed.

Since that time, considerable reversals seem to have occurred in my homeland. Now it seems that one can only be part of the "priesthood" if one accepts what the new set of religious elites say the Bible says. For instance, faculty members at educational institutions and persons holding various church offices have been, and continue to be required to sign statements agreeing essentially that *the Bible says what the religious elites say the Bible says*.

Changes in the "priesthood of believers" concept and acquisition of power are not necessarily unrelated to the assertion of literal inerrancy. Persons who accept the literal inerrancy assertion are apt to be more inclined to accept "the Bible says what we say it says" type of ideological claims by religious elites. Literal inerrancy lends authoritativeness to such claims, and increases reluctance to raise questions or voice doubts. Questioning pronouncements of religious elites takes on more of an aura of questioning God. As a result, religious elites acquire greater capability to select particular Bible verses and to construe these verses in a manner that enhances their exercise of influence and power over people, and exalts their own positions.

From an ethical perspective, the literal inerrancy assertion rests on selective reading of the Old and New Testaments; i.e., on emphasizing particular verses while ignoring other passages. Otherwise, numerous logical inconsistencies arise

when these scriptures are considered in their entirety, assuming current dictionaries of American English are used to ascribe meanings to the language of these scriptures. Ethical issues arise because the literal inerrancy assertion necessitates the willful withholding of evidence; that is, willfully disregarding passages that are inconsistent or contradictory with the ideology of the religious elites who advocate literal inerrancy.

Literal inerrancy advocates, in addition to glossing over logical inconsistencies, typically fail to point out carefully and fully, that the contents of the Bible as known today were not formalized until more than 300 years after the life of Jesus, that numerous additional writings were considered sacred by people who called themselves Christian during the first two to three centuries, and that some of these writings were still viewed as inspired or sacred several centuries later.¹ From a present day perspective, this 300 plus year time lapse exceeds the length of time the United States has formally been a nation.

The failure to address and seriously consider rigorously developed scholarly evidence that contradicts the closed-minded ideological interpretations of religious elites may occur for two reasons. One, the scholarly knowledge of these religious elites may be seriously impaired in the area in which they claim to have the utmost knowledge and expertise with complete clarity and certainty. Or, two, they are willfully withholding information from their audiences. Furthermore, it is essentially misleading for them to characterize evidence, considered rigorous by outstanding scholars with international reputations, as heresy without carefully providing the technical definition of the term to naïve lay audiences, or to apply out-of-hand other dismissive and prejudicial terms to such evidence without offering counter evidence of, at least, equal scholarly rigor. The point is not to argue that the evidence and conclusions offered by internationally recognized scholars such as Ehrman² are correct. Instead, the point is to maintain that the failure of literal inerrancy advocates to rigorously address scholarly evidence which runs counter to their ideological interpretations indicates serious shortcomings in their knowledge and expertise, or seemingly a willful withholding of information from their audiences, of which most members are likely to be naïve in such matters.

It is not uncommon for members of naïve lay audiences to be likened as God's "children" or "little children" in church sermons. This brings to mind the U. S. legal environment. Federal courts and regulatory agencies have held that it is deceptive and misleading, and thus illegal, for firms to direct promotional messages to children that contain information which children lack the cognitive maturity to adequately evaluate and process, or to withhold substantive information from such messages.

More generally, in the U.S. and many developed societies, consumer protection regulations and statutes mandate affirmative disclosure of information that may not serve the interests of the parties who must reveal the information. For example, lenders are required to disclose to potential borrow-

ers the actual interest rates and other finance charges. The Food and Drug Administration requires that consumers be told about the potential undesirable side effects of pharmaceuticals. In several states, homeowners are required by law to inform potential buyers about known defects in the property.

In my state, a person who had been in prison for many years on a murder conviction was recently fully acquitted in a retrial. The retrial was held because it was discovered that the two prosecutors in the initial trial withheld evidence that cast doubt on their assertions of guilt. The two prosecutors were investigated for a breach of legal ethics.

If affirmative disclosure of contrary or potentially unfavorable information is required in several fields such as business, law, and medicine, is it ethical for religious elites to commonly withhold from their lay audiences information that may run counter to their ideological purposes, while at the same time asserting their questionable pronouncements with certitude? Are present day religious proponents exempt from ethical standards of other fields of endeavor and given the latitude to act according to the behavioral principle said to have been followed by some spokesmen in early Christian history? It has been observed that some early spokesmen, in construing events and differing beliefs of others, appeared to follow the principle, "All is fair in love and war, and religious domination is nothing if not love and war."³

Another area in which information is often withheld or offered in a misleadingly incomplete form is in teaching creationism. A retired professor of life sciences at a major southern public university talked to me on several occasions about continuously encountering students who were seeking to become practitioners of life sciences (e.g., veterinarians) and who had been indoctrinated in their pre-university years to believe that evolutionary processes were a scientific hoax. Such students were faced with an agonizing choice. They could change career goals, or discard conflicting religious beliefs. Or, they could lead double, misleading lives based on two contradictory belief systems as some elected to do; i.e., claiming adherence to one belief system on Sundays and Wednesday evenings, and adhering to a conflicting one in their professional lives other times in the week. Is it not deceptive for persons in religious positions who are perceived by young people as authority figures to advocate to youths a belief system that is contrary to rigorously developed evidence accepted by the world's top scientists without addressing this evidence with a level of instructional accuracy comparable to that at top schools, which do not teach creationism?

In my former Southern Baptist homeland, government interference in the practice of one's religion was considered an anathema. Now, a number of religious elites seek to utilize federal, state and local governmental agencies to impose their particular religious assertions and beliefs on all persons in the community and society. For example, some demonize public schools for not promoting certain so-called Christian beliefs, which in actuality means the particular beliefs they espouse. Would these religious proponents insist on religious procla-

mations in public schools if those in a position to determine the religious content were practicing Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims? If not, would this lack of intellectual integrity be "different" because the Christian elites who would promote their particular religious beliefs in public schools know God and God's will with absolute clarity and certitude, a capability that they possess exclusively?

I am a refugee from the land of those religious elites who claim that God created human beings, but who are afraid to allow the human brain created by God to utilize all of its capabilities in seeking to acquire knowledge and understanding about God, about all of God's creation, and about God's desires for human lives, wherever the pursuit of such knowledge leads. Why do these religious elites envision God to be so fragile and impotent that God can't withstand such inquisitiveness, and that they must protect God and God's revelations to humans? My desire is not to be associated with those religious elites who are too fearful of losing their religious power over others or their elevated positions to allow religious beliefs and perspectives to be informed by rigorously acquired evidence by outstanding scholars in various disciplines, including early Christian history. I do not want to be among or support those who assert doctrinaire interpretations of highly selective Bible verses, particularly ones that may be problematic to some extent, to subjugate to subservient roles other members of God's creation based on ethnic, gender, marital status, nationality, and other grounds. It is my wish to be free from religious elites who claim to know God's will with such clarity and certitude that they are intolerant of differing beliefs and are willing to use governmental agencies to impose their own beliefs on the entire community and society. For instance, how do such Christians differ, other than perhaps in degree, from Muslim zealots who seek to establish so-called Islamic governments? It might be noted that both claim they are doing the will of the same God!

Obviously, I am a refugee from the ideology pursued the past couple of decades by the dominant group of religious elites in the Southern Baptist Convention. According to a newspaper report, a Southern Baptist official responded by saying in essence, "good riddance," when asked about former President Jimmy Carter's resignation from the SBC. My refugee status undoubtedly constitutes "good riddance" in the eyes of some SBC religious elites. But I am in good company! ■

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Lost Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

² *Ibid.*, and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 47.

Book Reviews

Whatever Things Are Lovely

Foy Valentine, Wimberley, TX: CET Publication, 2004.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan

Richardson, TX

If ever a book lived up to its title, this one is it! Here is a delightful, highly readable and engagingly humorous compilation of most of the columns Valentine has written for *Christian Ethics Today* since he founded this publication in 1995. What emerges from these pages is almost an autobiography of one of the finest and most expressive Christian ethicists we have among us. And there are no plans afoot for an autobiography to be written!

The author is known far and wide for his writings and emphases on moral and ethical values, both in his native Texas and literally around the world because of his many years of identity with Baptist World Alliance. In these chapters we not only sense enduring biblical values, but we also can relish multiple personal asides and comments which reveal refreshing insights about Valentine that previously were not known.

Valentine is never far from his rural East Texas heritage where life began in a farm family and in a wonderful little Baptist Church. His respected father was a deacon and his wonderful mother was a teacher, both in the public school and the church. Here is the nurturing place for his biblical values which deeply and lastingly influenced him. In this book Valentine comments on these deep roots as well as early Christmas memories, rural cemeteries, East Texas trees, and life as the son of a farmer. He does this seemingly mundane side of his life with that “Valentinian” skill as a writer that makes us feel we are there with him. Nearly always his comments about these early family days give way to his current family which constitutes one of the most important facets of his life—his wife, his daughters, and his grandchildren! These are relationships, which are never maudlin, but they are wholesome and beautiful and deeply satisfying.

Throughout this entertaining and enjoyable book are ample evidences of Valentine’s competence as a biblical scholar. Not only does he know the Bible, he loves it and shares insights from it that confirm his choice of a title from Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Mixing biblical knowledge with innumerable personal experiences and a rip-roaring sense of humor, the reader receives a solid sense of old-fashioned pleasure.

Emerging from these pages are some rare and frustrating insights about the author. One reads about his reluctance to

part with money for a new car. It is apparent he can live without computers, cell-phones, television, movies, hearing aids, and most medicines. He relishes rocks! If he ever invites you to see the fireplace in that unusual cabin in New Mexico on the river, he will point out rock by rock how that part of the house came to be. His powers of observation in nature are exceptional, and thankfully never descend to the levels of quirkiness. It all adds up to enhance the reputation of a genuinely fascinating individual, the likes of which we rarely meet.

One gets the impression from the book that East Texas, the Red River area of New Mexico, and his family are the areas of lasting interest in his life. Somewhere in between are many dominant patterns for which he is known far and wide yet they fade into relative insignificance as he reflects on the enduring lessons of loveliness that come from his major sources. And that is the privilege of authorship.

The consistent skills Foy has with words and images, a skill that seemingly grows richer with age, have brought us a volume that will occupy a permanent place on our library shelves.

The book is guaranteed to bring the reader pleasure, insight, and a graphic reminder of “lovely things.” It is replete with a healthy optimism and a basic Christian faith, which will bless and encourage everyone. When you review the long life of this octogenarian—from his beginnings on a farm, through college and seminary days, into the swirling waters of denomination leadership, and now into retirement—Foy Valentine’s optimism and faith shine brighter than ever! ■

Note: To receive this book, see offer elsewhere in this Journal.

Columns: Glimpses of a Seminary Under Assault

Russell H. Dilday, Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan

Richardson, TX

Here is a “must read” for Baptists everywhere! Here is a brittle, hard-hitting, overwhelmingly sad but accurate accounting of how the fundamentalist segment of the Southern Baptist Convention literally tore Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from its moorings of a healthy,

balanced, and theologically conservative stance. One of the inevitable conclusions one moves toward as this tragedy unfolds is the realization that one of the chief architects of “The Takeover” is now the current president of this school. Baptists everywhere need to be informed about these associations of charges and counter-charges which emerge from these events on this tenth anniversary of “a Seminary under Assault.”

The format of this book is quite novel. After a helpful introductory chapter that speaks eloquently to the relevance of the manner of documenting this personal and institutional shock wave, Dilday uses his “Columns” (a series of regular reports to the entire Southwestern Family) as the basis of the book. He intersperses this sixteen-year period of his presidency with updates on the seminary’s expansion and ministry. He also adds penchant asides from his busy personal schedule of appearances and his lectures on his well-known book on biblical authority, which is a major proof of his own conservative credentials.

It sounds anything but exciting, but cleverly and adroitly he weaves two separate streams together in a most readable and helpful fashion. One is the astounding story of the growth and strengths of Southwestern. There are record enrollments, new buildings, new directions of study, new programs, and exciting additions of the faculty and staff. That there are problems along the way with such growth and people is not glossed over. But the reasons why national and international recognition came to this school in this timeframe are clearly stated. There is no doubt whatsoever that Southwestern was a solid, healthy, conservative theological institution, recognized far and wide as the largest such school in the entire evangelical world.

The other emphasis in Dilday’s book is his account of the growing strength of the fundamentalist trustees on the board of the school. Their avowed intent from the beginning of “The Takeover” in 1979 was to rescue the school from its

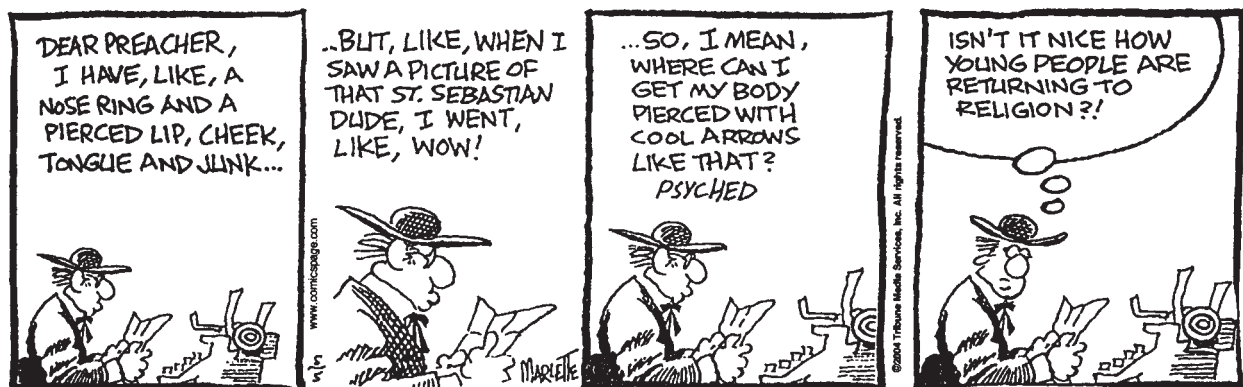
moderate stances to the hard-core right of their philosophy. Slowly and inexorably the balance in the governing body moved in that direction with a “cat and mouse” game, resulting in Dilday’s brutal and callous ouster in 1994, a move predetermined by a plurality of rigid trustees who forced him out. The accounting of this move, accompanied by mistruths and obvious hypocrisy and sham, is literally one of the most sickening moments in Southern Baptist history.

Perhaps Dilday and his staff misjudged the intent and depth of the fundamentalist mindset. He is not alone in this. But as the internal rejoicing took place about the sheer numbers of graduates, the expansion of endowment, and the encouragement from accrediting circles, the administration seemed unaware of how these factors did not impress those who wanted power and control of this great school. The personal animosity and conflict is not swept under anyone’s rug. But the absence of Christian love, respect, and the willingness to compromise and to work toward common goals increases the continuing tragedy.

So ten years after this dismissal, Dilday tells in depth and with precision the details of what led up to that fateful day. He boldly lists names of his antagonists. His recall of conversations and responses to the tightening noose his enemies were fabricating is a vivid reminder of their unchanging goal—complete control of every aspect of both the denomination and its institutions!

So in that timeframe (1979-1994), charges and counter-charges about theological liberalism resounded so forcefully that fundamentalism swept the deck. Today in all SBC seminaries changes of leadership have taken place with the ultimate plan to indoctrinate succeeding generations of SBC pastors and leaders. This educational process now blends a biblical literalism with dispensational overtones that will have astounding influence in the years ahead.

Dilday’s final chapter is worth the price of the book. With deep emotional and spiritual insights, he makes it clear that



he and his wife personally have moved far beyond these events, which at that time shattered them both. Using 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 as his text, he shares some lessons for Christians anywhere who have suffered at the hands of other Christians. With God's help in the midst of a painful darkness and abject personal sufferings, Dilday affirms you can go on. The bitterness is history. Russell Dilday has discovered open doors of service, continued ministry, and the power to survive and transcend. ■

Da Vinci Code Remedy: Two Recent Books

Reviewed by Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ
Charles Fisher Catholic Professor of New Testament
Brite Divinity School, Ft. Worth, TX

The Mary Magdalene Tradition

Holly E. Hearon, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.

Mary Magdalene has become the subject of intense scrutiny and speculation in recent years. Here is a competent discussion of what we can know about the real Mary Magdalene through the four canonical Gospels, in the context of ancient storytelling. Images of women, literary strategies of developing traditions and characterization, and setting the Christian texts within their environment of Greco-Roman literature, all help to situate the figure of Mary Magdalene in her own historical and literary world. Appendixes give information about similar storytelling in Talmud and other ancient literature. ■

Mary Magdalene: The First Apostle

Ann Graham Brock, Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 2003.

After reviewing the figure and treatment of Mary Magdalene in the canonical Gospels, this study moves on into the developing tradition about her in Christian non-canonical texts, where a rich and varied characterization emerges. In apocryphal gospels and acts, in Gnostic dialogues and revelations, Mary assumes the status of "apostle of the apostles" and recipient of special revelations from the risen Jesus. The later challenges to her apostolic authority resulted in the other (and later) image of her as converted prostitute. The figure of Mary Magdalene forms an interesting test case on the politics of church status and imaging. ■

Note: These two reviews first appeared in *Vital Theology* (www.vitaltheology.com), January 1, 2005, and are reprinted by permission.

WE APOLOGIZE FOR THE DELAY OF THE GIFT BOOK

Due to shipping delays (freighter from Europe—engine failure) and further delays in NYC port and Houston detour, where Customs decided to delay two weeks to examine, we did not receive Foy Valentine's book until early February. The gift copy to every subscriber was finally mailed in mid-February. If you have not received your book by early in March, please notify us (see back page) and we will send your copy immediately. Thanks for your patience.

SPECIAL OFFER FOR EXTRA COPIES

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Breakfast At The Elite Café

(continued from page 2)

I.H. 35 today. It has been refurbished, updated, and the menu is more in keeping with its name. I recently had dinner there with my grandson (a Baylor student now). I never pass the place without thinking of that day.

The events of 1963 and the following years led to civil rights legislation and many social changes—the American dream of "justice and equality for all" was renewed. History books record seminal events in those years—Rosa Parks refusal to sit at the back of the bus, a civil-rights march across a bridge in Selma, the rally in Washington, D.C. highlighted by Martin Luther King's sermon, "I Have A Dream," and many more.

But for me it began at breakfast in the Elite Café. ■

“Whatever things are lovely . . . think on these things” *Philippians 4:8*

Good News; Bad News

By Foy Valentine, *Founding Editor*

Dallas, TX

Today I have some good news and some bad news.

It has to do with prophets, prophethood, and prophesying. First the good news.

Prophets are folks who *forthtell* the word of the Lord; and the world is everlastingly in need of authentic *forthtellers* for God. No pussyfooting. No hemming and hawing. No equivocating. No cost counting. No testing of the wind to see which way it is blowing. No poll taking. No mealy-mouthing. Just a clear, “Thus saith the Lord.” Prophets are true believers who share Amos’ unnuanced conviction:

The lion has roared, who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?

But now the bad news.

Prophets are everlastingly causing trouble.

They rock the boat. They challenge the status quo. They upset the apple cart. They mess up the establishment’s equilibrium. They disturb the peace. And sometimes they get carried away.

It seems that nearly everybody with a pulse read Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* when it was first published some twenty years ago. Those who did not read the book seem to have seen the movie. As for my own tardy, dilatory, procrastinating self, I have not seen the movie and only a few days ago broke down and bought the book.

Set somewhere in central Europe during what many of us understand to be the Dark Ages, the plot of this intriguing novel is focused on a huge monastery housing the greatest library in Christendom. Terrible things have been happening there including murders most foul. A wise and uncannily observant senior Brother named William from Britain has been called to come in and solve the mystery of the murders. Within a few short days after his much-heralded arrival at the monastery, the plot thickens, the murders multiply, and the monastery itself, including the marvelous library, is finally torched and utterly destroyed by a disastrous fire. It seems that a trusted and earnest Brother named Jorge had been so concerned about potential heresies that he feared were leading some of the other Brothers astray that he killed them and then, to keep still others from the heresies he believed the books to contain, burned down the library itself.

William, with his young companion, Adso, watched the terrible conflagration as it consumed the priceless books. The Sherlock Holmes-like William philosophized as they watched the tragedy’s denouement:

“It was the greatest library in Christendom,” William

said. “Now,” he added, “the Antichrist is truly at hand, because no learning will hinder him any more. For that matter, we have seen his face tonight.”

“Whose face,” I asked, dazed.

“Jorge, I mean. In that face, deformed by hatred of philosophy, I saw for the first time the portrait of the Antichrist, who does come from the tribe of Judas, as his heralds have it, or from a far country. The Antichrist can be born from piety itself, from excessive love of God or of the truth as the heretic is born from the saint and the possessed from the seer. Fear prophets, Adso, and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them, often before them, at times instead of them. Jorge did a diabolical thing because he loved his truth so lewdly that he dared anything in order to destroy falsehood The only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for truth.”

So, the bad news is that *prophethood*, unseasoned by grace can be disastrous. True believers, like today’s Fundamentalists, can love their “truth so lewdly” that they come to believe that their *end* of resisting falsehood, or what they deem to be falsehood, justifies their use of any *means*, no matter how bad.

To further complicate matters for us simple folks, sometimes false prophets come along to deceive us, lead us astray, and mess up our minds. It is necessary for us to be alert, on guard, always testing them to determine for ourselves whether or not their bold assertions, “Thus saith the Lord,” are authentic. Nobody ever said life with liberty in Christ would be easy. Living under Christ’s marvelous “law of liberty,” to use James’ felicitous phrase, requires eternal vigilance. As the Bible says, we are to “try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). Hear! Hear!

The true prophet’s “thus saith the Lord” is a vitally important *forthtelling* of God’s message related to truth and justice, righteousness and peace, honesty and integrity. Without this word we would all be infinitely poorer. Consider:

Abraham was a prophet (Gen. 20:7).

Moses was a prophet (Deut. 34:10).

John the Baptist was a prophet (Mt. 11:4).

Jesus was a prophet (Mt. 21:11).

And, yes, so were Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Jdg. 4:4), Huldah (1 Kgs. 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Anna (Lk. 2:36), and the evangelist Philip’s four virgin daughters

(*continued on page 21*)

Financial Report For 2004

From the beginning of *Christian Ethics Today* in 1995, the Journal has been sent *free of charge* to anyone requesting it. The cost of publishing five issues last year (Winter/Spring/Summer/Fall/Christmas) was about \$74,000, or about \$21 for each of over 3600 subscribers (an increase of 400 over last year). Due to the labor and love of dedicated assistants from Beeville to Wimberley and Dallas to Des Moines, the annual budget remains very frugal, even with 10% increases in circulation each year.

During 2004, 541 contributors (an increase of 37 over 2003) gave \$73,140 (an increase of \$5,246). These gifts ranged from \$10 to \$1000—\$1000 or more gifts came from 10 individuals (including one gift of \$10,000), 2 foundations, and 2 churches. The majority of supporters sent \$25 to \$30, which paid for their subscription.

Our heartfelt gratitude to every person or church who supported the ministry of *Christian Ethics Today* in 2004. Without each of you the Journal could not continue. Because of your support we are able to send the Journal to hundreds of students, colleges, seminaries, and churches.

Special Thanks to the “Valentine Supporters”

Our special gratitude to these supporters who have honored the dream of our founding editor Foy Valentine by providing major support of \$1000 or more in 2004:

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The following churches contributed \$100 or more in 2004 to the ministry of CET.

First Baptist Church, Gainesville, GA	North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, FL
First Baptist Church, Plainview, TX	Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, MS
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In 2004, we visited the communities of Tyler, Longview, Marshall, Lubbock, Plainview (TX), Atlanta, and Birmingham (AL) meeting with supporters and promoting CET. We encouraged them and you to enlist your church to support the Journal in 2005.

Our goal is thirty-five churches providing \$1000 annually from their budget or special gifts (or seventy churches \$500). This amount would provide a financial base of one-half of the CET annual budget. *Would you represent us to your church in this appeal?*

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2004

Balance on Hand 12/31/03:	\$23,513	Expenditures 2003:	\$73,991*
Gifts/Income 2003:	\$73,140*	BALANCE 12/31/2003:	\$22,686
TOTAL: \$96,677			

**Designated gift for book publication was not included in Income or Expenditures.*

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."

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

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