

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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

**TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE 1995-2005**

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

## Happy Birthday!

By Foy Valentine, *Founding Editor*

12527 Matisse Lane, Dallas, TX 75230

There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

So Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar* has Brutus to say to Cassius.

There have been some tides in my own life, which, to contort poor William’s immortal words a bit, I have taken at the *ebb*, leaving me bound in shallows and in miseries—somewhat. Yes. Hoist by my own petard, to borrow Hamlet’s felicitous phrase, blown up by my own dynamite.

One of the tides which I took at the *flood*, however, was the conception and launching of *Christian Ethics Today*. That move has not exactly led “on to fortune;” but it was nevertheless a fortunate plunge, a move which I have been pleased by, which lots and lots of friends have affirmed, which generous allies in the Christian ethics vineyard have kept afloat financially, and which, as best I can understand it, God has blessed.

Since the current issue of the journal marks the Tenth Anniversary of that launching, perhaps some modest celebration will not be considered altogether inappropriate.

Birthdays are special.

When I was young, my Mother made a chicken pie on everybody’s birthday. It was a very special way for our family to celebrate those very special days. With all the good things she prepared to go with that scrumptious chicken pie, those big birthday meals during the depths of the Great Depression constituted the major part of our birthday celebrations. As we said in Van Zandt County in East Texas, we really put the big pot in the little one.

I wish I could whomp up such a glorious feast for all the friends of *Christian Ethics Today* on the occasion of this Anniversary. Lacking the recipe for that fabulous chicken pie, however, I will have to do with just inviting you to celebrate by looking back over our shoulders for a little while.

Now, the journal’s birth ten years ago came about on this wise.

A couple of years after my retirement following 28 years with the Christian Life Commission, the Christian ethics

agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, it became increasingly clear that some medium was needed for ongoing support of the cause of Christian social ethics. After numerous conversations, discussions, meetings, and phone calls, it was decided that a Christian ethics journal should be launched. I committed myself with God’s help to make it happen. The journal would be called *Christian Ethics Today*. It would be published about every other month “as energy and funding permitted.” A 32-page, 8 1/2” by 11” format was settled on; and about 1500 names and addresses were cobbled together. A fine typist with good computer skills was enlisted to prepare the copy from the manuscripts, which I would secure and provide. A knowledgeable and experienced layout professional was found who agreed to work with me in preparing the copy for the printer. A first-class printing establishment agreed to print the journal on high quality paper with an attractive and readable typeface. From the beginning, it was determined that the journal would be copy driven with no artwork and no advertising. Only some years later were we able to make arrangements to utilize selected drawings by Doug Marlett, one of the nation’s most effective and successful cartoonists.

For the first issue dated April, 1995, I elicited a few articles related to Christian ethics, transcribed a rather substantive interview with Christian ethicist Henlee H. Barnett, wrote up a piece on “Christian Ethics: Who’s Alive in ’95?,” personally transcribed from a tape recording the masterpiece of an address on “The Crisis in Public Education” (which Frosty Troy had delivered at the annual meeting of Americans United for Separation of Church and State), and with no small expenditure of time, endurance, and energy, dug out an uncut, untamed, and unemasculated version on Walter Rauschenbusch’s “Why I Am a Baptist,” which to this good day is the only unexpurgated copy of that masterpiece which I have found to be in print. (Reprints from *Christian Ethics Today* have been widely disseminated; and I still have available a few for \$1 including postage and my pro bono handling.) That first issue also included a piece, which I pulled together, but mostly have to take the  
*(continued on page 31)*

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# EthixBytes

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

“Never retire. Your brain needs exercise or it will atrophy.”

*Nobel laureate James Watson,  
co-discoverer of the structure of DNA.*

“The left mocks the right. The right knows its right. Two ugly traits. How far should we go to try to understand each other’s point of view? Maybe the distance grace covered on the cross is a clue.”

*Bono, lead singer of U2.*

“I have a son-in-law serving his second tour in Iraq. I correspond with him several times a week. I send him packages . . . Don’t tell me that I can’t support the troops while opposing the war. In a similar vein, don’t accuse the media of not telling the truth about the war just because you don’t like what you hear.”

*Pat Miller, Austin-American.*

“To be a superpower is to be the champion of peace, freedom, and democracy, of human rights, environmental quality, and the alleviation of suffering.”

*President Jimmy Carter, PBS Newshour Interview,  
19 November 1996.*

“War itself is the most extreme form of terrorism.”

*Howard Zinn, in The Progressive.*

“There is no such thing as the United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that is the United States.”

*John Bolton, President Bush’s choice  
to be U.N. ambassador, in a 1984 speech.*

“*Revelations* is taking the reality of supernatural evil seriously and giving validity to the prophecies of the End Time.”

*Richard Land, SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty  
President, the only religious expert in TV Guide giving  
a positive review of NBC’s controversial miniseries.*

“There are seven counts [of war crimes] against Saddam Hussein—five of which he committed while the United States supported him.”

*Ambassador Edward Peck,  
former U.S. Chief of Mission in Iraq.*

“The analysis by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said Bush’s plans for spending and taxes would yield

deficits through the decade ending in 2015 totaling \$2.58 trillion. That is \$1.6 trillion worse than they would be if none of the president’s fiscal plans become law.”

*Alan Fram, Associated Press 3/5/05.*

“According to the White House’s own numbers, this budget [Federal 2006] would move 300,000 people off food stamps in the next five years. It would cut the funds that allow 300,000 children to receive day care. It would reduce funding for Medicaid by \$45 billion over the next ten years, and this at a time when 45 million Americans—the highest level on record—are already without health insurance.”

*Joint Ecumenical Statement, Episcopal News Service, 3/8/05.*

“About 1400 college students die each year from excessive drinking. Because binge drinking is frequently tied to fraternities and athletics, . . . some universities are banning alcohol at both fraternities and football games.”

*New York Review of Books, 12/16/04.*

“Statistically speaking, if you drove across the country, every ninth household you passed was unable—or in danger of being unable—to afford sufficient food at some point in the past year.”

*Arloe Sherman, Center for Budget  
and Policy Priorities ([www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)).*

“In 2004 Roman Catholic leaders received 1,092 new abuse claims against American priests and deacons, even after they had paid more than \$800 million in settlements during the long-running crisis over predatory clergy.”

*Rachel Zoll, Associated Press.*

“There is no energy policy and no real effort to reduce our voracious demand of foreign capital. The U.S. pulled in 80 percent of total world savings last year largely to finance our consumption. . . . 43 percent of all U.S. Treasury bills, notes and bonds are now held by foreigners.”

*Robert Hormats, vice chairman of  
Goldman Sachs International.*

“Actually it’s a lot of fun to fight, you know. It’s a hell of a hoot. It’s fun to shoot some people.”

*Lt. Gen. John Mattis, who led 65,000 troops  
into Baghdad in 2003 at a forum in Los Angeles  
sponsored by top U.S. defense contractors.*

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# God and the Tsunami

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

The most catastrophic event in recent memory is the giant earthquake that erupted under the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004, caused by the movement of two tectonic plates four thousand fathoms under the surface of the sea. Registering 9.0 on the Richter scale, this two-hundred megaton jolt thrust up a giant wave a hundred feet high that raced at nearly five-hundred miles an hour to devastate 3,000 miles of unprotected shoreline. Saturation media coverage makes it unnecessary to dwell here on the carnage that has already caused 300,000 deaths, 250,000 of them in Indonesia alone. Instead, we focus on the profound religious issues raised by the sheer arbitrariness of the disaster. Since tsunamis do not play politics, there are no enemy terrorists to blame, so does that make God the culprit?

Efforts to explain the divine role in such calamities leave much to be desired. As might be expected, some were ready with theories of retribution: one popular author covered all the bases by insisting that God was punishing our enemies for persecuting Christians and punishing us for our moral laxity as a wake-up call to repent. To critics challenging the severity of his verdict, he retorted, "You ought to see what hell is like. It's going to be an eternal judgment of God on all people."<sup>1</sup> Others have used scriptural descriptions of upheavals in nature (Matt. 24:7-8; Lk. 21:25-26) to view the tsunami as a sign of the last days when the rewards of heaven will more than compensate us for the severe trials that we must endure here on earth. However, to explain the tragedy in terms either of heaven or of hell leaves it a mystery that will not be solved until we reach eternity, thereby diverting our attention from responses that are urgently needed in the present.

The concern prompting this sermon is that, if we as Christians refuse to face head-on the hard questions that arise whenever nature becomes our enemy, that very denial of the problem will create a dark closet of doubt within the house of faith. After all, we are endlessly threatened, not only by earthquakes, but by floods, tornados, landslides, and plagues. It is the mega-scourges that get media attention, but our heartbreaking dilemma is mirrored in the face of one tiny baby dying of leukemia. What do we say when nature seems not only capricious and cruel but downright callous about those whom it hurts the most? As Christians we make some very strong claims about the essential goodness of our world as a gift of God. But how can we sing "For the Beauty of the Earth" on beaches littered with rotting corpses? Let us honor

the dead by grappling with the tough issues raised by those terrible realities that cost them their lives.

## The Creator

The religious questions being raised about the tsunami fall into a predictable pattern that has surfaced many times in the past. First, "How could God allow such a terrible thing to happen?" and, second, "Where was God when it happened?" The assumption is that, if God is all-loving, he would not permit such a cataclysm to occur; and, if he all-powerful, he would act to prevent any other force from causing it to occur. Since the Christian faith insists that God is intimately concerned with each individual life (Matt. 10:29-31), we cannot assume that he was indifferent or detached like the Deist god of the Enlightenment. If we have no answers to these questions, does this imply either that God is vindictive rather than loving, or that he is weak rather than strong, or that he is absent rather than present with us? Clearly the tsunami calls into question our most fundamental understanding of God.

Let us begin with the issue of power. Many simply assume that God, by definition, is in charge of everything that happens. We like to use the "omni"- words, stressing that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. When we shift out of that philosophical framework, we often speak of God as sovereign, almighty, and majestic. Or as one theologian put it, "God is in control of the entire universe, and there is not even a single atom outside His sovereignty."<sup>2</sup> Descriptions of God's absolute power abound which assume that he could immediately halt the most ferocious storm if he so desired. Sometimes it seems as if Christians are in a contest to claim more for their God than other religions claim for theirs, which causes us to insist that our God can do anything he pleases.

Let me trouble you to think about whether this is the best way to understand the greatness of God. Obviously God cannot do anything that is inherently impossible or contradictory, such as make a rock so heavy that he cannot pick it up. More important is the recognition that God can act only consistent with his character. Thus, for example, God cannot sin or do anything that would be ungodly, which puts off-limits to him many things that we do. According to the Bible, the holiness of God means that he is unique, radically different from us in what he thinks and does (Isa. 55:8-9). To say that God can act only for good does not mean that he is

restrained by some power greater than himself, but rather that he chooses to limit his power by his perfection. In short, God is *not* free to *not* be God!

Now let us look more closely at the common platitude that God is all-loving. We all know that the word “love” has great latitude, which is well expressed by acknowledging that we “love” our God, our country, our family, as well as cold watermelon and our favorite flavor of ice cream. One kind of love can easily become self-gratifying, as when a lad whispers to his date in the moonlight, “I love you, I love you,” but what he really means is, “I love me and I want you.” Another kind of love can lead to a pampering of the beloved that results in their corruption. All of us know parents who coddle their children until, like bad fruit, they become “spoiled.” Love can be so smotheringly possessive that the beloved is crushed by its embrace.

In the Bible, God is pictured as having a very distinctive kind of love that is different from our own, so much so that it required a new word to describe it. This *agape* is what we might call “tough love,” sacrificial rather than selfish or smothering in nature. By the time of the Apostle Paul, the followers of Jesus came to realize that it was redemptive love because it was causing them to grow toward maturity (Eph. 3:14-19; 4:13-15). The central truth of the New Testament is that the nature of God was most fully revealed by Christ’s death on the cross, which represented a revolution in our understanding of just how vulnerable his love was willing to be on our behalf (Phil. 2:6-11).

When we combine these insights regarding God’s power and love and apply them to his role as creator of the universe, we begin to understand why God did not fashion earth as a perfect planet that never changes, a place where there are no germs or snakes or hurricanes. God did not make a robot world for the same reason that he did not make robot people to inhabit it, namely, because such a world would leave no room for choices, for growth, for the achievement of maturity. Trapped in a world of total predictability, we would be forced to bow to the inevitability of the way things always are.

Theoretically, it might seem easier to live in a perfect world where nothing ever goes wrong, but such a world

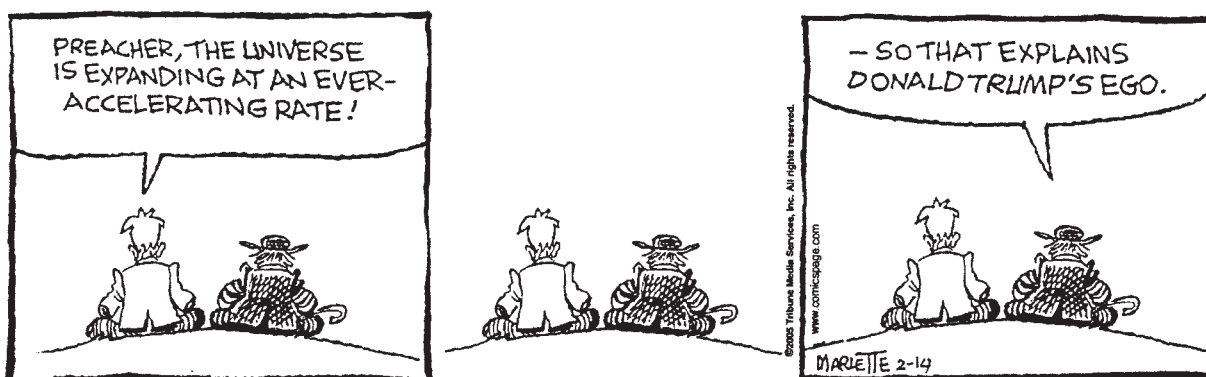
would deny us the most precious dimension of our humanity, namely, our freedom, the freedom to decide what to believe and who to love and how to relate to the world about us. Think of the parents who do everything possible to create a perfect world for their children only to watch them grow up unable to cope with the harsh realities of human existence. There is no maturity without freedom and no freedom without risk. That is why God chose to use his power on the hardest task of all: to love us in such a way that we will freely choose to love in mature fashion. So let us begin to think about the kind of world where responsible freedom is encouraged.

### The Creation

Only after we sharpen our understanding of the character of the Creator are we able to ponder what kind of creation is compatible with God’s nature. Just as we often adopt an absolutist idea of God that puts no limits on the way he uses his power and his love, even so we often entertain a simplistic idea of creation by assuming that God began with a nice clean slate, a perfect emptiness filled only with himself. It is always easier to start like that, in a vacuum with no clutter or carryover from the past. Many of our problems stem from our inability to start from scratch. We lament the legacy that others have left behind but assume that God was not encumbered with such restrictions.

The biblical account in Genesis 1, however, is not so simple. For no sooner does verse 1 declare that God created the earth than verse 2 immediately goes on to say that, before this began to happen, the earth was (1) devoid of form or content, having no shape or substance, no law or order. (2) Furthermore, there was a dark watery void underneath this chaos called “the deep.” (3) Again, upon the face of the deep there was a brooding “darkness.” And yet God faced down this bleak abyss. The wind of his breath blew across its shadowy face. He moved in to hatch something new like a bird sets on an egg. The creative God came up against the most uncreative, unpromising raw materials imaginable and determined to use them as building blocks for a livable planet earth (Isa. 45:18).

Such a startling picture of chaos leaves us hungry to spec-





ulate about where this amorphous nothingness, this watery emptiness, this overarching blackness came from, but on such issues the text is silent, as is its New Testament counterpart in John 1:5 where the origin of “darkness” is not explained but simply posited. The key point lies rather in the contrast: verse 2 describes the antithesis of creation, what our world would be like without the creative intervention of God. In other words, creation does not mean making something out of nothing but it means bringing order out of chaos. You do not create a painting simply by gathering oils and brushes. Or create a cathedral by assembling lumber and bricks. These are only raw materials waiting to be transformed. Just so, to say that our world was “created” means more than to say merely that it “exists,” for the former implies design, purpose, and beauty such as God superimposed by gradually sorting out the confusion that confronted him.

It is just here that we come to a second startling biblical insight about creation, namely, that it is unfinished because the nothingness of the void was overcome but not forever banished. Always the possibility of reverting to corruption and disorder lurked in the shadows. In our incredible capacity to choose, we can lay waste to God’s good creation by ravaging its forests, polluting its streams, and fouling its air. The Prophet Jeremiah pictured a relapse of creation to its pre-created chaos (Jer. 4:23-26), but God asserted his determination to work within the constraints of our freedom to renew creation and bring it to completion (Jer. 4:27-28). That is why Jesus affirmed, not only that God was still engaged in his creative work, but that the Son joined him in that endeavor (Jn. 5:17). His miracles, for example, restored small fragments of creation to their original goodness (compare Gen. 1:31 with Mk. 7:37). Indeed, the work of creation will not be completed until there is “a new heaven and a new earth” as envisioned in the last book of the Bible (Rev. 21:1).

It is just here that we need to turn aside for a moment and reflect on the meaning of evolution that has become so controversial in contemporary religious life. To be sure, there are those who would use an extreme view of scientific or social Darwinism to discredit the Christian faith, but the growing evidence for a vast process of evolution over billions

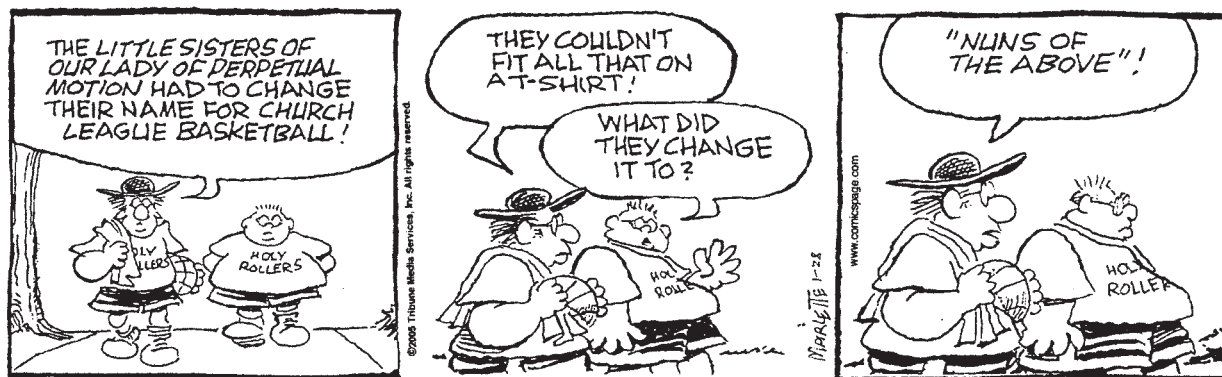
of years, if understood properly, may actually enhance our understanding of creation. For what it means is that there is an amazing drive toward order, purpose, and wholeness built into the very way that things are made. There was a time when our planet was little more than an uninhabitable mass of fiery magma endlessly pummeled by celestial meteors. Why should this utterly unpromising beginning lead eventually, not only to animal and human life, but to intelligence and community, even to goodness and beauty, rather than collapsing into a meaningless jumble?

There are few places to see the work of the creator God more clearly than in the millions upon millions of ways in which nature has decided, in the use of its own God-given freedom, to grow to the point of development it has now reached. And why should these choices that the evolutionists call “natural selection” result in such purposeful progress except that this was the direction that God intended from the beginning? Clearly nature’s quest for harmony and balance is not yet complete, which is why the tectonic plates that have been grinding against one another for some three billion years may still overlap in ways that cause unintended disasters. But the improvements made thus far are breathtaking if only we will stop to behold them.

### The Creature

At last we are in a position to ask what it might mean for us to live in the kind of world just described. Obviously it is an unfinished creation just as we are unfinished creatures. Despite enormous progress, the world is just as broken as we are, thus there is much work yet to be done. Meanwhile, the lurking void reminds us of just how finite, vulnerable, and thus necessarily interdependent we really are. Life is a hazardous venture at best, not only because we cannot predict what may happen next in nature, but also because we cannot predict what may happen next in the human heart. The only way to cope with the many contingences that belong both to the freedom of nature and to the freedom of humanity is to be prepared for the worst but committed to work with God for the best in completing his “new creation.”

It may sound audacious to suggest that God has invited us to help him tame the chaos, to literally be co-creators with



him in making a better world, but that is precisely why he has endowed us with what we call “creativity,” which means exactly what it says, namely, the capacity to make things new and better! Why would God ask us to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion” over it (Gen. 1:28) unless he had fitted us for that very task? Unfortunately, many Christians have a vague and weak doctrine of creation that leaves them indifferent to the plight of nature. What is needed is an attitudinal change according to which it becomes an overriding passion of us all to leave the world better than we found it. It is a scandal that some environmentalists who have no God are more actively involved in the care of the earth than are some Christians who claim to worship its creator!

To take seriously our role in helping creation attain its full potential is to honor science and technology for the great strides made in understanding how the physical world works and what its most pressing needs might be. Specifically regarding the recent tsunami, only since the 1960s have seismologists begun to understand the workings of tectonic plates and therefore gained the ability to predict well in advance when disasters may occur. In this case, several hours of warning time were available but no alarm systems were in place despite the fact that they utilize a simple technology which has been in existence for almost a century.

Third World countries often plead the excuse of poverty for their neglect when the problem is really one of priority, most of them spending far more on weapons of destruction than it would cost to install an early warning system able to alert their citizens to danger. If we but have the will to do it, we can make this world a much safer place in which to live instead of squandering our ingenuity and resources on that which can only destroy life and fracture its habitat. That is precisely the kind of choice that God gave us: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore *choose life* that you and your descendents may live” (Deut. 30:19).

To be sure, this will not be a quick or easy task and, in our petulance, we whine at God for not having already done our work for us. But remember, God himself has been working on behalf of our world for a lot longer than we have. At the outset, he spread his labors over six days rather than commanding an instantaneous creation that would be complete from the outset. Instead of pulling the world out of a hat full blown, God followed a gradual progression, an orderly sequence, a purposeful process that has evolved to the present day. We must infer from this approach that he “took his time” because the kind of creativity that honors freedom takes patience even for God. If God never gives up in his efforts to create something worthwhile, if he is willing to work one step at a time, who are we to refuse to join him in that task?

The fact that the job is not finished, either for God or for us, does not mean that he has consigned us to live with a succession of tragedies as acts of judgment, punishment, or warning. Rather, he has joined us in the struggle and made himself vulnerable to their impact. In the magnificent eighth

chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul wrote of the emptiness, brokenness, and sense of futility that haunts the whole created order (v. 20). No one could have painted the tragic dimension of life on a vaster canvas than did Paul in his personification of every part of creation joining together in a common chorus of cries. But he moved swiftly to interpret this writhing as the travail of an expectant mother about to bring forth her most cherished hope (v. 22b). The spasms that convulse life are but the labor pains by which the creation is struggling to “be set free . . . and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (v. 21).

Paul’s key word in this passage is “groaning” which he attributes not only to creation but to the Christian community as we share creation’s ordeal (v. 23) and to the divine Comforter who intercedes on our behalf with “groanings too deep for words” (v. 26). Herein lies our ultimate hope for the transformation of tragedy, not that we have discovered a neat theodicy which somehow “explains” the problem of suffering, but that we have experienced the sovereign God striving with us “in all things” until he once again makes them “good” (v. 28).

So, to answer directly the question, “Where was God when the tsunami struck?,” he was on every mile of those battered beaches weeping with those who wept, groaning for the day when nature and all of its inhabitants will know a better world in which to live. As a child of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionaries working in the area put it:

When wave upon wave of water hit shores thousands of miles from where they began, You were there.

When these waves crashed away everything in their path, You were there.

When the people You loved enough to die for ran for their very lives, You were there.

When houses fell and possessions were swept away, You were there.

You saw as these waves broke buildings, stole lives, left terror and grief in their wake.

Did Your heart break? I don’t have to ask.

I imagine Your tears would put the waters of tsunamis to shame.

In the midst of death and destruction, the God of the Universe was there. You were there.<sup>3</sup> ■

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Blackaby, cited by *BP News*, January 24, 2005. For commentary on such “explanations” see Bob Terry, “Simply Unexplainable,” *The Alabama Baptist*, February 10, 2005, 2.

<sup>2</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “God and the Tsunami: Theology in the Headlines,” *Crosswalk.com*, January 3-4, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> “He was There: A Personal Reflection,” *CBF Fellowship!*, February/March, 2005, 3.

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# There Is No Tomorrow

*By Bill Moyers, Journalist  
New York City, NY*

**Note:** This article is taken from Moyers' remarks upon receiving the Global Environmental Citizen Award from the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School.

One of the biggest changes in politics in my lifetime is that the delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington.

Theology asserts propositions that cannot be proven true; ideologues hold stoutly to a worldview despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality. When ideology and theology couple, their offspring are not always bad, but they are always blind. And there is the danger: voters and politicians alike, oblivious to the facts.

Remember James Watt, President Ronald Reagan's first secretary of the interior? My favorite online environmental journal, the ever-engaging *Grist*, reminded us recently of how James Watt told the U.S. Congress that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. In public testimony he said, "after the last tree is felled, Christ will come back."

Beltway elites snickered. The press corps didn't know what he was talking about. But James Watt was serious. So were his compatriots out across the country. They are the people who believe the Bible is literally true—one-third of the American electorate, if a recent Gallup poll is accurate. In this past election several million good and decent citizens went to the polls believing in the rapture index.

That's right—the rapture index. Google it and you will find that the best-selling books in America today are the 12 volumes of the "Left Behind" series written by the Christian fundamentalist and religious-right warrior Timothy LaHaye. These true believers subscribe to a fantastical theology concocted in the 19th century by a couple of immigrant preachers who took disparate passages from the Bible and wove them into a narrative that has captivated the imagination of millions of Americans.

Its outline is rather simple, if bizarre (the British writer George Monbiot recently did a brilliant dissection of it and I am indebted to him for adding to my own understanding): Once Israel has occupied the rest of its "biblical lands," legions of the antichrist will attack it, triggering a final showdown in the valley of Armageddon.

As the Jews who have not been converted are burned, the

Messiah will return for the rapture. True believers will be lifted out of their clothes and transported to Heaven, where, seated next to the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents suffer plagues of boils, sores, locusts, and frogs during the several years of tribulation that follow.

I'm not making this up. Like Monbiot, I've read the literature. I've reported on these people, following some of them from Texas to the West Bank. They are sincere, serious and polite as they tell you they feel called to help bring the rapture on as fulfillment of biblical prophecy. That's why they have declared solidarity with Israel and the Jewish settlements and backed up their support with money and volunteers. It's why the invasion of Iraq for them was a warm-up act, predicted in the Book of Revelation where four angels "which are bound in the great river Euphrates will be released to slay the third part of man." A war with Islam in the Middle East is not something to be feared but welcomed—an essential conflagration on the road to redemption. The last time I Googled it, the rapture index stood at 144—just one point below the critical threshold when the whole thing will blow, the son of God will return, the righteous will enter Heaven and sinners will be condemned to eternal hellfire.

So what does this mean for public policy and the environment? Go to *Grist* to read a remarkable work of reporting by the journalist Glenn Scherer—"The Road to Environmental Apocalypse." Read it and you will see how millions of Christian fundamentalists may believe that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed—even hastened—as a sign of the coming apocalypse.

As *Grist* makes clear, we're not talking about a handful of fringe lawmakers who hold or are beholden to these beliefs. Nearly half the U.S. Congress before the recent election—231 legislators in total and more since the election—are backed by the religious right.

Forty-five senators and 186 members of the 108th Congress earned 80 to 100 percent approval ratings from the three most influential Christian right advocacy groups. They include Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Assistant Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Conference Chair Rick Santorum



of Pennsylvania, Policy Chair Jon Kyl of Arizona, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, and Majority Whip Roy Blunt. The only Democrat to score 100 percent with the Christian coalition was Sen. Zell Miller of Georgia, who recently quoted from the biblical book of Amos on the Senate floor: “The days will come, sayeth the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land.” He seemed to be relishing the thought.

And why not? There’s a constituency for it. A 2002 Time-CNN poll found that 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies found in the book of Revelation are going to come true. Nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the 9/11 attacks. Drive across the country with your radio tuned to the more than 1,600 Christian radio stations, or in the motel turn on some of the 250 Christian TV stations, and you can hear some of this end-time gospel. And you will come to understand why people under the spell of such potent prophecies cannot be expected, as Grist puts it, “to worry about the environment. Why care about the earth, when the droughts, floods, famine, and pestilence brought by ecological collapse are signs of the apocalypse foretold in the Bible? Why care about global climate change when you and yours will be rescued in the rapture? And why care about converting from oil to solar when the same God who performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes can whip up a few billion barrels of light crude with a word?”

Because these people believe that until Christ does return, the Lord will provide. One of their texts is a high school history book, *America’s Providential History*. You’ll find there these words: “The secular or socialist has a limited-resource mentality and views the world as a pie . . . that needs to be cut up so everyone can get a piece.” However, “[t]he Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God’s earth . . . while many secularists view the world as overpopulated, Christians know that God has made the earth sufficiently large with plenty of resources to accommodate all of the people.”

No wonder Karl Rove goes around the White House whistling that Militant hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers.” He turned out millions of the foot soldiers on November 2, including many who have made the apocalypse a powerful driving force in modern American politics.

It is hard for the journalist to report a story like this with

any credibility. So let me put it on a personal level. I myself don’t know how to be in this world without expecting a confident future and getting up every morning to do what I can to bring it about. So I have always been an optimist. Now, however, I think of my friend on Wall Street whom I once asked: “What do you think of the market?” “I’m optimistic,” he answered. “Then why do you look so worried?” And he answered: “Because I am not sure my optimism is justified.”

I’m not, either. Once upon a time I agreed with Eric Chivian and the Center for Health and the Global Environment that people will protect the natural environment when they realize its importance to their health and to the health and lives of their children. Now I am not so sure. It’s not that I don’t want to believe that—it’s just that I read the news and connect the dots.

I read that the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has declared the election a mandate for President Bush on the environment. This for an administration:

- That wants to rewrite the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act protecting rare plant and animal species and their habitats, as well as the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires the government to judge beforehand whether actions might damage natural resources.
- That wants to relax pollution limits for ozone; eliminate vehicle tailpipe inspections, and ease pollution standards for cars, sport-utility vehicles and diesel-powered big trucks and heavy equipment.
- That wants a new international audit law to allow corporations to keep certain information about environmental problems secret from the public.
- That wants to drop all its new-source review suits against polluting, coal-fired power plants and weaken consent decrees reached earlier with coal companies.
- That wants to open the Arctic [National] Wildlife Refuge to drilling and increase drilling in Padre Island National Seashore, the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world and the last great coastal wild land in America.

I read the news just this week and learned how the Environmental Protection Agency had planned to spend \$9 million—\$2 million of it from the administration’s friends at



the American Chemistry Council—to pay poor families to continue to use pesticides in their homes. These pesticides have been linked to neurological damage in children, but instead of ordering an end to their use, the government and the industry were going to offer the families \$970 each, as well as a camcorder and children's clothing, to serve as guinea pigs for the study.

I read all this in the news.

I read the news just last night and learned that the administration's friends at the International Policy Network, which is supported by Exxon Mobil and others of like mind, have issued a new report that climate change is "a myth, sea levels are not rising" [and] scientists who believe catastrophe is possible are "an embarrassment."

I not only read the news but the fine print of the recent appropriations bill passed by Congress, with the obscure (and obscene) riders attached to it: a clause removing all endangered species protections from pesticides; language prohibiting judicial review for a forest in Oregon; a waiver of environmental review for grazing permits on public lands; a rider pressed by developers to weaken protection for crucial habitats in California.

I read all this and look up at the pictures on my desk, next to the computer—pictures of my grandchildren. I see the future looking back at me from those photographs and I say, "Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do." And then I am stopped short by the thought: "That's not right. We do know what we are doing. We are stealing their future. Betraying their trust. Despoiling their world."

And I ask myself: Why? Is it because we don't care? Because we are greedy? Because we have lost our capacity for outrage, our ability to sustain indignation at injustice?

What has happened to our moral imagination?

On the heath Lear asks Gloucester: "How do you see the world?" And Gloucester, who is blind, answers: "I see it feelingly."

I see it feelingly.

The news is not good these days. I can tell you, though, that as a journalist I know the news is never the end of the story. The news can be the truth that sets us free—not only to feel but to fight for the future we want. And the will to fight is the antidote to despair, the cure for cynicism, and the answer to those faces looking back at me from those photographs on my desk. What we need is what the ancient Israelites called *hochma*—the science of the heart—the capacity to see, to feel and then to act as if the future depended on you.

Believe me, it does. ■

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## Antonin Scalia: Our Next Chief Justice?

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

St. Paul School of Theology, St. Louis, MO

Justice Antonin Scalia joined the Supreme Court in 1986 as its most recent appointee. He soon made a reputation as the most far-right member of the Court. He is an outspoken leader of the very conservative Federalist Society and a devoted right-wing Catholic.

Alan Dershowitz, in his book *Supreme Injustice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), wrote that Scalia's "conservatism, according to a professor who is an expert in these matters, are 'of the Old World European sort, rooted in the authority of the Church and the military. It is more reminiscent of French, Italian and Spanish clerical conservatism than of American conservatism with its libertarian bent.'"

According to a *Washington Post* story, Antonin Scalia was sent to "an elite church-run military prep school in Manhattan where one of his classmates remembered him at age seventeen as 'an arch-conservative Catholic [who] could have been a member of the Curia'" (Dershowitz, 168).

Scalia has generally followed the political program of the U. S. Catholic Bishops against abortion outlined in their 1974 *Pastoral Letter*. The *Letter*, which was directed to the Catholic Lawyers Association and among other groups such as the Knights of Columbus, had as its primary focus the influencing of judicial appointments so as "to reverse the decision that legalizes abortion." Scalia has rarely if ever departed from the Bishops' position opposing abortion and even uses the language of the Bishops in calling an embryo or fetus "an unborn child."

Justice Scalia is always in attendance at the annual Red Mass in Washington, D.C. The Red Mass [see CET, April, 2002, 26] is a medieval institution that has been repackaged in the United States in the twentieth century to influence judges and other lawmakers as well as the culture of the states and nation. Although it has some religious significance, the event has been used by Catholic bishops and cardinals as an opportunity to advocate the political proposals of the Vatican such as opposition to abortion and separation of church and state, support of aid to parochial schools, and reinterpreting personhood as taking place at conception rather than at birth. There is an underlying assumption that law and morality began with the Roman Catholic Church and divine revelation.

Scalia not only attends Red Masses in national and state celebrations, but speaks on occasion to those who meet after the Mass. In other words, he is a papal loyalist who appears to hold the Pope's authority to be above the authority of secular civil government. In a formal address to a Catholic audience in Fort Wayne, Indiana on

October 14, 2001, following a Red Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Scalia was reported by *The National Catholic Register* as saying, “We attorneys and intellectuals who don’t like to be regarded as unsophisticated can have no greater [role] model than St. Thomas More. Speaking of the beheaded advisor to King Henry VIII, the *Reporter* indicated that “the saint died because he refused to recognize a king’s authority as being higher than the Pope’s, and his conviction was rejected by society, friends and ‘even his wife,’” Scalia said. (*NCR*, November 4, 2001)

What actually happened in England during the reign of Henry VIII was an Act of Parliament in 1534, known as the Act of Succession, that forbade all payments by the government to the Pope and ruled that all bishops were to be elected rather than appointed by the Pope. The recognition of papal authority was done away. (Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, Charles Scribners, New York, 1943, 404)

Henry and each of his successors were declared “the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England.” This “was not understood by either the King or Parliament as conferring on the King spiritual leadership such as ordination, the administration of the sacraments and the like, but in all else it practically put the King in the place of the Pope. (Ibid.) The Lutheran Reformation had already taken place, and in 1535 John Calvin was safely in Protestant Basel. So it was not just England that rejected papal authority.

Although there were various Protestant revolts against the Papacy, the one in England was less a doctrinal revolt than a question of supremacy. Sir Thomas More was willing to accept the Act of Succession but unwilling to take the oath of supremacy to the King. He saw this as a matter of conscience. He was convicted of treason on the basis of perjured evidence and executed.

Scalia was correct in honoring St. Thomas More as a man of conscience, but not because of his rejecting of the authority of civil government.

What Scalia did not mention in his commendation of More is that England’s rejection of the papal authority was timely, because Pope Paul III in July, 1542, “reorganized the Inquisition largely on the Spanish model, on a universal scale, though of course its actual establishment took place only where it had the support of friendly civil authorities.” (Walker, 424) So England was spared.

Scalia, who led the Supreme Court majority in stopping the counting of the Florida vote in the Bush v Gore Presidential election and thus gave the election to Bush, is discussed in that context by Dershowitz. Among the possible hypotheses for such action is that one of the Justices “hopes to be promoted to Chief Justice when the incumbent retires, as he is expected to do if a candidate of his party becomes President.”

Another hypothetical reason is the belief that a certain candidate will ensure a solid majority on the Court to support “our views of the Constitution.” Other hypotheses are explored.

However, one of the chief values of Dershowitz’s book is its discussion of the “code of judicial conduct which has prohibited judges with a significant material interest in the outcome of a case from participating in its deliberations or decisions.” Every “contemporary American judicial code expressly prohibits a judge from ‘taking part’ in any case in which his personal self-interest may be involved,” and “self-interest is broadly defined so as to avoid even the appearance of

bias” or the “impression that any person can improperly influence him or unduly enjoy his favor, or that he is afflicted by kinship, rank, position, or influence by any party or other person.” (Dershowitz, 98)

What *Supreme Injustice* did not reveal is that Scalia’s son, Paul, is a member of a militant multi-million-dollar organization, *Priests for Life*. That organization’s leader, Father Frank Pavone, not only endorses clinic blockades and advertises in newspapers, TV, and on billboards, but also urges voters to vote for anti-abortion candidates. (*The Village Voice*, May 29, 2001, 51-52) *Priests for Life* was so important politically that in May, 2000 Presidential candidate George W. Bush met with Pavone (*Conscience*, Summer 2001, 5).

The American people may never know how close a relationship Justice Scalia has with his son, and hence with *Priests for Life*.

That, of course, is only part of the Scalia story. Since Scalia has already indicated in his use of Sir Thomas More as his role model, evidently because More refused to accept a King’s authority (civil government) as higher than the Pope, it is essential to refer to the March 28, 1995 Encyclical of Pope John Paul, known as *Evangelium Vitae*. In that encyclical, the Pope specifically called abortion “contrary to the Law of God” and said “It is never licit to obey it or . . . vote for it.” Since there is no statement against abortion in the Bible, the “Law of God” is proclaimed by the Pope and therefore binding on those who place loyalty to the Pope ahead of secular law and democratic judgment. The Pope specifically wrote, “Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality.” Although at least one lawyer admitted to practice before the Supreme Court called on Scalia to recuse himself in an abortion case, Scalia did not do so.

Justice Scalia also doesn’t easily accept criticism. An attorney in Independence, Missouri, who has practiced law for thirty years wrote him in October, 2000, questioning his “participation in the activities and agenda” of the Federalist Society, an organization of right-wing lawyers, judges, and legislators such as Orrin Hatch. Its significance is evident from the decision by George W. Bush to consult it rather than the American Bar Association in making judicial appointments. Attorney J. Martin Kerr wrote, “Your participation and speaking at meetings of the Federalist Society would have the appearance of impropriety in that you are engaging in political activities touching upon the very issues that come before you as a sitting judge of the United States Supreme Court” (October 12, 2000).

Scalia’s reply on October 27 denied that the Federalist Society is a “political organization” and added, “I confess never before to have received a letter—not even from a non-lawyer—accusing me of ethical improprieties on the Supreme Court bench. This suggests that, far from being (as you unctuously describe yourself) a ‘humble lawyer,’ you have an uncommon supply of cheek. That can sometimes be admired, but not when wedded to ignorance.”

One can only suspect that Scalia would be even more angry at Dershowitz, who not only accuses him of partisan political conduct in his decision in Bush v. Gore with respect to the Florida vote, but who also wrote, “Scalia was known more for his ideological extremes than for his scholarship. Few would have ranked him among the most distinguished theoreticians of constitutional law; but everyone would have ranked him as among the most ideological of right-wing theorists....It was his extremism, not his academic distinction, that brought him to the attention of the Reagan administration and ultimately got him his job on the high Court” (199). ■



# The Faith of Mother Teresa

By Pamela R. Durso, Associate Director  
Baptist History and Heritage Society

Mother Teresa has long been my hero. A missionary of love and hope to the entire world, Mother Teresa profoundly shaped my understanding of the Christian faith. She provided for me a model of what Christ calls each of us to be and do. Every day of her life, no matter where she was or what she was doing, she lived her faith.

But to be honest, I always found Mother Teresa's faith to be a bit simplistic, and I have never been able to resonate with her complete and unquestioning assurance. I never understood how she managed to work among the poorest of the poor and to wash the bodies of lepers and AIDS patients without asking why, without questioning God's role in all the suffering. But in recent days, I have discovered that she had her share of doubts.

On October 14, 2003, while listening to NPR on my car radio, I heard Barbara Bradley Hagerty's interview with Father Brain Kolodiejchuk, the chief advocate of Mother Teresa's cause for sainthood. Kolodiejchuk stated that letters written by Mother Teresa to her superiors reveal that she had serious doubts and experienced years of spiritual darkness.

The time of darkness began in 1948, the year that Mother Teresa began her new work in Calcutta, India. The darkness came after two years of intense and ecstatic spiritual experiences that began while she traveling by train to the Himalayan region of Darjeeling. On the train, she heard God calling her to devote herself to "the poorest of the poor" and to live among them. Teresa then petitioned the Catholic Church for permission to follow God's calling and to set up a convent in Calcutta. During the two years in which she prepared to begin her new work, Teresa had numerous vivid and clear visions of Jesus. Jesus spoke to her and revealed himself to her in profound ways.

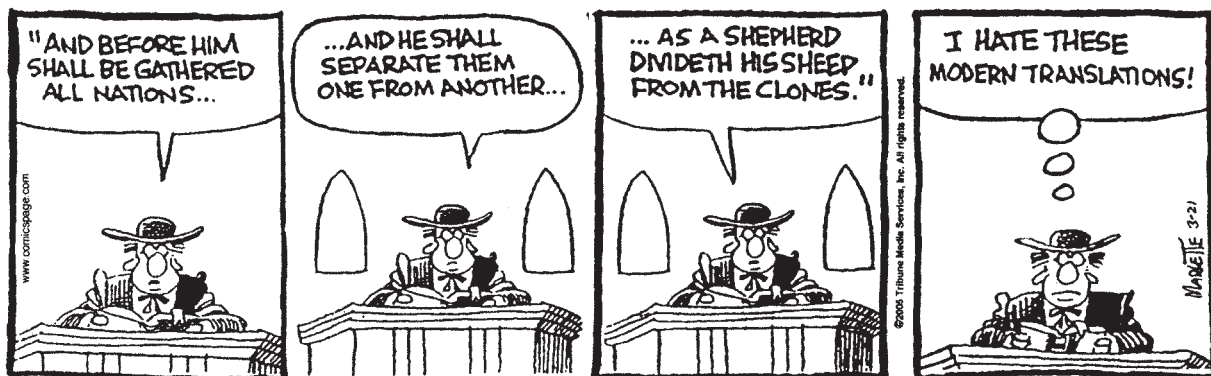
In 1948, the plans were completed for her work, and Teresa

began her ministry in the streets of Calcutta. Shortly after she started this new work, the visions stopped. Jesus never again came to her nor spoke to her. The incredible union she had experienced with Jesus completely disappeared, and Teresa was bereft. She felt that God had abandoned her, and she wrote of her tremendous pain in letters to her superiors. Kolodiejchuk read one letter in which she wrote, "I call, I cling, I want and there is no one to answer. The darkness is so dark and I am alone." In another letter, Teresa wrote of the "terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing."

Mother Teresa's letter revealed that this darkness, this feeling of rejection and abandonment, continued throughout her life. She never again had an ecstatic spiritual experience. She never again felt that close intimate union with Christ that she had experienced in 1946.

What I find truly amazing about these new revelations about Mother Teresa is that this woman who knew spiritual emptiness and who knew loneliness and darkness continued to give herself so completely to those around her. She never stopped loving people. She never stopped seeking to meet needs. She never stopped doing the work of the kingdom. She lived every day in faithful obedience to God.

When I heard this story on NPR, I was floored. In all the things I have read over the years about and by Mother Teresa, I found no clue that she had experienced great despair. I never knew that she felt distanced from God. Yet knowing that she had her doubts and her times of great questioning have made me love and admire her even more than before. Knowing how she lived out her faith and now knowing of her spiritual struggle, I know that this small Catholic nun will forever be my greatest hero. ■





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# The Power of Reconciliation

By Jim Wallis, *Sojourners* Editor

There is probably no more divisive time in America than an election season. So I thought it appropriate to tell a story of reconciliation that is very important to me, and one that I have never told before. It is about my relationship with a fellow Christian who, if he were still alive, would likely be voting differently than me in the upcoming election.

Bill Bright was the founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelical organization on campuses around the country. Motivated, above all else, by the Great Commission, Bill Bright wanted to reach every person on the planet for Christ “in this generation.” Concerned about the “moral degeneration” of America, Bright wanted America to come back to God—which for him meant an ultra-conservative political agenda. Bill and I were both evangelical Christians, but we clearly disagreed on a whole range of political issues.

In 1976, Bill Bright joined a far-right member of Congress named John Conlan and other conservatives in a project to mobilize evangelical prayer and cell groups for political purposes. It was, in fact, the first attempt to create a “Religious Right” in American politics—several years before the founding of groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition.

We at *Sojourners* decided to investigate. It became the most extensive investigative project we had ever undertaken, and resulted in a cover story in the magazine titled “The Plan to Save America.” Bright was publicly embarrassed by our expose and the whole experience. Though we had been scrupulously careful, backing up every fact in the story with at least three sources, Bright angrily denounced me. We invited Bright and the others involved to respond, both before and after the article was published, but they chose not to. Because we also differed on almost every political question from Vietnam to domestic issues, a bitter and public polarization grew up between Bill Bright and myself.

The bad blood continued for many years. I remember a particularly painful moment one year at a dinner for evangelical leaders, when Bright again went on the attack against me in a very public way, calling me a “liar.”

More than two decades later, Bright and I found ourselves at yet another religious leaders’ dinner. When I saw him across the room, I swallowed hard and headed in his direction. He obviously didn’t recognize me after so long. I introduced myself, and he became quiet. I said, “Bill, I need to apologize to you. I was in a hotel several months ago and knew you were there too. I should have come to your room

and tried to mend the painful breach between us after all these years. I didn’t do that, and I should have. I’m sorry.”

The now-old man reached out and wrapped his arms around me. Then he said, “Jim, we need to come together. It’s been so long, and the Lord would have us come together.” We both had tears in our eyes and embraced for a long time. Then Bill said, “Jim, I’m so worried about the poor, about what’s going to happen to them. You’re bringing us together on that, and I want to support you.” I was amazed. We agreed to get together soon.

A few months later, Bill and I were again, coincidentally, at the same hotel. I called Bill and we agreed to a walk on the beach together the next morning. Bill and I shared our own conversion stories. We shared our callings and dreams for our respective ministries, and how we might be more connected. Bill then astounded me, saying, “You know, Jim, I’m kind of a Great Commission guy.” I smiled and nodded my head. “And I’ve discovered that caring for the poor is part of the Great Commission, because Jesus instructed us to ‘teach the nations to observe all the things I have commanded you.’ And Jim, Jesus certainly taught us to care for the poor, didn’t he? Caring for the poor is part of the Great Commission!” said Bill Bright. When we got back to the hotel, Bill asked if we could pray together. We sat down and grasped each other’s hands. First praying for each other, we also prayed for each other’s ministries. Bill Bright prayed for me, and for the work of Call to Renewal and *Sojourners*. When we were finished, he said he wanted to raise some money for our “work of the Lord.”

Bill, who was now more than 80 years old, soon began to get sick. I kept track of how he was doing. Then one day, I got a letter—from Bill Bright. Here’s what the letter said:  
My Dear Jim,

Congratulations on your great ministry for our Lord. I rejoice with you. An unexpected gift designated to my personal use makes possible this modest contribution to your magazine. I wish I had the means to add at least three more zeroes to the enclosed check. Warm affection in Christ. Yours for helping to fulfill the Great Commission each year until our Lord returns. Bill

Inside the letter was check for \$1,000.

As I was reading Bill’s letter, my colleague Duane Shank walked into my office. “Did you hear?” he asked. “Bill Bright just died.” We looked at the postmark on the letter and compared it to the news reports of Bill’s death. We concluded that writing me this letter was one of the last things that Bill

Bright did on earth. Bill sent a \$1,000 gift to the magazine that had exposed his most embarrassing moment more than 30 years before, as an affirmation of the ministry of another Christian leader who he once regarded as his enemy. I couldn't hold back the tears, and can't again as I write down this story for the first time.

The experience of my relationship with Bill Bright has taught me much about the promise and power of reconciliation. I will never again deny the prospect of coming together with those with whom I disagree. It is indeed the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to break down the walls between us. Thank you, Bill. I will never forget you. ■

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## What Jesus Wouldn't Do

**Editor's Note:** The following is an edited excerpt from Jim Wallis' new book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (Harper San Francisco).

The politics of Jesus is a problem for the religious right.

In Matthew's 25th chapter, Jesus speaks of the hungry, the homeless, the stranger, prisoners, and the sick and promises he will challenge all his followers on the judgment day with these words, "As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me." James Forbes, the pastor of Riverside Church in New York City, concludes from that text that, "Nobody gets to heaven without a letter of reference from the poor!" How many of America's most famous television preachers could produce the letter?

The hardest saying of Jesus and perhaps the most controversial in our post-Sept. 11 world must be: "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you." Let's be honest: How many churches in the United States have heard sermons preached from either of these Jesus texts in the years since America was viciously attacked on that world-changing

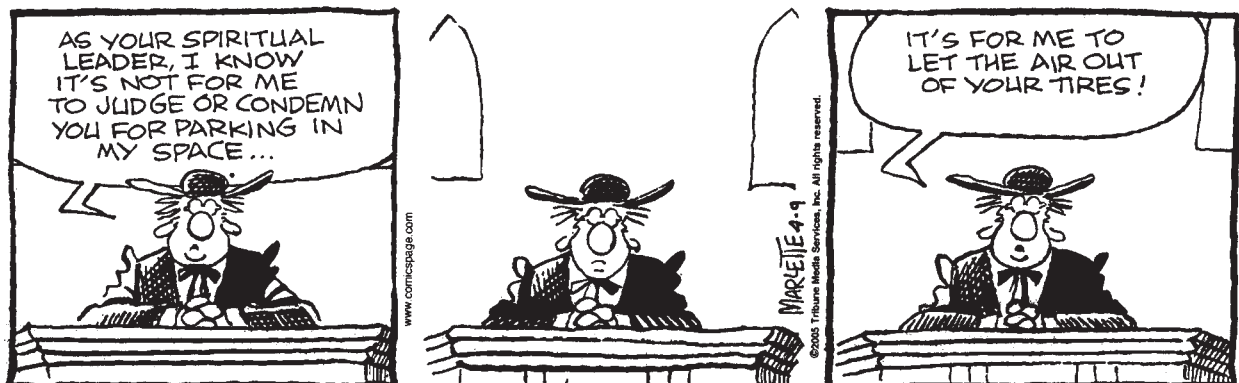
September morning in 2001? Shouldn't we at least have a debate about what the words of Jesus mean in the new world of terrorist threats and pre-emptive wars?

Christ commands us to not only see the splinter in our adversary's eye but also the beams in our own, which often obstruct our own vision. To name the face of evil in the brutality of terrorist attacks is good theology, but to say they are evil and we are good is bad theology that can lead to dangerous foreign policy. Christ instructs us to love our enemies, which does not mean a submission to their hostile agendas or domination, but does mean treating them as human beings also created in the image of God and respecting their human rights as adversaries and even as prisoners. The words of Jesus are either authoritative for Christians, or they are not. And they are not set aside by the very real threats of terrorism. The threat of terrorism does not overturn Christian ethics.

The issue here is not partisan politics, and there are no easy political solutions. The governing party has increasingly struck a religious tone in an aggressive foreign policy that seems much more nationalist than Christian, while the opposition party has offered more confusion than clarity. In an election we choose between very imperfect choices. Yet it is always important to examine what is at stake prayerfully and theologically.

This examination among evangelicals became clear in the 2004 Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility, an unprecedented call to social action from the National Association of Evangelicals. In contrast to the Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson era, evangelicals are now showing moral leadership in the fight against global poverty, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and sustainability of God's earth.

These changes represent both a reaction against overt partisanship and a desire to apply Christian ethics to a broader set of issues. Many people of faith have grown weary of the religious right's attempts to narrow the moral litmus test to abortion and gay marriage. For example, when likely voters were asked in a 2004 poll whether they would rather hear a candidate's position on poverty or on gay marriage, 75 percent chose poverty. Only 17 percent chose gay marriage. Any



serious reading of the Bible points toward poverty as a religious issue, and candidates should always be asked by Christian voters how they will treat “the least of these.” Stewardship of God’s earth is clearly a question of Christian ethics. Truth telling is also a religious issue that should be applied to a candidate’s rationales for war, tax cuts, or any other policy, as is humility in avoiding the language of “righteous empire,” which too easily confuses the roles of God, church, and nation.

War, of course, is also a deeply theological matter. The near unanimous opinion of religious leaders worldwide that the Iraq war failed to fit “just war” criteria is an issue for many Christians, especially as the warnings from religious leaders have proved prophetically and tragically accurate. The “plagues of war,” as the pope has referred to the continuing problems in Iraq, are in part a consequence of a “Christian president” simply not listening to the counsel of religious leaders who tried to speak to the White House. What has happened to the “consistent ethic of life,” suggested by Catholic social teaching, which speaks against abortion, capital punishment, poverty, war, and a range of human rights abuses too often selectively respected by pro-life advocates?

The politics of Jesus is a problem for the religious right.

The religious right’s grip on public debates about values has been driven in part by a media that continues to give air-time to the loudest religious voices, rather than the most representative, leaving millions of Christians and other people of faith without a say in the values debate. But this is starting to change as progressive and prophetic faith voices are speaking out with a confidence and moral urgency not seen for 25 years. Mobilized by human suffering in many places, groups motivated by religious social conscience (including many evangelicals not defined by the religious right) have hit a new stride in efforts to combat poverty, destructive wars, human rights violations, pandemics like HIV/AIDS, and genocide in places like Sudan.

In politics, the best interest of the country is served when the prophetic voice of religion is heard—challenging both right and left from consistent moral ground. The evangelical Christians of the 19th century combined revivalism with social reform and helped lead movements for abolition and women’s suffrage—not to mention the faith-based movement that directly preceded the rise of the religious right, namely the American civil rights movement led by the black churches.

The truth is that most of the important movements for social change in America have been fueled by religion—progressive religion. The stark moral challenges of our time have once again begun to awaken this prophetic tradition. As the religious Right loses influence, nothing could be better for the health of both church and society than a return of the moral center that anchors our nation in a common humanity. If you listen, these voices can be heard rising again. ■

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# A Dad's War Story

*By Milton W. Kliesch, Pastor*  
Osyka Baptist Church, MS

**Note:** Rev. Kliesch's son is serving in Iraq with an infantry airborne unit that does routine patrols in the Baghdad area.

I think about my nineteen-year-old son in Iraq all the time. I wake up thinking about him; I go to bed thinking about him. I wonder what he is doing, where is he, and what he is thinking and feeling. Is he alive? Is he hurt? Is he safe? I even dream about him. I wait for his next phone call, his next letter, or his next e-mail. When they don't come, sometimes for a week or so, I really become anxious. But we have learned that no news is usually good news.

There is a quiet anguish at our house. It is underneath the surface, unseen, but you know that it is there. I pray a lot! Most of all I pray my version of the sinner's prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon my son." Of course, I pray for his safety. I pray that he will have the wisdom, skill, and courage necessary to do his job and stay safe. I pray for his protection. But most of all I pray over-and-over my version of the sinner's prayer. These words seem to be the best words for me.

I try to be honest about this war only to find that most who support it look at me as if I am unpatriotic. I listen to their attempts to defend the cause. In their words I detect a lot of pride, not of the patriotic flavor but of the hubris type. To me this seems to be fueling a lot of the support for this war. At times there seems to be a thrill and a sense of jubilation in their voices that America is fighting another war. That is probably one reason many have trouble being honest about it. They are blinded by their pride.

I have been angry with a lot of things related to this war. But what really raises my anger is the gloating that I hear and see. For some, the fighting and the dying are like the Super bowl and the World Series all wrapped in one. They cheer when we are victorious; they stick out their chest and challenge the enemy when he taunts. It is the gloating that causes me such pain.

Many who cheer this war on, are not in the battles. They are in the stands. They are observers, not participants. No one seems to be eager to bare the sacrifices. I suspect that as long as many do not have to sacrifice in any form or fashion, this war will continue to be a "just war" in their eyes, especially as long as someone else is making the "just" sacrifices.

My son did sign-up! He signed up before this war even started. He signed up before he graduated from high school. It is called "Delayed Entry." He committed eight years of his

life to the Army before he could manage his own checking account. Sure, we tried to talk him out of it. In spite of my attempts to tell him that there was going to be a war, he signed up. In spite of my efforts to explain that everything in the Army is about life and death, he signed up. He signed up for the college money. He signed up for the monthly check. He signed up for the girls because his recruiter told him that the girls were pretty in the Army. And of course, he signed up to serve his country. I am proud of him, proud that he is fulfilling his duty.

One day someone made the comment to me, "Well, all who are there, signed up." He happened to be a strong supporter of the war with a 19 year-old son in college. I agreed with him. Then I challenged him to take his 19 year-old son and sign him up for the Army with a request to go to Iraq. He became quiet and said nothing more about the war. He hasn't mentioned the war to me again. It is real easy to be gung-ho about this war when you don't personally have to make any sacrifices, whether in family members or in taxes. That makes war real easy.

For me the election doesn't seem to matter any more. I've expended enough energy and emotions on it. And now, it just doesn't seem to be that important. As I watch all the election news, it seems to me that a monster has been released in our country and no one knows how to cage it again. Many see the world in "black-and-white" with no gray areas. Maybe that is the monster.

I am not a pacifist, never have been, even though I realize that Christ was. Neither do I support the "Just War Theory." There is no such thing as a just war.

I feel anguish in my soul. These are difficult times to be against the war in Iraq. These are difficult times to have a son in the middle of it. If he weren't there, it would probably be easy to wait this war out, keep my mouth shut, and keep my friends happy.

I have felt patronized by both those who support the cause and those who oppose it. I have also felt supported by them. I don't know where this war is going. At times I am not very optimistic about its outcome. I do hope that all the "rosy" scenarios do come to pass. The politics don't matter any more. What does is my son. I want this war to be over. I want my son to come home. ■



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# Is The War on Terror A Myth?

*By Hugh Nicholson, Assistant Professor of Religion  
Coe College, ILL*

**I**n desperate situations man will always have recourse to desperate means—and our present day political myths have been such a desperate means.” Thus the philosopher Ernst Cassirer reflected on the then recent events of National Socialism in light of his extensive study of myth and ritual. Noting that even so-called primitive societies have recourse to magical rites only in tasks that exceed their natural capabilities, Cassirer located the roots of National Socialism in the seemingly insurmountable social and economic problems that confronted the leaders of the Weimar Republic.

Only in a situation perceived as desperate could a populace fall under the influence of the fantastically irrational political myths so cunningly fabricated by the architects of Nazism.

I wonder if the threat of terrorism that looms over post-9/11 American society also constitutes such a desperate situation. Like the stereotypical tribesman confronted by an epidemic or natural disaster, are we not confronted by a threat against which we feel ourselves to be powerless?

Almost immediately after they occurred, the attacks of September 11, 2001, were defined as acts of war. No other concept seemed to express adequately the enormity of these events. And yet, defining these acts in this way made inevitable a response—large-scale military action—that seems largely ineffective against terrorism. Unlike a hostile state, a decentralized and nebulous terrorist organization appears to be strengthened, not diminished, by the suffering and destruction visited upon an identifiable population.

So does the “war on terror” constitute a desperate means? The absence of a causal link between the suffering of an identifiable population and the elimination of terrorist activity likens the purely military response to terrorism to a magical rite. Typical of magical thinking is a blurring of the distinction between mere expression and causation. Whatever expresses death—pins stuck in a voodoo doll, for example—is regarded as a cause of death.

One wonders, in light of indications that the nefarious Al Qaeda network continues to thrive, whether the war in Afghanistan served primarily as a cathartic expression of our national outrage, one sustained by the unrealistic hope that the elusive Al Qaeda would automatically—one might even say “sympathetically”—suffer the same fate as the easily targetable Taliban.

A “magical” tendency to read causation into a relation of similarity might also account for the astonishing success of the administration, aided by a complicit media, in constructing an erroneous belief in a link between the events of September 11 and Iraq. Where there is only similarity—Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden are both bad Guys—we were encouraged to assume a conspiratorial link. There is tragic irony in the fact that this canard, like the stereotypical magical formula, has effected what it signified, for today Iraq is a site of terrorist activity.

More recent theories of ritual no longer regard magical rites as desperate, irrational outbursts of activity arising in default of adequate technical knowledge. Rather, such rites are symbolic actions that structure human attitudes and behavior in what would otherwise be disorienting situations. For example, the rainmaking rites found in many traditional cultures express an attitude of expectancy with regard to uncertain weather.

This understanding of magical activity as a kind of attitudinal “focusing mechanism” suggests that the war on terror, while not irrational, is as much a symbolic response as a practical one. Out of the complex and uncertain welter of feeling and attitude that 9/11 left in its wake, the war on terror distilled and crystallized a few: anger, pride, loyalty, and the desire for retribution.

The war on terror is a myth, a culturally shared narrative that provides authoritative models for acting and feeling. Such political myths define social reality in such a way that certain forms of acting and feeling in a situation seem natural, while others are inconceivable. The Manichean structure of the war on terror construes the current global situation such that all but the most aggressive military response appears cowardly and irresponsible.

Cassirer urged his contemporaries not to be fooled by the face-value absurdity of political myths, which conceals a formidable power to objectify and mobilize the prevailing moods of a populace. Similarly, in today’s uncertain times, Americans should be particularly mindful of the seductiveness and danger of magical thinking. ■

**Note:** Published with permission from *Sightings*, Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

# Stem Cell Research: Debates and Divides

By Tarris D. Rosell, Associate Professor  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO

The presidential debates of 2004 are long over, elections decided and inaugurations complete; but a great divide remains between people of faith over many issues on which the candidates also disagreed. One ongoing battle pertains to the moral status of microscopic human life and what might be done with it ethically.

Stem cell research is not mostly about human embryos, of course. I am told that comparatively little research of this sort actually utilizes human tissue, much less embryos or fetuses. The stem cells of other species are studied especially, and then human adult stem cells taken from blood or marrow or body tissue. We hear some skepticism regarding actual therapeutic potential versus the media hype, regarding stem cell research funding versus other basic research (or basic healthcare) priorities; but in general, stem cell research is not a contentious matter until human embryos or fetuses get involved.

At that point, the ground opens up between us. Those who imagine that human personhood and rights begin at conception or very soon thereafter may object to any stem cell experimentation on prenatal human life. Some are inclined to side with President Bush's stated objections to using all but a few already existent and usable stem cell lines (estimated now at about a dozen of the 78 or so existing lines). If all post-conception human life is ensouled personality, the destruction of newly created embryos for purely utilitarian reasons seems wrong, no matter how well-intended.

Others of us imagine personhood and rights arising out of relationships occurring at a more advanced stage of fetal development, or even not until birth. Profound respect but not absolute rights might be accorded the human blastocyst

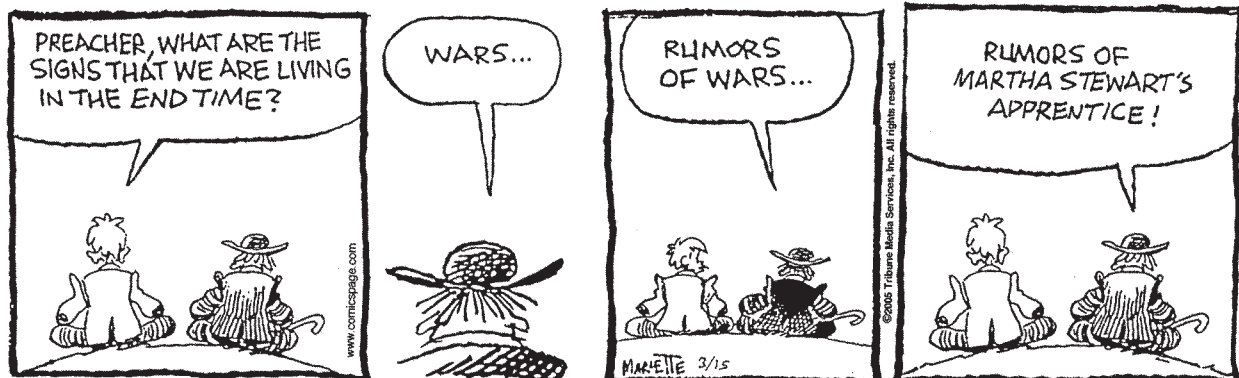
or embryo on the basis of its human origin and potential. On this account, cautious and respectful research utilization is permissible, perhaps even obligatory, for the greater good of alleviating human suffering via hoped for medical breakthroughs.

In either case, we are engaging in imaginative work since there is no imaginable way to prove our claims about the conception of personhood.

As one of those whose convictions fall within the "permissible" cohort, I have added my name to thousands on a petition to the president. The "People of Faith for Stem Cell Research" petition<sup>1</sup> begins, "As men and women of religious faith, we request that you expand the current federal funding policy regarding stem cell research." On the reasonable premise that human stem cell research will lead to the alleviation of suffering and saving of lives, petitioners ask for public policy revision, noting that religious faith leads *us* to advocacy even as it has motivated others to oppose expanded research protocols.

"In fact, this research is endorsed by people of all political perspectives and all faiths. Our religious traditions teach an obligation to pursue research that promotes healing and health. This duty is consistent with the principle of full respect for the dignity of human life."

In a letter circulated by email, "People of Faith" petition organizers acknowledge the religious divide on matters of stem cell research. They pledge respect for "the positions of those of you who are religiously and morally compelled to regard blastocysts as fully ensouled humans with full ethical status." Still a plea is put forth to all people of faith for agreement at least on this: "Science is not the adversary of reli-



gion, but on the contrary can help advance religion's ideals of compassion and healing."

That may be the best we can do on this research ethics issue as a divided people of faith. Yet others hope to do somewhat better in the consensus-building department.

William Neaves, PhD, is president and CEO of the Kansas City based Stowers Institute of Medical Research. He is an internationally respected research scientist and a minister's spouse (of the Reverend Priscilla Neaves). Dr. Neaves attempts to bridge the religious divide over human stem cell research historically, conceptually and semantically. In a recent public lecture at William Jewell College, Neaves traced the history of his research interest and the widely varying religious responses to it. This approach mostly demonstrates the same point made by "People of Faith" petitioners, that faith is not necessarily the enemy of scientific exploration of the human blastocyst.

The term "blastocyst" is used rather than "embryo," which more properly designates a later implanted stage within the uterus. Embryonic stem cell research is a misnomer, according to Neaves. What he wishes for is agreement on the ethical and legal permissibility of doing research on an undifferentiated clump of "early" non-sentient pre-embryonic stem cells.

In an earlier presentation at the Center for Practical Bioethics, Dr. Neaves took another tack aimed at ethical religious consensus on rational scientific grounds. He articulated a distinction between blastocysts derived from reproductive fertilization and those that are a research product of "regeneration." Neaves believes this procedural difference is one that should make a moral difference as well.

The fertilization process mating male genetic material with that of a female ovum needs no further explanation. This is also the means often used in assisted reproductive therapy with couples experiencing infertility. "Regeneration" involves a less well understood process entailing "somatic cell nuclear transfer," otherwise known as cloning. Dr. Neaves explains, "Regeneration starts with an egg from which its own genetic material has been removed. . . . This incomplete egg, now lacking its own genetic material, never meets a sperm. Instead, the genetic material (46 chromosomes) from an ordinary body cell of a person is placed inside the egg." The newly created cell regenerates and multiplies "into a small ball of stem cells" for use in basic research, not for reproduction of a human being.

The (pre)embryonic results of either process will look identical and may have similar developmental potential. But the laboratory process and research protocol distinctions otherwise are substantial. Do different initial means and intentional ends constitute a plausible moral difference of relevance to stem cell debates?

Dr. Neaves hopes so. With perhaps less optimism about bridging the divide, so do I. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible at [www.pfaith.org](http://www.pfaith.org).

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## The Terri Schiavo Case

*By James R. Fuller, Senior Pastor  
Calder Baptist Church, Beaumont, TX*

Over two years ago, I listened intently as the neurologist met with my 54-year-old brother's family three days after the sudden heart attack that left him unconscious and on a ventilator. Our pain compounded as the doctor said to his children, "Your dad will not recover. He has no higher brain functioning. He has no response to pain stimuli. There is no hope." His sons left the room and returned in about twenty minutes. "We've decided to remove dad from the ventilator and donate his organs. We know that is what he would want us to do."

When the day arrived, several of us sat with my brother, Thomas, after the vent was removed. Compassionate doctors and nurses had moved him from ICU to a single room for our privacy. We held his hand, stroked his face, and listened to his labored breathing. He made no response to us, but the lower brain functioning continued to direct his autonomic systems of breathing and circulation. Six hours later, his body relaxed and released him from his struggle. He died with dignity.

How grateful I am that compassionate doctors and nurses in a local hospital in Duluth, Georgia, allowed our family to make the decision that Thomas would have wanted. Make no mistake about what you have read and seen concerning the Terri Schiavo case. At issue for all of us is the right of families to fulfill the wishes of their loved ones in the manner of our dying.

The Schiavo case became an illustration of evil forces in our culture that are pushing for the state to make decisions that properly belong in the hands of families. It is not suffocating a person for a ventilator to be disconnected and the natural process of dying respected. It is not starving a person for a feeding tube to be withdrawn and for allowing a person to die with dignity. Our physical bodies are not designed to live forever, although medical science can now artificially prolong life for years after the body's own mechanisms for such functioning have failed.

The state should enact proper, broad parameters to make sure that no one's death is hastened when there is hope for meaningful life to continue, but the State has no business abrogating the proper responsibility of families to fulfill the wishes of their loved ones to die with dignity. The Religious Right wants to make families doubt that dying is a part of living. They use fear and guilt to drive their agenda, which is political, not religious. Politicians, judges, and religious extremists have no right to intrude into this most intimate part of life.

The circus that became the dying of Terri Schiavo powerfully demonstrates the wisdom of judges who refused to intervene. May their tribe, and their courage, increase. ■

# Gad: A Prophet For Our Times

By Richard D. Kahoe, Minister and Psychologist  
Woodward, OK

Who in the world was Gad? As a prophet he is so obscure that even book editors confuse him with God! So, you need not feel biblically ignorant if you haven't heard of David's "house prophet," Gad.

Gad is most frequently used in the Old Testament as a place name, and we have only two incidents referring to the prophet who served King David and his family. The first brief incident is in 1 Samuel 22:5, where Gad instructs David to leave the stronghold and go into the land of Judah. Though we know nothing about Gad's background or his call as a prophet, his credentials are revealed in the second passage: "The Lord said to Gad, David's prophet, 'Go and tell David . . .'" (2 Sam. 24:11).

The role of the prophet is one who receives a message from God and is told to take the message to others. Generally the message was to a broader part of the Jewish family, but some that I call "house prophets," like God and Nathan, took their messages primarily to one person. The keys here, of course, are "The Lord said," and the command, "go . . . tell." Gad was certainly acting as a prophet, though an obscure one.

## God's Prophecies in Context

*The First Prophecy.* Context is always important; sometimes it is most of the story for prophets. Our first prophecy from Gad is in the context of several chapters in 1 Samuel. Here Saul was still king, but David had killed Goliath and was receiving more attention from the people. Look in your Bible at 1 Samuel 18 and you will see a caption, "Saul Becomes Jealous of David" (mine has a picture of Saul's

first attempt to kill David). Chapter 19 is captioned, "David is Persecuted by Saul," and Chapter 21, "David Flees from Saul."

Though David escapes again, the seriousness of Saul's wrath is indicated by the caption in Chapter 22: "The Slaughter of the Priests." When Saul finds that David has escaped, he takes his anger out on the Lord's priests in the house of Ahimelech and kills all but one of Ahimelech's sons, who escaped to join David.

We learn (22:3) that David had gone to Moab, obviously to hide from Saul. While David was hiding in a cave, God apparently brought a personal message to David through the prophet Gad: "Don't stay here; go at once to the land of Judah." That's all, but clearly this was a message that was intended to save David's life—and, as you know the end of the story, it served the purpose, as David became king after Saul's death. (Let's hold our lesson from this first prophecy until we hear a more complicated story.)

*The Second Prophecy.* Our next word from Gad is in the last chapter of 2 Samuel. David has become a mighty warrior king. Notice in Chapter 23 there are lists of "David's Famous Soldiers," setting the stage for a military story. Chapter 24 begins, "On another occasion the Lord was angry with Israel and he made David bring trouble upon them"—specifically by taking a census. God gave directions for taking a census in Exodus (30:11-16), and in both Numbers 1 and 26, censuses were taken for God's purposes.

However, David had no thought of God's purposes in this census, for the king's purpose is revealed in verse 9: "The





total number of men capable of military service: 800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah.” David had war in mind. Dr. Ganse Little in the *Interpreter’s Bible* comments, “What David had in mind could not but transgress against the individual freedom—and indeed the very life—of the populace so numbered.”

Do you remember God’s warning through Samuel, about what kings would do? They would conscript the people’s young men into their armies. Saul was considered a worse king, but here even the great King David was doing the very thing kings often do out of the power and pride that comes with the office.

To David’s credit, his conscience began to bother him, and he tried to repent. However, sin is like a pillow full of feathers scattered in the whirlwind, or like Styrofoam peanuts cast into a raging surf. The damage done cannot be undone.

So here we have Gad’s prophecy from God: “You have three choices: What is it to be? Three years of famine, three months of retreating from your enemies, or three days of plague?” Either David or God chose the latter, and 70,000 Israelites died.

So, God was saying to David: “Look at what you have done. You have planned a mighty war, and when you lose, in retreat, you would lose 70,000 men. That many could die from a three-year famine or a three-day plague, but that result would be under my control. You have acted as if you were God and planned to lead 70,000 Israelite soldiers into death in needless battle.”

Dr. Little concludes, “Herein is seen the fallacy of believing that the state is ultimately protected by . . . any kind of sheer weight of numbers, or wealth, or productive genius, or scientific advance.”

Gad’s prophecy and David’s sin occurred around 1000 B.C., about 3000 years ago. What lesson arises from these events? When I read these words, I could not help but hear the echoes of words from the current U.S. political leadership: “We have the strength to fight both al Qaeda and Iraq at the same time!” We have the strength; we have the numbers; we have the technology; we have the weapons. We are just as confident as David was in counting 1,300,000 Jewish fighting men to go into battle. But God’s answer was, take heed! In a bloody retreat you could lose 70,000 men. Don’t rely on your power.

On the day I began preparing this message, I was reading the latest edition of *Christian Ethics Today* (October, 2002), edited by my old college roommate. Hear the titles of the first three articles in the journal: “Iraq: Don’t Go There” by Dr. George Hunsinger of Princeton Seminary, “Ethics of the War on Terrorism,” by Dr. John Swomley of St. Paul School of Theology, and “Just Peacemaking Initiatives Can Prevent Terrorism” by Dr. Glen Stassen of Fuller Seminary. These writers range from more liberal Presbyterian thought to Methodism to more conservative evangelical. Are they all modern-day prophets, in the line of Gad and Isaiah, warning not to trust in military and political power, but to trust in God? None of these articles is pacifistic, but they each warn

about mixed motives in America’s saber-rattling against Iraq.

I’m sure none of these modern prophets claims to have the final word on the present challenge of international terrorism and so-called “rouge nations” bent on developing nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. But the prophetic word of Christian ethics has been a relatively unheard voice in the national and international debate.

Christianity is not obsolete in today’s world. It should be a major voice in the debate. I wonder if our President has discussed the international military issues with his Methodist pastor, or his bishop, or the ethics professors in any of the fine Methodist universities or seminaries. I think he has not.

Dr Hunsinger’s article cites a Pentagon study that projects an “acceptable death rate of 20,000-30,000 U.S. soldiers” in a war to conquer Iraq. Our experience in Vietnam and other wars suggest that our estimates often are low.

### Application For Our Time

Although I have already made some applications of Gad’s prophetic voice to our time in relation to our present military situation, I also want to make a much broader purview. To begin, let us notice the different threats to David posed by Gad’s two prophecies.

In 1 Samuel 22, David’s obvious danger was an external one—namely, the jealous, angry, and vengeful King Saul. Sometimes prophets warn of external threats. Before September 11, 2001, some lone voices in the FBI and in the intelligence community had warned about the number of middle-eastern men in the U.S. that were studying to fly large airplanes, and even the possibility that crashing the airplanes could be a terrorist plan. Maybe these were “secular prophets” warning of an external threat. (I’m sure some people are convinced that the President is a prophet, warning us of external dangers.)

In that same issue of *Christian Ethics Today* I previously quoted is a speech by the founding editor Foy Valentine, given in Fort Worth (Debby and I were there) titled, “Ethics East of Eden.” Dr. Valentine is also the former director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

When I lived in Nashville I was a member of a black Baptist church. Dr. Valentine and his wife visited our church one morning. He is considered a modern Southern Baptist prophet who ranks with Tony Campolo, the American Baptist sociologist, evangelist, and social activist. Dr. Valentine writes in his article, “Pray that the Lord of the harvest will call forth ethics laborers who will stand up and speak out like Tony Campolo”—the first in a list that included Millard Fuller of Habitat for Humanity and President Jimmy Carter.

In his address, Valentine virtually equated Christian ethics with prophecy. At one place he accuses, “Preaching from today’s pulpits mostly [avoids] ethics like the plague, pussyfoots around prophethood.” He then cites other ethicists of days gone by. The first is Walter Rauschenbusch, the German and American Baptist who helped launch the

much-maligned “social gospel.” (At Green Lake American Baptist Assembly ground, where I was last Sunday, there is a Rauschenbusch hall.) About the prophet, Valentine said, “Walter Rauschenbusch flamed across the horizon with his detractors bellowing hot Irish epithets against him every step of the way, but without quenching his prophetic fire. Giants emerged to preach and teach and write in an explosion of commitment to doing the gospel.”

What did Rauschenbusch rail against so strenuously? Factory owners that exploited sweat labor of their day, that got rich without paying a living wage to their workers—against an economic system that robbed men of dignity, to say nothing of their health and lives. A true “prophet,” Rauschenbusch modeled the ministry of Gad in 1 Samuel 22, warning his parishioners in the Second German Baptist Church in the Hell’s Kitchen section of New York City of external threats.

As he preached comfort and strength to his own church members, he also rallied forces of justice and mercy in the industrial and urban areas of the country, confronting an unjust economic system. In his preaching and writing he exposed the robber barons and the evil systems without that threatened the American society.

In his speech, Dr. Valentine also mentions Clarence Jordan, who started Koinonia Farm in South Georgia. This much-hated early experiment at interracial living in the American South was also the launching pad for Millard Fuller and his Habitat for Humanity ministry. No, there is not a Clarence Jordan Hall at Green Lake, but he was mentioned during the time I was there. The speaker was one who really knew Clarence Jordan, even though he didn’t pronounce his name as I do, and as my grandmother’s family and every other Jordan family I know pronounce it.

In that fine old South Georgia accent, the speaker referred to Clarence “Jurden.” So I will follow his lead and say, Clarence “Jurden” was a prophet, but one more like the Gad of 2 Samuel 24. Just as Gad’s message from God in that

chapter was one of reproach to the King, so Clarence Jordan’s message to America was of our internal failing, the sin of racial prejudice. The sin of judging men, women, and children by their accents, by their appearance, and by the color of their skin.

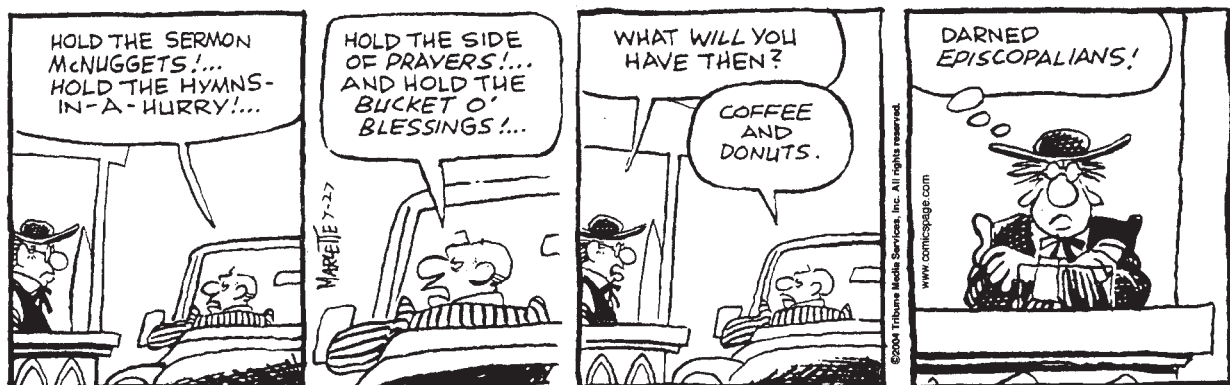
Other voices followed—the voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other ministers (black and white), and brave young civil rights workers who sometimes gave their own lives—all followed the example of Clarence Jordan in breaking down old artificial barriers.

That dream, of one long prophet in South Georgia, helped populate Green Lake Assembly grounds last week. I don’t believe there was an ethnic majority at that meeting of young seminarians and of pastors new to the American Baptist denomination. There were almost surely more whites than blacks, but the Hispanics and Asians probably kept the number of whites from reaching 50%.

I noticed at the Saturday evening banquet that at our table, without any design or intention, were seated alternatively white/black/white/black/white/black. And one of the “whites” spoke in an accent that seemed to have been Spanish. To my left was a white woman in a wheelchair who wants to become an American Baptist Pastor. And to my right was a former university dean of education, a black woman who is also finishing her seminary education to become a minister.

Dr. Valentine’s main theme was that Christian ethics and prophethood are fighting an uphill battle in today’s world. But as we look back to our spiritual forebearers, prophets like Rauschenbusch and Jordan and even Gad, we can appreciate today’s prophets and pray that God will continue to raise up women and men to speak for God in our world. ■

<sup>1</sup> See Fee and Stuart’s *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* to read: “Of a few prophets such as God, Nathan, or Huldah, we have a combination of prophecy and biography.”



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# More Honest Churches Needed

*By Jeffrey D. Vickery, Co-Pastor*  
Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, NC

Jerry Falwell's remarks last August 24 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel service sound, well, very much like Jerry Falwell. The question many Baptists should ask is, "Does this sound very much like my Baptist church?"

Although Falwell's political comments received much attention, his words of advice for the role of future seminarians and the churches they will serve were both horrifying and humorous at the same time: "May God lead many of you to some of these moderate churches that deserve fundamentalist pastors like you. . . . Sometimes it takes a full year before that church is who you are."

These words are humorous in the sense that they seem absurd on the surface, yet horrifying in that a distinct possibility exists that what he predicts may come true. That's right, it seems that evidence has surfaced once again that signals the "takeover" of the Southern Baptist Convention is now a fight for my local church (but then again, maybe it always has been). The churches that are most at risk for this kind of fundamentalist takeover are those churches that are dually aligned with the SBC and some other moderate Baptist organization (the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and/or the Baptist General Convention of Texas, for example).

As it turns out, the vast majority of moderate Baptist churches maintain some level of connection with the SBC as well. Consider CBF churches in NC as an example. Approximately 210 churches contribute directly to the CBF of NC. (Another large group of churches contribute to the CBF through the Baptist State Convention's giving plan known as Plan C, but they are not all identified.) No one has figures for how many of those are "CBF only" churches, but those in the state office who would venture a guess put the number at less than a dozen. That means that almost 200 "moderate" churches remain aligned in some way with the SBC as well, either in financial support to the Cooperative Program, giving to the Lottie Moon missions offering, or through the use of LifeWay teaching materials to their adults and children. Among states in the south, NC is not unusual in the number of moderate churches who also support the SBC, except that the number of Baptist churches who have pulled away completely from the SBC may be higher than most.

Is dual alignment, however, a long-term viable option

for churches? I believe the answer to be both "yes" and "no."

A large number of Baptist churches that maintain affiliations with the SBC and yet have some connection with moderate Baptists will always be around. The churches that sustain dual alignment for many years to come, however, will be those who increasingly favor the SBC but only tolerate moderate Baptists in their midst. On the other hand, those churches who find themselves more closely associated with the CBF or the BGCT but still allow a token level of SBC membership will be forced into making a decision about their allegiances with fundamentalism. Falwell's statement proves that to be true.

Any moderate church that continues to identify with the SBC in an era when fundamentalism has firm control over the denominational hierarchy will potentially one day find themselves with an SBC-indoctrinated pastor whose allegiance to fundamentalism is strong. SBC leaders like Patterson, Aiken, Mohler, and others expect that their pastors will find their way into moderate churches and take control. Falwell simply put the truth into plain words.

SBC seminary leadership, however, is not at fault for training their pastors to be fundamentalist or for stating their intentions. It has been clear for almost a decade now that each of the SBC seminaries is working toward that end. Churches that reach out to these SBC seminaries can expect pastors who align themselves with a fundamentalist perspective that they take to the churches. Their leadership will not respect the traditional principles of the priesthood of believers, for, as Falwell's statement makes clear, the pastor is the one who is to shape the church, not the congregation. These SBC pastors will hold to right doctrine as superior to right practice, as was modeled for them when President Mohler stated in a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel address in 1995 that "theology and social work are not congruent." The SBC seminaries have not been deceptive about their intentions but open and honest in their fundamentalist swing.

What is amazing is that many Baptist churches that do not identify themselves as fundamentalist continue to maintain strong connections with the SBC and search among recent SBC seminary graduates for their next pastor, or make use of convention-supported Sunday School

curriculum. In essence, they are Falwell's hoped-for church converts and the home for these new fundamentalist pastors.

I believe it is time for congregations to reassess their position of dual alignment with a nod toward congregational honesty. It is increasingly impossible to maintain a connection with the SBC and with moderate Baptists and be honestly moderate or honestly conservative. As the SBC becomes deeply entrenched in its fundamentalism and more open about that reality, any church that remains tied to the SBC will be forced into open fundamentalism as well.

I had a conversation many years ago about politics with another soon-to-be-pastor that went something like this (with some emendations due to the passage of time):

"Are you really a Democrat or a Republican?"

"Neither, I'm a registered Independent."

"Okay, but I bet you've never voted for a Republican."

"Actually I did once."

"Who, Reagan?"

"No, some county agriculture commissioner. She was the only Republican woman running for office."

"So did you vote for her because she was a Republican or because she was a woman?"

"Because she was a woman."

"So then you typically vote for Democrats?"

"Well, yes, almost always, especially if I don't know the candidates."

"So why don't you consider yourself a Democrat?"

"I generally do, but I like to be registered as an Independent in case I want to change my mind some day."

"Would you really ever change your mind?"

"Maybe—my parents are Republicans and I'd hate to offend them. But probably not. I'd really like to be both a Republican and a Democrat, but I can't register as both."

"Can you honestly be both?"

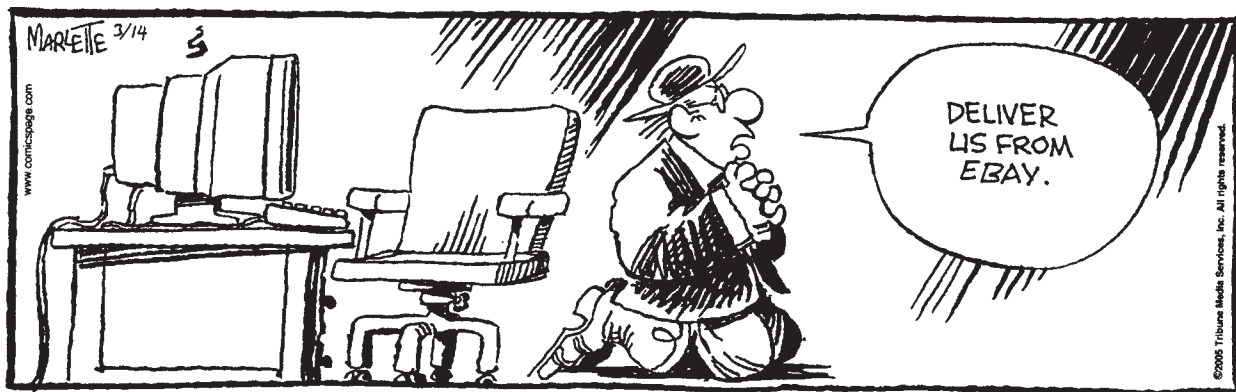
"No, I don't think so."

That conversation, in retrospect, reveals something about the mindset of many moderate Baptists. We like to identify ourselves as not fundamentalist. We call ourselves moderate or maybe even conservative, but not fundamentalist. Yet we keep our connections with the SBC because somewhere in the past we liked them, we identified with them, and there is at least one SBC person we still like. In fact, that person may be in our own family. If all we see, however, is the SBC of the past, then we are fooling ourselves about the current intentions of the SBC.

In recent times, many Baptist churches have approached dual alignment from the perspective of whom we will offend if we become honestly moderate, and how much money those people we potentially offend, give to the church. Come on, admit it pastors. I've heard those conversations more than a dozen times. But is it honest? Can Baptist churches be honest with themselves and continue to support both fundamentalism and freedom?

Fortunately the church I serve made that choice twelve years ago, and we are stronger for having chosen to be honest with who we are. Our sister church down the road is supporting and active in the state CBF and yet maintains a token relationship with the SBC, but could be, by the estimates of its own members, one pastor away from becoming fundamentalist. Dual alignment makes church members, pastors, staff, and even potential new members wonder, sometimes out loud, "Honestly, are we fundamentalist or not?" Worse still, it leaves the prospects for the future uncertain and makes trust a valuable commodity in the church.

If fundamentalism is your church's true identity, then embrace it. If not, then it is time to sever ties with the fundamentalists who would be your church's next pastor. ■





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# The Parable of the Bowl of Soup—Part 2

By Hal Haralson, Austin, TX

**Note:** This article is a continuation of Part I found in the last issue of the Journal (Winter, 2005).

After practicing law in Austin for twenty years, I wanted to become involved with others who had experienced forms of mental illness. I had been diagnosed bipolar twenty years earlier and had gone to law school and practiced law after that. I wanted to repay those who had helped me by helping others.

I wrote a letter to the Mental Health Association and offered my services. I helped organize the first support groups for former mental patients in Texas—perhaps the nation. After three years of traveling Texas we had groups in 25 cities. I was then given an okay to organize a retreat for former mental patients.

I went to my longtime friend Howard Butt, Jr., and told him what I wanted to do. He graciously offered *Singing Hills*, the Butt Foundation's beautiful Texas Hill Country facility, to be the spot to host the retreat. For the next seventeen years we held similar retreats—at no cost.

The time was set for Lennie Pierce to enter my world.

Once a month an MHMR (Mental Health and Mental Retardation) worker took Lennie by van from Kenedy to San Antonio to see her doctor. The trip took the entire day. During one of these visits Lennie was invited to go to the Laity Lodge retreat that I had planned. She was excited.

I was elated by the response to our invitations. Seventy-five participants had come.

One person caught my eye immediately. She was an old, hunchbacked lady dressed in rags. A bag hung on her shoulder. She looked at her feet as she hobbled along. She was clutching a Styrofoam cup. . . and watering plants on the grounds. "The bag lady from San Antonio."

This was my first encounter with Lennie Pierce, but certainly not my last, for she attended this retreat for the next nine years.

I made it a point to get to know Lennie. I can't say that we were friends, but we knew each other. She knew I was a lawyer.

One morning my secretary buzzed me and relayed the message that Lennie Pierce was on the phone.

"I need a lawyer! Will you help me?"

"Of course," I replied. "Tell me what has happened."

"I sold my house to this man two years ago. The man who bought it has quit paying. He still owes me \$18,000. He's moved. Can you find him?"

I went to San Antonio and met with Lennie. I told her to bring all the papers concerning the house's sale to the meeting.

All she had was a copy of a deed conveying the house to a Sam Jones. He was to make payments to Lennie. There was no note and no deed of trust.

Lennie said that Jones was a real estate broker who had told her that the deed was all that was needed.

The deed had been properly recorded.

After holding the property for two years, Jones had sold it. Since no note or deed of trust had been recorded, the record implied that Jones owned the house debt-free. He took the money from the sale and split.

I had been an investigator for a law firm for two years while I attended law school. If you are out there, I can find you. After several weeks I located Jones living in Houston attending South Texas College of Law.

In order to cover the \$18,000 still owed, I drafted a note and deed of trust. The payout to Lennie would be \$200 per month for the next twenty years. In my cover letter I told Jones that if these documents were not signed and returned to me within ten days the only bar he would practice before would be Maggie Mae's in Austin.

He sent the signed papers back. They were properly recorded and he never missed a payment.

Lennie now had a lawyer.

Lennie also had cats. Nine cats shared her one-room living quarter in an old house in Kenedy. The house was behind a row of trees so that it could not be seen from the street.

When I drove up Lennie was in her yard, watering her plants from a Styrofoam cup.

Lennie needed someone to bring her food and assist her in taking her medicine. I ran an ad in the Kenedy paper and interviewed twenty women. I hired one of them. It took Lennie only one week to run her off. Lennie did not want anyone looking after her.

I finally found an older woman who was kind and very gentle. She ignored Lennie's insults and brought her food each day. She also saw that Lennie took her medicine. Her name was Mrs. Moy.

For the next ten years, on the last Thursday of each month, I went to Kenedy to check on Lennie. It was two hours down and two hours back.

"Next time you come bring your shovel . . . we are going

to dig a flower bed!" Lennie considered me to be her "man servant." What she wanted—she demanded—and I complied with her demands.

Cornelia buzzed me. "Lennie is on the phone."

"The bus broke down. They can't take me to the doctor in San Antonio. I need for you to pick me up at 7:00 A.M. tomorrow and take me to the doctor."

I canceled my next day's appointments. At 4:00 A.M. I got out of bed. At 7:00 A.M. I pulled up to Lennie's "house."

My pickup is not adapted for anyone who is physically challenged. Lennie couldn't get up into the seat of my pickup from her wheel chair and I could not lift her. She weighed at least 200 pounds and was as limber as a sack of deer corn.

Finally she rolled herself into a ball and I pushed her onto the floorboard of my pickup. She rode in that uncomfortable position for the two hours that it took us to get to the hospital. The return trip was the same.

Sandwiched between our travel times in the truck were the eight hours in the hospital. I waited as she went from one doctor to another. I had a close-up view of what day in the life of Lennie Pierce was like.

She asked me to prepare her will. "I want my estate to be left in trust—with you as trustee—to be used for former mental patients."

I humored her. Estate? What estate?

Lennie was living in a nursing home. She would never leave. She could not walk and was unable to tell one medication from another.

I met with funeral director and made pre-need arrangements on Lennie's behalf. He was instructed to take care of everything whenever the inevitable call came.

On March 16, 1996, I was informed that Lennie had died in her sleep. She was ninety years old.

I was one of the four who were at her graveside to say farewell. Mr. and Mrs. Moy of Kenedy came as a courtesy. The fourth person there, Elton Moy, was Lennie's one true friend. Their friendship had grown from a tenderhearted offer, "Would you like a bowl of hot soup?"

I began the arduous task of going through Lennie's things in preparation for filing probate papers. Among the disheveled possessions I found correspondence from the Merrill Lynch firm in San Antonio.

"Do you have client named Lennie Pierce?" I inquired.

"Where is Lennie? We haven't heard from her in three weeks. She calls at least once a week about her stock," a Merrill Lynch associate said.

"Her stock?"

I subsequently learned that Lennie had over \$75,000 in stocks and bonds. A monthly statement from an Austin savings and loan institution indicated that there was an account holding \$22,000. When all assets were tallied, Lennie Pierce's estate totaled over \$125,000.

The trust was formed. According to Lennie's wishes, the money was used to benefit individuals who had experienced mental illness.

Lennie never mentioned her stocks and bonds or her savings. I had no idea as to the source of her funds.

For two hours Elton Moy and I sipped tea and traded stories about Lennie Pierce. "Elton," I asked, "do you know where Lennie got her money?"

"Yes, I do," he answered. "After nearly a year of mornings sitting with her as she had her bowl of hot soup at my San Antonio restaurant, the 'Bag Lady' confided in me."

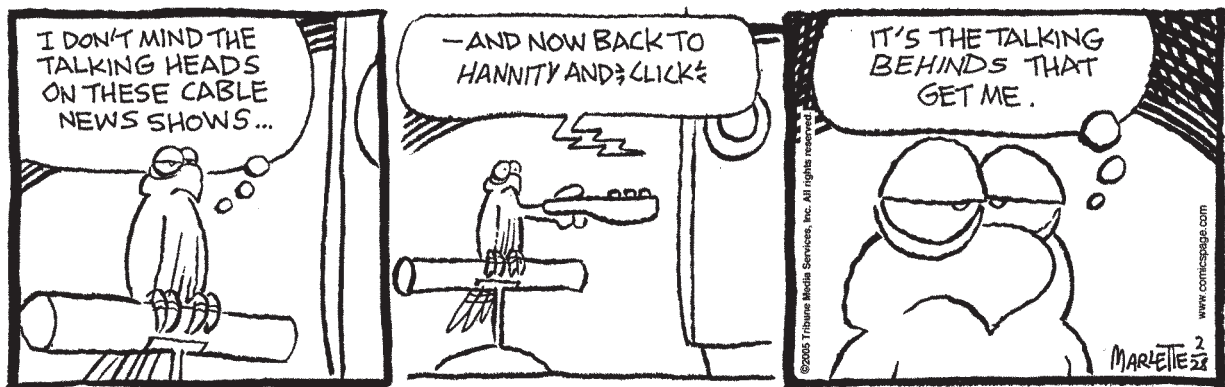
"Lennie painfully realized that her family was not coming back for her. As she roamed the grounds of the San Antonio State Hospital with her white Styrofoam cup in hand, she formulated an idea that blossomed into a plan. Once she had emptied the cup of its water, she began to refill it with the fruits and nuts, which she harvested from the trees of the season. Then, with her shoulder bag full, she would make the rounds of her 'customers'—employees at the hospital." Elton said.

"There was no stated price. Customers paid whatever they wanted to pay. The 'Bag Lady' became an entrepreneur."

Elton looked at me—there were tears in his eyes. "Do that for forty-two years and it adds up."

\$125,000 was left in trust to help others who had perhaps experienced pain and discrimination similar to what Lennie had known in her lifetime. Those funds undoubtedly would have ended up in the State's coffers had it not been for the heart softening actions of a friend—of a man who found a bent old lady scavenging for food in his trash and asked, "Would you like to come in for a bowl of hot soup?"

*And He said unto them, "In as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me." ■*



# A Greater Conspiracy Than The Da Vinci Code

By Adam C. English, Assistant Professor of Theology  
Campbell University, Buies Creek, NC

Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003), boasts over 17 million copies in print. Ron Howard has agreed to direct a movie version. Rumor has it that Tom Hanks will star as the dashing and cerebral main character, Robert Langdon (not the actor I would have picked—I can't get Forrest Gump out of my mind whenever I see Tom Hanks). The fast paced novel has created more than a spark of interest and controversy since its release in 2003. Currently, there are fifteen books, four DVDs, and countless articles that investigate, illuminate, decode, and rebut *The Da Vinci Code*. The buzz surrounding this novel arises from the conspiracy theory about the life and bloodline of Jesus that is central to the novel's plot. Essentially, Dan Brown raises the question: What if Jesus had been married? What if his original ministry had been a team effort with his wife and what if his wife (Mary Magdalene) had been written out of the story by the early, male-dominated church? What if he had a child who survived him and who carried on his lineage into the present times?

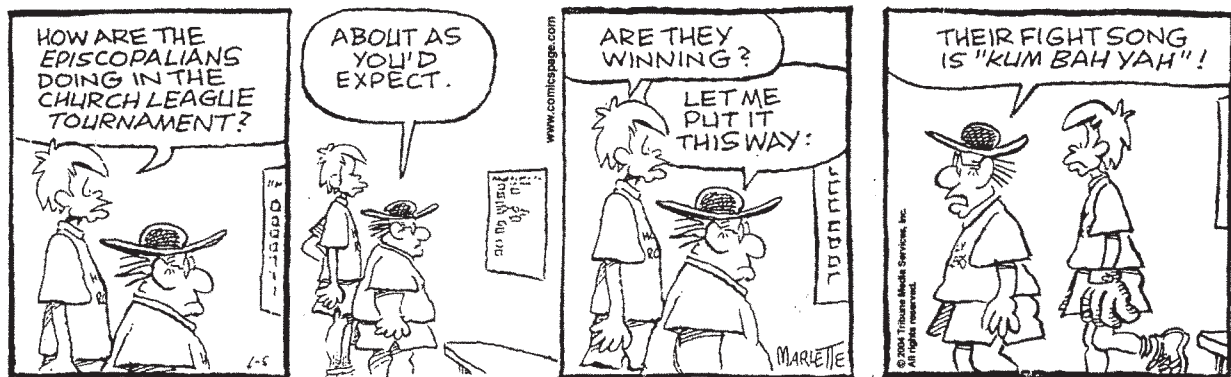
In *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown lays out his version of church history where such a scenario becomes possible. Some of his theory is based on good history, some on bad history, some on legend, and some is pure fabrication. The trouble with conspiracy theories is that they are irrefutable, especially the sensational ones like Brown's. You can't argue with them. It doesn't matter that they are not based on sufficient historical evidence. Conspiracy always trumps more plausible yet less imaginative explanations of events because a cover-up is always assumed by conspiracy theorists. For instance, you might ask a conspiracy buff, "Why is there no solid evidence for your particular version of the JFK assassi-

nation?" "Because the truth has been expunged by the FBI and CIA for political reasons." Duh! Credible support for conspiracy theories does not need to exist because it is assumed that the "truth" has been buried, denied, and locked away by the powers that be. We should not *expect* to find evidence.

*The Da Vinci Code's* premise about the early church's attempt to "cover up" the "truth" about Jesus and his marriage to Mary Magdalene rightly bothers Christians because it cannot be refuted. Bible-believing Christians argue, "The Gospels never say Jesus was married or had a child," to which the conspiracy theorist responds, "But you can't trust what the Gospels say. They are a cover story invented by the early Christians."

One response might be: If the Gospels do put up a front to hide a lie, why then did the Church include *four* of them in its Scriptures? Why not consolidate the accounts into one standardized biography? Wouldn't that better insure homogeneity of belief? Instead, early Christians forbade harmonizing the Gospels into a single life story. In A.D. 423, Theodoret, the bishop of Cyrhus, condemned and burned about two hundred copies of Tatian's *Diatessaron*—which was nothing more than a compilation of the stories and sayings of the four Gospels into a single narrative. Christians preferred the difficulties of having four separate accounts over a single, harmonized one.

However, there is still no point arguing with conspiracy theories, because the conspiracy trumps all. Instead, Christians should welcome conspiracy theories about Jesus. They can help us remember that the true faith *is* a conspiracy theory of the most outlandish kind. You think *The Da*



*Vinci Code* spins a tall tale? Listen to this whopper! Christians claim that Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary man: he was God's own son! Yes, the very God who created the universe and who gives life to all, that same God had a son (and by no conventional means either!), and his name was Jesus. The conspiracies get thicker though, because Jesus was put to death by the authorities for a plot he had supposedly cooked up to overthrow them. Little did they know, Jesus' conspiracy extended much further than Caesar or the Sanhedrin. Jesus did not just claim to be a new King of the Jews or a rival Roman Emperor. Jesus' kingdom would be on a much greater scale—a new kingdom built not on nationality, ethnicity, walls, gold, or spears. This would be a kingdom not of this world and yet it would include all the peoples of the world.

The plot thickens when the Christians claim that Jesus' death did not end his bid for a kingship. Jesus was raised from death. Here we find another level of conspiracy. The authorities first charged that the disciples stole the body and were spreading the story of the resurrection. But, ironically, the Gospels portray the disciples as being ignorant not only of the resurrection, but the fact that the body of Jesus was missing. The supposed conspirators were clueless. And when the women at the tomb hear of the resurrection, they seem just as surprised as the soldiers guarding the tomb, fleeing in terror and amazement and telling no one. Not exactly the response you would expect from those "in" on the real story.

All of this conspiring that goes into the good news about Jesus add up to one enormous conspiracy theory, which we call the Gospel: that God has conspired to save his creation in Jesus Christ. The Good News of Christ does not come as a pre-packed, run-of-the-mill factoid of history—it is controversial, inflammatory, and perhaps even absurd. The Gospel does not masquerade as mundane history; it claims to be the center of history, the pole propped under the sheet of all other historical events. The power of the Gospel story is in the implausibility of the plot: that the Creator would sacrifice his son to save what He created. And this we accept by faith, not by the historical reconstruction of likely events. The weakness of God's story is stronger to save than all of our credible attempts to *explain* the story.

So, I say, bring on new theories about the life of Jesus. They only serve as appetizers to an even greater, more outlandish conspiracy concocted by God himself—the redemption and reunion of the world. ■

## My King

By Floyd Emmerling, Bee Branch, AR

He stood there, bound like a Guantanamo detainee;  
Lips puffed up, eyes swollen, and spittle mixed with the blood  
That oozed from his brow and mingled with the sweat and dirt  
Of that oriental court.

Silently he bore the jests of the rookie goons,  
Ignorant, but intent on their sadistic sport.

In simple words he spoke truth to the federal judge  
Who seemed to know only that, having, he'd been had.

"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world."

## Religion in a global village of 1,000 persons

**300—Christians**

- 183—Catholics
- 84—Protestants
- 33—Orthodox

**210—No religion  
or confessed atheists**

175—Muslims

128—Hindus

55—Buddhists

47—Animists

85—Other religious groups

From M. Thomas Thangaraj,  
*The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Abingdon)



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# War and Peace

*By James A. Langley*

O Peace, how bereft you seem, how debased,  
In the shock and awe of war, how effaced,  
What short shrift is accorded you in plans  
Of the mighty to gain riches or lands.

Against laser missiles and armored might,  
What chance has peace to rule or win the fight?  
In the world's scales peace has so little weight  
It is often shunned in schemes of men's fate.

When bombs fall, rockets flash, shells detonate,  
Both buildings and bodies disintegrate,  
Children cower, grown men and women weep  
At war's carnage, appalled, life is so cheap.

Peace! Peace! men may cry when there is no peace.  
But true peace is a gain of such release  
Of human worth, little of man's life here  
Can compare in all on earth he holds dear.

Is it ordained: win the war, lose the peace?  
No! Yet our resources for peace decrease  
In inverse proportion to those of strife,  
As tho' only war were of death or life.

If those at the summit were in harm's way,  
With a legion of demons loosed to play  
Their havoc in the gruesome clash of arms,  
And generals' glories were joined with harms,

Would preventive war be so quickly chosen,  
Other means of restricting evil be frozen,  
While armies and navies are moved at will,  
Youth and new ages left to pay the bill?

Wars decimate the race, robbing still more  
Of lives which nature's Maker had in store;  
War's wild excitement, vain and callous thrills,  
Give way late and soon to myriad ills.

Wars' desolations—Verdun, Stalingrad,  
Hiroshima—horrify, drive men mad.  
Swords shall one day be turned into ploughshares,  
What seemed weak or null will root out the tares.

One day of true peace surpasses most wars,  
Whose proud victories are less man's than Mars';  
Peace inspires like a Pierian Spring,  
Lifting human spirits with heart and wing.

Mass destruction is an abiding threat  
Midst the evils by which man is beset;  
All the more reason to change killing fields  
By waging peace and gaining peaceful yields.

Peace's origin is in divine blessing;  
Man's quest begins in earnest confessing;  
The Prince of Peace shall exercise full sway,  
If heaven's boon arrives on earth to stay.

If a just war there be, with toll so great,  
And freedom hanging on its awe-ful fate,  
What fools we are to give injustice rein,  
When justice might have brought us peace in train.

Justice and righteousness are bound to peace—  
They must lead the way if wars are to cease;  
Thus comes the summons from the realm of light:  
Make straight the high road with the just and right.

Ah, blessed Peace! You shall yet win the field!  
From Guernica to Baghdad your appeal  
Endures, and a guerdon shall be laid down,  
Hailing your achievements the world around. ■

James A. Langley is Executive Director/Editor Emeritus,  
District of Columbia Baptist Convention, Washington, D.C.

# He Kept On Keeping On— A Tribute To My Grandfather

By Jonathan Teitloff, Anderson, SC

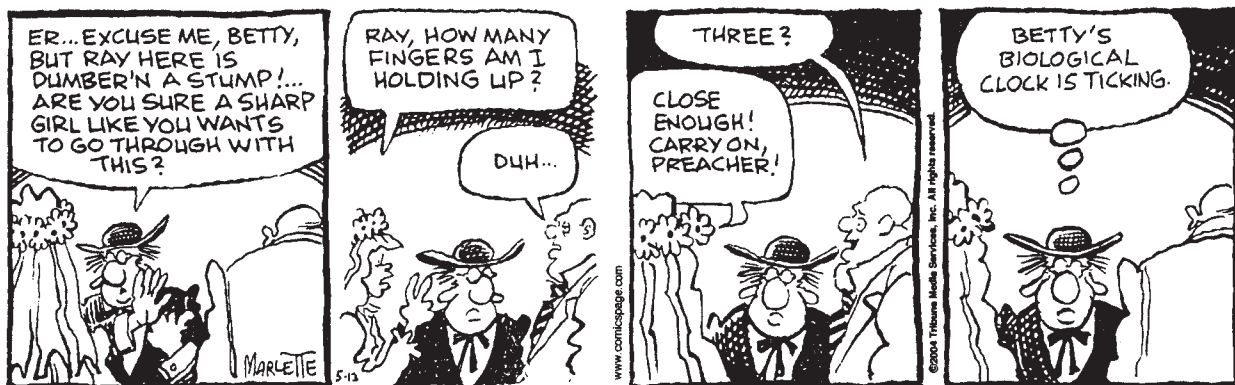
**Note:** The writer is in the eleventh grade, a member of Boulevard Baptist Church, and grandson of my Christian ethics classmate and friend. His grandmother Mary served on the Christian Life Commission of the SBC during Foy Valentine's tenure.

This morning my mother carefully handed me the cassettes she had retrieved from my grandmother's house. "This is me doing the children's sermon," she said, passing the tape to me. "This one is Debbie and me reading the Scripture." She placed several more on the countertop. "This one," she said, holding up a particular tape, "is what Mimi called a very sacred one. It's Eddie singing, 'O Holy Night.' She said to make sure nothing happens to it." Delicately I picked through the old tapes, searching for labels that grabbed my attention. I chose one that read 6-22-80. Inserting it into my stereo, I anticipated the shaky baritone of a man ridden with Parkinson's disease. Instead, a strangely unfamiliar, rich and persuasive tone flowed from the speakers. I hardly knew my grandfather, but I do know this much: as a Baptist minister, he affected many people and as a role model, he affects me even now. For these reasons, he is my favorite Baptist.

He was born Pinckney Edward Rickenbaker, Jr., on June 8, 1935, in Columbia, South Carolina. After studying at four different colleges, he graduated from Baylor University in 1957, then attended Southwestern Seminary to earn his Master of Divinity and Th.D. with a major in Christian Ethics. He first served at First Baptist in Denmark, South

Carolina, then was appointed to the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) in Atlanta, Georgia, as an associate in the personnel department. After this, he returned to Columbia as pastor of Kathwood Baptist Church. During his ministry there he made history by ordaining one of the first women in the Southern Baptist Convention. Eventually, he made his way to Belton, South Carolina, and settled down as pastor at First Baptist. As a minister, my grandfather was more than a speaker. He sometimes broke into song in the middle of a sermon, or played his trumpet during the service.

Unfortunately, his career was to end earlier than he would have liked. In the winter of 1983, at the age of 48, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He is remembered for advising his congregation to "keep on keeping on," which is just what he did. Unwilling to leave the work he loved, he did not retire until 1987. By then, his condition had significantly worsened. I was born in the following February; for the next fourteen years, as I developed, he deteriorated. I never heard my grandfather speak when it was not murmurs or incoherent phrases, and I never saw him walk with steady footing. As a result, I never had a strong relationship with him.



Eddie Rickenbaker died on March 24, 2002. At the memorial service, I heard a lot about my grandfather. By the end of the service, I was crying, not because I had lost someone I knew well, but because I had lost someone I never had the chance to know at all. It is now clear to me that my grandfather affected many people. As a minister he impressed everyone he met, and not only those in the small congregation at First Baptist. The Anderson Independent Mail sponsored a survey during his ministry in which he was selected as one of the top ten most influential religious leaders in the Anderson area. He was also selected again in 1993, six years *after* his retirement. All over South Carolina, it is not heard to find people who have been acquainted with him at one point. This is because my grandfather led a very active Baptist life. He served as chairman of the Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, as moderator of the Saluda Baptist Association, on the Anderson College Board of Trustees, and on the North American Mission Board of Directors. He was also a very progressive man in the church, who enjoyed being on the cutting edge of issues such as race and gender. His service to the local and greater Baptist community, as well as his dedication to interpreting the ways of God, make him the kind of man I admire. In the words of my grandmother, Mary Rickenbaker, "Even after he was sick, he was such an inspiration because he 'kept on keeping on.' He tried so hard to continue his participation in church and community activities."

Because my grandfather was a minister, I feel that being a Baptist is part of my heritage. There is a direct relationship between my eagerness to serve the church and the legacy of my grandfather. This transcends any genetic traits he gave me, because it encourages me to be an active church member for the rest of my life. Even though his disability handicapped our relationship while he was living, it has not prevented me from learning his beliefs and values through what he left behind. The fact that my grandfather's actions before his medical diagnosis have affected the outcome of my life after his death stand as true testament to the reason why this man is my favorite Baptist.

Tonight, I sit down to read a sermon my mother just gave me. I do not have the tape for it; it is a typed version of the original manuscript. It is entitled, "Let Me See Your Slides." In it, my grandfather wonders what Heaven will be like, and using the analogy of theologian Henry Nouen, compares it to returning from a long trip. "Everything that we experience on this 'trip' is predicated on another world, and another life," the sermon reads, "And one day we will reach the other side and when we do, we will hear a friendly voice say, 'Hi, Eddie! Welcome home. How was your trip? Let me see your slides.'" My one wish for my life is that when I show my slides to God, they will depict a life as touching, faithful, and dedicated as was my grandfather's life. ■

## Happy Birthday!

(continued from page 2)

blame for myself on "95 Theses."

My highly competent and extraordinarily longsuffering wife, Mary Louise, and I proofed all the articles before they went to the typist, after they came back from her, when the layout professional had finished his handiwork, and then once again in blue line form just before the journals were finally printed.

For that first issue, I jumped through all the hoops devised in the Post Office's torture chambers, secured a mailing permit, and located a mailing service company owner who consented to receive the journals from the printer and then to utilize the mailing list I provided to get them to the mailing dock in properly zip-coded order for distribution.

The first issue stated that this new journal of Christian ethics was intended "to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness . . . [to be] issued as money and energy permit. . . . A few pieces might curl your hair. . . . The opinions expressed in the articles . . . are certainly not the opinions of the employees . . . for there are none. . . . If you hate what is in this issue, please do not write as enough griping has already been heard in other contexts for a lifetime. If you like it, enjoy!"

A proud parent could hardly have been more pleased, even elated, over a brand new baby with all its fingers and toes, healthy lungs, and functioning plumbing than I was over that first issue of *Christian Ethics Today*.

From the beginning, the official Board that I had enlisted and I had agreed that we would not charge a subscription fee but would simply tell the readers that if they wanted to contribute anything toward defraying the expenses of publication and distribution, their contribution would be appreciated. Now, after ten years, the journal has never experienced a deficit; it has never once been in the red. Faithful and generous supporters are the primary reason for this happy circumstance; but another reason is that the authors have nearly always been provided with a paltry \$100 honorarium, poor pay for work that Gustave Flaubert called harder than digging ditches. I gratefully salute all those authors whose good, and often brilliant, contributions have made possible this enterprise.

Although this Tenth Anniversary reminiscing has focused on the past, I have to tell you that when Dr. Joe Trull and his very competent and cooperative wife, Audra, took the journal's reins in the summer of 2000, that was one of the happier days of my life. I felt like a two-ton hippopotamus was off my back. My five years of editing the journal had been wonderfully rewarding; but the never-far-away deadlines of publication exacted a not inconsiderable toll. After the Board's election of Dr. Trull, I sang the Doxology all the way home.

His work for the past five years has been highly effective, indeed; and I heartily congratulate him and his current Board. God's best blessing to them.

And Happy Birthday again to *Christian Ethics Today*. ■

# 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 five times each year.

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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