

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4 AGGREGATE ISSUE 56 FALL 2005

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

**Lamentations** *Clyde E. Fant, Jr.*

**EthixBytes**

**Religion and the Global Crisis** *William E. Hull*

**Jesus Has Been Hijacked!** *Bill Moyers*

**Another Atheist Finds God** *John Scott*

**Coming Soon to a School Near You?** *Mark A. Chancey*

**The War of the Lamb: What Is God Doing About Evil?**

*Jeph Holloway*

**Is "Biblical Counseling" At SBTS Biblical?** *Keith Herron*

**A Very Long Shadow** *Jerry W. Reeves*

**Dear Pops** *Hal Haralson*

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Ethics (Bonhoeffer)** *Reviewed by Adam English*

**The Beloved Community** *Reviewed by Darold Morgan*

**Religious Freedom Award Remarks** *Foy Valentine*



**KUDZU** *by Doug Marlette*  
[www.dougmarlette.com](http://www.dougmarlette.com)

**NOTE: OUR NEW HOME ADDRESS BEGINNING IN 2006**  
9608 Parkview Ct Denton, TX 76207-6658

---

# Lamentations

*By Clyde E. Fant, Jr. Professor of Christian Studies Emeritus*

Stetson University, DeLand, FL

“I am from Louisiana. In these last days, grief and outrage have held a contest inside of me. So I’m writing this, because I have to.”

How like a widow sits the city once so beautiful!  
She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks,  
Because there is none to comfort her.  
She stretched forth her hands, but none came to her;  
They heard how she was groaning, but none came unto her.  
In her streets the flood bereaves;  
In the sodden houses it is like death.  
The leaders and elders of the city have fled, but the poor  
are trapped within her levees.

Her friends have dealt treacherously with her;  
Those who promised to help are worse than her enemies.  
When she cried aloud, none came;  
Smooth words promised much,  
But they were empty rhetoric, wells without water, phan-  
tom bread.  
Shame! Shame upon us all.

Who would have believed it!  
She who sang, even when she mourned,  
The people who danced even in their want—  
Now they are dying.  
Their colorful robes are stained with mud;  
They are gray, all gray, the pallor of the dead.

Weep, weep for the great city!  
Orators of platitudes, politicians of promises, it is you who  
betrayed her!  
You took from her her safety; you neglected her when she  
reached out to you.

You channeled her rivers and harnessed her waters—but  
for yourselves! For the profits of your friends!  
You caused her marshes to dry and her wilderness to recede;  
you brought the might of the waves and the winds to her  
very doors.

The poor, those who dwelt in the lowest places, who lived  
in miserable shanties of wood, termite-ridden and forlorn,  
Where none but the hopeless would dwell:  
You have murdered them, and their corpses drift in the  
brackish floods,  
But their cries have gone up to God!

Woe to you, Republicans!  
For you pumped wealth from their lands and sent their  
sons to die in your wars,  
But they are as nothing to you.  
“Who is my neighbor?” You do not know yet the answer to  
this ancient question.  
Are your only neighbors your friends in the country clubs  
and board rooms?  
Your grandfathers set the slaves free, and you return them  
to a worse bondage of perpetual poverty!  
Your fathers segregated them, but you ghettoize them;  
Then you redistrict them to take away the few voices  
they have,  
But God will cause the ruined city to cry on their behalf!  
Shame! Shame for your hypocritical use of my name to  
lure the unwary.

Woe to you also, Democrats!  
You were the fathers of slavery, first sons of the South!  
You damned the poor to generations of ignorance and want.  
Your fathers segregated them, and you promised to bring  
them into your family.  
But where were you when they needed you?  
For you lack the courage of your convictions! You curry the  
favor of the enemies of your own people!  
You have become impotent by your timidity.  
You endorsed the wars.  
You approved the miserable crumbs for education and  
employment.

---

**Editor:** Joe E. Trull

**Publisher:** Christian Ethics Today Foundation, 101 Mt. View Rd.; Wimberley, TX 78676. (512) 847-8721; FAX (512) 847-8171.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY is produced in the U.S.A. and is published bi-monthly, mailed from Dallas, Texas, where third-class postage is paid. Articles published in CET express the views of the authors and not necessarily the viewpoint of the Journal or the Editor. Send corrections and change of addresses to P.O. Box 26, Wimberley, Texas, 78676.

You courted the indifferent, smug suburbs—may you live among them eternally, bored forever by their white sameness! Shame! Shame for your graft in the statehouses, Your selfishness that has turned your people from you in disgust.

Woe to you Christians who pride yourselves in the name Conservative,  
Who call all generous spirits and inclusive hearts liberals,  
Who see wars as strength and peace as weakness!  
The Prince of Peace rebuke you!

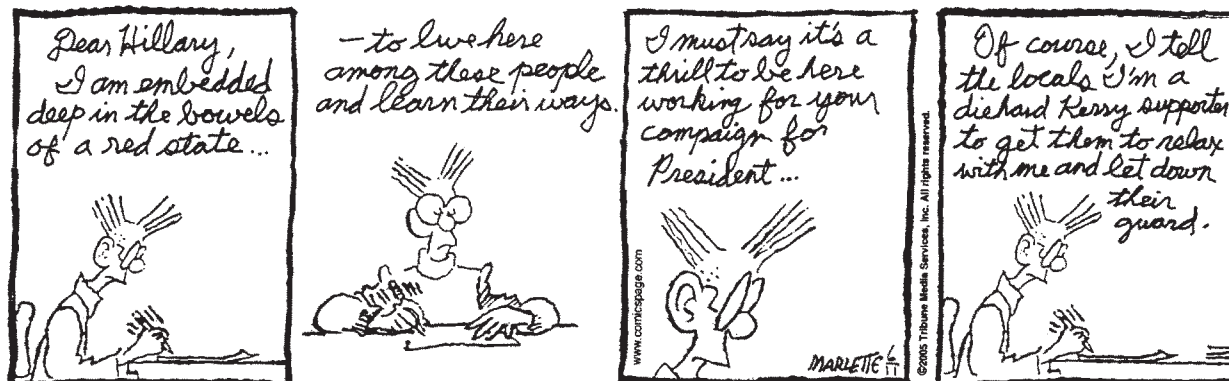
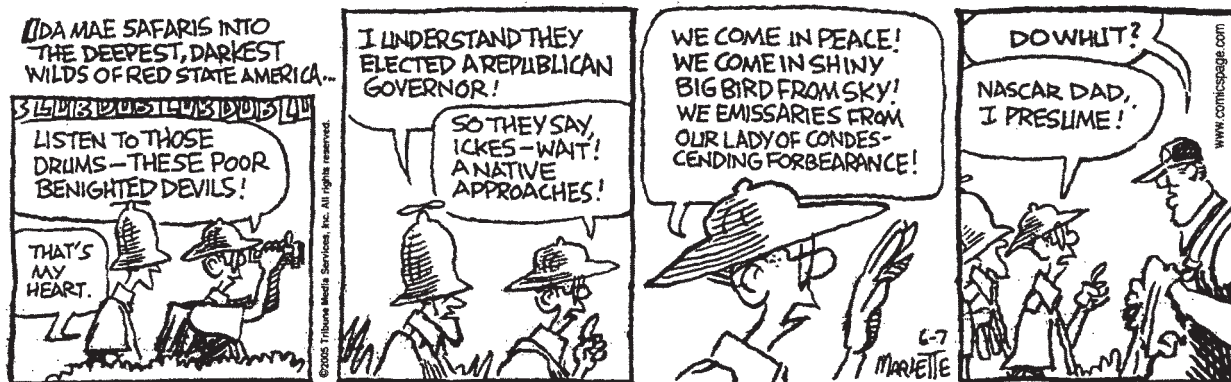
Woe to you also, Liberal Christians!  
You scorn the common and cause the simple to feel inferior in your midst.  
Your hearts are ever open, but your pocketbooks are always closed!  
He who lived among the poor rebuke you!

Woe to you, television preachers and megachurch pastors!  
False prophets!  
You deceive the people with your bleats of piety while you endorse wars and favor your rich benefactors.  
Your prophecies of end times have come true—in your own generation!

Look upon the city! Look upon hell on earth!  
See what your leaders have wrought, the shame of the earth!  
All mock us and call us fools,  
We who send armies across oceans but cannot cross the Mississippi to help our own!  
Shame, shame upon you!

I hate, I despise your solemn assemblies,  
The self-hypnotic repetitions of your pagan praise-hymns are a scandal in my ears.  
Come before me no more lifting up unholy hands,  
Do not use my name to grow your personal kingdoms,  
Or to bless your political ambitions.  
What do you think I desire? Barrels of oil from Iraq?  
Herds of sacred cows from Texas?  
Go now and learn what this means:  
I desire mercy and not sacrifice,  
Lovingkindness, not benign neglect.

Weep, weep for my city,  
For my people,  
For my children.  
For they are dead. ■



---

# EthixBytes

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

“The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts.”

**C. S. Lewis.**

“If the God you believe in hates all the same people you do, then you know you’ve created God in your own image.”

**Ann Lamount** in *beliefnr.com*

“The slow response to Katrina and poor federal leadership is a replay of the mishandling of Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The government wasn’t prepared, scrimped on storm spending, and shifted its attention from natural disasters to terrorism.”

**Former FEMA Chief of Staff Jane Bullock,**  
a 22-year veteran of the agency.

“Would somebody show me in the Bible where it says we have to get our guy elected to the office before we can advance the kingdom of God? I may have missed it, but I don’t remember one single instance where the church ran a candidate for the Roman Senate.”

**Charlie Johnson,** pastor of Trinity BC in San Antonio at a Religious Liberty luncheon July 1.

“The biggest mistake progressives [Democrats] have made is to cede the entire territory of moral values to the political right. . . . I don’t think Jesus’ top two priorities were a capital-gains tax cut and the occupation of Iraq.”

**Jim Wallis,** author of “God’s Politics.”

“I deeply believe that if we as evangelicals remain silent and do not speak up in defense of the poor, we lose our credibility and our right to witness about God’s love for the world.”

**Rick Warren,** author and pastor, in an open letter campaign sent to President Bush and 150,000 evangelicals.

“In the long run, we will defeat the terrorists through the spread of freedom and democracy.”

**President Bush** explaining the new strategy of the United States, which does not appear in the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism published two years ago.

“There’s no articulation of how we are going to apply this principle [spreading democracy] in practice—and that’s where the rub is.”

**Clark Murdock,** strategic planner at the Pentagon, CIA, and White House in Republican and Democratic administrations.

“I attended the Dove awards recently and was broken-hearted . . . in stead of saying, ‘Look, fashion doesn’t matter, hip doesn’t matter,’ Christians were saying, ‘World, please accept us, we can be just as hip as you, just as fashionable, only in a religious way.’”

**Don Miller,** in *Leadership, Summer, 2005.*

“The broader goal is a federal judiciary and Supreme Court that will reverse 40 years of ‘anti-religion’ rulings and regard the Constitution with the same reverence that a fundamentalist church holds for the Bible.”

**Ted Haggard,** President of the National Association of Evangelicals at the “Justice Sunday II” rally August 14, 2005.

“Any effort to explain Iraq as ‘we are on track and making progress’ is nonsense.”

**Newt Gingrich,** former House Republican speaker.

“The president has turned the volume up on his megaphone about as high as it could go to try to tie the war in Iraq to the war on terrorism . . . . I don’t think it washes after all these years.”

**Richard Viguerie,** conservative direct mail consultant.

“What is it with you people? Do you think not getting caught in a lie is the same as telling the truth?”

**Robert Redford** in “Three Days of the Condor.”

“If we want to win the war against terror, we must win the war against poverty.”

**Former Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell.**

“It is wrong for us to take the money of Southern Baptists and then tell them it’s none of your information what these salaries are. It is wrong. It is ethically immoral to do this.”

**Rev. Nichols,** pastor of FBC, Kenai, AK, who studied the salary structure of SBC entity employees and learned of difficult access requirements, including a pledge of confidentiality.

“A corporate entity can choose to disclose salaries in any manner it wishes to do.”

**Rev. Gary Smith,** SBC Exec. Comm. member and pastor of Fielder Road BC, Arlington, TX.

"I was deeply troubled to learn that my client's access to counsel was conditioned on his willingness to plead guilty."

**Lt. Cmdr. Charles Swift**, Navy JAG lawyer appointed to represent a Guantanamo Bay detainee, to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

"The detention of terror suspects at the Guantanamo Bay naval base is an embarrassment and has given extremists an excuse to attack the United States."

**President Jimmy Carter** at the Baptist World Alliance centenary conference in England.

"Growing at a rate of about 900 inmates each week [since mid-2003], the nation's prisons and jails held 2.1 million people, or one in every 138 U.S. residents . . . [due to] laws and practices that have focused on punishment and prison as our primary response to crime."

*Associated Press and Malcolm Young, director of the Sentencing Project.*

"Capital punishment means them without the capital gets the punishment."

**Sister Helen Prejean** noting that those subjected to the death penalty are disproportionately poor and black.

"Melting ice and warming waters have raised average sea levels worldwide by more than an inch since 1995. If the current rate continues . . . the world's seas will rise at least a foot by the end of this century, causing widespread flooding and erosion of islands and coastal areas."

**Robert S. Boyd**, Knight Ridder Newspapers, July, 2005.

"After the Rapture, I hope our books [the *Left Behind* series] will become even more popular than they are right now."

**Tim LaHaye**, in *Sojourners*, August, 2005.

"*Your Best Life Now* [TV Pastor Joel Olsteen] is another entry in the long list of American contributions to the prosperity gospel: just improve your attitude, keep your chin up, and God's blessings will rain down on you."

**Jason Byassee**, *The Christian Century*, July, 2005.

"About 11% of women and 21% of men cheat on their spouse each year, and 90% of Americans believe adultery is wrong." **Helen Fisher**, anthropologist on *ABC News*.

"The number of unmarried opposite sex couples living together has climbed from 439,000 in 1960 to over 5 million now. And the marriage rate has fallen from 77 of every 1000 women in 1976 to 40 per 1000 last year."

*National Marriage Project, Rutgers Univ.*

"A casino-rich tribe [Coushatta Indians] wrote checks for at least \$55,000 to House Majority Leader Tom Delay's political groups, but the donations were never publicly disclosed, and the tribe was directed to divert the money to more obscure groups [including] Christian voter outreach."

**Adam Nossiter**, *Associated Press*.

"Fewer than one-half of 1 percent of Americans in an April Gallup Poll said they would advise a young man to enter the ministry as a career, and just 1 percent said they would suggest a young woman aspire to be a stay-at-home wife and mother."

*EthicsDaily.com.*

"I tell (female students) to toughen up and understand that their call is from God and not from human beings, and that they have to follow what God has told them to do."

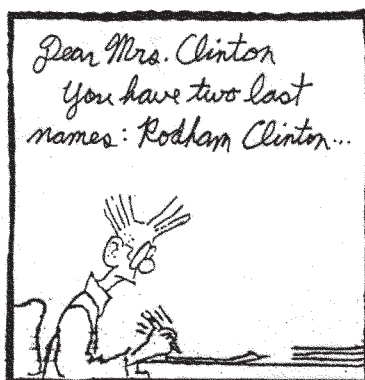
**Dr. Carolyn Ratcliffe**, Assistant Professor of Religion, Wayland Baptist University.

"George W. Bush is not Lord. The Declaration of Independence is not an infallible guide to Christian faith and practice. Nor is the U. S. Constitution, nor the U. N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The American flag is not the Cross. The Pledge of Allegiance is not the Creed. "God Bless America" is not the Doxology."

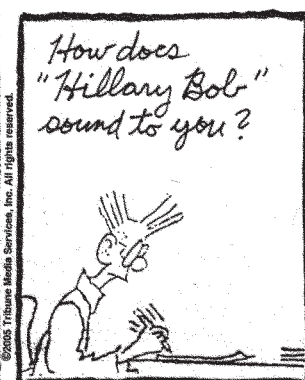
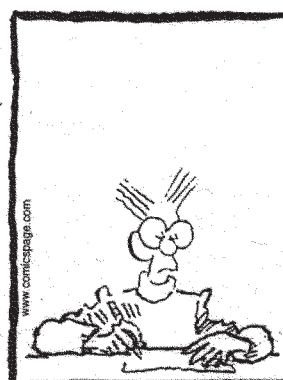
*Christianity Today* editorial, July 23, 2005.

"After seven years of marriage, I'm sure of two things—first, never wallpaper together, and second, you'll need two bathrooms, both for her. The rest is a mystery, but a mystery I love to be involved in." ■

Comedian **Dennis Miller**.



Many of these red state women have two first names, like "Betty Lou" or "Mary Alice"...



---

# Religion and the Global Crisis

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

Endless media hype notwithstanding, a truly new millennium did not begin on January 1, 2000, 12:01 a.m., at Times Square in mid-Manhattan, but on September 11, 2001, 8:47 a.m., at the World Trade Center in lower-Manhattan. Suddenly, without warning or provocation, we were confronted with a civilizational clash of global proportions<sup>1</sup> that threatens to redefine our priorities for decades if not centuries to come. Gazing at ground zero, we came away with the deep intuition that nothing will ever be the same again.

Surprising as it may seem, religion was the defining characteristic of this monstrous eruption of violence. For here was no nation-state attacking our country in a military engagement such as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Rather, what occurred was the openly declared launching of a “holy war” (*jihad*) by the worldwide “House of Islam” against “infidels” (*kafir*) believed to be dominated by that “Great Satan,” the United States of America. But how could this happen if, as our President regularly reminds us, Islam’s “teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah”?<sup>2</sup> Does a Texas Methodist who became personally interested in faith only in recent years really understand this ancient Middle Eastern religion better than Osama bin Laden, who has long belonged to the strict Wahhabi branch of Islam and can inflame the Muslim masses with his religious rhetoric?<sup>3</sup>

The answer to that troubling question is complex because Islam is not a monolithic unity but a diverse cluster of what we are accustomed to call “denominations.” Some are rational and others mystical, some pietistic and others legalistic, some tolerant and others violent. If we were to say, “Will the true Muslims please stand up,” they would all rise and immediately begin arguing among themselves as to which is the best expression of Islam. But the same thing is true of Christianity with its Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals. Or of Judaism with its Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed. Sad to say, every religion has its gentle saints and fierce fanatics, its flexible progressives and rigid traditionalists, its coercive exclusivists and collaborative inclusivists. Thus, when we judge Osama bin Laden to be an extremist who has corrupted his faith, we are thereby judging the same extremism that would corrupt our own faith. Because September 11 throws into such bold relief how religion itself can become

demonic, it serves as a wake-up call to all of us to examine the integrity and health of our own beliefs and practices.

Therefore, let us probe a few of the most important ways in which Islam has been degraded by those who would make it the driving force behind an obsession with senseless destruction. While such an analysis may contribute to our understanding of current events, few of us will have any opportunity to become reformers purifying a perverted Islam, hence I would like to go further and ask whether we need to guard our own religious traditions from contamination by similar tendencies. To those made uncomfortable by such a critique because they hold all religion to be sacred and thus exempt from censure, I would point out that at the very heart of the Old Testament is a prophetic protest leveled straight at the debasement of Israelite religion (e.g. Isa. 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24; Jer. 3:19-25), and that Jesus repeatedly warned his Jewish contemporaries about the folly of fighting a religious war against Rome (Lk. 19:41-44). I know that it is politically correct to honor all religions in the name of tolerance, but perhaps we may escape the charge of judgmentalism if we apply the same rigorous standards to our own religion as we do to Islam.

Since a great deal has already been written about the historical, political, and military aspects of the present conflict,<sup>4</sup> let us focus here on five religious issues that are at the heart of the civilizational clash which we now confront. In so doing, I shall consider, not the textbook Islam popularized by Western scholars, but the Taliban Islam that has openly supported a global strategy of terror which has now reached our shores.

## Absolutism

The reactionary mentality so prevalent in parts of Islam highlights the dangers inherent in all forms of religious fanaticism. Here is a militant religious movement offering authoritarian opinions based on a literalistic interpretation of the original language of one ancient book to which zealous followers give unquestioning obedience. Quite simply, it is old-fashioned religious fundamentalism raised to the level of national and international policy.<sup>5</sup> The problem is not that Muslims have no right to their convictions, or that they are not entitled to base them on the Koran, or that they are wrong to urge them on others. The problem, rather, is that their views are both determined and delivered with finality, that there is no

room for alternative viewpoints, that self-criticism has been overwhelmed by certainty. In a word, the root problem is that of religious absolutism, treating understandings that are human and therefore contingent as God's decrees which are divine and therefore categorical. The Muslims who adopt this mindset leave no room for the life of dialogue, for an ongoing process of development both within their own lives and within Islam's understanding of itself.

This rigid stance did not always characterize the religion of Mohammed. In its founding century (632-732 A.D.), it not only united the diverse tribes of the Arabian peninsula, but also fused whole regions as disparate as North Africa and Southeast Asia into the last great empire of the ancient world. By the Middle Ages, Islam virtually dominated world culture. George Sarton, the Harvard historian of science, has written that, in the tenth century, "The main task of mankind was accomplished by Moslems. The great philosopher . . . mathematicians . . . geographer and encyclopedist" were all Moslem.<sup>6</sup> From Islam came the rediscovery of Aristotle and the first scientific astronomy and medicine since the Greeks. By the time Columbus discovered America, this desert faith was not only the largest religion in the world but, in some respects, its most universal.<sup>7</sup> For as the Arab empire decolonized itself, vast stretches of the world's great sunbelt were left "permanently caught in the light but unbreakable net of a common Islamic culture."<sup>8</sup>

But in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, dogmatic Islamic theologians shut down the philosophical schools in order to banish the heresy of liberal learning. As "the high culture lost its capaciousness and hence, its adaptability . . . reactionary features of Islamic society hardened,"<sup>9</sup> leaving it intellectually stagnant, politically impotent, and economically exhausted by the opening of the twentieth century. Perhaps its low point came in 1924 when the caliphate, or dynastic rulership, was abolished by Kemal Ataturk in connection with the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. This move was part of a Herculean effort to modernize the archaic civilization of Islam by introducing Western ways of thinking hammered out by the scientific revolution and Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. Because Westernization was accompanied by cultural values repugnant to the traditional Islamic faith, it was rejected in many parts of the Muslim world. For example, Taliban schools in Pakistan, from which the recent rulers of Afghanistan came, are staffed by religious scholars (*ulema*) who teach nothing from the modern era but only Islamic tradition that is memorized, not discussed.<sup>10</sup> Two assumptions are central to this system: first, there is only one route to reality, the religious one; and second, its content never changes, for its truth is both total and final.

Like early Islam, Judaism and Christianity were founded as developing religions. The Hebrew scriptures themselves reveal a dynamic growth from the Law through the Prophets to the Wisdom literature. But even before

the Old Testament canon was completed, it stimulated ceaseless interpretations (*Midrashim*) which, when codified (*Mishnah*), became the object of further elaboration (*Gemara*) that was then gathered up into an encyclopedic repository (*Talmud*). Jesus enabled his followers to contribute to this ongoing quest for understanding by providing them with a twofold framework for their own creative appropriation of the past. First, he showed them patterns of "promise-and-fulfillment" according to which ancient truth could find fresh and finer expression in a new day (Mt. 5:17-20). Second, he promised them his living Spirit as a guide to the discovery of the truth that they could not possibly grasp during his brief earthly ministry (Jn. 16:12-15). What this remarkable openness to a never-ending adventure with truth is trying to tell us is that, if God's thoughts are infinitely greater than our own (Isa. 55:8-9), should it not take us an eternity to comprehend fully what he is trying to reveal?

As we view the tragic consequences of a rigid Muslim mindset unfolding in the Middle East, it should warn us against some of the same symptoms that have emerged in American religious life. The "noise level" is rising in many pulpits as popular preachers bellow and scream with a stridency that says unmistakably, "Don't talk back, I have declared the last word, take it or leave it!" A new zealotism among the masses welcomes this bombast as a way of verbalizing gut feelings of anger and frustration over the course of human events. One veteran participant in denominational life remarked after attending a highly publicized showcase of such preaching, "Anybody who brought his mind to this meeting wouldn't know what to do with it." Whenever we allow others to do our thinking for us just because they rant and rave while waving a Bible in the air, we are starting down the same dangerous road that Islamic fundamentalists are now walking.

I suggest three ways to test whether this trend has made inroads into your own religious mentality and community. First, does a totalistic and literalistic doctrine of Scripture leave any room for growth in understanding both on the part of the writers of Scripture and on the part of its readers today? Look carefully to see whether those championing the inerrancy of the Book are really championing the inerrancy of their own interpretation of the Book! Second, does your religion have a robust doctrine of creation that encourages its adherents to celebrate the discoveries of science? To be sure, there are always those, like the tormentors of Galileo, who fear that such discoveries may undermine established doctrine and so upset the status quo, but *new* truth can never be a threat to the God who is the source of *all* truth! Third, does your religion actively support the kind of educational institutions that cultivate an appreciation of ambiguity in the face of ultimate mystery, with its components of irony, tragedy, and pathos? We are never as wise as when we know what it is that we do not know, or, as the Apostle Paul put it, when we realize that we hold the surpassing treasure of truth in the earthen vessels of our

religious traditions “to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

### Theocracy

A particular problem with the religious totalitarianism of the Taliban is that it is fused to the political ideal of a theocratic civilization. Throughout its history, Islam has steadfastly advocated the union, rather than the separation, of church and state. Remember that the movement was born in a vast desert where the lack of communication and mobility radically decentralized and thus fragmented public life. The great achievement of Mohammed was to unite warring clans and tribes by means of a common religion uniquely adapted to their circumstances, thereby giving them an identity and cohesiveness that they had never known before. As the movement rapidly spread until it stretched from the western shores of North Africa to the eastern islands of Indonesia, the linkage of religion and politics made it possible to develop a comprehensive civilization based on a common culture reinforced both by religious decree and by civil edict. The liability of this system was that it introduced an inescapable dimension of coercion and conformity into the life of the religious community.

Needless to say, in this regard Islam took its cue from the theocratic vision of the Christian civilization in Europe that came to a climax in the Holy Roman Empire. At this remove it would be hard to say whether more Christians or more Muslims were converted at the point of a sword, but it is important to note how different have been the responses to these tactics in the East and in the West. All of the fifty-seven Islamic nations, with the single exception of the Turkish Republic, continue to be highly autocratic in governance and thus have no problem with coercive religion or politics. By contrast, Europe has spent the past five hundred years disestablishing the Constantinian church in order to include freedom of religion within its emerging definition of democracy. In fact, one of the main reasons why the scientific revolution in the West became increasingly “secular” was to protect its quest for truth from the disruptive effects of the religious wars that had convulsed Europe for a century (1556-1648). While some of the state churches of Europe still retain a few ceremonial prerogatives, the great lesson of this struggle for democracy in the West is that the awesome spiritual power of religion must never again be linked to the equally awesome temporal power of the state if any semblance of freedom is to survive.

Even though our country transplanted some of the traditional theocratic assumptions of Europe during the colonial period, after gaining independence we quickly divested ourselves of state churches with their troublesome alliances between ministers and magistrates. The insistence of Roger Williams on the centrality of religious freedom from government interference gave birth to the sacredness of the individual conscience which has remained at the center of American identity to this day.<sup>11</sup> That is why

we are, indeed, fighting a “religious war” with the likes of Osama bin Laden. Listen to the British Roman Catholic, Andrew Sullivan, who sees so clearly one central issue in this conflict:

[T]he question of religious fundamentalism . . . was the central question that led to America’s existence. The first American immigrants, after all, were refugees from the religious wars that engulfed England and that intensified under England’s Taliban, Oliver Cromwell. . . . Following [John] Locke, the founders established as a central element of the new American order a stark separation of church and state . . . [which] led to one of the most vibrantly religious civil societies on earth. . . . it is this achievement that the Taliban and bin Laden have now decided to challenge. . . . What is really at issue here is the simple but immensely difficult principle of the separation of politics and religion. . . . We are fighting for religion against one of the deepest strains in religion there is.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the centrality of religious freedom to the American experience, the lure of theocracy is ever with us. For Jews, the Zionist impulse that led to the re-establishment of the nation of Israel has strong theocratic implications. For Roman Catholics, the waves of immigrants from countries such as Italy and Poland imported European notions of theocracy to our shores while, for Protestants, the resurgence of a neo-Calvinism has had a similar effect. Emerging from their fundamentalist rootage, evangelicals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson have done much to keep the theocratic hope alive in that broad coalition called New Right Religion. Black church leaders of the civil rights movement learned to depend upon the federal government for relief when the white church establishment refused to challenge a segregationist culture. All about us the historic “wall of separation” between church and state is being eroded, especially in this anguished time when praying to God and rallying around the flag have become virtually indistinguishable.

Of the many problems raised by these theocratic trends, two may be mentioned here. The first is that democracy cannot grant a large measure of liberty to its citizens unless that freedom is guarded from the perversities of human nature by a strong system of checks-and-balances. This division of powers is not only necessary *within* government, as with the separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, but also *between* government and other major forces in society, such as a free press in the public square, a free podium in the schools, and a free pulpit in the churches. Of course there are areas of mutual concern where voluntary cooperation is desirable between governmental entities and religious groups. President Bush is exploring such possibilities in his advocacy of “charitable choice” and “faith-based initiatives.” But the primary relation between church and state ought to be one of complete independence, leaving each free to challenge the other with its finest vision of human betterment.



Second, in the present crisis it is important that Christianity not be perceived as an American religion or even as a Western religion but as a global religion not beholden to any country or culture. If our religious interests are no broader than our national interests, then they serve only to deepen the divisions that condemn the world to perpetual strife. Surely this is a time to concentrate on the commonalities that unite the three great Abrahamic faiths, chief of which is the monotheism that they all emphatically affirm.<sup>13</sup> For if there really is only one God, then this universal deity must be the God of us all, friend and foe alike. There is no place for tribalism or nativism in religion if God is truly one, but religion can never escape its cultural captivity unless it is free from the smothering embrace of the state.

### Clericalism

Our third characteristic is the inevitable offspring of the first two features of Islam just discussed. Once a religion becomes fossilized, drawing its inspiration from the distant past as understood by centuries of tradition, it requires a cadre of experts to explain its meaning for today. In the case of Islam, everything is based on the Koran (*Qur'an*) that must be studied and recited in its seventh century Arabic text. Only those with long years of training in Muslim seminaries/mosques (*madrassas*) can attain this esoteric knowledge, limiting religious leadership to a tightly controlled guild of learned experts (*mullahs*) with enormous authority. Add to that the theocratic scope of Islam and it gives political as well as religious clout to the role of clergy in society.

That is why *ayatollahs* can issue edicts touching on every aspect of private and public life, from decisions of national diplomacy down to minute details of manners and morals. Again, the issue is not whether God's will embraces the totality of life, or whether clerics may hold an opinion as to what God's will might be on any particular point. The issue, rather, is whether expertise in the Koran, or in any other scripture, confers an omniscience—or, indeed, any special competence at all—in areas not related to religion. Do clerics have a monopoly on the full range of human wisdom, or does God guide laypersons into secular callings where they may become far more expert in the affairs of statecraft than scriptural specialists ever could?

To be sure, it would simplify things if we could put all of the problems of life into one basket and hand them over to a cleric for solution. But God does not offer any such shortcuts to building a better world. If politicians could find all of the answers by becoming experts in scripture and theology, they would all quickly line up to enroll in the nearest seminary! What the most sensitive and spiritually committed public officials have learned, on the contrary, is that true faith, far from conferring easy answers to complex problems, may actually intensify the difficulty of finding a just but workable solution. Issues of governance need to be discussed and decided on the basis of input

from a wide range of viewpoints, with differing conclusions likely from equally sincere and dedicated citizens. To determine public policy by single-issue crusades which equate one position with the will of God for American life is to drift toward the very disaster which is unfolding in Islam.

When I was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Shreveport, U. S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston was a member of our church. As we discussed the pressures that converged on his office, he described how religious lobbyists would try to coerce his vote for special-interest legislation by threatening to oppose his reelection with funds raised from across the nation. The problem was not just how to counter such a reprisal orchestrated far beyond the boundaries of Louisiana but, even more important, how to represent those citizens with divergent opinions regarding the legislation in question. What Senator Johnston helped me see is that preachers make poor politicians. They deal so constantly with what they view as moral and spiritual absolutes that they lack the ability to reach accommodations involving trade-offs and compromises, not just with so-called "secularist" positions, but even with religious positions that differ from their own.

In a significant sense, the American experiment was a revolt, not only against the established church with its religious wars, but also against a clericalism that perpetuated authoritarian religion in the public square. Democracy represented a fundamental challenge to "authority from above." In shifting the locus of power from the "divine right of kings" to the inalienable rights of citizens, it implicitly encouraged the transfer of religious authority from the clergy to the laity. Out of that ferment, Free Church denominations began to emphasize concepts such as "the priesthood of the believer" and "the soul competency of the individual." Clergy were seen increasingly, not as an elite leadership with a subservient following, but as a servant leadership empowering and enabling an egalitarian following. Religious renewal seldom comes from professional clergy dependent on the approval of their fellow ministers for vocational success. Whether it be from an Amos, John the Baptist, or Stephen, the prophetic word of renewal usually emerges outside of ecclesiastical channels. A clergy-controlled religion that does not listen to and learn from its laity will never be compatible with the finest expressions of democracy on which our country was founded.

### Hierarchy

What we have just sought to describe are the limitations of a clerical hierarchy to liberate the full potential of the laity. Now let us notice how this "top down" authoritarian mentality is applied to fully half of the human race in Islam's refusal to grant gender equality to women. For example, when the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in 1996, they immediately issued a number of repressive edicts, the first of which ended all education for females at every level beginning with kin-

dergarten. Women could not return to work or to school but became virtual prisoners in their own homes where music, dancing, television, the Internet, and western hair-styles were also banned. On the rare occasions when they appeared in public, they were to cover themselves from head to foot including the face and be accompanied by a close male relative or receive one hundred lashes. These strictures were imposed despite the fact that the Muslim nations of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey have all been ruled by women in recent years.

The Harvard historian of economics, David S. Landes, has made a major study of poverty and wealth by nations and regions of the world.<sup>14</sup> In regard to Islamic societies, he has concluded that a key reason why they have fallen so far behind the West lies in their treatment of women. By forcing females to live such circumscribed lives, Islamic civilization denied itself the enormous human capital which they could provide.<sup>15</sup> Imagine how completely the American economy would be wrecked if women were suddenly excluded from the work force. In Afghanistan, for example, this ban virtually destroyed the educational system in which seventy percent of the teachers were women. Because it extended to widows, as many as a million women were left with no recourse but to beg on the street. Imprisoned from head to toe in a shroud for the living called the *burka*, women suffer claustrophobia like caged animals, their hearing muffled and vision restricted, unable to look at, much less talk to, male strangers. Condemned to illiteracy and anonymity, they live out their lives in domestic servitude to a husband whom they did not choose, for all practical purposes not only invisible but nonexistent as well.

Even more disastrous is what this hideous system does to religion. Think of a spirituality devoid of any input or influence from those who participate most intimately in the central passages of life by giving birth to babies, nurturing children, feeding and clothing the family, caring for the sick and dying. A male dominated faith is one largely without tenderness and compassion for the vulnerable. More often than not, it is a religion that does not know how to love. The Taliban, for example, sponsored a so-called "Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice" that, in the name of a fierce Islamic legalism, sent thugs out on the streets to beat women and children with lengths of steel cable for silly infractions like wearing white socks or shoes that "clicked" on the pavement. We shudder at how this sadistic use of religion conspired to obliterate the potential of women and girls simply because they were guilty of the crime of being born female. But we remember just enough of our own history of human slavery and segregation to realize the incalculable damage that such exploitation does to the souls of men made into ruthless tyrants by their supposed obedience to the will of God.

After endless delays spanning three centuries in the life of our nation, American women finally began to achieve

a measure of equality in the twentieth century. First they gained access to political power as a result of the woman's suffrage movement, then they gained access to equal employment opportunities by achieving a measure of control over their reproductive functions. Building on these two breakthroughs, they are making remarkable strides both in the workplace and in the church. Women now outnumber and outperform men in most areas of higher education, which means that it will be only a matter of time until they are able to express their full creative potential in every sector of American society. Less than a century ago, female students were excluded from almost all of our theological schools, but now they comprise more than thirty percent of the enrollment, with many of them moving into prestigious professorships where they will teach the religious leaders of tomorrow.

For all of these recent rapid advances, however, it is conspicuously evident that male-dominated American Christianity, far from being in the forefront, was downright resistant to giving women either the ballot or the pill. Furthermore, equal access to higher education has been prompted far more by federal legislation than by encouragement from the churches and the schools that they sponsor. Most noticeable is the "glass ceiling" within congregational life which public law is reluctant to challenge. Women continue to fill far more than their share of "subordinate" but significant roles as they care for the children, cook in the kitchen, and sing in the choir, but in most churches they have seen severely limited service in senior leadership positions, whether lay or clerical. For example, the two largest denominations in America have chosen to make gender discrimination a theological test of orthodoxy, thereby restricting pastoral and episcopal functions only to males. In such a system, even the meaning of a venerable female icon such as the Virgin Mary may be authoritatively interpreted only by a group of elderly celibate males! In practice, not only does this approach give the church a one-sided masculine mindset, but it also denies the majority of its members, who are women, the chance to see mature models of feminine spirituality at work in helping to shape the spirit and direction of the church.

### Violence

The most perplexing feature of the present struggle to most Americans is the Islamic determination to fight a "Holy War" with the West. The roots of this resentment go back to 1683 when the second Turkish siege of Vienna ended in total failure followed by one defeat after another until one of the greatest empires in all of human history lay in ruins, dominated and exploited by the West for centuries. We travel as tourists to glimpse the monuments of the Crusades, but Arabs live with these galling reminders of their subservience on a daily basis. In their eyes, every time the United States mobilizes the Western world to intervene with massive military force, it is but the latest in a series of "crusades" against the Arab world.

Moreover, they interpret this intervention as support for the oil sheiks who have invested untold billions of petrodollars in the West even as the Middle East, for all of its vast natural resources, sinks into economic squalor. On their understanding, Osama bin Laden wins even if he loses because he is fighting a holy war (*jihad*) for Islamic self-determination, while the West is fighting only to protect an oil supply that feeds the voracious appetite of its insatiable consumerism.<sup>16</sup>

Seen in the context of the centuries, therefore, George Bush and Osama bin Laden are but human symbols of vast historical forces locked in mortal combat. That is why it is foolish to suppose that this crisis will vanish if only our latest antagonist is captured or assassinated. We know that bin Laden is but one of many political leaders in a vast terrorist network shrewdly exploiting the implacable opposition of Islam to Western “modernization.” If we were to silence his voice today, other spokesmen would be drawn into the powerful political void which has existed in Islam since the abolition of empire and caliphate. After all, in thousands of mosque-based schools, especially in the Northwest Frontier province of Pakistan near the Afghan border, “students” (*Taliban*) as young as seven years of age are being tutored in terror to defend Islam to the death. It is estimated that as many as 4.5 million future “holy warriors” (*mujahedeen*) are being groomed in these assembly-line incubators of *jihad*.

Once the problem is defined in this fashion, many Americans are left wondering why the Middle East should get so fanatical about defending itself against something as wonderful as “Western civilization.” Does not this legacy bring with it all of the benefits of the scientific revolution? The great Islamist scholar Bernard Lewis answers plainly: “For vast numbers of Middle Easterners, Western-style economic methods brought poverty, Western-style political institutions brought tyranny, even Western-style warfare brought defeat.”<sup>17</sup> But that still does not bring us to the heart of the problem, which is: How could admittedly profound cultural differences cause these two civilizations to engage in such violent conflict? In particular, how could their religion condone the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent civilians? How could the Islamic concept of *jihad*, meaning “struggle” or “exertion,” which Mohammed interpreted as the individual’s lifelong struggle to resist temptation, be used to justify random acts of mass terror?

Before we fly into a rage of religious judgmentalism in answering such questions, let us remember a few sobering facts. The Christian scriptures of the Old Testament contain numerous references to “holy wars” which include the idea of *herem*, a Hebrew word meaning “anathema” or “separated,” according to which the enemies of Israel were to be utterly destroyed without mercy (Dt. 7:1-2; 20:16-18), including men, women, children, infants, and animals (1 Sam. 15:3). Even those Israelite towns that compromised the faith were to be torched “as a whole

burnt offering to the Lord” that would become “a heap forever” never to be rebuilt (Dt. 13:12-18). This kind of extreme militancy has surfaced repeatedly in Christian history, notably in the medieval Crusades (1096-1396) that provided papal armies with abundant opportunities to ravage and plunder Muslim lands. Thus when bin Laden ignited anti-American passions in 1998 by issuing a *fatwa*, or religious ruling, declaring it to be “the individual duty” of every Muslim “to kill Americans and their Allies—civilians and military . . . in any country in which it is possible,”<sup>18</sup> he was merely borrowing an old religious idea from some of his Abrahamic cousins.

The only way to counter and cleanse this bitter legacy is to categorically reject the use of violence to fight any kind of “holy wars” in the name of God. In all three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—a small but noisy minority would use their scriptures to sanction slaughter as a religious act. But the Scriptures of all three religions contain more mature truths that make for peace. Measured by the highest witness of the Abrahamic faiths, the use of indiscriminate violence to fight “holy wars” has no place in the will of God for his people. We as Christians cannot invite Islam to join us in that understanding unless we first put our own house in order. How may that be done?

To rid the world of the hydra-headed monster of religious violence, American Christians will need to help our nation develop a new mindset. Before September 11, all that we could talk about was how to cut taxes, reduce government spending, and prop up an economy that was in danger of falling below the double-digit yields to which we had become accustomed. In the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, our global responsibility as a nation was hardly discussed by either candidate because the polls showed that voters couldn’t care less. If September 11 has taught us anything, it is that the richest nation in the world cannot spend all of its time and energy becoming even richer and let the rest of the world “go to hell in a handbasket.” If we try that approach long enough, the embittered whom we ignore will bring their hell to our shores in a suicidal frenzy of wanton destruction.

So we are tutored by tragedy in the lessons of *noblesse oblige*, that privilege imposes obligations. The time has come to set aside our consuming greed for extravagance and relearn the disciplines of compassion for those homeless and starving millions living on the outer edge of human subsistence. It will not be easy to show the world that we care for others as much as we care for ourselves. Indeed, it may prove easier to win the war against terrorism than to win the peace against that desperation which makes it possible. But we do not have to look far to find models of selfless global commitment that is our overriding need in the present crisis. They are called missionaries. Our religion has been sending them out for twenty centuries as agents of a universal faith intent on uniting the entire human race in a fellowship of life and love regardless of political loyalties.

While we need Christian missionaries as never before to help overcome the cleavages caused by our inherited religious animosities, we also need missionaries of the American way of life at its best: travelers, entrepreneurs, teachers, social workers, agriculturalists, engineers, and a host of others willing to go and give, willing to listen and learn, willing to save and share that a broken world might be rebuilt on the basis of mutual tolerance and respect. The task will not be easy nor will it be brief. There is little hope of changing the entrenched attitudes of those long infested with the virus of violence, but we can begin to lay the foundations of a new world order in which the moderating forces of justice and compassion in all of our religions will have a chance to gain the upper hand.

The place to start is here at home by insuring that our own religion not become a westernized version of Taliban Christianity like the Taliban Islam that has become such an implacable foe of those democratic values which lie at the bedrock of the American experiment. Sad to say, any religion can be hijacked by a fanatical minority intent on making it an instrument of obscurantist repression. So let us be vigilant to guard Christianity from the troubling tendencies that have befallen Islam by insisting that ours be a dynamic, developing faith under the guidance of God's Spirit; that it refuse to co-opt government to do by force what it will not do by faith; that its clergy exist to enable and empower the laity; that its women become full partners with men in the quest for spiritual fulfillment; and that it function as a universal faith not beholden to any country or culture. The best way for bad religion to be defeated is for good religion to take its place. Let us offer the Islamic world that witness with a prayer that all the spiritual heirs of Abraham may learn to dwell together in peace. ■

- 1 The thesis that geopolitics is entering a new phase in which conflict will be primarily cultural rather than national was advanced by Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, Summer, 1993, 22-49; subsequently expanded into a book, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). On the discussion generated, with a response by Huntington, see *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate. A Foreign Affairs Reader* (New York: Foreign Affairs, 1993). On the author's academic career that undergirds this seminal work, see Robert D. Kaplan, "Looking the World in the Eye," *The Atlantic Monthly*, December, 2001, 68-82. On attitudes toward Huntington's thesis since September 11, 2001, see James M. Wall, "Civilization Clash?," *Christian Century*, November 7, 2001, 37.
- 2 George W. Bush, address to a joint session of Congress, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001.
- 3 On David Forte as "W.'s unreliable adviser on Islam" see Franklin Foer, "Blind Faith," *The New Republic*, October 22, 2001, 12-14. On bin Laden's religion see Neil MacFarquhar, "Bin Laden and His Followers Adhere To an Austere, Stringent Form of Islam," *New York Times*, October 7, 2001, B-7. On the estimate of Daniel Pipes "that bin Laden enjoys the emotional support of half the Muslim world," see Peter Beinart, "New Faith," *The New Republic*, December 3, 2001, 8.

- 4 For a summary see William E. Hull, "Religion and The World Crisis," *Christian Ethics Today*, December, 2001, 6-10.
- 5 On Islamic fundamentalism in a global context see the encyclopedic work edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1995), 5 volumes. For a description of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world and South Asia, see volume I, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, 345-530. On its views of science and technology, family and interpersonal relations, as well as education and media, see volume II, *Fundamentalisms and Society*, 73-125, 151-213, 341-73. On its political, economic, and militancy views, see volume III, *Fundamentalisms and the State*, 88-232, 302-41, 491-556. On its dynamics as a movement, see volume IV, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, 359-588. On its similarities and differences with other fundamentalist movements across various traditions and cultures, see volume V, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, 71-95, 115-52, 179-230, 277-87.
- 6 Quoted in *Time*, April 16, 1965, 73.
- 7 For a comparison of the Islamic and Christian religions and civilizations in 1492 see Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict: Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5-26.
- 8 Peter Brown, "Understanding Islam," *The New York Review of Books*, February 22, 1979, 30.
- 9 David S. Landes and Richard A. Landes, "Girl Power," *The New Republic*, October 8, 2001, 20.
- 10 Daniel Del Castillo, "Pakistan's Islamic Colleges Provide the Taliban's Spiritual Fire," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 28, 2001, A19, A21.
- 11 Robert N. Bellah, "Is There a Common American Culture?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 66, no. 3, Fall, 1998, 617-22.
- 12 Andrew Sullivan, "This Is a Religious War," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 7, 2001, 53.
- 13 This is an enormously challenging agenda for trilateral conversations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims because monotheism, depending on how it is understood, can be either a powerfully unifying or a powerfully alienating force in competing religions. On a typology of "elective" versus "Ametaphysical" monotheism, see Martin S. Jaffee, "One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 69, no. 4, December, 2001, 763-75. For a disturbing treatment of monotheism and identity politics, see Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- 14 David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: Norton, 1998).
- 15 David S. Landes and Richard A. Landes, 20, 22.
- 16 For a detailed study of Islamic opposition to Western economic imperialism, see Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995), especially 205-16.
- 17 Bernard Lewis, "Western Civilization: A View From the East," The Jefferson Lecture for 1990, cited in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 9, 1990, A4.
- 18 Cited in *U. S. News & World Report*, September 24, 2001, 56.

---

# Jesus Has Been Hijacked!

*By Bill Moyers, New York City, NY*

**Note:** On July 2 at the American Baptist Churches Biennial in Denver, CO, veteran reporter and ordained Baptist minister Bill Moyers was given the Lifetime Achievement Award. Accepting the award on his behalf was family friend, James M. Dunn, who read Moyer's speech.

I do not deserve this award. On the other hand, I have arthritis and I don't deserve that, either. So thank you from the depth of a grateful heart.

I wish that I could have made it. I would like to be with you in person. But even as we speak I am in Europe fulfilling a long-standing commitment. There is no one I would rather this award for me than my soul-brother James Dunn. Actually, he and Howard Moody truly deserve this honor.

There could not be a more timely moment for you to be proclaiming once again freedom of conscience as the well-spring of our faith and our freedoms. The militant rhetoric of holy war echoes around the globe and, sadly, from the precincts and pews of our own country.

Who among us does not wince at the Republican Congressman who said that "Democrats cannot help but demonize Christians."

Or Pat Robertson speaking of liberal America doing to evangelical Christians "what Nazi Germany did to the Jews," and of non-Christians as "termites destroying institutions that have been built by Christians."

Who does not remember Lieutenant General William G. "Jerry Boykin", deputy under-secretary of defense in 2003, declaring that George Bush had been elevated to the presidency by a miracle" and, who, speaking of his encounter with a Somali warlord, "that I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol." Who among us did not cringe at the official of the United States Air Academy justifying the taunting and harassing of non-Christian cadets—including (and I quote) "a dirty Jew."

Ten years ago, when then Representative Charles Schumer of New York held a special hearing on violence and harassment by militia groups, his office was deluged with hate calls and faxes, many stamped with the hot fury of religious anger. One message warned him: "You should make no mistake that you are a conceited, arrogant [expletive]. You will suffer physical pain and mental anguish before we transform you into something a bit more useful. . . a lamp shade or wallets or perhaps soap."

Ten years ago Arlen Specter, the moderate Republican Senator from Pennsylvania ran for his party's nomina-

tion for President. His avowed purpose was to save the party of Lincoln from extremism. He described what he called "a continuum from Pat Buchanan's declaration of a 'holy war' at the Republican National Convention to Randall Terry calling for 'a wave of hatred' to 'the guy at Pat Robertson's law school who says murdering an abortion doctor is justifiable homicide to the guys who are pulling the triggers.'" When Senator Specter spoke out against the radical agenda of the religious right at the Iowa Republican convention, he was booed and jeered.

That was the time Thomas Kean, the former governor of New Jersey, tried to warn his fellow Republicans against giving control to dogmatists. He, too, was booed—and then announced that he would not run for the Senate because it had fallen under the grip of the radical religious right.

What was anticipated a decade ago has now been realized.

To be furious in religion, said the Quaker William Penn, "is to be furiously irreligious."

Over my long life I have traveled a long way from home but I have never left the ground of my being. At the Central Baptist Church in Marshall, Texas, we believed in a free church in a free state.

My spiritual forbearers did not take kindly to living under theocrats who embraced religious liberty for themselves but would deny it to others. "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils," thundered the dissenter Roger Williams as he was banished from Massachusetts for denying the authority of Puritans over his conscience. Baptists there were only a "pitiful negligible minority," but they were denounced as "the incendiaries of the commonwealth" for holding to their belief in the priesthood of believers. For refusing tribute to state religion Baptists were fined, flogged, and exiled.

In 1651 the Baptist Obadiah Holmes was given thirty stripes with a three-corded whip after he violated the law in taking communion with an elderly and blind Baptist in Lynn, Massachusetts. Holmes refused the offer of friends to pay his fine so that he could be released. He refused the strong drink they said would anesthetize the pain. Sober, he endured the ordeal; sober still, he would leave us with the legacy that "it is the love of liberty that must free the soul."

Over time and at great struggle, the First Amendment has made of America “a haven for the cause of conscience.” It checked what Thomas Jefferson called “the loathsome combination of church and state” which had been enforced in the old and new world alike by “weapons of wrath and blood” as human beings were tormented on the rack or in the stocks for failing to salute the prevailing orthodoxy. It put and end to the subpoena of conscience by magistrates who ordered citizens to support churches they did not attend and recite creeds that they did believe in.

The Constitution of the new nation would take no sides in the religious free-for-all that liberty would make possible and human nature would make inevitable. It would neither inculcate religion nor inoculate against it. For my Baptist ancestors, this delicate balance between faith and freedom encourages neither atheism nor animosity toward religion. We learned that Americans can be loyal to the Constitution without being hostile to God.

I confess that I do not understand the new breed of our co-religionists who invoke the separation of church and state to protect themselves against encroachment from others but denounce it when it protects others against encroachment from them; who use it to shelter their own revenues and assets from taxation but insist that taxes paid by others support private sectarian instruction in pervasively religious schools; who loath any government intrusion into their sphere but are laboring mightily to change federal tax laws so that churches may intrude upon government; who stand foursquare behind the First Amendment when they exercise their own right to criticize others—sometimes with a vengeance and often with vitriol, as when Jerry Falwell circulated videos implicating President Clinton in murder; but who when they are challenged or criticized, whine and complain that they are being attacked as “people of faith.”

Make no mistake about it. The language of religion has been placed at the service of a partisan agenda. God is being invoked to undermine safeguards for public health and the environment, to demonize political opponents, to censor textbooks, to ostracize “the other,” to end public funding for the arts, to cut taxes on the rich, and to mis-

inform and mislead voters.

The fact is, *Jesus has been hijacked*. The very Jesus who stood in his hometown and proclaimed, “The Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.” The very Jesus who told 5,000 hungry people that all people—not just those in the box seats—would be fed. The very Jesus who challenged the religious orthodoxy of the day by feeding the hungry on the Sabbath, who offered kindness to the prostitute and hospitality to the outcast, who raised the status of women, and who treated even the despised tax collector as a citizen of the Kingdom.

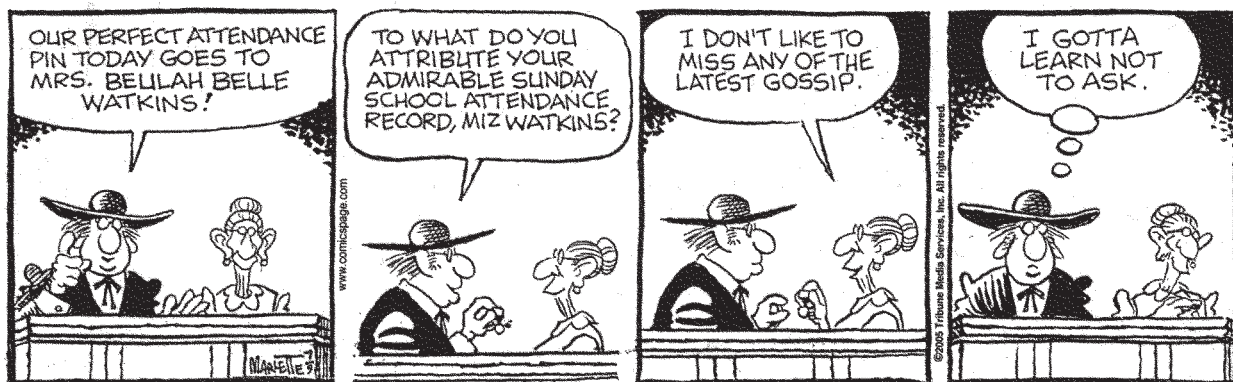
The indignant Jesus who drove the money-changers from the temple has been hijacked and turned from a friend of the dispossessed into a guardian of privilege, a militarist, hedonist, and lobbyists, sent prowling the halls of Congress like a Gucci-shod lobbyist, seeking tax breaks and loopholes for the powerful, costly new weapon systems, and punitive public policies against people without power or status.

The struggle for a just world goes on. It is not a partisan affair. God is neither liberal nor conservative, Republican nor Democrat. To see whose side God is on, just go to the Bible. It is the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the poor who are blessed in the eyes of the Lord; it is kindness and mercy that prove the power of faith and justice that measures the worth of the state. Kings are held accountable for how the poor fare under their reign. Prophets speak to the gap between rich and poor as a reason for God’s judgment. Poverty and justice are religious issues, and Jesus moves among the disinherited.

This is the Jesus who challenges the complacency of all political parties, who would shame today’s Republican Party and shake up timid Democrats. He drove the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem; I believe today he would drive them from the temples of democracy.

It is this Jesus you honor by your faithfulness to the greatest of all Baptist principles—our belief that we are most likely to hear God’s eternal call to love and justice and redemption in the still small voice of the soul.

Thank you for that fidelity, for the work you do and the witness you render—and for the recognition that today you have bestowed on me. ■



---

# Another Atheist Finds God

By John Scott, Dallas, Texas

The Associated Press recently reported that Professor Antony Flew of England now accepts the existence of God.<sup>1</sup> That was newsworthy because Professor Flew had been the world's leading intellectual champion for atheism for more than a half century. He changed his mind on the basis of recent scientific developments. When asked if his admirers might be upset with his newfound belief, he reaffirmed his commitment to Aristotle's principle: "Follow the evidence, wherever it leads."

Of course Professor Flew is not the first atheist to have changed his mind. The meeting in 1950, where he presented his most famous paper on atheism, was chaired by a former atheist. His name was C. S. Lewis, the author of *Mere Christianity*, a book that is still being published and persuading atheists to change their minds and hearts.

"Science Finds God" was a cover story in *Newsweek* in 1998.<sup>2</sup> *Time Magazine* had run a similar story in 1992.<sup>3</sup> They reported that some of the world's leading scientists, including some former atheists and Nobel Prize winners, believe in God. Some have shared their faith in writing.<sup>4</sup>

This proves that scientific knowledge does not stand in the way of a belief in God. But has science affirmatively proved the existence of God? Some scientists say yes, but others still say no.

So where does that leave the rest of us—the more than 99 percent of the world's population who are not scientists? Very few of us have enough time or expertise to analyze the massive amount of complex data that Professor Flew and others are relying on when they say scientific evidence leads to God.

Isn't there some other way to find God, something simple enough for everyone who struggles with doubt or disbelief?

I believe there is. It's an experiment, but it's not complicated. It's consistent with scientific principles, but virtually anyone can do it. I tried it when I didn't believe in God, and it worked. It changed my mind, and my life. That simple experiment has led many others, including both scientists and non-scientists, to believe in God.

One way to describe the experiment is to break it down into seven steps. That makes it more orderly than my actual journey because I took some wrong turns before finding the way. But the seven steps describe those parts of my journey that turned out to be headed in the right direction.

The following description of the experiment is pre-

sented in the form of suggestions for those who are willing to try it.

## The Experiment

*Step 1: Admit that God is a possibility.* An atheist must live with this chilling thought: "If I'm right, I will never know that for sure; but if I'm wrong, I could live to regret it." That's one reason I read over 200 books containing arguments both for and against the existence of God. But after all that reading I came to only one certain conclusion: No one can prove the negative claim that God does not exist.

I knew that before reading those books.

This first step, for some, is just to stop being an atheist and become an agnostic.

*Step 2: Acknowledge that if there is a God, you need His help.* I once assumed that religion had to begin with a belief in God. But the great Scottish scholar William Barclay said, "The beginning of all true religion is a confession of one's need for God."

Even an agnostic can do that.

This step was easy for me, as it is for virtually everybody. My willpower was like an old battery in my pocket radio; it worked, but not for long. And I could not just will myself to possess two things we all desire most: a sense of purpose and peace of mind. I read many self-help books, only to discover that *self-help* just wasn't nearly enough. Not even close.

In other words, I acknowledged my need for help from a power greater than myself.

Some call that humility. I just call it reality.

*Step 3: Make a decision to apply the "act as if" principle to God.* While reading those books debating the existence of God, I finally zoomed in on a recurring suggestion: Instead of just reading arguments, try an experiment.

William James, the famous medical doctor-psychologist-philosopher-Harvard professor, observed that most of our functional beliefs—in all areas of life—start out as "act as if" experiments. Francis Bacon, who formulated the scientific method, said, "The best proof *by far* is still personal experience." Albert Einstein said, "Only experience is knowledge; all else is information." C. S. Lewis said that faith "is really finding out by experience that it is true." And we all say, "Experience is the best teacher," and, "There is no substitute for experience."

I had lost confidence in secondhand faith based on tradition. Now I would try firsthand faith based on exper-

rience. (In retrospect, I can see that's what my religious tradition had tried to get me to do in the first place.)

At that point I bogged down in a swamp of questions: Where does one look for instructions for acting as if God exists? Which religion? Which branch of that religion?

I emerged from that swamp with a simple, achievable plan. After reading about the major religions, I decided to look for my "instructions" in only one place, a very small set of teachings. They're so small they can be read in less time than it takes to watch a movie. Yet those few words have had a greater positive impact on more lives than all other words ever spoken, written, or enacted into law. Those are of course the words attributed to Jesus Christ in the four gospels.

That's not all that drew me back to Jesus. While reading about other religions I noticed that even non-Christians had an extremely high regard for him. Gandhi was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Jesus. Some Hindus believe Jesus was God in human form. The Dalai Lama has described Jesus as a "fully enlightened being." The Koran says many of the same things about Jesus as the Bible: he was born to the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, performed many miracles, was a Messenger from God, and will return as the Messiah to bring peace to the world. Even secular scholars regard Jesus as the most influential moral figure of all time. I found it hard to believe that someone of that moral stature would lie about who he was. And I was impressed by the historical fact that many witnesses to his life, death, and resurrection chose to be tortured to death instead of recanting their story. Many may die for secondhand lies they believe are true, but not for firsthand lies they know are false.

So I returned, not to the roots of my earlier faith, but to the seeds of those roots—the words of Jesus. I read from one of those Bibles in which his words are printed in red. And I found to be true something Albert Schweitzer

said: "There is deep significance in the fact that whenever we hear the sayings of Jesus we have to enter a realm of thought that is not ours."

Some call that a ring of truth.

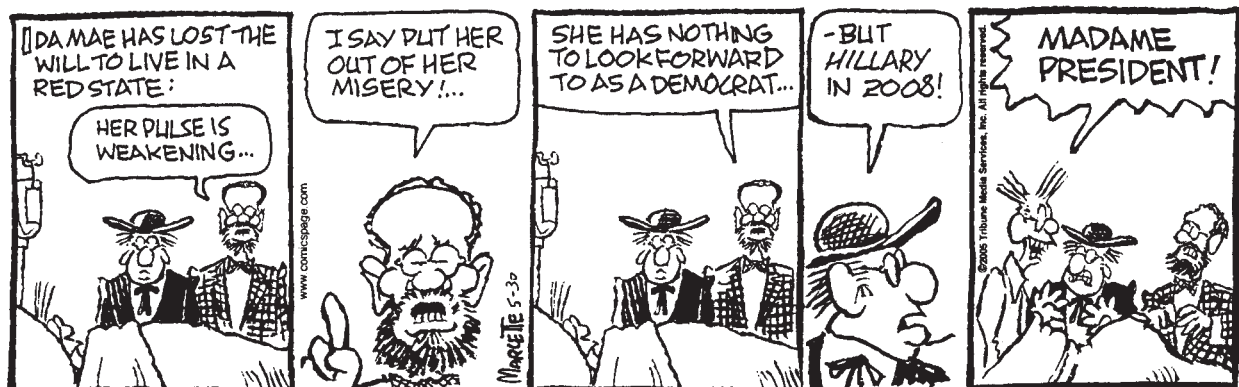
In any event, that's where I found the remaining steps.

The first three steps had been thinking steps that needed to be done only once. The next three were going to be action steps to be done every day.

*Step 4: Pray as if God exists.* It is no more hypocritical to pray to a God you're not sure exists than it is for a scientist to act as if some other hypothesis is true. Both are honest efforts to find out the truth. As my friend Preston Bright told me many years ago when I was struggling with doubt, "Sometimes the best evidence of God is an answer to your prayers, and you will never have a prayer answered if you don't pray."

I took my instructions for praying from the Sermon on the Mount. It tells us to pray privately and daily. It also includes a model prayer (that came to be called The Lord's Prayer). I tried to make my daily prayer time sort of a two-way communication; I talked to God, read from the scriptures, and then sat quietly for a few moments. I was testing the biblical passage: "Be still and know that I am God."

*Step 5: Be good to yourself.* This step answers the question that naturally comes to mind when you decide to act as if God exists: What kind of God? Answer: a God who loves you, *and expects you to do the same*. This comes from what Jesus called one of the two greatest commandments: "Love your neighbor as you *love yourself*." If God wants you to love others as much as you love yourself, it follows that God wants you to love yourself as much as the Creator wants you to love others. And the word love, as used here, is not a noun about a feeling; it's a verb, an action word.





So be good to yourself.

The test question for this step is not, “Will this make me feel good?” It is, “Will this make me feel good about myself?”

*Step 6: Practice the golden rule, including worldly charity.* Surveys show that most people, including non-Christians, regard the golden rule (“treat others as you would have others treat you”) as the highest point of all moral thought. Jesus himself said it sums up all the laws and prophets (Mt 7:12). It tells us how to treat everybody, even the rich and famous. But Jesus placed the highest possible emphasis on down-to-earth charity—worldly charity. He spoke very specifically about helping others who need food, water, clothes, and shelter, and those who are sick, lonely, in prison, poor, crippled, or blind (Mt. 25:31-46; Lk. 14:13-14).

The other steps are about what God can do for us. This is the only step requiring us to do something for others. Jesus warned, in the strongest possible terms, that worldly charity is not just an option for bonus points (Mt. 25:31-46). Yet surveys show that just over half of all Christians who are active in church are not active in charity. Are they on the easy path Jesus warned about, instead of the harder path that “few” ever find? (Mt. 7:13, 14)

I decided not to take that risk. So I began doing some volunteer work, and found it to be deeply gratifying. In fact, no step in the experiment has brought me more joy than this one. At many levels we help ourselves when we help others.

*Step 7: Take the public step.* The religious basis for the other steps can be strictly private. Others may notice improvements in your behavior, but they don’t have to know religion has anything to do with it. But this step is clearly religious and must be done in public. This step is to participate in organized religion. I had misgivings about that. But most of my excuses for not going to church made no more sense than saying I’ll never eat another vegetable because: (1) my parents madew me eat them when I was a child; (2) some of them weren’t good; (3) there are too many to choose from; (4) the people who sell them just want your money; and (5) some vegetarians are hypocrites because they have healthier-than-thou attitudes, but sneak around and eat meat.

After reflecting on it, I could not ignore the fact that Jesus attended religious services. And he said we must acknowledge our faith commitment publicly. He also taught that going to church is not something we do for God; it’s something God wants us to do for ourselves. We need to recharge our physical and spiritual batteries.

So I started going to church.

At first I was a bit put off by some judgmental members, and one who was downright dishonest. But I had to remind myself that all worthwhile movements attract some fanatics and frauds. And nobody’s perfect. So churches, like all other human institutions, are filled with imperfect people (including me). But many churches are worth attending, and you only need one. And I found one. So can you.

## The Results

The experiment worked like a miracle. I experienced dramatic improvements in my physical, emotional, and financial health. A friend at the office, after returning from an extended foreign assignment, asked, “What’s happened to you?” He said I had “completely changed . . . for the better.” My own son, following an absence of only a few months, asked his mother, “What’s happened to Dad?” She told him it was “something spiritual.” My little mustard seed of faith was removing some mountains of bad habits. I was actually doing more of what those “self-help” books recommended. All my relationships got better. I’m still far from perfect of course, but I am, at worst, a lot less bad than ever. And I enjoy a deeper sense of purpose and much more peace of mind.

At first I wondered if these seemingly miraculous changes were the results of something that was just psychological. But I was too happy for the experience to worry about the explanation.

I call that a practical level of faith. If my faith had never progressed beyond that point, I would have remained deeply grateful and never looked back. But it didn’t stop there.

My faith has grown to a spiritual level. I have felt God’s presence in ways that left no room for doubt. There have been moments when I knew God was there, sometimes during my prayer time but more often while engaged in charity work. At other times I trust the memories of those moments, just as we still believe in the sun at midnight.

In short, I quit trying to find God by sitting in a chair and reading arguments. I got up and tried the experiment of acting as if God is real. I discovered, as William Temple said, “The person with an experience is never at the mercy of someone who merely has an argument.” ■

- 
- 1 *Dallas Morning News*, December 16, 2004, pages 34-35A, and December 26, 2004, page 2A. At the time this news broke Professor Flew was a deist. But he had not ruled out the possibility of taking the next step, as the famous former atheist C. S. Lewis did when he became a Christian after going through a transitional phase as a deist.
  - 2 *Newsweek*, July 20, 1998, “Science Finds God,” pp. 46-52.
  - 3 *Time Magazine*, December 28, 1992, “Science, God and Man,” pp. 38-44.
  - 4 Personal religious testimonies by some world-renowned scientists have been published in numerous books, including *Spiritual Evolution* (Templeton Foundation Press, 1998). Another refreshing book has been written by an award-winning physicist who was a professor at Harvard and then a science correspondent for ABC News. His name is Michael Guillen. The title to his book is *Can a Smart Person Believe in God?* His enthusiastic answer is “Yes!”

---

# Coming Soon to a School Near You?

By Mark Chancey, Assistant Professor

Department of Religious Studies, Southern Methodist University

Chances are you have never heard of the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools or its textbook, *The Bible in History and Literature*. But if you are a member of a school board, you may be hearing about it soon. Over 1000 schools in 308 school districts in 36 states from Alaska to Florida currently utilize the curriculum, and over 175,000 students have taken courses based on it, according to the NCBCPS Web site ([www.bibleinschools.net](http://www.bibleinschools.net)). It's not a huge number, but it's on the increase, says president and founder Elizabeth Ridenour. Seven years ago, only 71 school districts were using the curriculum.

The NCBCPS has not listed the schools using the curriculum so its geographic impact is difficult to measure. Over a fifth of the schools are in Texas and Louisiana, and it's likely most of the others are in the rural south and Midwest.

The NCBCPS's list of advisers reads like a Who's Who list of religious, social and political conservatives. It includes two U.S. representatives, the chaplain to the U.S. Senate, and two of *Time* magazine's "25 Most Influential Evangelicals"—Joyce Meyer and David Barton. The group has been endorsed by Family Research Council president Tony Perkins, the Eagle Forum, Focus on the Family and a host of similar groups and figures. The NCBCPS uses such organizations to advertise, and then looks to grassroots supporters to push the curriculum in their school districts.

That's what happened this past spring in Odessa, Texas, where the NCBCPS registered 6,000 signatures in support of the cause. The debate there drew attention from the national media. One of the people voicing concern was David Newman, an English professor at Odessa College and father of a 12-year-old student. Newman is Jewish, and he told the *Dallas Morning News* that his daughter already was occasionally made uncomfortable with questions from classmates. "They'll ask her why 'your people' killed Jesus. Or if she knows that Jesus is her savior. . . . I don't think it's hate. It's just kids being kids. But I worry what will happen if a pronounced Christian viewpoint is taught in the class."

The school board unanimously approved offering a Bible course, reportedly receiving a standing ovation from the audience. The board has apparently not finalized its choice of curriculum. Many in the city advocate using NCBCPS materials.

Courts have ruled clearly that teaching the Bible in a

nonsectarian manner is legal and appropriate in public schools, and the NCBCPS insists that its course is indeed nonsectarian. "The program is concerned with education rather than indoctrination of students," says the Web site. "The central approach of the class is simply to study the Bible as foundation document of society, and that approach is altogether appropriate in a comprehensive program of secular education."

Ryan Valentine of the Texas Freedom Network takes a different view. "Academic study of the Bible in a history or literature course is perfectly acceptable," he says, "but this curriculum represents a blatant attempt to turn a public school class into a Sunday school class. Even that may be giving it too much credit—this curriculum wouldn't even pass muster in most churches I know."

The curriculum does make occasional efforts to be evenhanded. It nowhere urges students to become Christians. A separate CD offers perspectives from multiple religious traditions. Some pedagogical components are quite helpful, such as map exercises, reading comprehension questions, quizzes and recommendations of classic musical works inspired by biblical stories. Creative activities include preparing foods that are traditionally associated with Passover and writing a monologue describing Jonah's inner feelings. The book is well illustrated and parts of it are visually appealing.

Nevertheless, the curriculum does present a distinct theological perspective. Discussions of science are based on nonscientific literature, Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of "Old Testament" prophecy, and archaeological findings are cited as evidence of the Bible's complete historical accuracy. Almost an entire unit of the curriculum is devoted to depicting the U.S. as a historically Christian nation, with the strong implication that it should reclaim that purported heritage.

The Protestant Bible is the course's norm, and the Bibles of Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy receive scant attention. The first page highlights the King James Version as "the legal and educational foundation of America." Christian theological claims are sometimes explicitly affirmed and a Christian audience presupposed, as in statements like: "The tabernacle of the Old Testament was a 'shadow of things in heaven.' Hebrews 8:1-5 tells us that the real Tabernacle is in heaven. This is where Jesus himself is our high priest (Heb. 8:2)."

There are occasional surprises. The book does not insist that Job was written by its namesake, and it even presents a brief overview of the synoptic problem. But it generally advocates traditional views of biblical authorship, early datings of biblical books, and the historicity of biblical reports. Students are asked to describe the impact of Noah's flood on world history. The Exodus is confidently dated to 1446 BCE, with no other views represented. An inscription is cited as confirmation of the accuracy of the Tower of Babel story. Stories of miracles and divine intervention are portrayed as historically accurate—an approach that might be unproblematic in many religious schools, but which the courts have explicitly ruled out for public school settings.

The curriculum's appeal to archaeological materials aptly illustrates its emphases and its shortcomings. A summary statement cites a claim by a "respected scholar, Dr. J. O. Kinnaman," that "of the hundreds of thousands of artifacts found by the archaeologists, not one has ever been discovered that contradicts or denies one word, phrase, clause or sentence of the Bible, but always confirms and verifies that facts of the Biblical record."

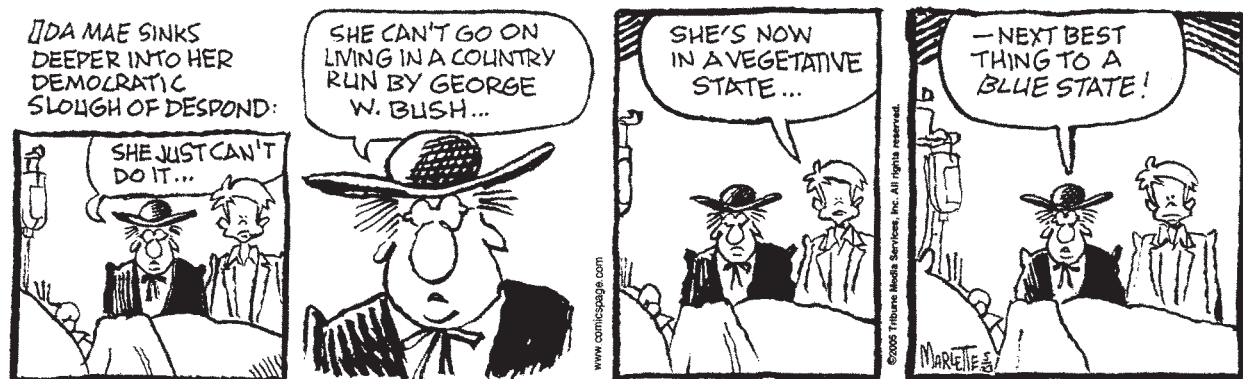
J.O. Kinnaman is not a name well known in contemporary academic circles. He has argued (in *Diggers for Facts: The Bible in Light of Archaeology*) that Jesus and Paul visited Great Britain, that Joseph of Arimathea was Jesus' uncle and dominated the tin industry of Wales, and that he himself personally saw Jesus' school records in India. According to an article by Stephen Mehler, director of research at the Kinnaman Foundation, Kinnaman reported finding a secret entrance into the Great Pyramid of Giza in which he discovered records from the lost continent of Atlantis. He also claimed that the pyramid was 35,000 years old and was used in antiquity to transmit radio messages to the Grand Canyon. Kinnaman might not be the best figure on which to base material for a public school textbook.

The book's treatment of the Dead Sea scrolls is equally problematic. Most scholars will be startled to learn

that the "scrolls contain definite references to the New Testament and more importantly, to Jesus of Nazareth"; that fragments of New Testament books were found in the Dead Sea caves; that one scroll mentions the crucifixion of Jesus; and that some Jews at Qumran accepted Jesus as the Messiah. They will be even more puzzled by claims that the Dead Sea scrolls prove that the Hebrew text underlying modern translations "was identical with the original text as given to the writers by God and inspired by Him." In light of such claims, it is perhaps not surprising to encounter these study questions on the scrolls: "Describe the impact of this discovery on those who do not accept the authenticity of the Bible" and "Determine the evidence from the Dead Sea scrolls confirming the claims of Jesus as the Bible describes him."

In discussing scientific issues the book argues that biblical writers accurately described the global water system and wind patterns. The claims are based primarily on a book by evangelist Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Signature of God* (Frontier Research Pub., 2002). The cover of at least some editions of this book proclaims it as "Documented Evidence That Proves Beyond Doubt the Bible Is the Inspired Word of God."

In several instances, the curriculum advises teachers to use resources from the Creation Evidence Museum in Glen Rose, Texas, an organization that believes in a six-day creation, a 6,000-year-old earth, and the simultaneous existence of humans and dinosaurs. The material also presents an urban legend as scientific fact. Students are told to "note in particular the interesting story of the sun standing still" in the book of Joshua. "There is documented research through NASA that two days were indeed unaccounted for in time (the other being in 2 Kings 20:8-11)." A Web site is provided for an article titled "The Sun Stood Still" about the alleged NASA discovery. The "Ask an Astrophysicist" section of the Web site of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center dismisses this story, and folklorist Jan Harold Brunand has documented the evolution of the legend.



Much of the course appears to be designed to persuade students and teachers that America is a distinctively Christian nation—an agenda publicly embraced by many of the NCBCPS’s advisers and endorsers. One need not even open the book to find this agenda. The cover is decorated with a photograph of the Declaration of Independence and an American flag. The title pages of most units depict similar images. A consideration of the Ten Commandments draws students’ attention to the possibility of instituting biblical law in America.

A unit titled “The Bible in History” relies heavily on the thought of David Barton, founder and president of Wall-Builders, an organization based in Aledo, Texas, that argues against the separation of church and state. His views prompted considerable controversy when the Republican National Committee hired him to stump for President Bush at churches in 2004.

Even something as seemingly innocuous as a dictionary recommendation reflects a theological agenda. The book recommends the 1828 edition of *Noah Webster’s American Dictionary of the English Language* and provides contact information for its publisher, the Foundation for American Christian Education (FACE). A visit to FACE’s Web site reveals that this edition contains “the greatest number of biblical definitions given in any reference volume.” An advertisement there reads, “This dictionary is needed to Restore an American Christian Education in the Home, Church, and School.”

Perhaps most shocking of all, however, is the way the curriculum reproduces nearly verbatim lines, paragraphs and even pages from its sources. Though it occasionally notes its sources, nowhere does it explicitly acknowledge that it quotes them directly. In addition, many passages are virtually identical to ones in uncited sources. In one unit alone, 20 pages are almost identical to uncited online materials. All in all, the wording of nearly 100 pages of the curriculum—approximately a third of the book—is identical or nearly identical to the wording of other publications.

The NCBCPS wants to reach many more school districts. Ridenour has recently announced efforts to expand the use of the curriculum. It may be coming to a school district near you. ■

*Copyright 2005 Christian Century. Reprinted by permission from the August 23, 2005, issue of the Christian Century. Subscriptions: \$49/yr. P.O. Box 378, Mt. Morris, IL 61054. 1-800-208-4097.*

---

## The War of the Lamb: What Is God Doing About Evil?

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

Our university chaplain has planned a series of chapel services, “Kingdom Practices of Kingdom People,” intended to address some of the significant ethical issues of our day. I endorse such an emphasis with the recognition that often the concern to direct attention to what we call “ethical issues” is a response to a situation we perceive to have gotten out of hand. The proliferation of ethics courses in business schools or medical schools, the appearance of a weekly column offering ethical guidance in the *New York Times*, and the competition between political parties as to who can lay claim to the language of “values” are all indications of a situation that has gotten out of hand.

I have been asked to provide a theme interpretation for this series of chapel services. My strategy for doing this is for us to look at a set of concerns from the Book of Revelation that I believe go to the heart of a Christian response to ethical challenges that can seem complicated and ominous. My plan is to look to the Book of Revelation to examine God’s strategy for dealing with evil. Undergirding any Christian response to this or that ethical concern has to be an inquiry concerning the larger question of what is God doing about evil. If we are to address in a faithful way the appropriate concerns we have about the moral challenges in our world, what better strategy to pursue than how God is at work in our world?

To consult the Book of Revelation, however, is risky. New Testament scholar Harry Meier warns, “Wherever the Book of Revelation shows up, trouble is not far behind. It is a menace to public safety.” But, he adds, “the Apocalypse makes trouble far too important to ignore, and not all of it is bad”—especially for churches that have grown comfortable aligning themselves with the reigning definitions of reality.<sup>1</sup>

There are ways of avoiding trouble from the Book of Revelation. Some diminish the dangers by interpreting the bizarre language of the book as “static symbols, referring only to specific events, individuals, or institutions in the first century,” rendering Revelation “a ‘safe’ text, one that does not address us or make demands on us.”<sup>2</sup> We must read Revelation in light of the first century situation and of the relationship between believers and the Roman Empire. But the book is more than an ancient relic. It is Scripture that addresses us.

In other circles, Revelation is taken as a forecast of end-time events suitable for wide distribution through super-market tabloids, where we can learn of both the two-headed baby that does algebra and the identity of the beast (Rev. 13). Such an approach to Revelation is an escape mechanism enabling us to project onto some safe horizon a chronology of horrific events that Christians will supposedly escape. Such an approach is similar to voyeurism—as peeping toms we read Revelation to gain a thrill but without the risks that come from intimate involvement.

But the Book of Revelation causes trouble and it demands our involvement. It speaks not just to a distant past, or to some speculative future, but to the question of how God's people are today to engage in the war of the Lamb—God's triumph over evil. If we are concerned to address this or that ethical concern from the standpoint of the Christian faith, we must first ask what God is doing about evil and how we are challenged to participate in God's work.

John writes Revelation to underscore that Christians must take the conflict with evil seriously, engage this conflict in the same manner as God does, and face the future with confidence in God's strategy for victory. We have many questions for Revelation. John's initial readers had many questions as well, but of a different sort. By the end of the first century, the situation for Christians was becoming quite ambiguous. For some it was becoming more difficult as their exclusive commitment to Christ required a measure of social and moral distance between believers and the surrounding culture. Others, however, had evidently found ways by which they could enjoy the benefits and advantages of their culture and, at least to their mind, not jeopardize their Christian identity. Either group of Christians might have had some important questions to ask: What price might I have to pay for my faith? Where is God in these difficult times? How am I to respond to the challenges of a wider culture that does not support my faith? Following Jesus doesn't really have anything to do with politics or economics does it?

John responds to each of these concerns, but he really boils them all down to one question: Whom do you worship? That is the main concern of his book. As Richard Bauckham puts it, "In a sense the theme of his whole prophecy is the distinction between true worship and idolatry, a distinction which Christians in the contemporary situation needed prophetic discernment." In Revelation 14:7 an angel issues the basic challenge "to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people . . . . 'Fear God and give him glory . . . and worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.'" But in Revelation 13 we read of those who "worshiped the dragon . . . and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'" The issue of worship is not incidental to the Book of Revelation or to the question of what God is doing about evil. It is a reminder that "the conflict between God and Satan takes historical form in the conflict between human allegiances manifest in worship. And so the question is raised: Whom do you worship?"<sup>3</sup>

Most of us are confident we can answer the question to John's satisfaction. We certainly would not engage in the pagan rituals that tempted John's readers. There is no beast worship in our Sunday bulletins! But John had some readers that were equally confident of an uncompromised loyalty of whom Jesus speaks. To the church at Pergamum he says, "You have there some who hold to the teaching of Balaam" (2:14). To the same church he insists, "You also have some who . . . hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (2:15). To the church at Thyatira he says, "You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (2:20). What each of these villains had in common was the idea that Christians could compartmentalize their lives, maintain Christian spirituality, and still, for whatever reason, participate in practices that John sees as contrary to Christian confession.

The assessment of this strategy in Revelation is pretty clear; it is called "the deep things of Satan" (2:24). Over and over the complaint is made about idolatry. What is John going on about and what does all this concern for worship versus idolatry have to do with what God is doing about evil?

The Book of Revelation will present a stark contrast between two different visions of the world, of world order, and of how things really work in this world. One vision is of the God who is the creator of all things and of life ordered by that God in worship. The other vision is of the beast as a parody of God who apparently rules creation in a very different way and who demands participation in a completely different order of things. John invites his readers to join with him in the worship of the one true God where the differences between these two visions of reality will be made clear. In fact, one of John's great goals is to provide his readers with a new way of seeing. He wants them to have a new way of seeing so they can pursue a new way of living. This new way of living includes participation in what God is doing about evil, so that they will experience a new way of conquering—by their participation in the war of the Lamb.

John's new way of seeing has to do with what we read in chapters 17-18 about Babylon, a harlot, and the beast. While certainly John is referring to Rome with all this talk of harlots and beasts, his concern is not to speak in some sort of code in order to confuse us, but to speak in images in order to awaken us to some startling realities. John will use the language of Babylon, harlot, and beast to strip the conventional description of Rome away and to unveil the true character of a system of world order that is fundamentally at odds with the ways of God.

We do hear in these chapters echoes of the conventional account of Rome and an appreciation of all that Roman order had to offer. In chapter 17 Rome is depicted as a woman clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls—images of regal power and prosperity. In chapter 18 we hear of the vast commercial network that kept the Mediterranean busy with trade and industry ultimately centered on Rome.

The signs of prosperity were part of a bigger package offered by Rome to all who would come under her standard.

We hear of security and stability that Roman power would guarantee: “I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning” (18:7). Client kings and sea-faring merchants would exclaim, “What city is like the great city . . . the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth” (18:18-19)? John cites those who saw in Rome a channel of peace, prosperity, security, and stability whose source was divine blessing. The power, prosperity, grandeur, and glory evoked a sense of awe and allegiance that ultimately gained a religious character so that loyalty to Rome became integrated into expressions of religious devotion. Rome offered security and prosperity, assured through its use of superior military power; and all of this seen as the way in which divine power was at work in the world. And so we hear “They worshiped the dragon . . . and they worshiped the beast” (Rev. 13).

John’s concern is with whether Christians can see things differently. Will they see engagement with a political, economic, and military system as a threat to their faith, or as an innocent accommodation? Will they see in Rome the channel of divine blessing, or as the inspiration of Satan? Will they accept the standard account of the glory of the empire, or will they learn a new way of seeing?

He has good reason to worry about them. Some Christians had evidently enjoyed first-hand the benefits of the empire. The congregation at Laodicea could claim, “I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing” (3:17). And there were plenty of prophetic voices around, like a Balaam, to assure any troubled conscience that the spiritual relationship with Jesus is on an entirely different plane than the mundane realities of economics, politics, and imperial relations.

But John crafts his language carefully and chooses his images purposefully. Rome is “the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality” (17:1-2). John knows that what Rome offers will be attractive. But the attractions are the seductions of a harlot, the imagined benefits are ultimately delusions brought on by strong drink. “Rome offered . . . unity, security, stability, the conditions of prosperity. But in John’s view these benefits are not what they seem: they are the favours of a prostitute, purchased at a high price.” Some looked at the busy seaports and vast network of commerce as the blessings of a stable order safeguarded by strong leadership. John sees the enticements of a harlot. Some looked at the military achievements of the ancient world’s greatest superpower and saw the wise use of force to promote peace and security. John sees a harlot drunk on the blood of the saints and whose threats of violence covered the globe (17:6; 18:24). Some gazed upon the splendor and power of Rome and expressed thanksgiving for divine blessing. John saw the deceptions of idolatry and he wants his readers to wake up and smell the cheap perfume. He wants them to see in a new way.

I need to underscore something here. Seeing past the conventional required the work of God in John’s life and such

would be the case for his readers. The standard account of the world order as one that promises security and prosperity based on the threat of violence is so entrenched in John’s world that to see past the deceptions required a journey into the wilderness by the work of the Spirit (17:3). The nature of the beast is not discerned by those immersed in its attractions. Only those who can see from a distance created by the Spirit will see things as they really are. For John’s readers to see things as they really are will require what John has provided; not an objective analysis that would be accessible to any observer, but a revelation that unveils the true character of dominant realities that routinely use subterfuge as a strategy for maintaining control.

But John wants them to see in a new way so that they can live in a new way. Once they realize the true character of the choices facing them, the demands of a new way of living will become more apparent. This new way of living will at least include this: Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitans are out! Any teaching that suggests some sort of distinction can be made between personal religion and public matters of economics, politics, or the use of violence for the sake of world order is fundamentally at odds with John’s practice of assessing the practices of Rome in light of the ways of the Lamb. To worship the Lamb will mean a critical eye cast toward every other claim to allegiance. As David Peterson says, “John is very concerned to show that Christian commitment has political, social, and economic consequences. Acceptable worship involves faithfully serving God in the face of every conflicting loyalty.”<sup>5</sup> To those who think Christianity is simply a matter of personal salvation free from responsible choices concerning economics, politics, or issues of violence, the Book of Revelation says “No!” The notion that economic and political activity exist in some autonomous region exempt from the demands of the “King of kings and Lord of lords” is fundamentally excluded.

In the midst of his critical reading of the Empire, John hears a voice from heaven calling to God’s people, “Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins” (18:4). Clearly John’s message challenges that of Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolaitans—that Christian spirituality operates in a sphere separate from the day-to-day practices in which we find ourselves embedded. When we confront issues of prosperity, security, politics, and violence the Book of Revelation is right there with its penetrating question: “Whom do you worship?”

This was no small issue for John’s initial readers. For them to worship God rather than the beast would mean the creation of a critical distance between the Christian community and the wider culture. Such a move is filled with risks and is always costly. Some would say, however, that creating such a distance removes the possibility for any creative involvement that might tame the beast at least to some degree. The angelic call is bad strategy for confronting the serious moral and ethical issues of the day. Should not Christians risk some compromise with the ways of the Empire if it means having some measure of influence in that Empire? After all, we want to be

in some position of influence and power so as to effectively address those serious moral and ethical issues, don't we?

But for John the new way of living also brings with it a new way of conquering, a new way of fighting, a new way of confronting the challenge of evil as believers engage with God in the war of the Lamb. If the Book of Revelation is about worship, it is about worship as an arena of conflict where competing visions of faith, world order, and issues of allegiance and loyalty come to a head. Whom do you worship—the beast or the Lamb? The answer is revealed in our vision of world order and what we really believe God is doing about evil.

The beast has his own answer. Security, stability, prosperity, and peace are the blessings of a divine order that employs threats, intimidation, and violence to safeguard a system of privilege and prosperity enjoyed by the few at the expense of the many. The chief symbol for this vision of world order is the cross, which always stands as a reminder of what can happen to those who challenge the vision. The Lamb offers a drastic alternative. But its chief symbol is also the cross.

Bauckham describes the Book of Revelation as something of a Christian war scroll, permeated with holy war imagery, describing not only God and Christ's conflict with the forces of evil, but also a messianic army of believers who enlist in the war of the lamb.<sup>6</sup> Yes, the Book of Revelation uses the language of conflict and warfare to describe what God is doing about evil, but the vision of world order and of God's rule over his creation is other than the vision of the beast. The key passage here is Revelation 5:5, where John hears of "the lion of the tribe of Judah," a traditional image evoking "the idea of the Messiah as the Jewish nationalistic military conqueror." But in verse 6 the image is transformed completely and John turns and sees the lamb standing as if slain, the picture of a sacrificial death by which God redeems a people from all the nations. "By placing the image of the sacrificial victim alongside those of the military conqueror, John forges a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death."<sup>7</sup> How does God seek to order his world? Not as the beast does through the threats of violence symbolized by the cross, but by the sacrificial death of the lamb who embraced the cross for the sake of others. God's way of dealing with evil is the way of the cross. And this is explicitly the pattern given for believers to pursue as we engage in the war of the Lamb. How do we conquer? What are we to do about evil in the world?

Let me be as clear here as I can be. There is all the difference in the cosmos between the world order envisioned by the beast and the world order promised by God. And the difference has everything to do with whether the cross is a symbol of threat, intimidation, and coercion backed by an appeal to force, or the cross as a reflection of our willingness to suffer for the sake of others.

Many Christians are cheered at the insistence of the public character of the Christian faith. They are suspicious of attempts to keep a Christian perspective out of public affairs. And so there is a concern on the part of some to champion what some call "traditional values" in the public arena. But what this often means is our eagerness to allow others to suf-

fer for what we believe as we use the methods of coercion and constraint to impose our vision of world order. That is different from our being willing to suffer for what we believe. To require others to suffer for the sake of our vision of world order was precisely the way of Rome with all its glory, grandeur, and its promises of security and peace. To follow God's strategy is to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. So what is this new way of conquering? Revelation 12:11 reveals the pattern for actually following Jesus: "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life, even to death."

Rome's use of the cross is entirely different from the Lamb's. For Rome the cross is its most fearsome symbol of authority and power over others. For the Lamb and his followers it is the symbol of suffering service for the sake of others. It is a central issue: do we seek to cause others to suffer for our faith, or are we willing to suffer for the sake of others in the name of our faith? How we answer that question reveals whether we worship the beast or the Lamb.

What is God doing about evil? Through the work of the crucified Lamb he is creating a people who will gather in his name for worship and in that worship is revealed the truth about the world in which we live. The truth is that there are two distinct and opposing visions for how divine power orders the cosmos. There is the way of the beast, the harlot, Babylon—its attractions are obvious and its dangers known only by revelation. But there is also the way of the Lamb that calls us to conquer by the way of suffering service.

From the standpoint of Babylon, the way of the Lamb has to be seen as utterly foolish. Question the offer of security, prosperity, and peace assured through the might of Babylon? Stake your life and the well-being of the cosmos on the way of the Lamb? What kind of fool would say something like that?

Early in Revelation John challenges the teaching of one he calls Balaam, an echo of an Old Testament figure who sought to threaten the integrity, identity, and calling of the people of Israel. If you remember the OT story, you remember that Balaam's donkey turned and spoke to him in rebuke and refused to participate in Balaam's scheme. If today you feel as if you have heard the braying of a donkey, I will take comfort in knowing that I stand in a long line of voices concerned to uphold the integrity, identity, and calling of the people of God. What is that calling? To overcome by the blood of the lamb who in righteousness judges and wages war. ■

---

1 Harry O. Meier, *Apocalypse Recalled* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1, 7.

2 Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 353.

3 Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 135.

4 *Ibid.*, 347.

5 David Peterson, *Engaging God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 262.

6 Bauckham, 212.

7 *Ibid.*, 215.

---

# Is “Biblical Counseling” At SBTS Biblical?

By Keith Herron, Senior Pastor

Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, MO

There’s an old joke told among therapists that asks the question: “Why are there so many different psychological theories?” The answer: “It gives the therapist something to think about when the client is talking.”

If that’s so, what do biblical counselors think about?

In February 2005, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary issued a press release stating their plan to alter its historic pastoral counseling program to “a more biblical counseling approach.” This is a radical revision of the curriculum approach developed by Wayne Oates who taught there in the formative years of the emergence of pastoral counseling. More than that, the seminary has turned its back on a body of knowledge they claim was overly dependent upon science and not inclusive enough of biblical faith. In typical reductionistic style, they have reduced pastoral care and counseling to Freudian psychotherapy with no apparent understanding that pastoral counseling includes biblical faith in its understanding of the human condition.

The decision to change reflects Southern’s desire to make counseling a skill available to all pastors and not limited to what they call “the therapeutic guild.” In short, the school will no longer prepare counselors for a serious practice of pastoral counseling that meets the credentialing process of state licensure. Instead, they claim to be preparing pastors “to help people conform all of their thoughts and behaviors to the authority of God’s Word.”<sup>1</sup> By doing so, they remove themselves from such scrutiny and deepening the division between themselves and other bodies of knowledge and dialogue.

The leadership at Southern is clear: They are dumping the Oates approach in order to recover a sense of pastoral care based exclusively on the biblical text and differentiated from the psychotherapeutic model as it is widely taught. They claim psychotherapy is not a single scientific understanding of personality and is often contradictory and incoherent.<sup>2</sup>

The response to these claims of biblical purity for the healing process are countered by those who contend that Southern has created a false dichotomy between faith and science when they work collaboratively in the traditional pastoral care model as understood by Wayne Oates. According to Wade Rowatt, the effect of this dichotomy is to imply that pastoral care and counseling is not and has not been biblical.<sup>3</sup>

This decision sharpens the focus for the initial question: “How does biblical counseling differ from traditional pastoral counseling?” More importantly, the initial question gives way to the larger concern of whether this model of pastoral care and counseling is adequate in the face of such depths of pain, confusion and conflict. Can biblical counseling as described by the leaders at Southern Seminary be considered helpful or healing? Or is it instead counter-productive or even dangerous to the one in need?

Russell Moore, Dean of the School of Theology at Southern, claims Southern is honoring its commitment to *Sola Scriptura*, the notion that only the scriptures are authoritative as a resource for counseling. Scripture claims its own authority in “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Through the oracles of God the *man* of God is “competent, equipped for every good work.”

Critics hear this and wonder how one can simply ignore vast arenas of knowledge not included in the ancient texts. Vicki Hollon, the Executive Director of the Oates Center responds, “They have created a proverbial straw man and their movement away from science reveals a lack of faith, or at least a fear that somehow science is outside the realm of God’s creation and domain.”<sup>4</sup>

One may wonder how the *Sola Scriptura* viewpoint is sustained in the face of such daunting psychological needs as Bi-Polar Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and multitudes of other serious psychological conditions. One may further speculate about the terms used in diagnosis if the field of study currently taught is not included in the training of biblical counselors. How would a biblical counselor dialogue with a pastoral counselor if *Sola Scriptura* is the boundary of knowledge and all other sources of knowledge are disregarded?

The curriculum created by Wayne Oates trains pastoral counselors to combine the historical traditions and beliefs of the Christian faith with the widely varying tools of psychology that analyzes the human personality. In the new system displacing the Oates curriculum, will the story of Jesus and the demoniac be text enough to sustain them without causing undue harm to the one presenting themselves for help?

Southern Seminary’s decision was prompted by the notion that much of what causes persons to seek counseling from their pastor is due to the prevalence of sin. They contend that only the Bible adequately grapples with the problem of evil.



Most pastoral counselors would agree that human choice (the evidence of sin's effects) is a major issue that must be considered in pastoral counseling. But to attribute every presenting issue of persons who come for counseling to sin is problematic for counseling. Pastoral counselors must learn to listen intently to the counselee before labeling someone's concern as evidence of the presence of sin. Is depression the result of sin? Is it conceivable that anxiety disorders are the result of some poor choice or the presence of evil or is there some other attributive cause other than sin? Is the theological notion of sin adequate in explaining complex structures of the personality often governed by brain chemistry or traumatic events in childhood or familial or societal experiences?

What about the world of other needs pastoral counselors may face? Is it rational to think that sin is the causative factor for all of them? If the counselor is limited to *Sola Scriptura*, how much help can honestly be offered? Surely the counselor will be tested to find sin in every counseling relationship.

The cultural oddity of Southern's decision is most pronounced when considering the fundamentalist position of gender hierarchy based on the Bible. The new program will teach women to counsel other women because of the emphasis on the Titus 2 teachings on the gender roles of men and women. Consequently, Southern has extended a strict patriarchy as demonstrated in the radical teachings of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (housed on the Southern campus) to the new counseling program. Randy Stinson, Executive Director of the CBMW, has been rehired by Southern as Assistant Professor of Gender and Family Studies for the newly adopted Biblical Counseling Program.

Southern Seminary admits they will seek out women as candidates for this program but suggest it will be for the purpose of counseling women. If only men are qualified to be pastors, does this imply they cannot counsel women but must have a woman counselor on staff to handle this indelicate job? As an aside, who will train the women who will teach women to counsel women?

Professor Sam Williams further argues, "Christians should engage in a serious study of God's emotions in Scripture and develop 'a theology of emotion.'" In that study, one will reportedly discover and emulate God's thoughts as one's own. "Good theology should lead us not only to think God's thoughts after him but also to feel God's feelings after him," says Professor Williams.

Apart from the speculation of who can know for certain what God's emotions might be, how is this useful for the one in pain? Should one be instructed how to feel in response to their problematic circumstances? Is this emphasis an interest in controlling emotions rather than dealing constructively with the causes for the feelings being honestly experienced?

Dealing with emotions can be helpful in a therapeutic relationship, but should one be instructed how and what

to feel by the counselor or should the emotions be a trail followed to discover the sources of pain or frustration?

"The care of souls" has been a guiding image for the work of ministry that occurs in a counseling relationship between counselor and client. Additionally, the counselor is guided by ancient tradition that implores the counselor to "do no harm." That is, the counselor should offer a level of help that is professional and informed to the best abilities the counselor can bring to serve the one in need.

Apparent in this decision is the presumption that the field of pastoral counseling is biblically faulted and counter-productive to the will of God. The chosen course correction at Southern Seminary is to dump the old curriculum that is based on a blend of the fields of psychology and pastoral and biblical theology.

Has the person in need been well served by this decision? When the counselor ignores vast bodies of knowledge and experience, has the person in need been adequately helped? Must the Bible always stand in opposition to other truths or can a mutually respectful dialogue be discovered that can elevate the truth found in both?

In summary, the extension of the fundamentalist agenda to reshape the entirety of Baptist thought has reached the counseling ministry of the church. Southern Seminary's response is more akin to the proverbial ostrich sticking its head in the sand of human need rather than facing the depths of struggle that many persons endure. The compelling ethical need to "do no harm" is at best naively ignored. Those who seek out the healing of God for the mental and psychological ills that plague them will ultimately find little help and possibly more confusion to the chaos they are already suffering.

An inherent danger of "doing harm" in the name of a blind Biblicism makes this announcement doubly-dangerous. Innocent persons seeking a counselor who will include the rich resources of biblical faith can be victimized by a blind faith that intentionally severs itself from the resources of a long tradition of caring for persons utilizing the tools of pastoral care and counseling.

A tool is only as effective as the one using it. Southern Seminary's withdrawal from the training of ministers who can effectively use such pastoral resources seems silly in light of what's tragically forsaken and what's piously gained. ■

- 
- 1 David Roach quoting Stephen Wellum, "Biblical View of Counseling Examined in Theology Journal," *Baptist Press*, 2/26/04
  - 2 David Winfrey quoting Russell Moore, "Southern Seminary Nixes Pioneering Curriculum for 'Biblical Counseling,'" *Associated Baptist Press*, 2/22/05
  - 3 Winfrey quoting Wade Rowatt, *ABP*, 2/22/05
  - 4 Winfrey quoting Vicki Hollon, *ABP*, 2/22/05

## Thank You CET Readers

For the scores of phone calls, cards, emails, and letters in response to Audra's illness I described in my last editorial ("Lessons from Shadowland"), we cannot begin to express our deep gratitude for your prayers, thoughts, and concern.

September 6 was a special day. Audra completed her sixth (and last) chemo treatment. It also was our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, which we celebrated a few days earlier in Oklahoma City with a "Renewal of Vows" ceremony in the church where we first married, with all of the wedding party save one (deceased) and about 70 relatives and friends. When minister-friend Jerry Barnes asked the "Will you take this man . . ." question, Audra replied, "Let me think about it!" A reception dinner followed with comments serious and humorous, as we all laughed and cried throughout the evening.

When Audra finishes the precautionary radiation treatments, followed by the new miracle drug Herceptin (only 20% of breast cancer survivors qualify), she will be at the 90% range for non-recurrence. Her prognosis is excellent. She is doing very well.

Needless to say, we are grateful for so many blessings—the real presence of God, the love of family, the encouragement of friends, the skill of doctors and nurses, the concern of readers we have never met, and even Medicare, which has covered most of the treatment costs and will pay for the 18 Herceptin injections (\$6000 each!).

But again, "Thank You." Editing the Journal is our present joy and our readers are our special family. God bless you each and every one.

Joe E. Trull, Editor

## PLAN NOW TO ATTEND THE FIRST ANNUAL CET CONFERENCE

TRUETT SEMINARY  
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

February 13-14, 2006

"How To Be a Good Minister"

Hear Tony Campolo, Joel Gregory,  
James E. Carter and  
Others Discuss Ministerial Ethics  
For Our Day

**ATTENTION!**

### WHILE THEY LAST!

Foy Valentine's Latest Book

"Whatsoever Things Are Lovely"

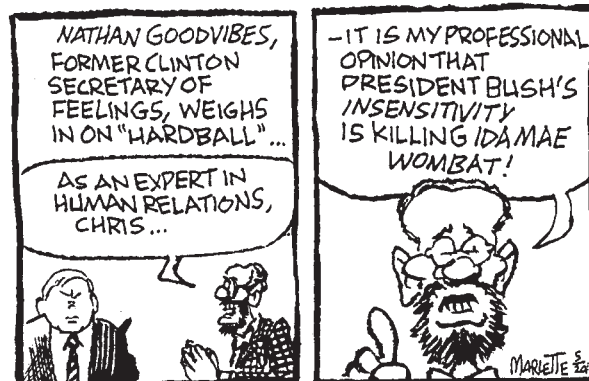
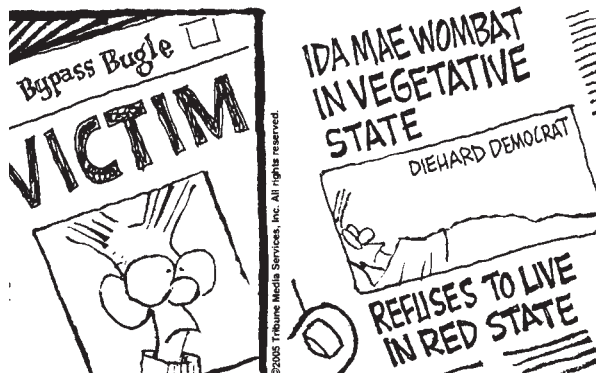
Extra copies available to our readers:

5 copies for a \$50 contribution;

12 copies for a \$100 contribution,

30 copies for a contribution of \$250.

Call us for larger quantities.



# A Very Long Shadow

By Jerry W. Reeves, Chaplain (Ret.)  
Lincoln, TX

There is a very long shadow casting its grip across Washington, D. C. these days. No, it is not the long, thin line of the Washington monument. Nor is it the selfish, evil shadow of the greedy lobbyists, as they vacuum their puppets in the offices of Congress and the White House for the profit of their wealthy, corrupt benefactors. It's not even the shadow of a small Cessna nearing the White House.

It is the shadow of the Vatican.

Now before you mount your cavalry and come looking for a *catholiphobic* Baptist preacher, you might consider that this author has always had very warm feelings for John XXIII, both while he was alive and to this day. Pope John saved the Roman Church from itself by opening its windows, letting fresh air and cleansing light into the Church. Vatican II let the Spirit of God dance in Roman churches around the world with results that still demonstrate themselves right now.

It maybe would be good to also know that Mother Theresa is one of my heroes, and that Francis of Assisi is my role model for what it means to be a real pastor. So you would do well to hold your breath and keep on reading. Hollering right now is like a squirrel dog barking up the wrong tree—lots of noise and wasted air!

Behind all the squawking about stem cell research is some history that probably few on either side have considered. It is a theological issue called cosmology.[1] The term is from two Greek words that literally mean, "a word about the cosmos"—the study of creation.

The problem is that the cosmology of the Roman

Catholic Church is built on a pre-scientific understanding of the universe. This is why the church has had knock-down, drag-out battles with scientists since the Dark Ages. The doctrine of "Natural Law" was formulated by the Catholic church, more for law than for an accurate understanding of nature. With egg on its face, the church finally had to admit that the earth was not flat and that the earth is not the center of the solar system. The real issue was the control of people's thoughts and behaviors, not scientific truth.

Ponder this. I am not a scientist, but I have been told by scientific authorities that every little girl is born with 200,000 eggs. Sexually mature boys produce 100 sperm with every second-hand tick of the clock. Obviously God intended in creation for every woman to have 200,000 kids, correct? That's obvious, because he put that many eggs inside her in creating each female life. Why are we not following nature's law?

When I hear some "learned" representative rise and sanctimoniously pontificate, "I believe that human life begins at conception," I want to rise and answer: "Well, duh!"

If every egg and every sperm are that valuable, then why are we not monitoring every woman's menstrual cycle and every little boy who might masturbate, so we can protect these precious commodities? Or maybe that's the 1984 that the president is 20 years late delivering on? And even more frightening, maybe that's his desired future?

No. The *reductio ad absurdum*[2] above is intended to show just how stupid some people can be, and how igno-

AFTER VISITING  
IDA MAE AT HER  
HOSPITAL BEDSIDE,  
GOODVIBES CALLS  
A PRESS CONFERENCE:



I KNEW IDA MAE  
WHEN SHE WORKED  
FOR ME AS MY  
UNDERSECRETARY  
FOR CONTRITION  
IN THE DEPARTMENT  
OF FEELINGS...



AS FIRST FAMILY  
THERAPIST, I SEE  
DEEPLY INTO THE  
HUMAN HEART...  
AND KNEW IDA MAE  
AS WELL AS MY  
OWN MANTRA...



—AND I KNOW SHE  
WOULD HAVE WANTED  
US TO PULL THE PLUG—  
SHE WOULD NOT HAVE  
WANTED TO LIVE IN A  
RED STATE!



rant Americans in general have become with regard to history, especially the specialized field of church history. So this whole problem is an issue of theology, and the villain is the Vatican, who wants its creepy, crawly little fingers on the levers of government?[3] Again, the answer is “No.”

The problem is one of morally bankrupt politicians, too concerned about getting re-elected and who try to please their socially bankrupt constituency, so they can play their little control games. They don't have any care or concern about suffering humanity. And in ironic hypocrisy raised exponentially, they wave the flags of “family,” “family values,” “ethics and morality,” etc.

Jesus was castigated for healing on the Sabbath. Were he here in the flesh today, I can easily imagine him saying to the descendents of his tormentors, “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You who turn down up and up down, right to left and left to right, truth to lies and lies to truth. I will remember every one of my ‘little ones’ who could have been helped but for your stone-cold-hard hearts. Drowning yourself in the deepest hole in the Pacific will not protect you. I will come get you, and you will answer to me.”

How in God's Holy Name can one claim to know the Jesus I know and be more concerned about a few cells in a Petri dish (which will be destroyed anyway), requiring a microscope to even see, than a real, live, flesh and blood human being who has Alzheimers, Parkinsons, or Lou Gehrigs disease—or cancer, diabetes, and only the Lord knows how many other diseases that might be cured or at the least made treatable by this research?

Now I must go outside. I just saw a huge shadow here in central Texas. I need to see if the earth is still rotating around the sun. But one never knows in this state. The Texas legislature has just been in session, and the textbooks may have been corrected to read the sun orbits around the earth!

*Kyrie Eliason* (Lord have mercy) on all of us! ■

[1] It really did not surprise me to find that even in my new 2005 computer Windows 2003 Word dictionary said: “No results were found.”

[2] To carry out to its logical absurdity.

[3] They indeed do, as well as a deep-dip hand in the US Treasury. They are just like fundamentalist Baptists and others who are just as ignorant of the importance of Jefferson's “Wall of Separation.”

© 2005 Jerry W. Reeves.

---

## “Dear Pops”

*By Hal Haralson, Attorney (ret.)*

Austin, TX

The letter came on April 12, 2005, from our son, Brad who is 42 years old. He is an attorney living in San Angelo with his wife, Rachel and sons, Matthew (three years old) and Weston (1 year old).

Brad writes:

“Dear Pops, It is hard to believe I write this on your seventieth birthday. It seems like only yesterday we were hunting in the high country at Live Oak Ranch or piling into ‘Old Red’ to fish on Onion Creek at the Byrd Ranch.

I was cleaning out my truck and found an envelope with two letters in it. One of the letters was dated April 12, 1950 (your fifteenth birthday).”

The letter Brad was referring to was the only letter I ever received from my father. He wrote to me while I was in Dallas. A large growth had been found on my thyroid gland and I was in Baylor Hospital for surgery. Papa wrote to my mother and me with news from the farm north of Loraine:

“You finally lost the little chick that was sick, but the others are doing good and growing. Your old pig is doing fine, so don't worry about your livestock. Old Shep brought up a possum to the house last night from somewhere and bayed him right under my window. I got up and got the flashlight. When I saw what he had, I said, ‘Get him Shep’ and he really did get him; just shook him to peases.”

Brad's letter to me continued:

“The second letter is dated September 26, 1966 written by you to Papa on his sixty-seventh birthday. You mention how much you are looking forward to showing Papa a good quail hunt over Thanksgiving, and then follow up with:

“I got to thinking the other day when Brad was with me moving cattle and riding in the cattle truck, that those are the most pleasant memories of my childhood. You have had a more profound influence on my life than any other man I have known. It was not from what you said or the ‘things’ you gave me, but the way you lived—all the times you allowed us to ‘tag along’ and the outdoor environment in which you allowed us to find ourselves. I want my children to have the same experience and I am enjoying this because it became a part of me as a boy and I have never gotten away from it.”

Brad concludes:

“I cherish those two letters because they embody the legacy that you have passed on to me. They show me that being a good father is a day-by-day job and that the process is never over. I think you did such a good job raising us because you never lost sight of what Papa did for you. Papa set the standard for which you strived—just as you set the standard for me. I want you to know that as I teach Matthew and Weston how to aim a rifle, how to bait a hook, or build a fire, that you will be there standing with me, just as Papa stood with you and just as one day, I'll stand with them as they pass on that legacy. I couldn't have asked for a better father and I thank God for making me your son.”

What greater birthday present could a father receive? ■

---

# Book Reviews

*"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed."  
Francis Bacon (d. 1626).*

## Ethics: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6.

Edited by Clifford Green, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005, \$55.

*Reviewed by Adam C. English, Assistant Professor of Theology and Philosophy,  
Campbell University, North Carolina*

The title of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's unfinished masterpiece, *Ethics*, belies its content. It is not a treatise on ethics, but on the *end* of ethics. Bonhoeffer does not set out to show all the various ways the knowledge of good and evil can be used in a fallen world, he sets out to overcome the knowledge of good and evil. He says that the name "Christian ethics" should be invoked "only as the critique of all ethics" (300). He explains in the opening paragraph to the work:

Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, as inappropriate to this topic, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: "How can I be good?" and "How can I do something good?" Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God? (47)

Coming on the fiftieth year anniversary of the first publication of *Ethics* in English, this new translation and edition is nothing short of paradise for Bonhoeffer devotees and scholars. Complete with a lengthy introduction and afterward, rich footnotes that cross-reference other Bonhoeffer works, a brimming bibliography, a glossary of names, a chart comparing previous editions of *Ethics* with the new edition, and even a timeline for the writing of *Ethics*, this is the definitive edition. My wife pokes fun at me for getting so enthusiastic, but it really is great. True, you can buy the 1955 N. H. Smith translation, which has been recently reissued by Touchstone, for \$13.00. But, the \$55.00 you spend on the new Fortress edition is well worth it.

Since Bonhoeffer died before completing the text, the format, order, and number of chapters is left to editorial discretion. The editors of this new Fortress edition have rearranged the chapters and added some material not printed in older editions. For instance, they include an earlier version (in addition to the later version) of the chapter entitled, "History and Good." In this important section Bonhoeffer offers a theological rationale for join-

ing the Abwehr plot to assassinate Hitler, even though the decision went against his pacifist commitments.

As two recent films (*Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace*, 2001 and *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, and Nazi Resister*, 2003) and a number of recent books and essays attest, interest in Bonhoeffer's role in the conspiracy abounds. The *Ethics* provides tremendous insight into his decision to become involved in the plot. Throughout the text, the reader observes Bonhoeffer coming to grips with the fact that "everyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty" (275). Even Christ, who remained sinless, took on the guilt of the human race when he entered history and became responsible for their sins. In like fashion, those who try to act responsibly without getting their hands dirty divorce themselves from reality and Christ's work of reconciliation. "They place their personal innocence above their responsibility for other human beings and are blind to the fact that precisely in so doing they become even more egregiously guilty" (276). Bonhoeffer goes so far down this line of thinking to suggest that there may be a legitimate suspension of the law for the sake of affirming it, renewing it, and bringing about a higher good. "The suspension of the law must only serve its true fulfillment. In war, for example, there is killing, lying, and seizing of property solely in order to reinstate the validity of life, truth, and property" (297). According to this provocative statement, it seems those involved in the Abwehr's attempt at tyrannicide are more than justified in their lying, deception, and plans to kill. And yet, Bonhoeffer is not content with such a simplistic justification. He refuses to have his argument reduced to "The ends justify the means." In truth, ends *do not* justify means. Immediately after the sentence quoted above, Bonhoeffer adds, "Breaking the law must be *recognized* in all its gravity" (297). Although the ends may supersede the ends, they do not justify them. Lying is still lying, killing is still killing. There is real guilt that attends such breaking of the law, even when it is nevertheless necessary to break the law in service of God and neighbor.

Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* proves today, as it did fifty years

ago, to be a milestone in Christian moral thinking and radical discipleship. The new Fortress edition offers a fine opportunity to become acquainted or reacquainted with it. ■

---

## The Beloved Community

### How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today

Charles Marsh, New York: Basic Books, 2005, \$26.

*Reviewed by Darold Morgan*

Richardson, TX

All students of Christian ethics will find in this book an exceptionally well-written, strongly researched volume of lasting value on the issues of social justice in the United States. The author takes as his title a powerful phrase popularized by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his Montgomery years (*The Beloved Community*), and infuses it with such depth and perception that the prevalent jaded disillusionment about social civil justice senses the potential of renewal and revival.

Dr. Marsh brings the spotlight of superb research to King's inaugural ministry in Montgomery, recording succinctly the events and personalities that literally revolutionized the civil rights movement. Vital events are brought into perspective that need to be recalled. Additionally, there are biographical facts about these seminal days that should not be forgotten. The skills of the author in recreating these times contributes to the genuine interest created by this most readable and interesting book. By no means is King presented without fault, but his dream of "The Beloved Community": does color this entire section of American history. Deeply influenced by the black Baptist church heritage and enhanced by Niebuhr's insights about the kingdom of God, the author develops his thesis about faith being a primary factor in this crusade for social justice. The major goal for a community where equal rights can be a reality for all people, regardless of race or economic levels shines through every chapter in the book.

The author wisely brings in other key personalities and movements in this never-ending quest for social justice. His paragraphs about Clarence Jordan and the Koinonia Farms in Georgia are both timely and helpful, especially the additional biographical background about Jordan and his contacts with King.

Painful but necessary memories of the radical phase of the civil rights movement are treated fairly as one recalls many years later the massive conflicts between leaders who espoused a non-violent approach to the flaming issues and those to whom violence was the only answer.

Those times constitute a dark side of American history in the mid-twentieth century, which still shadows social justice needs among us today.

The book documents the collapse of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the ultimate passage of civil rights legislation, and the lapse of leadership, producing a peculiar malaise in the arena. Other factors now necessitate the timeliness of this fresh review—i.e., the force of immigration, the constancy of poverty, the lack of educational and medical facilities among the poorest segment of the population, and the simmering levels of racial prejudice. There have been some major achievements in all of these areas, but the need for continuing progress is both apparent and urgent.

One of the strengths of the book is a study of current experiments in "faith-based" movements. These reports are separate from the current emphasis on government support for social programs. Marsh writes persuasively and positively about these examples. John Perkins and his widespread influence through "The Voice of Calvary" ministry is interestingly presented, though somewhat controversial as a part of the contemporary "Beloved Community." References are made to similar work and ministries in Harlem, Oak Park, Philadelphia, Boston, Charlottesville, and Jackson. Each of these examples merit far more study as to how faith shapes social justice.

Marsh concludes by defining the "Beloved Community as a gift of the kingdom of God introduced into history by the church, and thus it exists within the provenance of Christ' mystery in the world" (207). Churches, therefore, need to be a part of the social justice movement, and many have responded during these turbulent decades. However, their involvement needs to be balanced and committed to biblical concerns.

The author's thesis is strengthened by helpful quotations throughout the book from Karl Barth, Helmut Thielicke, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others. Do not casually dismiss these influences as radical. Each has an unmistakably strong biblical stance that centers in a personal relationship with Christ, bringing a solid base of theological underpinnings to their approach.

That the problems confronting social justice today are massive and unrelenting is beyond debate—crime, drug addition, lack of medical facilities particularly for the poor, immigrant discrimination, and homelessness are only a part of this array of social problems that will not go away. But also there are people motivated by Christian compassion, concern, intelligence that will not go away. It is apparent from this excellent study that today we are blessed with many churches and people who are a living part of the "The Beloved Community." ■

---

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

## Religious Freedom Award Remarks

*By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor*

12527 Matisse Lane, Dallas, TX 75230

A sincere and hearty word of appreciation must be offered to the planners of this program for choosing me to receive the Fifth Annual George W. Truett Religious Freedom Award at this Texas Baptist Heritage Awards Banquet.

Thank you.

Thanks, too, to my family members and to my many friends who have honored me by letters, phone calls, personal visits, and now by your presence on this occasion.

The relationship between church and state is the most important subject in the history of the West.

Religious liberty's corollary, the separation of church and state, is the most important contribution the United States of America has made to world civilization.

There has never been an American doctrine of church-state separation, only a Baptist doctrine that has had great influence in America, according to America's best known and most widely respected church historian, Martin Marty.

My own interest in the subject is life-long.

I was nurtured in family lore related to French Huguenot ancestors. (Both Foy and Valentine have French Huguenot roots.)

In 1953, as the newly elected director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, I was drawn like bees to honey to involvement in the religious liberty/church-state issue. My heart burned within me at the courageous and principled stands taken by the newly organized Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State. For some fifty years I have served as a Trustee of this immensely influential organization, now called Americans United for Separation of Church and State, working on most of its committees, as Chair of its Executive Committee, and twice as its President.

In my own speaking, preaching, teaching, writing, organizational work, and stewardship in support of the religious liberty/church-state separation principle, I have stood on the shoulders of giants. Chief among these giants have been George W. Truett, J. M. Dawson, and Glenn L. Archer.

Dr. George W. Truett's famous sermon, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," preached on the East Steps of the United States Capitol, marks this great man of towering genius as an eminent champion of this worthy cause.

In his very mature years, Dr. J. M. Dawson left his native state of Texas to head the work of what was to become the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. From that bully pulpit, Dr. Dawson made immeasurable contributions to the cause of religious liberty and church-state separation.

At Dr. Dawson's initiative, Glenn L. Archer came from his law school deanship in Kansas to head the work of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Glenn L. Archer's towering strengths and unflinching commitment to church-state separation enabled him to fulfill with remarkable effectiveness what he deemed to be his special calling from God.

I respectfully salute these three giants who, though dead, are yet speaking.

Now, the heaviest possible shot must be fired across the bow of the ship carrying the current detractors of church-state separation.

Blithely ignoring the lessons of history, these detractors would sell our birthright for a mess of pottage.

Piddling dribbles of tax money are being doled out for "faith-based initiatives"—and for votes.

Pitiful little photo-op grants are being scheduled to buy silence on church-state separation today and votes for tomorrow.

Roving through the garden of religious liberty cultivated by wise pioneers in the past, these detractors, like Goths rampaging through Rome in her dotage, are bent not just on breaching the wall but on destroying it altogether so that not one stone is left on another.

In the name of George W. Truett and in the name of Liberty's Lord, let Baptists rise up now to stop these detractors. And let Baptists with one heart, one mind, and one will raise high the banner of religious liberty/church-state separation. As Chaucer put it, if gold rust, how shall Iron be clean? What our forebears secured at great sacrifice let us not basely relinquish. ■

# 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.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Fisher Humphreys, Chair

Pat Anderson

Tony Campolo

Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler

Carolyn Dipboye

Aubrey H. Ducker, Jr.

Darold Morgan

David Sapp

Philip Wise

**Contributions** should be made out to the Christian Ethics Today Foundation and mailed to the address below. Your comments and inquiries are always welcome. Articles in the Journal (except those copyrighted) may be reproduced if you indicate the source and date of publication. Manuscripts that fulfill the purposes of *Christian Ethics Today* may be submitted to the editor for publication consideration and addressed to:

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

**Phone:** (512) 847-8721  
**Line 2** (512) 847-8171  
**email** jtrull@wimberley-tx.com

**NOTE: THE ADDRESSES AND PHONE NUMBERS MAY BE CHANGING SOON.**

**VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE: [www.ChristianEthicsToday.com](http://www.ChristianEthicsToday.com)**

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY  
Post Office Box 26  
Wimberley, Texas 78676

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
DALLAS, TX  
PERMIT NO. 3648