

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

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

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KUDZU by Doug Marlette
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F. F. V. (Friends of Foy Valentine)

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

Last December, as often he did, Foy Valentine called to ask, “How are the finances? Do you need some help?”

In 1995, Foy published the first volume of *Christian Ethics Today*. Pecking away on his ancient typewriter (he resisted computers with a passion) and keeping all records hand-written in proverbial blue-green ink on a yellow pad, he stated a basic principle of the bi-monthly Journal that has never changed: *Christian Ethics Today will be sent free of charge to anyone requesting it, as long as money and energy permit.*

Ten years and fifty-nine issues later, we have kept that promise without omitting a single issue! We have come close a few times, but always the needed funds arrived. At times, Foy himself would send \$1000 or more out of his pocket to ensure the next issue.

Christian Ethics Today was Foy’s final dream, and many think his best. The Journal certainly is unique; it is indeed, in Foy’s words, “a prophetic voice for Christian social ethics.”

Foy wanted the Journal to endure; he knew the key was financial support. Only now can I share what he would not want me to share about his personal investment (I suspect he is frowning in heaven over this paragraph). In the early stages of planning the publication of *Whatever Things Are Lovely*, Foy insisted he pay out of his pocket every expense: the cost of 10,000 copies and the expense of packaging and mailing them to almost 4000 subscribers. A monumental sum, but he said, “I want this to be my gift to the Journal, to help raise money for CET.” To date, about 4000 were sent to all subscribers, and an additional 4000+ have been ordered!

From a few hundred readers in 1995, we now mail to over 4300 subscribers and distribute about 300 more each issue. We have published two significant books— Foy’s acclaimed work and one by Henlee Barnette and his son Jim (see ad in this issue). We have visited seven college and seminary campuses, speaking at chapel services, classes, and ministerial organizations. In February, we conducted our first conference at Truett Seminary (thanks to a special

grant); Dean Paul Powell and attendants praised the meeting and the six speakers who discussed, “How To Be A Good Minister.”

After the Memorial Service for Foy, Ross Coggins and Bob Mitchell pulled me aside. “How can we promote a Memorial Fund in Foy’s memory, to fulfill his dream for the future of the Journal?” Several others have written or called to express the same concern.

Recently I have met and talked with several of them about organizing a group of Foy’s friends—let’s call them the F. F. V. (Friends of Foy Valentine) Committee.

What is their dream? To mobilize a group to help raise at least \$500,000 as an endowment for *Christian Ethics Today*—the interest from this fund would underwrite a significant part of the annual budget, which is now \$80,000. (During the first weeks after the Memorial Service, without any appeal, seventeen memorial gifts came in totaling \$9,375, including one for \$5000 and one for \$2500).

At a meeting with Ross and Bob, when the goal of \$500,000 was proposed, I uttered words I would soon have to eat: “To raise that amount someone would have to donate \$100,000. Who could do that?” *The very next day* a check arrived for \$100,000 from a close friend whom Foy had known for fifty years (Foy was his pastor while in seminary).

God has a way of surprising us with joy, in spite of our lack of faith! Audra and I sat speechless in my office. Then I laughed, and then I cried a little. My only sorrow was that Foy could not be present to rejoice with me—but maybe he was. When I visited with Harold Simmons in his Dallas office, he expressed the hope that his gift might be matched to perpetuate the memory and the legacy of Foy Valentine.

So, soon we will begin the work of fulfilling Foy’s dream—the dream of the Journal continuing without the month-to-month stress of hoping enough is in the bank to publish the next issue.

Pray with us that God would bless our efforts and the \$500,000 goal would be reached. Some on our CET Board
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We've Got Mail

Letters From Our Readers

"Foy's courageous stands on the social issues of civil and women's rights stand out in my memory. . . . He could take such stands and not be bitter about the opposition. . . . He was indeed a man for all seasons . . . what a privilege it was to know him."
Judy B. Brooks, San Mateo, CA.

"How I will miss that good man—you introduced me to Dr. Foy at a CLC seminar . . . how he lived up to all my expectations."
Jim Crouch, Hamilton, TX.

"Our dear Foy is in our S.S. class . . . he is really funny, a delightful moral man, dear Lord how we need so many more of him . . . I feel like if he prays for me God stops what he is doing and listens right then."
Naomi Stanley, Park Cities BC, Dallas, TX.

"When I read CET, familiar emotions rise up in me reminding me that I am not alone on the journey that seems to be inexorably on a darker and drearier path. My denomination has left me, my country has left me, and at times I feel like God has left us all. Then I get a copy of your magazine that speaks such assurance and comfort to my heart that it's like the Holy Spirit coming to me folded and stapled whispering encouragement."
Ragan Courtney, the Sanctuary, Austin, TX.

"I mentioned Christian Ethics Today to Hardy Clemons—he told me that CET was one of two periodicals that he reads every month. I have not been a reader but I want to be. How do I get a subscription?"
Bill Little, St. Charles, MO.

[Answer: Just send us your address for the free subscription]

"It was good to have you . . . at Truett for the CET conference. . . . it was an outstanding conference. Thanks for the good work you are doing."
Paul W. Powell, Dean of Truett Theological Seminary.

"How much I enjoy CET. You are doing a great work on a small budget. My grandson John Kenneth Burk finished Baylor and Truett, then he went to Princeton for a Masters in Ethics and is now in Edinburgh, Scotland working on his PhD—he wants to teach Ethics."
Fred V. Richards, MD, San Antonio, TX.

[Note: We contacted John, sent several issues of CET and books—he responded with an article in this issue.]

"I've really enjoyed reading the past CET issues. They are fresh, timely and smart. Moreover, they are Christian—a real rarity these days, especially when it includes those former three attributes. Keep up the good work!"

Clint Rainey, University of Texas Journalism student.

"I am a (recovering) Liberty University graduate and very intentionally sought Eastern University/Palmer Seminary as a place of social, political and theological refuge. As a 'black sheep' formerly living in Jerry Land I can't tell you how important, refreshing and encouraging it is for me to find a publication like yours."

Robert W. Gauthier, Assistant to Dr. Tony Campolo, St. Davids, PA.

"CET is by far the best publication that comes through my mailbox. Thank your for your contribution to ethics, and logic!"

Mike Mitchell, Ft. Payne, AL.

"Since a friend added my name to your mailing list, I have devoured ever issue, and I am blessed. . . . It's nice to remember there are many Christians who still believe that love is more important than legalism."

Don Claybrook, Sr., Elk, CA.

"I continue to give thanks for Audra's recovery and for your being able to continue the work that means so much to many of us . . . I wonder, of course what the warning of a change of address bodes for your lives and for us your readers."

Pat Gillis, Statesboro, GA.

Editor's Note: To Pat and to many inquirers, Audra is doing wonderfully well, back to normal strength and activity (including her 3 mile daily walk)—the successful surgery found no evidence of cancer cells in the margins or lymph nodes. After precautionary chemo and radiation treatments, she is now receiving the new drug Herceptin (adds 10% to her prognosis for no recurrence, putting her in the 90%+ category, for which we are extremely grateful. Our move to Robson Ranch (an Active Adult Community just south of Denton at Exit 79 on I-35W), is a lifestyle move that includes two daughters and six grandchildren nearby, as well as a better location for the Journal. Your prayers and concern have sustained and encouraged us. Please visit us if you are in the neighborhood. ■

EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“GREED EST BONUM.”

*Motto of Trump University online school website, according to cartoonist **G. B. Trudeau** in *Doonesbury*.*

“Never dilute the oil of anecdote with too much of the vinegar of truth.”

*A favorite “Foyism” (quote of Foy Valentine) by **Brooks Hays**, Baptist Statesman and Congressman.*

“He was an unwavering advocate for Texans in need. He has provided strong ethical leadership and is a reminder to us all that government exists to serve the people.”

*Former Texas House Speaker **Pete Laney**, in response to the death of Phil Strickland, who was director of the Christian Life Commission of Texas Baptists for 25 years.*

“The greatest threat to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. is a ‘cradle to prison’ cycle in which a 4-year-old black boy today has a 1-3 chance of going to jail.”

***Marian Wright Edelman**, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund.*

“I learned that when you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone.”

***Coretta Scott King**.*

“The New Testament says the church is the body of Christ, but for the last 100 years the hands and feet have been amputated, and the church has just been a mouth. And mostly it’s been know for what it’s against.”

***Purpose Driven Life** author **Rick Warren**.*

“President Bush will ask Congress for another \$120 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing the total cost to about \$440 billion—expenses for Iraq are about \$4.5 billion a month. That’s enough to buy General Motors Corp. 33 times.”

“For war, billions more, but no more for the poor.”

***Rev. Joseph Lowery**, co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at the funeral of **Coretta Scott King**.*

“This is about justice and equality because there is no way we can look at what’s happening in Africa and conclude

that we would let it happen anywhere else.”

*U2 lead singer **Bono** at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.*

“Figures compiled by the Iraqi Health Ministry put the civilian death toll for 2005 at 4024—1695 Iraqi police and soldiers were killed last year. The Brookings Institution estimates that 5696 to 9934 civilians were killed in Iraq in 2005.”

Associated Press, 3/3/06.

“With confidence that it is the mouthpiece for God, it endorses candidates, supports constitutional amendments and mobilizes campaigns to keep poor souls hooked up to feeding tubes. . . . that is the style, and I think, the sin of the Christian right.”

***John Danforth**, Episcopal priest and former U.S. Senator (R-Mo).*

“Those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither.”

***Benjamin Franklin** quote hoisted by two-dozen students at Georgetown University Law Center during a speech by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales defending domestic eavesdropping.*

“The First Amendment requires no less and allows no more than this: that the government accommodate religion without advocating it; protect religion without privileging it; lift burdens on religion without extending it a benefit.”

***Brent Walker**, Exec. Dir. of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.*

“The expense can damage the show’s credibility.”

***Melanie Sloan** of *Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics*, in response to “fair and balanced” Fox News not revealing that it paid \$14,000 for a private jet to ferry indicted congressman Tom DeLay for an exclusive interview.*

“Experts point out that less than a fifth of all oil imports come from the Middle East . . . the largest sources of U.S. petroleum [are] Canada, Mexico, Nigeria, and Venezuela.”

***Los Angeles Times** response to the President’s pledge to cut Middle East oil imports by 75% over the next 20 years. ■*

Violence, Religion, and Politics

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

Note: This article is adapted from Bill Moyer's address in February, 2005, at Union Theological Seminary in New York after Judith and Bill Moyers received the seminary's highest award, the Union Medal, for their contributions to faith and reason in America.

At the Central Baptist Church in Marshall, Texas, where I was baptized in the faith, we believed in a free church in a free state. I still do. My spiritual forbears did not take kindly to living under theocrats who embraced religious liberty for themselves but denied it to others.

"Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils," thundered the dissenter Roger Williams as he was banished from Massachusetts for denying Puritan authority over his conscience.

Baptists there were a "pitiful negligible minority," but they were agitators for freedom and therefore denounced as "incendiaries of the commonwealth" for holding to their belief in that great democracy of faith—the priesthood of all believers. For refusing to pay tribute to the state religion they were fined, flogged, and exiled.

In 1651 the Baptist Obadiah Holmes was given 30 stripes with a three-corded whip after he violated the law and took forbidden communion with another Baptist in Lynn, Massachusetts. His friends offered to pay his fine for his release but he refused. They offered him strong drink to anesthetize the pain of the flogging. Again he refused. "It is the love of liberty," he said, "that must free the soul."

Such revolutionary ideas made the new nation with its Constitution and Bill of Rights "a haven for the cause of conscience." No longer could magistrates order citizens to support churches they did not attend and recite creeds that they did not believe. No longer would "the loathsome combination of church and state"—as Thomas Jefferson described it—be the settled order.

Unlike the Old World that had been wracked with religious wars and persecution, the government of America would take no sides in the religious free-for-all that liberty would make possible and politics would make inevitable. The First Amendment neither inculcates religion nor inoculates against it. Americans could be loyal to the Constitution without being hostile to God, or they could pay no heed to God without fear of being mugged by an official God Squad.

It has been a remarkable arrangement that guaranteed "soul freedom." It is at risk now, and the fourth observance of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 is an appropriate time to think about it.

Four years ago this week, the poet's prophetic metaphor became real again and "the great dark birds of history" plunged into our lives. They came in the name of God. They came bent on murder and martyrdom. It was as if they rode to earth on the fierce breath of Allah himself for the sacred scriptures that had nurtured these murderous young men are steeped in images of a violent and vengeful God who wills life for the faithful and horrific torment for unbelievers.

Yes, the Koran speaks of mercy and compassion and calls for ethical living. But such passages are no match for the ferocity of instruction found there for waging war for God's sake.

The scholar Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer carefully traces this trail of holy violence in his important book, *Is Religion Killing Us?* [Trinity Press International, 2003]. He highlights many of the verses in the Koran that the Islamic terrorists could have had in their hearts and on their lips four years ago as they moved toward their gruesome rendezvous.

As I read some of them, close your eyes and recall the scenes of that bright September morning which began in the bright sun under blue sky:

Those who believe Fight in the cause of Allah, and Those who reject Faith Fight in the cause of Evil. (4:76)

So We sent against them A furious Wind through days of disaster, that We might Give them a taste of a Penalty of humiliation In this Life; but The Penalty of the Hereafter will be More Humiliating still: And they Will find No help. (41:16)

Then watch thou For the Day That the sky will Bring forth a kind Of smoke (or mist) Plainly visible, Enveloping the people: This will be a Penalty Grievous. (44:10-11)

Did the people of the towns Feel Secure against the coming Of Our Wrath by night While they were asleep? Or else did they feel Secure against its coming in Broad daylight while they Played About (carefree)? Did they then feel secure Against the Plan of Allah?—But no one can feel Secure from the plan of Allah, except those (Doomed) to ruin." (7:97-99)

So the holy warriors came—an airborne death cult, their sights on God's enemies: regular folks, starting the

day's routine. One minute they're pulling off their jackets, shaking Sweet n' Low into their coffee, adjusting the height of their chair or a picture of a child or sweetheart or spouse in a frame on their desk, booting up their computer—and in the next, they are engulfed by a horrendous cataclysm. God's will. Poof!

But it is never only the number of dead by which the terrorists measure their work. It is also the number of the living—the survivors—taken hostage to fear. Their mission was to invade our psyche; get inside our heads—deprive us of trust, faith, and peace of mind: keep us from ever again believing in a safe, just, and peaceful world, and from working to bring that world to pass.

The writer Terry Tempest Williams has said “the human heart is the first home of democracy.” Fill that heart with fear and people will give up the risks of democracy for the assurances of security; fill that heart with fear and you can shake the house to its foundations.

In the days leading up to 9/11, our daughter and husband adopted their first baby. On the morning of September 11th our son-in-law passed through the shadow of the World Trade Center toward his office a few blocks up the street. He arrived as the horrors erupted. He saw the flames, the falling bodies, the devastation. His building was evacuated and for long awful moments he couldn't reach his wife, our daughter, to say he was okay. Even after they connected, it wasn't until the next morning that he was able to make it home.

Throughout that fearful night our daughter was alone with their new baby. Later she told us that for weeks thereafter she would lie awake at night, wondering where and when it might happen again, going to the computer at three in the morning to check out what she could about bio-terrorism, germ warfare, anthrax and the vulnerability of children. The terrorists had violated a mother's deepest space. Who was not vulnerable?

That morning Judith and I made it to our office at Channel Thirteen on West 33rd Street just after the second plane struck. Our building was evacuated although the two of us remained with other colleagues to do what we could to keep the station on the air. The next day it was evacuated again because of bomb scare at the Empire State Building nearby. We had just ended a live broadcast for PBS when security officers swept through and ordered everyone out.

This time we left. As we were making our way down the stairs I took Judith's arm and was struck by the thought: Is this the last time I'll touch her? Could what we had begun together a half century ago end here on this dim, bare staircase?

I forced the thought from my mind, willed it away, but in the early hours of morning, as I sat at the window of our apartment looking out at the sky, the sinister intruder crept back. Terrorists plant time bombs in our heads, hoping to turn each and every imagination into a private hell governed by our fear of them. They win only if we let

them, only if we become like them: vengeful, imperious, intolerant, paranoid.

Having lost faith in all else, zealots have nothing left but a holy cause to please a warrior God. They win if we become holy warriors, too; if we kill the innocent as they do; strike first at those who had not struck us; allow our leaders to use the fear of terrorism to make us afraid of the truth; cease to think and reason together, allowing others to tell what's in God's mind. Yes, we are vulnerable to terrorists, but only a shaken faith in ourselves can do us in.

So over the past four years I have kept reminding myself of not only the horror but the humanity that was revealed that day four years ago, when through the smoke and fire we glimpsed the heroism, compassion, and sacrifice of people who did the best of things in the worst of times. I keep telling myself that this beauty in us is real, that it makes life worthwhile and democracy work and that no terrorist can take it from us.

But I am not so sure. As a Christian realist, I honor my inner skeptic. And as a journalist I always know the other side of the story. The historian Edward Gibbon once wrote of historians what could be said of journalists. He wrote: “The theologians may indulge the pleasing task of describing religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian [read: journalist]. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings.”

The other side of the story: Muslims have no monopoly on holy violence. As Jack Nelson-Pallmayer points out, God's violence in the sacred texts of both faiths reflect a deep and troubling pathology “so pervasive, vindictive, and destructive” that it contradicts and subverts the collective weight of other passages that exhort ethical behavior or testify to a loving God.

For days now we have watched those heart-breaking scenes on the Gulf Coast: the steaming, stinking, sweltering wreckage of cities and suburbs; the fleeing refugees; the floating corpses, hungry babies, and old people huddled together in death, the dogs gnawing at their feet; stranded children standing in water reeking of feces and garbage; families scattered; a mother holding her small child and an empty water jug, pleading for someone to fill it; a wife, pushing the body of her dead husband on a wooden plank down a flooded street; desperate people struggling desperately to survive.

Now transport those current scenes from our newspapers and television back to the first Book of the Bible—the Book of Genesis. They bring to life what we rarely imagine so graphically when we read of the great flood that devastated the known world. If you read the Bible as literally true, as fundamentalists do, this flood was ordered by God.

“And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh . . . behold, I will destroy them with the

earth” (6:5-13). “I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die” (6:17-19).

Noah and his family are the only humans spared—they were, after all, God’s chosen. But for everyone else, “the waters prevailed so mightily . . . that all the high mountains . . . were covered . . . And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts . . . and every man, everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died . . .” (7:17-23).

The flood is merely Act I. Read on: This God first “hardens the heart of Pharaoh” to make sure the Egyptian ruler will not be moved by the plea of Moses to let his people go. Then because Pharaoh’s heart is hardened, God turns the Nile into blood so people cannot drink its water and will suffer from thirst.

Not satisfied with the results, God sends swarms of locusts and flies to torture them, rains hail and fire and thunder on them, destroys the trees and plants of the field until nothing green remains, and orders every first-born child to be slaughtered, from the first-born of Pharaoh right on down to “the first-born of the maidservant behind the mill.” An equal-murderous God, you might say.

The massacre continues until “there is not a house where one was not dead.” While the Egyptian families mourn their dead, God orders Moses to loot from their houses all their gold and silver and clothing. Finally, God’s thirst for blood is satisfied, God pauses to rest and boasts: “I have made sport of the Egyptians.”

Violence: the sport of God. God, the progenitor of shock and awe.

And that’s just Act II. As the story unfolds women and children are hacked to death on God’s order; unborn infants are ripped from their mother’s wombs; cities are leveled—their women killed if they have had sex, the virgins taken at God’s command for the pleasure of his holy warriors.

When his holy warriors spare the lives of 50,000 captives, God is furious and sends Moses back to rebuke them and tell them to finish the job. One tribe after another falls to God-ordered genocide: the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites—names so ancient they have disappeared into the mists as fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren, infants in arms, shepherds, threshers, carpenters, merchants, housewives—living human beings, flesh and blood: “And when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them . . . (and) your eyes shall not pity them.”

So it is written—in the *Holy Bible*.

Yes, I know the early church fathers, trying to cover up the blood-soaked trail of God’s sport, decreed that anything that disagrees with Christian dogma about the

perfection of God is to be interpreted spiritually. Yes, I know Edward Gibbon himself acknowledged that the literal biblical sense of God “is repugnant to every principle of faith as well as reason” and that we must therefore read the scriptures through a veil of allegory. Yes, I know we can go through the Bible and construct a God more pleasing to the better angels of our nature (as I have done). Yes, I know: Christians claim the Old Testament God of wrath was supplanted by the Gospel’s God of love [See *The God of Evil*, Allan Hawkins, Exlibris].

I know these things; all of us know these things. But we also know that the “violence-of-God” tradition remains embedded deep in the DNA of monotheistic faith. We also know that fundamentalists the world over and at home consider the “sacred texts” to be literally God’s word on all matters.

Inside that logic you cannot read part of the Bible allegorically and the rest of it literally. If you believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection, and the depiction of the Great Judgment at the end times you must also believe that God is sadistic, brutal, vengeful, callow, cruel, and savage—that God slaughters. Millions believe it.

Let’s go back to 9/11 four years ago. The ruins were still smoldering when the reverends Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell went on television to proclaim that the terrorist attacks were God’s punishment of a corrupted America. They said the government had adopted the agenda “of the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians” not to mention the ACLU and People for the American Way. (The God of the Bible apparently holds liberals in the same low esteem as Hittites and Gerushites and Jebusites and all the other pagans of holy writ.)

Just as God had sent the Great Flood to wipe out a corrupted world, now—disgusted with a decadent America—“God almighty is lifting his protection from us.” Critics said such comments were deranged. But millions of Christian fundamentalists and conservatives didn’t think so. They thought Robertson and Falwell were being perfectly consistent with the logic of the Bible as they read it: God withdraws favor from sinful nations—the terrorists were meant to be God’s wake-up call: better get right with God.

Not many people at the time seemed to notice that Osama bin Laden had also been reading his sacred book closely and literally, and he had called on Muslims to resist what he described as a “fierce Judeo-Christian campaign” against Islam, praying to Allah for guidance “to exalt the people who obey Him and humiliate those who disobey Him.”

Suddenly we were immersed in the pathology of a “holy war” as defined by fundamentalists on both sides. You could see this pathology play out in General William Boykin. A professional soldier, General Boykin had taken up with a small group called the Faith Force Multiplier

whose members apply military principles to evangelism with a manifesto summoning warriors “to the spiritual warfare for souls.”

After Boykin had led Americans in a battle against a Somalian warlord he announced, “I know my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his God was an idol.” Now Boykin was going about evangelical revivals preaching that America was in a holy war as “a Christian nation” battling Satan and that America’s Muslim adversaries will be defeated “only if we come against them in the name of Jesus.”

For such an hour, America surely needed a godly leader. So General Boykin explained how it was that the candidate who had lost the election in 2000 nonetheless wound up in the White House. President Bush, he said, “was not elected by a majority of the voters—he was appointed by God.”

Not surprising, instead of being reprimanded for evangelizing while in uniform, General Boykin is now the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence. (Just as it isn’t surprising that despite his public call for the assassination of a foreign head of state, Pat Robertson’s Operation Blessing was one of the first groups to receive taxpayer funds from the President’s Faith-Based Initiative for “relief work” on the Gulf Coast.)

We can’t wiggle out of this, people. Alvin Hawkins states it frankly: “This is a problem we can’t walk away from.” We’re talking about a powerful religious constituency that claims the right to tell us what’s on God’s mind and to decide the laws of the land according to their interpretation of biblical revelation and to enforce those laws on the nation as a whole. For the Bible is not just the foundational text of their faith; it has become the foundational text for a political movement.

True, people of faith have always tried to bring their interpretation of the Bible to bear on American laws and morals—this very seminary is part of that tradition; it’s the American way, encouraged and protected by the First Amendment. But what is unique today is that the radical religious right has succeeded in taking over one of America’s great political parties—the country is not yet a theocracy, but the Republican Party is—and they are driv-

ing American politics, using God as a battering ram on almost every issue: crime and punishment, foreign policy, health care, taxation, energy, regulation, social services, and so on.

What’s also unique is the intensity, organization, and anger they have brought to the public square. Listen to their preachers, evangelists, and homegrown ayatollahs: Their viral intolerance—their loathing of other people’s beliefs, of America’s secular and liberal values, of an independent press, of the courts, of reason, science and the search for objective knowledge—has become an unprecedented sectarian crusade for state power.

They use the language of faith to demonize political opponents, mislead and misinform voters, censor writers and artists, ostracize dissenters, and marginalize the poor. These are the foot soldiers in a political holy war financed by wealthy economic interests and guided by savvy partisan operatives who know that couching political ambition in religious rhetoric can ignite the passion of followers as ferociously as when Constantine painted the Sign of Christ (the “Christograph”) on the shields of his soldiers and on the banners of his legions and routed his rivals in Rome.

Never mind that the Emperor himself was never baptized into the faith; it served him well enough to make the God worshipped by Christians his most important ally and turn the Sign of Christ into the one imperial symbol most widely recognized and feared from east to west. Let’s take a brief detour to Ohio and I’ll show you what I am talking about.

In recent weeks a movement called the Ohio Restoration Project has been launched to identify and train thousands of “Patriot Pastors” to get out the conservative religious vote next year. According to press reports, the leader of the movement—the senior pastor of a large church in suburban Columbus—casts the 2006 elections as an apocalyptic clash between “the forces of righteousness and the hordes of hell.”

The fear and loathing in his message is palpable: He denounces public schools that won’t teach creationism, require teachers to read the Bible in class, or allow children to pray. He rails against the “secular jihadists” who have “hijacked” America and prevent school kids from learn-



ing that Hitler was “an avid evolutionist.” He links abortion to children who murder their parents. He blasts the “pagan left” for trying to redefine marriage. He declares that “homosexual rights” will bring “a flood of demonic oppression.” On his church website you read: “Reclaiming the teaching of our Christian heritage among America’s youth is paramount to a sense of national destiny that God has invested into this nation.”

One of the prominent allies of the Ohio Restoration Project is a popular televangelist in Columbus who heads a \$40 million-a-year ministry that is accessible worldwide via 1,400 TV stations and cable affiliates. Although he describes himself as neither Republican nor Democrat, but a “Christocrat”—a gladiator for God marching against “the very hordes of hell in our society”—he nonetheless has been spotted with so many Republican politicians in Washington and elsewhere that he has been publicly described as a “spiritual advisor” to the party.

The journalist Marley Greiner has been following his ministry for the organization FreePress. She writes that because he considers the separation of church and state to be “a lie perpetrated on Americans—especially believers in Jesus Christ”—he identifies himself as a “wall builder” and “wall buster.”

As a wall builder he will “restore Godly presence in government and culture; as a wall buster he will tear down the church-state wall.” He sees the Christian church as a sleeping giant that has the ability and the anointing from God to transform America. The giant is stirring.

At a rally in July he proclaimed to a packed house: “Let the Revolution begin!” And the congregation roared back: “Let the Revolution begin!” (The Revolution’s first goal, by the way, is to elect as governor next year the current Republican secretary of state who oversaw the election process in 2004 year when a surge in Christian voters narrowly carried George Bush to victory.)

As General Boykin suggested of President Bush’s anointment, this fellow has acknowledged that “God wanted him as secretary of state during 2004” because it was such a critical election. Now he is criss-crossing Ohio meeting with Patriot Pastors and their congregations proclaiming that “America is at its best when God is at its center.” [For the complete stories from which this information has been extracted see: “An evening with Rod Parsley, by Marley Greiner, FreePress, July 20, 2005; Patriot Pastors,” Marilyn Warfield, Cleveland Jewish News, July 29, 2005; “Ohio televangelist has plenty of influence, but he wants more,” Ted Wendling, Religion News Service, Chicago Tribune, July 1, 2005; “Shaping Politics from the pulpits,” Susan Page, USA TODAY, Aug. 3, 2005; “Religion and Politics Should Be Mixed Says Ohio Secretary of State,” WTOL-TV Toledo, October 29, 2004]

The Ohio Restoration Project is spreading. In one month alone last year in the President’s home state of Texas, a single Baptist preacher added 2000 “Patriot Pastors” to the rolls. On his website he now encourages

pastors to “speak out on the great moral issues of our day . . . to restore and reclaim America for Christ.”

Alas, these “great moral issues” do not include building a moral economy. The Christian Right trumpets charity (as in Faith Based Initiatives) but is silent on social and economic justice. Inequality in America has reached scandalous proportions: a few weeks ago the government acknowledged that while incomes are growing smartly for the first time in years, the primary winners are the top earners—people who receive stocks, bonuses, and other income in addition to wages. The nearly 80 percent of Americans who rely mostly on hourly wages barely maintained their purchasing power.

Even as Hurricane Katrina was hitting the Gulf Coast, giving us a stark reminder of how poverty can shove poor people into the abyss, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that last year one million people were added to 36 million already living in poverty. And since 1999 the income of the poorest one fifth of Americans has dropped almost nine percent. None of these harsh realities of ordinary life seem to bother the radical religious right.

To the contrary, in the pursuit of political power they have cut a deal with America’s richest class and their partisan allies in a law-of-the-jungle strategy to “starve” the government of resources needed for vital social services that benefit everyone while championing more and more spending rich corporations and larger tax cuts for the rich. How else to explain the vacuum in their “great moral issues” of the plight of millions of Americans without adequate health care? Of the gross corruption of politics by campaign contributions that skew government policies toward the wealthy at the expense of ordinary taxpayers? (On the very day that oil and gas prices reached a record high the President signed off on huge taxpayer subsidies for energy conglomerates already bloated with windfall profits plucked from the pockets of average Americans filling up at gas tanks across the country; yet the next Sunday you could pass a hundred church signboards with no mention of a sermon on crony capitalism.)

This silence on economic and political morality is deafening but revealing. The radicals on the Christian right are now the dominant force in America’s governing party. Without them the government would not be in the hands of people who don’t believe in government. They are culpable in upholding a system of class and race in which, as we saw last week, the rich escape and the poor are left behind. And they are crusading for a government “of, by, and for the people” in favor of one based on biblical authority.

This is the crux of the matter: To these fundamentalist radicals there is only one legitimate religion and only one particular brand of that religion that is right; all others who call on God are immoral or wrong. They believe the Bible to be literally true and that they alone know what it means. Behind their malicious attacks on the courts (“vermin in black robes,” as one of their talk show allies recently put it) is a fierce longing to hold judges accountable for inter-

preting the Constitution according to standards of biblical revelation as fundamentalists define it.

To get those judges they needed a party beholden to them. So the Grand Old Party—the GOP—has become God's Own Party, its ranks made up of God's Own People “marching as to war.” Go now to the website of an organization called *America21*. There, on a red, white, and blue home page, you find praise for President Bush's agenda—including his effort to phase out Social Security and protect corporations from law suits by aggrieved citizens. On the same home page is a reminder that “There are 7177 hours until our next National Election . . . ENLIST NOW.”

Now click again and you will read a summons calling Christian pastors “to lead God's people in the turning that can save America from our enemies.” Under the headline “Remember-Repent-Return” language reminiscent of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell reminds you that “one of the unmistakable lessons [of 9/11] is that America has lost the full measure of God's hedge of protection. When we ask ourselves why, the scriptures remind us that ancient Israel was invaded by its foreign enemy, Babylon, in 586 B.C. . . . (and) Jerusalem was destroyed by another invading foreign power in 70 A.D. . . . Psalm 106:37 says that these judgments of God . . . were because of Israel's idolatry. Israel, the apple of God's eye, was destroyed . . . because the people failed . . . to repent.”

If America is to avoid a similar fate, the warning continues, we must “remember the legacy of our heritage under God and our covenant with Him and, in the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14: “Turn from our wicked ways.”

Just what does this have to do with the President's political agenda praised on the home page? Well, squint and look at the fine print at the bottom of the site. It reads: “*America21* is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to educate, engage, and mobilize Christians to influence national policy at every level. Founded in 1989 by a multi-denominational group of *Pastors and Businessmen*, it is dedicated to being a catalyst for revival and reform of the culture *and the government*.”

The corporate, political, and religious right converge here, led by a President who, in his own disdain for science, reason, and knowledge, is the most powerful fundamentalist in American history. What are the stakes?

In his last book, the late Marvin Harris, a prominent anthropologist of the time, wrote that “the attack against reason and objectivity is fast reaching the proportions of a crusade.” To save the American Dream, “we desperately need to reaffirm the principle that it is possible to carry out an analysis of social life which rational human beings will recognize as being true, regardless of whether they happen to be women or men, whites or black, straights or gays,

employers or employees, Jews or born-again Christians. The alternative is to stand by helplessly as special interest groups tear the United States apart in the name of their ‘separate realities’ or to wait until one of them grows strong enough to force its irrational and subjective brand of reality on all the rest.”

That was written 25 years ago, just as the radical Christian right was setting out on their long march to political supremacy. The forces he warned against have gained strength ever since and now control much of the United States government and are on the verge of having it all. It has to be said that their success has come in no small part because of our acquiescence and timidity.

Our democratic values are imperiled because too many people of reason are willing to appease irrational people just because they are pious. Republican moderates tried appeasement and survive today only in gulags set aside for them by the Karl Roves, Bill Frist, and Tom DeLays.

Democrats are divided and paralyzed, afraid that if they take on the organized radical right they will lose what little power they have. Trying to learn to talk about God as Republicans do, they're talking gobbledygook, compromising the strongest thing going for them—the case for a moral economy and the moral argument for the secular checks and balances that have made America “a safe haven for the cause of conscience.”

As I look back on the conflicts and clamor of our boisterous past, one lesson about democracy stands above all others: Bullies—political bullies, economic bullies, and religious bullies—cannot be appeased; they have to be opposed with a stubbornness to match their own. This is never easy; these guys don't fight fair; “Robert's Rules of Order” is not one of their holy texts. But freedom on any front—and especially freedom of conscience—never comes to those who rock and wait, hoping someone else will do the heavy lifting.

Christian realism requires us to see the world as it is, without illusions, and then take it on. Christian realism also requires love. But not a sentimental, dreamy love. Reinhold Niebuhr, who taught at Union Theological Seminary and wrestled constantly with applying Christian ethics to political life, put it this way: “When we talk about love we have to become mature or we will become sentimental. Basically love means . . . being responsible, responsibility to our family, toward our civilization, and now by the pressures of history, toward the universe of humankind.”

Christian realists aren't afraid to love. But just as the Irishman who came upon a brawl in the street and asked, “Is this a private fight or can anyone get in it?” we have to take that love where the action is. Or the world will remain a theatre of war between fundamentalists. ■

Will Fear Win?

By E. Glenn Hinson, Professor of Church History
Baptist Seminary of Kentucky, Lexington

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” President Franklin Delano Roosevelt told us as another terrorizing event cast its dark shadow across our world, and our age is throwing his challenge at us again. From that apocalyptic moment to our own resounds the urgent question: *Will fear win? Or will we find the courage in ourselves to face the mother of all challenges?*

The ancient apostle who gave us our text believed we *could*. “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God and God in that person. Love has been perfected in one who abides in God so that we may have boldness in the time of apocalyptic crisis, for we are in this world just as he is in the world. There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts fear out, for fear torments, and a person who is afraid has not been perfected in love” (1 John 4:16b-18).

If John is right, something is missing from American religious life, for we are afraid, terribly afraid, shaking in our boots. How ironic! The United States has amassed the most formidable weapons systems the world has ever seen. Piles upon piles of nuclear weapons. Delivery systems capable of reaching any spot on earth. Technologies of detection which count the hairs on our heads from heavens’ orb. The only country now meriting the sobriquet of “superpower.” Yet the destruction of those twin symbols of global economic dominance left us quaking and trembling. It led us into war. We are afraid. By consensus judgment on the reelection of George W. Bush to a second term, Americans are dreadfully afraid.

Why Such Fear?

What lies behind such fear? James gives us one factor that begets wars and fights—our desires at war within us. “You lust for it and you don’t get it, you murder and are jealous and don’t obtain it, so you fight and go to war” (Jms 4:2). One might expect that in a land as rich as ours, with a seemingly endless supply of the world’s goods available, the “haves” would reach a point of contentment, of satisfaction, of enough. But you and I know our thinking does not work that way. Rather, enticed on and pushed forward by a market economy, the more we have, the more we have to have. Like old King Midas, we want everything to turn to gold. More and more is our entitlement. We’ve made a virtue of selfishness and greed.

This may sound like an awfully harsh thought, and I apologize if it’s too harsh. As I meditated during preparation of this message, I began to wonder whether we in America

were morally bankrupted by our materialism before the invasion of Iraq and whether the war has completed the process. Need I mention more than Enron and MCI, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo? Jesus asked us questers the most disturbing question: “What will you benefit if you acquire the whole world and lose your own soul? Or what will you take in exchange for your soul?” (Matt 16:26, adapted to the second person). There’s no doubt that war diminishes the human soul, but the readiness to fight to protect and to obtain what we claim as entitlement had its source somewhere else. Was that not in the materialism which possesses our culture to the point that we would launch a “preemptive strike” to safeguard our goods and way of life and that we would accept the flimsiest of evidence as “proof” of the threat to our security?

A Deficiency of Love

Here is where John takes us to a deeper level in our quest to understand why we are afraid. “One who is afraid has not been perfected in love” (1 Jn 4:18). I don’t think John meant here that love would remove every little trace of fear. Insofar as I can see, the only people who have absolutely no fear are in cemeteries. We who are alive possess some fear, and some fear is healthy. Fear makes you jump out of the way of a car headed your way. It gets your adrenaline pumping when you sit down to take a test. Indeed, it incites you to study in advance of that test.

No, John is talking about fear that immobilizes, fear that causes you to lash out mindlessly, fear that prompts a nation to launch a preemptive strike against an imagined enemy. Fear in excess. As John sees it, only God’s love can bring that kind of fear under control. In our culture that means that we, religious people though we claim to be, are not giving the love of God a chance to do its work in us. We are letting our culture shape us in its mold. It beats, hammers, molds, engraves us in its ways. It’s blocking the beams of love that can come in and turn fear into hope.

Can Love Trump Fear?

You are probably asking, “Can love, perfect love, God’s love, do what John believed? Can it ‘cast out fear’ and enable us to live in peace with the rest of humankind?” You and I should pray mightily that it can. As Thomas Merton said, “There is one winner, only one winner, in war. The winner is war itself.”

John is not speaking here about romantic love, a love

that bills and coos. Notice that he used the Greek *agape* rather than *eros* and was careful to qualify it with the adjective “perfect.” Obviously he is talking about *God’s* love, the Love God is. If I may call on Paul’s great hymn of love in 1 Corinthians 13 to help us, he’s talking about a love that “bears up in all circumstances, goes on being faithful in all circumstances, goes on hoping in all circumstances, endures in all circumstances,” a love that “never gives up” (1 Cor 13:7-8, my paraphrase). A love William Blake spoke of in that wonderful line, “We are put on earth a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love.” “Love divine, all love’s excelling” can trump our fear, but we have to open—to let such love stream into our inner rooms and dispel the darkness and gloom where fear lurks.

Ah, there’s the catch—*opening*. We have to open from the inside. God doesn’t drive a bulldozer. The catch is . . . it’s so hard to open in a culture which keeps us on a treadmill of activity for activity’s sake and which endlessly distracts us with its cacophony of noise and its whirl of psychedelic lights. Life’s storms cause us to pull our shutters to and to bar our doors from the inside. But if you can open just a crack, love will slip in through the teeniest aperture and create deep-down security, God’s *shalom*. Energies of fear can become energies of hope for peace.

No, fear, you will not win! God is Love!

Prayer: “O God of infinite love, Love itself, we gather here as people concerned about the cost of war, this war, the war in Iraq—

the shedding of blood,
the wasting of innocent life,
the demeaning of people, a whole nation,
the destruction of property,
the poverty,
the hate.

Forgive us, O God, American people, for being part of the problem.

For wanting too much for ourselves, too many comforts and conveniences.

For ignoring how our desires impact the lives of other people.

How wanting becomes needing.

How denial rouses our anger and, yes, hate.

For pressing those who lead us to follow practices which hurt others.

For creating a world not healthy for humankind as a whole.

For overlooking and overriding our own consciences.

As we come before you, we come as penitents seeking

change and transformation in the thinking of American people.

May we humble ourselves under your Mighty Hand.

May we put aside aspirations to world rulership.

May we adopt as our own the sufferings of the peoples of the world—

the AIDS afflicted of Africa and Asia,
the gaunt and starving masses of Ethiopia,
the droves huddled in Palestinian camps of refuge,
the families jammed together in barrios around cities without life’s amenities,
the immigrants seeking places and livelihoods in this world,

your children everywhere on the face of the earth.

May we surrender the false idea that force and violence will solve political problems.

May we begin to ask what we are doing that evokes hatred of others.

And now, O God of Love, we put ourselves in your hands as instruments of Peace.

Where there is hatred, may we sow love.

Where there is conflict, peace.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is despair, hope. Amen.” ■

F. F. V. (Friends of Foy Valentine)

(continued from page 2)

urged us to aim for \$1,000,000—that is very possible also. All size gifts are appreciated. Obviously, we will need a number of large gifts from those who can do so.

In my hand is a letter from Foy, dated January 5, 2006, sent to me by Susan who wrote: “I found this on my Dad’s desk . . . the last correspondence from my Dad’s hand. Thanks for all you have done for the Journal, all of which put his mind at rest in recent years.”

I treasure that letter in which Foy wrote, “I look forward to seeing you on your forthcoming trip to the Dallas area.” Yes, Foy, we will see you, but in a place even better than Dallas. Until then, your dream continues. ■ JET

Note: Please remember the Memorial Fund Gift is in addition to your regular annual contribution, which supports our basic budget for each issue.. Thanks.

Celebrating President Carter

By *Martin E. Marty, Martin Marty Center*
University of Chicago Divinity School

In weekly *Sightings* and biweekly “*M.E.M.O*” and *Context*, my regular outlets, readers may have noticed that I very rarely “do” presidents, especially sitting ones. Today an ex-president comes into periscope range, since it’s exactly a quarter of a century since Jimmy Carter left office. It would seem to be a safe time to get distance on him.

Still, this “best ex-president we ever had” stirs slurs—as in the weeks-ago Wall Street Journal’s trashy trashing of his new bestseller, *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis*. Carter the politician knows that politics is not a sport for the timid, and is used to the give-and-take of criticism, some of which he gives in his new book.

Having just finished co-directing a project at Emory University in Atlanta, I had several chances for close-up views again on this fellow retiree. On two occasions he made public appearances to advance our project, so one might say I “have an interest.” My main interest, however, is to say that if I don’t speak up once, in measured admiration and immeasurable gratitude, I’d be an ingrate.

Let his detractors say what they wish; Mr. Carter strikes me as someone who can be at ease with himself. Millions of voters in scores of nations are better off for his (and his team’s) monitoring of their elections. Literally hundreds of thousands of the poor, especially in Africa, are alive and healthy, thanks to Carter-inspired ventures (for example, against river blindness and guinea worm infestation).

This is not the place to review Carter, but a review of Carter’s book by Gary Wills, which concentrates so much on religion (as it has to if it wishes to “catch” the man), inspires some quoting and commenting. Wills compares religion-in-politics in 1972, when he first tracked Governor Carter in Georgia, with politics-in-religion today.

One unavoidable theme, for Carter and Wills, is the 180-degree turn by the Southern Baptist Convention majority since Carter’s younger years. Such Southern Baptists “have become as authoritarian as their former antitype, the Roman Catholic hierarchy”—something that grieves Carter, who grew up in the Convention back when Baptists were Baptists. Now by their version of pushing religion into the public square they are doing the most un-Baptistic thing conceivable: asking “the state” to do much of “the church’s” job. Wills writes in the *New York Review of Books*, my citing of which will taint me, for “hanging out” with and quoting such sorts. (His indictment, in the February 9 issue, merits reading.)

Wills says better than I could who Carter is, so I will

quote from his conclusion: “Carter is a patriot. He lists all the things that Americans have to be proud of. That is why he is so concerned that we are squandering our treasures, moral even more than economic. He has come to the defense of our national values, which he finds endangered. He proves that a devout Christian does not need to be a fundamentalist or fanatic, any more than a patriotic American has to be punitive, narrow, and self-righteous. He defends the separation of church and state because he sees with nuanced precision the interactions of faith, morality, politics, and pragmatism.”

Happy 25th, President Emeritus and tenured post-retirement public servant.

Multiple Choices from the Founders

By *Martin E. Marty*

The “Founding Fathers,” or “Founders,” are getting worked over in public affairs, and especially in religious matters, more than ever before. With courts wrestling with issues of church and state, educators fighting over ways to treat faith and faiths in public institutions, and communities battling over the place of religious symbols on “everybody’s spaces” like courthouse lawns and walls, we often find citations from figures like Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, and so many others. These figures were writing in the context of their own times and are easily misrepresented out of that context, but we can still draw some signals from their works.

Fortunately, a new collection of snippets from their writings is available in *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*, edited by James H. Hutson. I first came across Hutson during the bicentennials of the Declaration and the Constitution, about which he had so many sane things to say. He is chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress, and a scholar friendly to religion—one who shows little bias in his writings and in this current work. Thus, since the Founders differed so much from each other, Hutson offers some conflicting and contradictory comments by these leaders.

I used his book while preparing a lecture on Founders’ types. First, let it be noted that this whole cast of char-

acters was concerned with “virtue” and “morality” in the young republic, and all were favorable to the influences of religion on these. The differences came in on the question of what public institutions should do to privilege and promote religion and its practice.

Type one was **John Jay**, author of Federalist Paper No. 2, who spoke of “the privilege and interest of our Christian nation.” He thought citizens of such a nation should elect only Christian rulers and not vote for the infidels, the ungodly. He was nearly alone, and his view, popular as it is in some circles today, did not win out among Constitutionalists in his day. He wanted uniformity in faith.

Type two was **Thomas Jefferson**, who thought that legal privileging and promotion was harmful to church and state. “Truth can stand by itself. Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity.”

Type three found its voice in **James Madison**, who had most influence on the Constitution. He famously wrote that “in matters of Religion, no man’s [sic] right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society and that Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance,” while the Civil Magistrate was not a “competent Judge of Religious Truth” or a good user of it “as an engine of Civil policy.” Christians ought to be most concerned, since the Christian religion was never to show “dependence on the powers of this world.” Privilege Christianity, and you have “pride and indolence,” ignorance, servility, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.

It’s our choice which direction to go in, which type to favor. ■

These articles originally appeared in Sightings, a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

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Baptists and Christian Realism

By John K. Burk, Ph.D. Student
University of Edinburgh, New College

At age 27, I am more and more mindful of the political debates that relentlessly vie for the attention of many in my generation. I am also aware that many in my generation are less and less interested in the jockeying of politicians and political parties for favorable position with a majority of the American public. This disinterest no doubt stems partly from a weariness of seeing the stories of political failure that headline our daily news reports. Rancor over wars and rumors of war, disagreements over the inception of life, and arguments about the rights of the homosexual in society all wear on the soul of an individual, tending to lead some to apathy, or worse, cynicism.

For the citizen of a country founded on democratic principles, such apathy is accepted as the right of the individual, though it ought to raise serious concerns about the future political health of the nation. For the Christians of my generation who embrace this apathetic attitude toward political processes, the concern should be much greater.

My doctoral research is focused on Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), perhaps the most influential and poignant political thinker and Christian statesman of the mid-twentieth century. Niebuhr came to prominence in the midst of two world wars and the disaster that was Soviet communism. Although his own political positions changed during the course of his lifetime, Niebuhr is most remembered for his development and articulation of what is known as “Christian realism.” The definition Niebuhr gave to this kind of realism is that political activities—activities in which Christians should unquestionably participate—have the ultimate aim of “approximating” justice, given the sinful state of human affairs. The love ethic of Christ expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and evidenced most demonstrably by Christ’s willing acceptance of crucifixion is the ideal for which humans should strive. Nevertheless, it is the “impossible ideal” because of the intractability, inevitability, and incomprehensibility of human sin. Thus, for Niebuhr, the role of human beings is to live in the creative tension between the perverse cynicism derived from the experiences of sin, and the naïve optimism of any generation that believes in its capacity to usher in the Kingdom of God as social utopia. While aiming for the realization of love in our social relationships, the realist acknowledges that the best we will achieve is a temporary justice that will need reshaping and reconsidering as we are confronted by

new circumstances and innovations—that is, as we are met with new possibilities for sin.

Recently, CET published an article by R. Hal Ritter, Jr.—a former professor of mine at Truett Seminary—in which he made the case that “the voices of Niebuhr [sic], and Hauerwas and Costas all have something to say to who the church is today.”¹ I will not try to say anything here about the latter two, but I think Ritter is certainly correct that Niebuhr is vitally relevant today to our church discussions about how the Christian is to relate to society-at-large. However, the project of the Christian realist today is less one about recapturing what Niebuhr said than it is about adopting the methodology Niebuhr employed in his attempts to relate the insights of the Christian faith regarding the human condition to the predicaments in which humans find themselves constantly mired.

To my knowledge, the person who is dedicating himself most fully to this project is Robin W. Lovin, Cary M. Maguire University Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University.² Professor Lovin’s view is that new social realities will require new insights from the realist. While Niebuhr’s voice may be a guiding beacon, it is by no means the normative standard on which our moral judgments will be based. In short, Niebuhr’s attempts to understand sinful human nature juxtaposed with the life of Christ can be models for the Christian church, but we must be aware that we will likely arrive at different conclusions in our day than Niebuhr did in his.

If Christians believe, as I do, that we have certain moral obligations to engage political processes, not to shun them, then we must begin to ask ourselves what kind of realities we are facing today. For Baptists, I think this question presents a unique opportunity in light of our traditional understanding of church-state relations. Given the current political atmosphere, it often seems as though Christians are presented with one of two options: either we can divorce ourselves entirely from the political engagements of the day, as many in my generation are doing, or we can seek to Christianize the social order by implementing specifically Christian doctrines for the whole of society. In either circumstance, the position adopted is antithetical to the message of the gospel.

If we seek to remain disengaged from politics, we fail to take seriously the promise of God’s ultimate triumph of good over evil. If we attempt to socialize our Christianity by legislating Christian doctrines, we run the risk of aligning ourselves with corrupted government actions, as has so often been the case for the Religious Right on the one hand, and liberal Protestantism on the other.

For Christians seeking a *tertium quid*, a way of engaging the present political climate without compromising the hopeful claims of our faith, Niebuhr’s realism is a helpful guide. For Baptists interested in maintaining our historic stance on religious liberty and the relationship of the church to the state, a Christian realism that seeks to deal with present realities truthfully and frankly is an appro-

priate posture to assume. Baptists have long held to the belief that while the state should not interfere in an official capacity as governor over the church’s autonomy, the church should be free to enter into political debate in the public square. Such a position is consonant with that of the Christian realist. We must remember, however, that the church’s entrance into public debates does not silence the voice of others who do not make the same claim to the Christian faith as we do. Hence, if the success of liberal democracy in America is to continue, the opinions of the Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and atheists will all have to be heard. Only then can a true majority opinion be legitimately established.

As I write, I hear the echo of words from George W. Truett’s famous sermon, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,” which he preached from the east steps of the U.S. Capitol in 1920. Truett succinctly captured the spirit of what I am attempting to say here when he stated that, “It is the consistent and insistent contention of our Baptist people, always and everywhere, that religion must be forever voluntary and uncoerced, and that it is not the prerogative of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of worship, or to pay taxes for the support of a religious organization to which they do not belong and in whose creed they do not believe.”³ Notice, though, that Truett did not say that the church should avoid participation in civil affairs. In fact, his contention was that Christians should be the champions of “civil liberties,” which requires the direct participation of the Christian in society.

Remembering the concerns of such individuals as Niebuhr and Truett is a clarion call to those of us in the younger generations who will soon find the futures of the nation and church placed in our hands. However, if we are going to be Christians who choose to become involved with the public and political debates of our day, two points of concern deserve mentioning. First, the hope of the Gospel is not to be found in the political process. At best, politics offers a temporary salve to a wound that must be continually redressed. Consequently, attempts to implement the ethic of Christian love into our present political climate will ultimately fail. Instead, the best we can do is to seek justice on behalf of our fellow citizens. In Niebuhr’s words, “In the Christian faith the final law in which all other law is fulfilled is the law of love. But this law does not abrogate the laws of justice, except as love rises above justice to exceed its demands. The ordinary affairs of the community, the structures of politics and economics, must be governed by the spirit of justice and by specific and detailed definitions of rights and duties.”⁴ In other words, we as Christians will do well to remember that the science of politics is imperfect and the best we can hope for are “tentative harmonies of life with life.” Additionally, we must remember that our hope as Christians is in the “already, not yet” nature of Christ’s Kingdom. That is, while this world is not all that exists, it is what we have been given

stewardship over. To abandon the role of engagement with society is to refuse to answer the call of the God who is active in the affairs of humanity.

Secondly, it will behoove those of us in the Christian community to remember that we will never achieve a consensus on the debates de jour. Disagreements will continue about the war in Iraq, policies regarding social welfare, and even the role of religion in the public square. Nevertheless, with the acknowledgement of our own fallibility, we may be able to move forward with a critically realistic appraisal of the world in which we live.

In a post-9/11 world which continues to evolve, I am concerned by the perceived lack of interest in political engagement by many Christians in my generation. Yet, I am encouraged when I read the words of Niebuhr and others in the mid-1900s who sought to vocalize their apprehensions about the societies in which they lived. I am realistic enough to know that the voice of the Christian church may continue to diminish, but optimistic enough to hope that it will not. Only by critical assessment and engagement with the political structures of our day will we avoid the seductive siren songs of cynicism and apathy. ■

- 1 Ritter, Jr., R. Hal, "Politics and Religion in America: How Did We Get Where We Are?" *Christian Ethics Today*, Volume 11, Number 5, Christmas 2005, 16.
- 2 Cf. Robin W. Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Impact and Implications" *Political Theology*, Volume 6, Number 4, October 2005, 459-471.
- 3 http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/032/Baptists%20and%20Religious%20Liberty%20By%20George%20W%20Truett,%20May%2016%201920_032_22_.htm
- 4 Niebuhr, Reinhold, "The Spirit of Justice" in Robertson, D.B. (ed), *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1957), 25.

WHILE THEY LAST!

Homely Joys: Prayers, Poems and Barbs

By Henelee Barnette and James Barnette

Christian Ethics Today Foundation is pleased to announce the publication of a new book of collected prayers, poems, and barbs by a well-known father and son. Henelee Barnette devoted his life to teaching Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for 30 years; James teaches and ministers at Samford University.

As indicated in our Thanksgiving Letter, a book will be sent (postage paid) to everyone who contributes \$50 to the ministry of the Journal (3 books for \$100, 6 for \$200, etc.). Be sure to indicate how many of the books you wish to receive.

Stretching Our Hearts and Minds

By Walter T. Norris, Plano, TX

In the men's room where I used to work as a caseworker is a poster sign with different quotes. Each quote has an age level beside it where this quote might be a reality. The quote that matches my age level goes like this: "I've learned that we grow only when we push ourselves beyond what we already know—age 53."

I wonder how many of us are willing to stretch in this fast paced, comfort and convenient seeking society? How many of us are willing to go beyond what we already know to find the truth? Do we seek out the truth or do we wait around for someone to dictate to us his or her dogma or philosophy? Why should we grow in this manner?

It is through this process of stretching our hearts and minds that we mature. This is where we have those important "aha" moments. These are the times when we acquire a certain insight or realize the wisdom of a certain concept or action. This is where we really start to think for ourselves. We have come to a certain reality and learned for ourselves what is important. Wisdom starts to take hold.

I am somewhat concerned with what I see going on in the conservative evangelical movement. I see evangelical leaders telling people what they have to read, what to watch on TV or at the movies, who to vote for, and even what preachers to hear. These leaders claim to have some kind of authority with which they manipulate their people. They even hold Sunday night rallies to tell people what judges are bad for America. I wonder how much money they spent on these rallies. Could they have used this money for a better cause, like feeding the hungry in Christ's name?

Sometime back I read an article in a newspaper where the author, who was a woman, stated that she did not agree with her pastor. However, she stated that she would do what he asked, because he had authority over her. This minister is the pastor of a very prominent church in the Dallas area.

That article caused me to shiver because she gave up her right to openly disagree with someone because she thought they had authority over her. Many of the ministers in mega churches are extremely powerful and are beginning to dictate in the political realm.

Several years ago I returned to a particular seminary to work on a master's degree where I had done undergraduate work. However, this particular seminary had changed drastically since I was there in the early 1980s. It had been

caught up in a political battle within the Southern Baptist denomination and was now dominated and controlled by a very right wing group that I did not agree with personally. Even though there were still professors at the seminary from when I was there before, the climate and direction of the seminary had changed.

Since I did not agree with their authoritarian and dogmatic philosophy, I was going to have to be able to challenge their extreme ideas. I pushed myself to study diligently to affirm what I believed and then to set forth those ideas in a clear systematic fashion. This challenge really helped me shape a clear view of my basic beliefs, founded upon what I had learned through studying the Bible and other related disciplines.

I was able to honestly say, "I believe this because this is what I have learned and not because someone told me to accept it." In my position as a Bible study leader in my church, I have tried to present various views to stretch the hearts and minds of those in the class. I have taken different approaches in my teaching, but always it has been biblically based.

We also have done various ministry projects that have helped us to see more needs in the community than we ever imagined. Stretching ourselves means getting out and doing ministry, not just sitting around talking about it. We have gathered food for our local food pantry, we supported a teenage single mother for a year, we have supported

and participated in helping a local church whose members have a serious mental illness, we have supported a local free children's clinic, and we have collected items for a local AIDS/HIV Center.

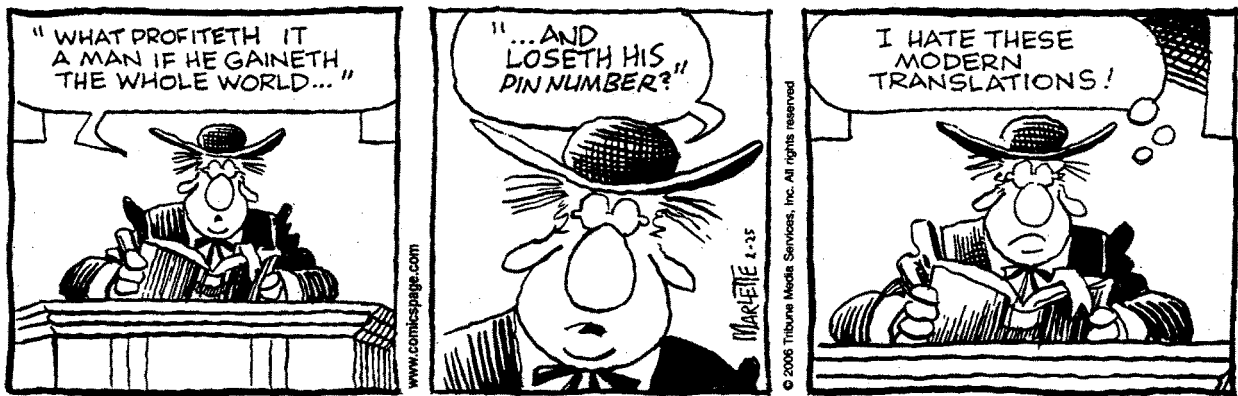
A few years ago, I heard a story over the radio about the oldest practicing attorney in the United States. He had just died. He was 100 years old, an African-American, lived in Indiana, and had seven educational degrees, the last being acquired when he was 78 years old. Someone asked him once what was the secret to longevity. He remarked, "Once a person quits learning, it is all over."

In the book, *Who Needs Theology?*, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen invite lay people to engage theology and to practice sound theology. They give a three-step journey to being a theologian:

1. Seek to know the heart of God.
2. Be dissatisfied with our current level of understanding.
3. Be willing to work.

We will never know the truth without stretching our hearts and minds as we encounter Jesus Christ in the world. ■

Walter Norris is a caseworker with the Dallas County Public Defender's Office, defending the indigent mentally ill. He also teaches an adult Bible class at FBC Plano and is chair of their Missions Committee.



Arguing With Muslims

By William H. Willimon, Bishop

Northern Alabama Conference, United Methodist Church

While back a Duke student was telling me that he and his roommate were not getting along well. I asked him why. “Because he is a Muslim and I’m not.” I asked him how that made a difference.

“When we moved in together, he asked me what my religion was. I told him that I was a sort of Christian. A Lutheran. I told him up front that my family and I weren’t the very best Christians, that we only went to church occasionally, and it wasn’t that big a deal to me. But my roommate has this nasty habit of asking embarrassing questions.”

“What sort of questions?” I asked.

“Like after we had roomed together a few weeks, he asked me, ‘Why do you Christians never pray?’ I told him, ‘We pray all the time. We just sort of keep it to ourselves.’”

“He said, ‘I’ll say that you do. I’ve never seen you pray.’ He prays, like, a half dozen times a day on his prayer rug in our room, facing East Durham.”

“The last straw was Saturday morning, when I came in from a date, and he asked me, ‘Doesn’t your St. Paul say something about not joining your body with a prostitute?’”

“I told him, ‘Look, she is not a prostitute! She’s a Tri Delt. I told you I am not the best Christian in the world. You shouldn’t judge the Christian faith by me!’”

And I, hearing the torment in his voice, asked, ‘Well, how should he judge the Christian faith? I ought to write your Muslim roommate a thank-you note. If that Muslim keeps working on you, he may yet make you into a real Christian.’”

Such are the encounters between Christians and Muslims on campus these days.

I’ve enjoyed the series in this magazine, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?” (April 20, May 4, May 18, June 1, August 24). The comments on worship in Judaism and Christianity, compared with that in Islam, have been clarifying and helpful. But there were times in reading those articles that I wanted to protest: “But we have a much more interesting and difficult God than that!” I’m fond of saying to students that the modern question, “Is there a god?” is unbiblical. The Bible’s big issue is, “Who is the God who is there?”

We have a most interesting God. But so do Muslims. And our God looks even more interesting when compared

with their God. From my own experiences in a bubbling multifaith environment, when we interface with people of different faiths, the toughest task is to let the other be the other, to attempt to love our neighbor, as Jesus commanded us, in all the neighbor’s differentiation and peculiarity, to bless the neighbor as the neighbor really is, not as the person we would have the neighbor become.

When it comes to faith, it’s often the differences and the peculiarities that we love the most about our religion. This is what Diana L. Eck fails to recognize in books like *A New Religious America*. Her approach, like that of many, seems to be, “First make Muslims convert into liberal, Western universalists, then render your faith into an abstraction, a generality. Then we can talk.” The great theological challenge for Christians is to demonstrate, in our interactions with Muslims, that we have God-given resources for letting the neighbor remain the other and still be the neighbor.

In his book *Chueless in Academe*, Gerald Graff says that the purpose of higher education is to teach students to argue. Our society, says Graff, is conditioned to avoid engagement with the ideas of others. Better simply to assert our beliefs than truly to listen and to respond to the beliefs of another, and to risk being changed in the conversation. The purpose of higher education is to begin an argument.

Yet most of us learn to converse with other people in such a way that either we don’t encounter them as they are, in all their difference and particularity, or we rework them, making them over in our minds so that we are able to say to them, “Well, after all, we’re both really saying fairly much the same thing, right?”

It would be a shame for us Christians to do that to our sisters and brothers in Islam. On campus I’ve found that our Islamic neighbors can be important allies in our attempt to walk by faith rather than merely to acquiesce to the American Way.

If you keep your attributes of God abstract enough—God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, loving, just—all three “Abrahamic” faiths appear to be on the same page, or talking about the same God, because to be Muslims, Christians and Jews all believe that God is omnipotent, loving and just. Trouble is, this sort of abstract reasoning is about as revealing as saying that “Mary Jones is a Caucasian, female android.” You haven’t said much. And

who wants to talk to someone who is just like us?

When you get down to the scriptures of these faiths, the specific stories they tell about God, then the claim that all these often-conflicting stories are talking about the same God seems simplistic and silly. Christians and Jews worship the same God because we share many of the same stories. We share Abraham, though we say very different things about him and Sarah. Two thirds of the Bible, and just about every one of our claims for Jesus, came to us as gifts of the Jews.

But I defy anyone to attempt to read through a translation of the Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, and come away saying, "Well, Jesus and Muhammad are headed in much the same direction." Muhammad routinely says things that just would not fit into the mouth of Jesus.

What do I really know about the God of Islam anyway? Islam, like Christianity, is more than a set of ideas; it's a way of life. If I have not attempted to take up the practice of Islam, then my understanding of it will be limited. I recall the Hindu student who complained to me about the silly "World Religions" course that she was taking at Duke.

"The professor makes Hinduism sound like some sort of desiccated philosophy. Hinduism is what we eat, what we do, not some interesting explanation for the vacuity of American middle-class lives!" It was enlightening to see how faith wilts in the hands of detached, academically arrogant onlookers in the department of religion. Their idea seems to be that you must first kill something, then spread it out like a cadaver on an operating table, in order to think about it. The Hindu student's comments made me embarrassed that I have not been incensed at what is done to my faith in the "Introduction to Christian Theology" class. Hindus and Muslims often remind Christians on campus that we have allowed our faith to be qualified and our intellectual life to be truncated by the limits of Western ways of thought and economics. Christianity, like Islam, is something that we eat and something that we do that makes us determinedly different from what the government would have us be.

If my daily practice of my religion has taught me anything, it is that I have so often failed to live up to what I know about the God who is Trinity that—well, who am I to criticize others for misunderstanding the truth about God? Fortunately, my faith gives me resources that enable me constantly to confess my stupidity and infidelity. I don't know enough about the God who has met me in Jesus Christ to say conclusively just who does and who does not get this God absolutely right.

I do know that it's wrong to paper over and sugarcoat our differences with Islam. Jesus, our image of God—the Son of God, Savior of the World—is notably different from much that is said about God by Muhammad. If Muhammad is a prophet of the true God, as all Muslims know him to be, thane that God seems not at all like the God Jesus taught us to call "Father." Muhammad was a

sort of knight, an astute military man, a government official and a wise teacher who ended his life in serene beatification. Jesus was a teacher who brutally died at the hands of the military, the government and the religious establishment, refusing to lift a hand in self-defense, and then was raised from the dead. Watch the expression on the face of a Muslim when you tell that story. Forgive Muslims and Christians for having difficulty finding points of contact between our two faiths.

True, both faiths talk "love," "peace," "justice," but once again we have remarkably different ways of defining or obtaining love, peace, and justice—so different that, well, it's almost as if we were worshipping a different God.

Sometimes students have asked, "What did Jesus say about Muslims?" Of course, the answer is, "Nothing." There's not one word of condemnation of other religions and other faiths in the teaching of Jesus, except for Roman emperor worship. No, when Jesus is in his most condemnatory, judgmental mood, it's his own disciples that he beats up on the most. For the Bible, judgment begins not against other faiths but rather with God's own house, with God's own people, *us*.

Last year, during Islamic Awareness Week, Duke had a panel discussion involving an imam from Chicago, a local rabbi and me (representing all Christians everywhere, even though you didn't vote for me to represent you). During the discussion, the imam said, "Islam is a very tolerant faith. In the Holy Qur'an, if an unbeliever attacks a believer, I am under obligation to punish the unbeliever. If my brother here, the Jew, is attacked by an unbeliever, the Holy Prophet commands me to punish the persecutor."

The rabbi seemed pleased by this. For my part, I said, "Gee, I wish Jesus had said something like that! I've got people that I want to punish, folk who need killing. Unfortunately, even when we tried to defend Jesus, he cursed us and told us to put away the swords!"

Frankly, I think Muslims have got it right when they say that Christians in the West appear to have produced, or at least acquiesced to, a pagan, sex-saturated, violent, materialistic society. Muslims seem to despise us not because we're so free (wrong, G.W. Bush) or because we're so very Christian (wrong, Jerry Falwell) but because we're so awfully pagan.

And on campus many Christians have found that we really need Muslims to help us withstand the assaults of pagans in the department of religion and at the local shopping mall. I've watched conservative evangelical, Bible-thumping Christian students, link up with conservative, Qur'an-thumping Muslim students—they are brought together by the realization that in many subtle and disturbing ways the modern university is aligned against belief in and fidelity to any God. In many subtle and powerful ways the modern university is designed to produce people who have no god to worship but Calvin Klein and The Gap.

Furthermore, we Christians need to admit that—considering our lamentable infidelity to the God of Israel and

the church—it's no wonder that most Muslims are distinctively unimpressed with our God. We invoke God's name as we bomb, occupy and dominate Islamic countries. We may say on our money "in God we trust," but Muslims suspect that oil, power and wealth are our true hearts' desire. I wonder if Muslims look at us and think, "You're going to have to look a lot more redeemed before I'll believe in your redeemer."

I find it deeply disturbing that terrorists justify their murderous work with appeals to the Qur'an, though from my reading of the Qur'an I can see their point. Perhaps I should find it even more disturbing that the people who led us into the war in Iraq—and, I presume, most of the young people who have committed abuses in our Iraqi prisons—are all this day praying to Jesus.

Recently I was asked by a reporter, if I thought it was moral for the Southern Baptists to send missionaries to Iraq (I'm not sure that the Southern Baptists are awaiting my approval on this!). I replied that I don't see any harm in sending Southern Baptist missionaries to Iraq, but I wonder how many Iraqi folk you can convert to Jesus, Prince of Peace, Lamb of God, after you have bombed them into oblivion. Not many, I'd wager (if Methodists were allowed to wager).

The God of Islam and the God of the church and synagogue appear to look enough like God to make dialogue possible, but also different enough to make for an interesting conversation.

I know this: Our God, the God we meet in Jesus the Christ, had given us our Islamic sisters and brothers and commanded us to go and to tell, to witness, and to live our lives in service to the Trinity in such a way that our sisters and brothers might say, "Wow, you really have an interesting God. Tell us and show us more."

I can fully understand why Muslims aren't that inter-

ested in the Trinity, considering our sorry record of fidelity to Jesus, but we Christians are trying to believe what the Jews taught us: that there is only one God (and it's not us)—Lord of heaven and earth, God of love—who commands us to deal with our sisters and brothers as this gracious, forgiving, receiving God has dealt with us.

In strange ways, the modern university campus can be a great place to think about these matters. Years ago there was a student whom I met his first day of the school year. He was tall, utterly white, utterly blond, utterly southern. I saw him walking on campus sometime later, hand in hand with a young woman who was short, utterly brown and (as I was to discover) utterly Muslim and Ohioan. Sure enough, I got a call from his mother. "Have you met Thomas's girlfriend?" she asked. "Talk to him! They're serious!"

I called him in for a chat and eventually asked, "Thomas, tell me about Miranda." He told me that they were very much in love, that she was a wonderful person and that they were planning to be married right after graduation.

I said, "Really? Tell me what brought you together."

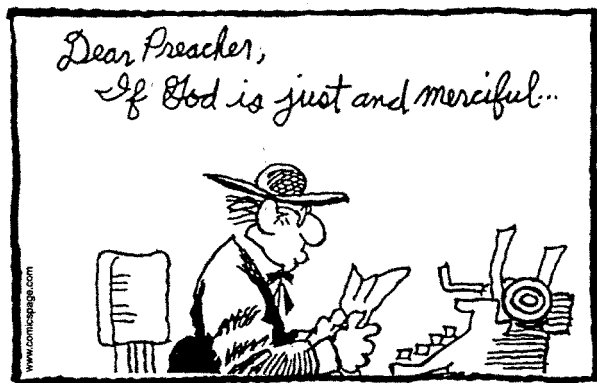
He said, "We had so very much in common."

I said, "Thomas, you're from South Carolina, you're blond and Baptist. She's Muslim, brown and from Ohio. What in the world could you possibly have in common?"

He said, "Well, you know me—I don't drink on weekends and don't believe in casual sex. And I'm not really into the success-at-any-cost thing. She was the only girl I met who had the same values as mine."

How do we Christians hope to survive on campus without Muslims? ■

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A Unique Café

By Britt Towery, SBC Missionary (ret.)
Brownwood, TX

Bryce Courtenay wrote a novel, *The Power of One*, showing how one person, doing what he or she knows to be right, can change a corner of their world for the better.

Ann Connor, an assistant professor at Emory University's School of Nursing for the last 25 years, took the message to heart and has been changing lives ever since. She and her husband, A. B. Short, opened Cafe 458 in Atlanta, Georgia—a restaurant for the homeless with a difference.

I first met A. B. Short when he taught Sociology and Political Science courses at Hong Kong Baptist University. He was one of the most “alive” and innovative persons I ever met. Back then it was evident he cared for his fellow-man and meant to do something about it.

Cafe 458 looks like a chic bistro but is much more. It is a restaurant for Atlanta's homeless, who get reservations through referrals and earn the right to dine there by agreeing to participate in a focused program aimed at getting them back on their feet and back into the community.

The cafe gives a sense of respect, dignity and choice to people who have all but given up. Spiritual nutrition is as important as the physical. The uniqueness is in giving long-term services. They build relationships as lives are changed, addictions overcome, and steps taken toward getting a job.

The community took over and, with the help of volunteers, renovated an abandoned liquor store to house the cafe. It opened in 1988, and was soon serving up to 65 people a day. “Reservations” are by referral from any organization in Atlanta's social-services community, and the only requirement is that people chosen to dine at the cafe must agree to begin working toward specific goals, even

a goal as simple as replacing eyeglasses or getting the two forms of identification needed to qualify for benefits.

A. B. Short says to the folks, “Tell us your goals, and we'll help you reach those goals.”

He quickly grafted on an array of essential services, all operated by volunteers: Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Twelve Step meetings, free haircuts, a medical van, and legal services.

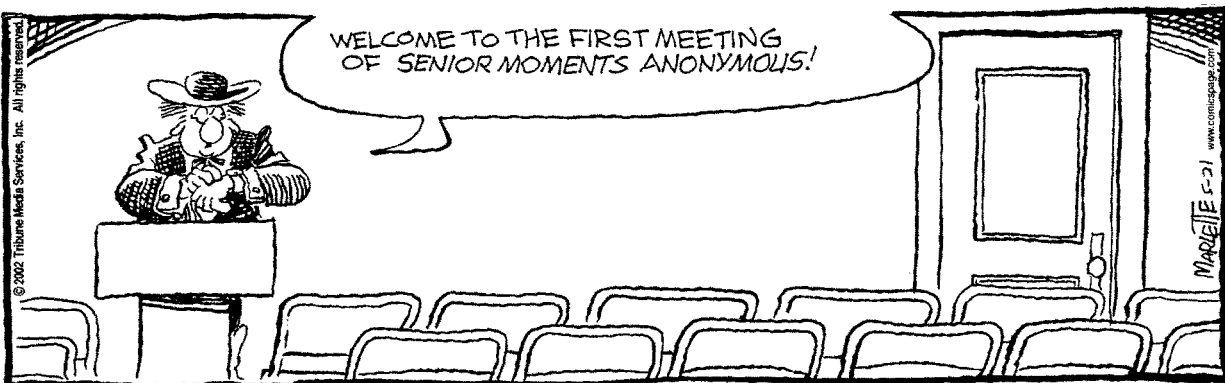
Former President Jimmy Carter wrote about Cafe 458: “There, homeless people can get a hug, a warm welcome, sit down at a table, select a meal they prefer, and order it from an attentive waiter.”

More than 1,600 people have passed through Cafe 458, in the process regaining some of their dignity as human beings, and many of them now help as volunteers.

Nationally, Short says, 90 percent of the graduates of other drug and alcohol programs “relapse” after six months. Fewer than 10 percent of Café 458's “Recovery” graduates do. One of the program's graduates is quickly rising through the ranks at Firestone Corp. Another is now a social worker with Fulton County Social Services. It's a wonderful model and like many such, it succeeds because the underlying premise is simple, and it's carried out with competence and care.

Then, just last week, I heard my friend A. B. He has branched out into another interesting work with Medshare International.

There is no limit to what one person can do. Don't give up on your dream. You may be the one who can meet particular needs right on your street, right in your home town. It only takes one person to make a difference. Someone, somewhere is depending on you. ■



Confessions of a Former Fundamentalist

By C. Truett Baker
Branson, MO

I was raised in a very conservative Southern Baptist family. When I say conservative, my childhood theology lessons would give new meaning to the word, “conservative.” At the tender age of seventeen, I decided that God had called me into the ministry and my preacher father’s response to the news was, “I always knew you would, son.” In addition to God’s call, it was certainly no disincentive that my father and two older brothers were ministers.

As a young minister and pastor, by the age of eighteen my father was my teacher and guide in learning all the accoutrements of ecclesiastical activity and leadership. I must have done well as some of my parishioners “allowed as how” I might become the next Billy Graham. That just encouraged me to shout louder in the pulpit and stay longer at the altar of prayer. Souls were saved and adult men surrendered to the ministry. Young people vowed to follow in the hallowed steps of Lottie Moon. (My brothers and I were all named after ministerial icons of the past—my wife once remarked that if I had been a girl, my mother would probably have named me Lottie. My mother didn’t think that was funny.)

I eagerly pursued my academic and pastoral goals throughout college and seminary and defended the faith when faced with “liberal” ideas that challenged any of my conservative beliefs. I imagined myself as the spiritual version of the Man of LaMancha, sacrificing myself for the “Impossible Dream” of an orthodox denomination that enthroned the correct beliefs I was taught at the knees of my conservative minister father. I recently read Judge Paul Pressler’s book, *A Hill on Which to Die* (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999). My brother gave me the \$29.95 book that he bought from the clearance rack in a bookstore for \$1.00. As a young minister, I could have resonated with the sacrificial enthusiasm of that book title. What I may have lacked in the way of reason and knowledge, I made up for in energy and noise.

Between my second and third year of seminary, I took a summer unit of Clinical-Pastoral Education at the Institute of Religion in Houston. For the first time, I found myself outside of the comfortable womb of Southern Baptist orthodoxy and in the midst of some non-Baptist ministers that really irritated me because of their liberalism. They had the unmitigated gall to admit that they had questions about portions of the Bible and our traditional beliefs as Christians. I could hardly contain my anger, and

when they questioned the reason for my anger, I carefully explained how important it was for them, as future shepherds of spiritual flocks, to lead their sheep to the green pastures and still waters of correct beliefs. I could brush aside the theory of two Isaiahs and questioning the authorship of the Pentateuch in Old Testament 101, but I couldn’t brush aside those guys who were patient and caring toward my harsh, and sometimes ugly rigidity.

My direction was not changed by this strange encounter, but it was slowed down. Two things happened. I began to try to understand my anger and I began reading some of the authors that were labeled “liberals” from whom I had been earlier “protected.” I had been introduced to neo-orthodox theologians in seminary, but I had been forewarned about them and their liberal ideas, and my conservative “switch” just turned them off. It did bother me that men who studied so much about God would not go to heaven.

Two other incidents in seminary life troubled me. New Testament professor Dr. Ray Summers wrote a book about the interpretation of the book of Revelation (*Worthy Is the Lamb*) in which he explained that much of the book was symbolic and not literal in order to preserve the message during a time of severe persecution of the faithful. Dr. Summers seemed like a godly man. If this part of the Bible contained symbolic language, maybe there were other such sections that likewise should be taken as metaphorical. This experience was at the beginning of my seminary career.

Near the close of that educational experience, I became acquainted with an Old Testament and Hebrew professor at Midwestern Seminary, Dr. Ralph Elliott. He wrote a book about the interpretation of the first book of the Bible—Genesis (*The Message of Genesis*, Broadman Press, 1961). He explained that the world may not have been created in seven 24-hour days as we count time today and that the creation stories may not be literal. I remember the storm that followed until the time that Dr. Elliott was fired. I don’t remember many details about his “liberal” theology, but I remember the attitude of the man. He began class every day with prayer and prayed for those who accused him, as well as the students and faculty and the denomination. Never did he lash out at his many accusers or be less than a dignified Christian gentleman.

That impressed me as a young ministerial student far more than the diatribes, subterfuge, lies, and darts thrown by the fundamentalists. My conservative shell was beginning to crack and the “hammer” was not so much the questionable theology as it was the contrast in attitude and spiritual depth between the two groups. I thought the moderates, or liberals as Judge Pressler chooses to call us, had more of the “mind of Christ,” and I wanted that.

Back to the books. I read a great deal but only from the approved Baptist “formulary.” The unspoken rule was, “read only those authors who believe like you do.” My need for things to make sense and my curiosity to know the basis for “liberalism” led me to read other themes and authors. Some of the authors included Philip Yancy, Jim Wallis, Carlyle Marney, Marcus Borg, Karen Armstrong, William Sloane Coffin, Bill Leonard, Grady Cothen, and Henri Nouwen. These were men and women who loved God and devoted their lives to serving him. Their temperament was not mean, vindictive, nor accusative of those who didn’t believe as they did. They deeply believed the Bible was the Word of God without believing it was 100% literal. Even in some circumstances, literalness distracted from the spiritual message of passages.

There were many isolated circumstances that troubled my young fundamentalist mind in the early years, things that just didn’t make sense. I could not accept the simple reply that “we must just accept by faith those things we don’t understand.” When my father was pastor of the Baptist Temple in Iola, Kansas, he once discovered he didn’t have unleavened bread for the Lord’s Supper, which was to be served that morning at church. He frantically called several deacons to see if any knew how to make unleavened bread. I innocently asked him why he couldn’t use broken soda crackers. His reply was that it must be with the same substances that Jesus used. The six-year old boy then made the mistake of asking, “Why then wasn’t wine used instead of grape juice?” His explanation didn’t make sense and he became angry and said, “My Lord would never put a drop of alcohol to his holy lips.” I knew something wasn’t right even at that early age.

The other occasion was during the 1960s civil rights movement. As a young pastor, I was troubled by the fact that we sent missionaries to Africa to save souls, but after being saved, the Africans couldn’t attend our universities to prepare for ministry or join our churches. This made no sense to me and created many doubts about the rightness of our conservative cause.

I believe the shove that pushed me completely into the moderate camp was the fundamentalist take-over of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). There have always been the Presslers and Pattersons around who have wanted to do away with diversity and pluralism in SBC life, but

never had there been a time when the majority of Southern Baptist allowed them to do this. The two “P’s” can’t be totally blamed for the division and damage to the SBC. We Southern Baptists allowed this to happen by our shallow discipleship training (if any was done at all), our long-standing distrust of theological education, and our apathy. Bill Moyers was right when he wrote to Dr. Presnall Wood of the *Baptist Standard*. “Paul Pressler is only what he is allowed to be. Christian indignation should cause every principled Baptist in any position of leadership to declare that the man has gone too far” (Letter to *Baptist Standard* Editor, July 5, 1990). We didn’t stop him or even slow him down.

Also, we allowed the “rugged western individualism” to creep into our theology and polity by way of Landmarkism and Freewill-ism. This mentality made personal choice and experience the sole determination of God’s will and left little or no room for the voice of the Holy Spirit through the collective voice of the church. It was the **church** in Antioch that called out Paul and Barnabas for ministry. Licensing and ordination were formalities that Southern Baptists used to express the church’s collective blessing. And so we sent thousands of ministers out to lead churches with education than ranged from the eighth grade to seminary. In the beginning, the SBC was made up mostly of rural churches with pastors who had little education—some were bi-vocational. The educated ministers were viewed with suspicion. No doubt some were arrogant, which didn’t speak well for an educated clergy.

Perhaps some of the blame needs to be directed toward a denominational polity that allowed teen-age boys (I was one of them) to be pastors, but disallows the suitability of mature, trained women to be pastors. Another one of those “don’t-make-sense” issues.

This journey has been painful but revealing. I have learned many things that have brought a long sought-after peace. My love for the scriptures has been deepened as has my love and devotion to Christ. I believe that love is more important than law, but law has its place in God’s revelation to us. I believe grace is more important than sin, but sin is a reality we cannot ignore. More than ever, I believe in freedom and I value the freedom of others.

I still don’t have all the answers (like I did as a troubled fundamentalist), but I am at peace with the light that God has given me. He may have spoken words to others that I don’t understand, but that doesn’t make the others wrong. I am humbled by the light that God has given me, and I want for others to know the joy of living in the light of their own understanding. ■

Truett Baker is an ordained Baptist minister and for fifty-two years has had training and experience in pastoral ministry and Christian social ministry

Television Evangelist I.Q. Test

Brian Kelcher, Compiler
Wittenburg Door Online

The vast majority of TV preachers are “charismatic/pentecostal,” who make claims of miraculous healings if you send in your cash. All the TV preachers on this page are “charismatic/pentecostal.” Take this quiz and find out how much you know about these men.

1. This televangelist has been known to heal phlegm and once, successfully, rebuked a hurricane from heading toward his TV production complex. (Pat Robertson)

2. Who said, “You’d be surprised how well you can praise God in the back seat of a Rolls Royce Phantom 5.” (Rev. Ike)

3. Which televangelist said Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel out of her side, taught that Adam could fly and believes the Godhead is actually nine (count ‘em-nine) entities? (Benny Hinn)

4. Who said, “IF you’re an intellectual, you’ll probably go to hell for it.” (Jonathan Bell)

5. Which televangelist teaches that Jesus was rich and the Apostles were successful businessmen with plenty of money? (Fred Price)

6. When sentencing this televangelist to 10 years in prison for money laundering, mail fraud, conspiracy, and interstate transportation of stolen property, the judge said, “You’ve picked the last flake of flesh from the carcass of the widow you defrauded.” (Jim Whittington)

7. Who felt he had to go to a psychiatrist to find out whether or not he was homosexual? (Jim Bakker)

8. Who reports that U.S. interstate highway signs are coded to let U.N. troops know where to attack in order to usher in a one-world government? (Jack & Rexela Van Impe)

9. Who wishes he could have a Holy Ghost machine gun so he can kill his enemies? (Benny Hinn)

10. Which televangelist was banned from British television for airing unsubstantiated testimonials? (Morris Cerullo)

11. Which televangelist, while being sentenced for tax fraud, was asked by the judge if he was from another plan-

et? (W.V. Grant)

12. Whose first miracle witnessed was the healing of a pet chicken? (Jan Crouch)

13. Who, when accused of a sexual impropriety defended himself by saying a demon had duplicated him, and that if you see him doing anything bad, it’s not the real him? (Bob Larson)

14. This preacher proudly displayed himself in bed with a bevy of Playboy Playmates. (Gene Scott)

15. Who stars in his own worse-than-B movies and charges \$930 for his Bible course on tape? (Kenneth Copeland)

16. Which televangelist owns his own mountain top? (Pat Robertson)

17. Who bought Twitty City and believes white hair is most often found among the holy? (Paul Crouch)

18. This current televangelist was exposed years ago for receiving “words of knowledge” not from God, but from his wife via radio transmitter. (Peter Popoff)

19. When an FCC investigation into his organization’s finances found that \$13 million was unaccounted for, this preacher explained, “Satan got into our computer and lost the money.” (Jim Bakker)

20. This preacher sells elderships to his church by mail. (Morris Cerullo)

21. Who claims U.N. troops are currently hiding out in U.S. national parks? (Jack & Rexela Van Impe)

22. While in federal prison this televangelist was publicly claiming to have repented, yet he was selling copies of his appeals papers proclaiming his innocence. (Jim Bakker)

23. Who failed to meet Better Business Bureau standards of reporting income from fund-raising activities? (All TV evangelists listed here) ■

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The Vatican in Colorado Springs

*By Andrew Lee, Rose Institute of State and Local Government
Claremont McKenna College*

Just east of Pike's Peak, a Colorado city has become, in the words of US News & World Report, the "Vatican for evangelical Christianity." Colorado Springs, founded as a tourist attraction for wealthy Europeans, is the base for over a hundred evangelical church and para-church organizations, including those of prominent figures in the Christian Right: Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church, and Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family. What drew these and other organizations to Colorado Springs? Public officials and clergy should heed the answer, because it illuminates an important intersection of religion, public policy, and business.

Ted Haggard says that God told him to move from Baton Rouge to Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs was already a bastion of traditional conservatism, with the Air Force Academy and NORAD based there, but Haggard moved to Colorado Springs with the mission of saving the city. To make the city more Christian, his congregation prayed over names cut from the telephone book, and in front of empty buildings. Twenty years later, he now heads the New Life Church with a membership of 4,800 and serves as the president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Unlike Haggard, Focus on the Family transferred from Pomona, California, to Colorado Springs for economic reasons. Although Focus on the Family joined a mass flight away from the smog, traffic, crime, and earthquakes of Southern California, it relocated primarily to expand its building complex. The Economic Development Corporation (EDC), seeking to create employment in the wake of military job cuts and the savings-and-loan crisis, aggressively courted Focus and other nonprofit organizations to establish themselves in Colorado Springs, even dangling a \$4 million grant from the El Pomar Foundation in front of Focus as an incentive.

Moreover, California was tax-hostile to religious organizations. In early 1988, Los Angeles County Tax Assessor John J. Lynch opposed tax exemptions for homes used by clergy and churches that provided shelter to undocumented refugees. By contrast, Colorado was a tax-friendly state for religious organizations. The state legislature had

passed SB 237, a measure that expanded tax exemption for the property of religious organizations, including daycare centers and land. The environment was so tax-friendly to religious institutions that Colorado's tax administrator resigned under pressure for her decisions to pursue taxation of some religious organizations. For Focus, the transplant to Colorado Springs was a no-brainer; they moved in 1991 and bought their 46-acre estate in 1993.

While some church and para-church organizations may have been divinely directed, most relocated to Colorado Springs for business purposes. Colorado Springs did not possess divine magnetism—rather, the Colorado Springs EDC simply showed religious organizations how relocation would make good economic sense. The initial movement of some of these organizations would cause others to move to Colorado Springs for networking purposes. This city would become a hub of evangelical activity, much as Las Vegas is for casinos. Focus on the Family not only moved to Colorado Springs; it also likely catalyzed moves by other evangelical groups.

We should note that para-church organizations are businesses. Focus on the Family, like other organizations, must also focus on its bottom line. You will not find their headquarters in poverty-stricken urban areas, because they are national organizations concentrating on finding places where business can be attractive and thrive. These organizations respond to taxes, incentives, and environments like any other business.

But I think clergy and public officials should encourage these groups to set up in areas where the need is greatest. Not only would such organizations bring jobs to depressed areas, but they could do their work where it is most essential. By relocating, these groups might pursue the political goals that obviously interest them, while also giving real help to those in need, returning to the roots of evangelical Christianity, whose call, according to Luke 14, is to serve the "poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (1/5/06), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Apparition

By Joel K. Thomas, Parishioner

Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Dallas, TX

She works in the same building as me, and I don't see her very often, but when I do see her, she looks tired—exhausted. She works for a company somewhere above my button on the elevator panels, and I have no idea what she does, or on what floor. One recent morning I darted between the elevator doors just in time to learn the source of her fatigue.

"Girl, yes: I am tired," she said to another woman I have seen before. "We had a busy night last night, and I hardly had time to sleep before I came in today."

"Oh, sister. A busy night here? Doing what?" the other woman asked from behind giant sunglasses. She dug a hand into that day's giant purse. "I didn't know anybody stayed late."

"A busy night at my second job," the tired woman said, then looked toward her feet and pressed her fingertips hard against the back of her neck.

The elevator arrived at my floor, so I didn't hear the rest of the conversation. But I did instantly stop marinating myself in reflexive resentment about the single hour of overtime I had worked the evening before. A second full-time job? I considered whether I should perceive a celestial admonition ("Stop whining!") in what I had heard.

Despite her weariness, each time I see this woman, she smiles and says "Hello" or "Good morning" or "Good afternoon." Unnoticeable phrases when spoken by anyone else in an office building, but she utters them in a sincere and pensive way that somehow hints at an inner wisdom or sadness more ancient than rain. Usually her greeting makes me feel better; sometimes it makes me feel no different; very occasionally, it seems more like a blessing than like a greeting, imparting a tranquility and subtle shiver of my whole skin that together make me wonder whether I

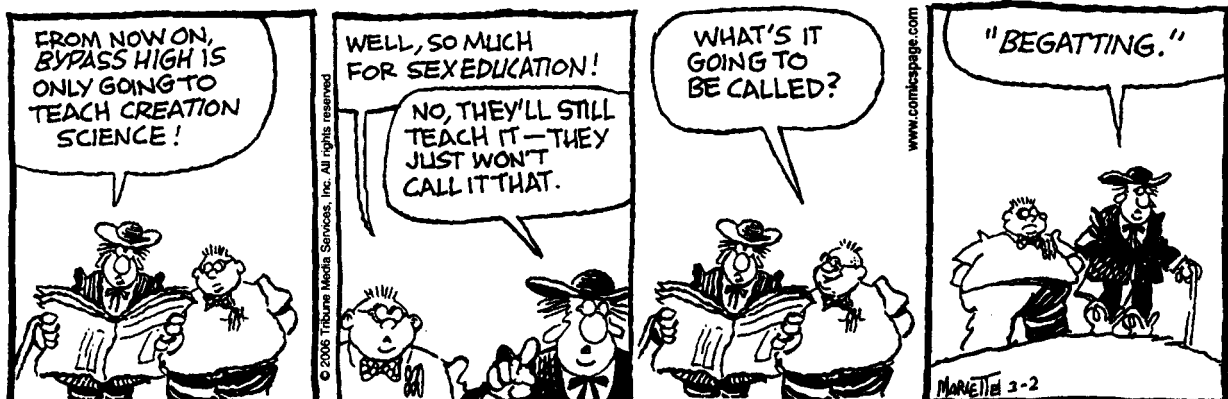
might have just interacted with an angel.

Or maybe I tend to read too much into this kind of thing. In the Bible, most of the time when people encounter an angel, the experience doesn't just nudge their nerve endings; it reduces them to quivering terror, so that the angel has to begin the conversation with the instruction "Fear not." But—not always. This from one translation of the book of Hebrews: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

The more I have cheerfully disregarded the unholy dogma of my Southern Baptist upbringing, the more that verse has unveiled itself as one of the spookiest in all of Scripture. It seems far more chilling than any depiction of thundering angered vengeful God, because when a deity aims omnipotent rage at you, then at least you probably know pretty much exactly what that deity wants from you. Not so with an entity that sends its messengers into your life undetected, on who knows what mission.

Of course at this point in the saga of the world, the possible incarnation of an angel could have little to do with matters of import and lots to do with the sheer entertainment value of full immersion in the human variety show. "We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe," says the first book of Corinthians, "to angels as well as to men." I like the idea of a God who would encourage the citizens of heaven to find amusement among the creatures made in God's own image, because it implies an infinite reserve of unconditional love for us.

And God knows I constantly need that. So I hope I always remember to treat people caringly, on the elevator and anywhere else I might meet someone with a possible halo. ■



Bribing People to Church: Pizzas and \$120,000 Houses

By Kyle Bueermann, Minister of Youth & Music

FBC, Crosbyton, TX

By now I'm sure most of us have heard about the big giveaways that many churches have started in order to boost attendance for key services. On January 1, the Houston Chronicle reported that a church in the Houston area gave away a \$120,000 house to a woman who attended their three-hour New Year's Eve Service.¹ The church took 100 names that had already been drawn, and added 20 names to that list from individuals who were in attendance, which was a requirement for winning. Out of the 120 people, the list was narrowed down to 12 (symbolizing the 12 apostles). As each name of the 12 finalists was called, that person would come running to the stage screaming with joy (this sounds more like an episode of "The Price is Right" than a worship service). The finalists were then each given a key. One of these keys opened the lock of the front door, which was on the stage. The 35 year-old woman who won the house later said, "It was God's will."

During Saturday evening's service, the pastor of the church joked that if he thought bribing people to come to church would work, he would do it. Apparently, it is working.

The same article also reported that a church in Iowa gave away gas in September to its first-time visitors, and last year in Florida a church gave away a Hummer!

As more churches are picking up on the trend of mega-giveaways to fill their pews, I can't help but wonder: Is this right? There is no question as to whether or not this strategy is effective. According to the article, there were thousands who entered the contest for the house. And, in a church with 3,000 members, one can only assume that the service was more than likely a packed house.

Please understand, I am not passing judgment on those who attended the service, the woman who won the house, or even the church that gave away the prize. I am only saying what I see as an observer. I cannot help but look at this situation and remember the words of Paul when he said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess 5:22). He does not say we should only avoid that which actually is evil. He says we are to avoid anything that appears *like* evil. As an outside observer, I see evil.

The pastor of the church says that he wanted to do something "special for the people," and that, "you

shouldn't have to bribe people to come to church." Maybe he does not consider giving away these mega-prizes bribes. However, as the proverb says, "If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . ." As I look at this contest, with the church advertising beforehand that they would give away a house, and with the pastor joking that he would bribe people to come to church if it worked, I smell a bribe!

I also wonder what this must look like to the non-Christian observer. Even more, I wonder what this says to the homeless man or woman living in this community. I wonder if they look at this and say, "Why didn't they spend that money to help me find a place to live?" or, "Why didn't they use that money to buy me a meal?" It seems to me that the money could have better been used by donating it to Habitat for Humanity, the Red Cross, or some other organization to help the countless people who have been so greatly devastated by the hurricanes of 2005.

As someone who was able to go and provide some relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina and join others from our church to help in relief efforts for Hurricane Rita victims, I wonder how this church (which is in the area that Rita affected) can justify spending \$120,000 on a home in an attendance contest. Somehow, this just doesn't make sense to me.

I wonder what victims of the hurricanes think when reading this story. If these Christians are the only Christ he ever sees, why would he want to follow Jesus?

This situation has also caused me to reflect upon my own ministry. Rarely have I held a big event for my students without having (and yes, advertising) some type of food, most often pizza. Looking back over that, I can see my own way of bribing students to come to our activities. And, to a certain extent I can understand where the church in the Houston area is coming from: we use what works. But is what works always the *right* thing to do?

Just as I wonder what the needy in the community think of the church giving away a house, I wonder what the one in our community thinks of my church when we flaunt pizza to get students into our doors. Does he wonder, "If they have the money to feed that many teenagers, why haven't they helped me?"

I pray that we all remember Jesus' words in Matthew

(continued on page 31)

Book/Movie Reviews

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

Top Films of '05

Reviewed by James M. Wall, Editor
The Christian Century

George Clooney had two films in release in 2005, both of which make my list of the year's top ten films. The first, *Good Night, and Good Luck* takes a sharply focused look at a moment when TV journalist Edward R. Murrow (David Strathairn) exposed the shallowness of Wisconsin senator Joe McCarthy's obsession with communism. (McCarthy plays himself in archival footage). Clooney both directed and scripted the film and also plays a supporting role. He yields the main performance to Strathairn, who speaks in Murrow's somber, clipped style for a dead-on portrayal. The picture, shot in black and white to evoke the era, captures a time when Murrow was at his professional peak. The film also depicts CBS's reluctance to support Murrow, and its insistence that in return for his courageous documentary work he conduct celebrity interviews with pop stars like Liberace, an assignment he detested. The film is set primarily in small smoke-filled studios that highlight the toxicity of the era, a not-so-subtle reminder that lung cancer ended Murrow's career prematurely. Jazz numbers sung by Dianne Reeves relieve the tension, *Good Night, and Good Luck* is the year's best film, a tribute to journalism at its finest.

Syriana. The title of this film is never explained, but off-screen interviews reveal that U.S. policy makers informally refer to "Syriana" when they envision re-creating a "greater Syria" in the image of America. Clooney, who co-produced the film (based on Robert Baer's *See No Evil*), plays an over-the-hill CIA agent who is betrayed by his superiors. The film parallels *Traffic*, a film by director-writer Stephen Gaghan about drug addiction. In *Syriana*, Gaghan uses the same format to highlight another addiction—Americans' addiction to oil—and to suggest that the U.S. motive for the Americanization of the region is control of its oil supply. He is unstinting in the harshness of his vision, most notably illustrated in the CIA-orchestrated murder of an Arab leader who dares to defy the U.S. by trading oil to China. The hostility to *Syriana* from conservative critics and columnists suggests that Gaghan has struck a nerve in American politics. What is surprising about Gaghan's portrayal is that none of his Arab characters makes any refer-

ence to Israel, a false note in a film that portrays Arab anger at the U.S.

Munich. Fans of *Pulp Fiction* will recall that just before Samuel L. Jackson's character kills two men, he quotes several verses from Ezekiel 25. In his book *Vengeance*, the source for *Munich*, George Jonas cites the same passage ("and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them"). In the film, a secret Israeli Mosad hit team targets 11 Palestinian leaders in revenge for the deaths of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Israel has never acknowledged its role in the assassinations, and several pro-Israel books written in the 1980s deny the single-hit-team theory. But this did not deter Steven Spielberg, one of Israel's favorite directors, from risking his pro-Israel credentials with a film critical of revenge as a national strategy. In the film, one Israeli gunman argues that the killings only extend the cycle of violence. The film explores complex political and moral questions so effectively that hard-liners on both sides have denounced it. Israel supporters strongly object to what they see as Spielberg's "moral equivalency," the suggestion that both sides have their motives and that both sides are wrong in the way they act on those motives. Palestinian supporters say that the arguments on behalf of their longing for a secure homeland are overshadowed by major characters who insist that Israel must do "whatever it takes" for its own security. ■

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Losing Moses on the Freeway: The Ten Commandments in America

Christ Hedges, Free Press, New York, 2005. \$24.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan
Richardson, TX

Simply stated, hold on to your hat as you get into this book on the Ten Commandments! It is unlike anything else you have ever read, and there are lots of good books on this subject around. This subject constitutes one of the Bible's most important and enduring guides to ethical values and behavior. As you make your way through this book

you will marvel at the author's profound sympathy with people who have succeeded in violating the gist of these commandments. You may even feel like throwing the book against the nearest wall as he sits in Olympic-like judgment on war and related issues with his contemporary applications on idolatry, murder, envy, and greed.

The author is a seminary trained would-be pastor, turned foreign correspondent, who has received numerous kudos for his incisive reporting on global terrorism. His deep-felt views about the war come through powerfully in some of these chapters. Increasingly, he is a well-known and respected author, currently teaching at Princeton. His experiences literally around the world in some extremely dangerous situations show up in some very interesting applications related to these historic commandments from the Bible.

One by one he takes the commandments and often recasts them in today's violent and rebellious world alongside observations that give an almost novel approach to a part of the Bible, which has had a surplus of books, applied to these centers of ethical concern. One of the main strengths of the book is his series of profound and often provocative illustrations from contemporary life.

This book is not for people who want to stay close to their comfort zone. For example, his experiences as a seminary graduate working with a church in a Boston ghetto is a vivid reminder of what is going on in every major city in the land. These are not success stories. They are alarming and bluntly realistic, and pose a backdrop for recapturing the essence surrounding the truths about the mystery and beauty of Almighty God. You will remember this part of his book long after you have completed it.

It is apparent by now that one of the major strengths of his book, so interestingly titled, come in the series of contemporary illustrations to the Decalogue. The author's powers of observing people from many walks of life, then translated into good, solid writing, keeps the reader's attention.

Again you may be offended by some of his words, but you will remember this book. Hedges draws deeply from his father's influence on his life, and makes the point that "memories define us." (p.91) One can almost predict in

advance his anti-war stance, an application that seems askance, but it is there and it is debatable.

The final chapter of the book moves beautifully to an emphasis on love. It well could be his finest writing as he zeroes in on a healthy overview of the commandments as moral guideposts for life. He speaks eloquently as to the savage price one pays when the commandments are not applied. Properly applied even in these times, Moses' words, though pushed aside by the pace and complexity of life, will prove an adequate guide through the multiply false covenants around us. ■

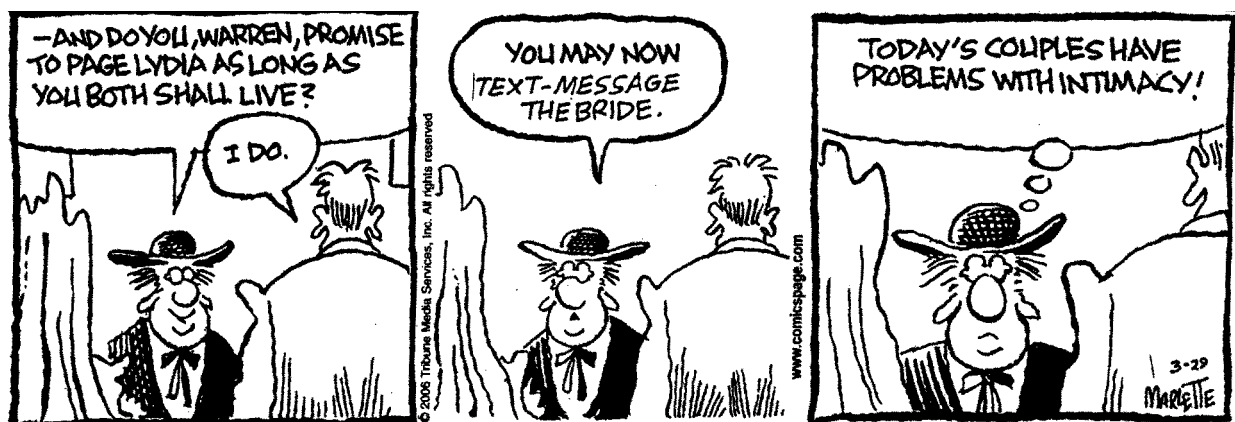
War Or Words: Interreligious Dialogue as an Instrument of Peace

Donald W. Musser and D. Dixon Sutherland, eds. The Pilgrim Press, 2005. \$28.

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

It is virtually inevitable when I read a collection of essays that I find a few are excellent essays, others are mediocre, and possibly a few should have been omitted. But this is decidedly NOT the case with this volume. After I finished a chapter I would say to myself, "This was a very good essay. Can the book sustain this quality throughout?" The answer is Yes.

Furthermore, the editors took their work seriously. They introduced each chapter with a concise summary of what was to come while also pointing out some of that chapter's connections with other chapters in the book. In addition, they made sure that the chapter in some way or other addressed the central theme of the book, i.e., interreligious dialogue as an instrument of peace. This tight editing process was no small feat, since the essays grew out of a yearlong series of lectures from a very diverse group of American religious scholars. The lectures were held at



Stetson University where the editors serve as faculty members and where the lecture series was initiated as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Part I describes in five chapters the issues that emerge in the dialogue between religions. The editors wisely place an essay by Hans Kung, an internationally respected Roman Catholic theologian, at the beginning of the book. Kung lays the foundation for the following essays with his basic thesis: "No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions." Kung calls for a new paradigm that presupposes a social consensus founded on particular basic values, basic rights, and basic responsibilities. Kung reminds us that all the great traditions accept the principles of reverence for life, truthful actions, honest and fair dealings and respect and love for one another. These are the bases of a global ethic without which the globe will not survive.

Martin Cook provides a thoughtful analysis of how the just war tradition applies to the current struggle against terrorism, noting that St. Augustine, while keenly aware of the serious moral defects of the Roman Empire, recognized that the barbarian invasion threatened the very collapse of civilization. Cook, like Kung, calls on the U.S. to lead the way to a cooperative (not unilateral) global consensus that will defend the common civilization against the new barbarians.

John Kelsey, a Christian theologian who specializes in Islam, observes that Islam is struggling with its own version of the fundamentalists/moderate debate. The fundamentalist believe that justice requires that a state be governed by divine laws revealed in the Qur'an and other Islamic sources and can move rather quickly to the notion that armed force might be justified, whereas moderates believe that justice can be derived from a more diverse set of sources and focus on shaping public opinion and fostering diplomacy. Internal debate in Islam regarding al Qaeda's violent tactics are focusing more and more on a basic principle: there are limits on what one can do, even when one is fighting for justice. Qur'an 2:190 is a key passage: "Fight against those who are fighting you but do not violate the limits. God does not approve those who violate the limits."

Jewish professor Steven Jacobs lays out the huge obstacles standing in the way of genuine Jewish-Christian dia-

logue (e.g., anti-Semitism in the N.T., Christian belief that Christ redeems the whole world, the mission of the church to convert Jews, the good and bad historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and, lastly, how the Holocaust impacts any effort at dialogue). Interestingly, he says that the place to start is with a careful study of N.T. passages, which deal directly and indirectly with Jews and Judaism.

The editors, along with graduate student Daniel Puchalla, describe what they view as "dangerous faith" in the present Bush administration. They are especially fearful of the dispensational theology that characterizes some, though not all, of the Religious Right, which has overwhelmingly supported Bush in both elections. The authors believe that some of Bush's advisors hold to a dispensational theology which demands full and uncritical support of the modern state of Israel, and which possesses a strong tendency to demonize Islam as an inherently violent and evil religion. Dispensationalists like Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham believe that efforts to improve the world are doomed to failure and, furthermore, tend to distrust Islam and Muslim people and instead associate them with an evil, which must be obliterated. In addition, America is viewed as representing God's interest for Good in the world. The authors conclude that to the extent that Bush is influenced by this theology (and they believe the influence is greater than most people think), authentic dialogue is impossible and peace is impossible.

Part II addresses the obstacles to religious dialogue. Charles Kimball focuses on the warning signs of corrupted religion, which he addressed in his popular book *When Religion Becomes Evil*. He believes that absolute truth claims are the result of selective proof-texting by extremists who ignore centuries of interpretation within their religious traditions. Literalistic and absolutist readings by both Muslims and Christians go against the truth that all humans are limited and that absolute truth rests with God and not with humans. Kimball says that his years of study of other religious traditions have not threatened his faith but has rather broadened and deepened his Christian faith. "Being a Christian pluralist means daring to encounter people of different faith traditions and defining my faith not by its borders but by its roots."



Although feminist theologian Valerie Ziegler rejects the essentialist view that women are inherently more pacifistic than men, she chronicles how women in America have been leaders in nonviolent conflict resolution from the nation's inception until the present. She fears, however, that female political empowerment has been moving women more in the direction of increased participation in war making efforts and in support of these efforts rather than in the effort to "wage peace."

Daniel Bell, Jr., a liberation theology specialist, disputes the commonly held view that liberation theologians are "apologists for terrorism." He also rejects efforts by many to privatize religion and remove religious values from the political/public sphere. The issue for Bell is not violence or terrorism, but the challenge that the liberationists present to the reigning political order, especially challenging the double standard that leads to cries of outrage in the face of armed insurrection and relative silence in the face of repressive regimes whose violence takes institutional forms such as covert and paramilitary action. Liberation theology deplores a "wild and savage capitalism" without a human face that has kept Third World countries from economic development. Thus, the "terrorism of the marketplace" and "capitalistic fundamentalism" is the kind of structural violence exposed by liberation theology. Liberation theology presents the God of the Bible as One who stands with the poor and who calls people to an unarmed resistance to injustice. Bell provides in his essay a powerful biblical and theological basis for liberation theology.

John Mohawk, a historian from a Native American heritage, examines "revitalization movements" that may be sustained and motivated by religious traditions but are not necessarily confined to religion. Revitalization movements, such as the Crusades, Nazism, and Marxism tend to pursue a utopian ideal and, unfortunately, tend to resort to violence since any means necessary to secure the Ideal is justifiable. (Even bin Laden's movement is seen as a mini-revitalization movement). Mohawk sees America's pursuit of the Ideal as very likely to produce a great ecological disaster as the U.S. attempts to globalize the world's economies. Mohawk rather gloomily predicts that future revitalization movements will represent a great danger to the future of humanity and to our planet.

Part III seeks to give directions on how to move toward dialogue. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz views the concept of reconciliation, both religious and civil, as an intrinsic element of peace and justice. Healing the rifts that divide people is of the essence of what it means to be a responsible human being. Reconciliation rejects revenge and retribution, which focus on the past, but instead embraces a new future built on forgiveness.

New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan concludes the volume with a powerful essay on the notion of distributive justice as illustrated both in the Old and New Testaments. Fair distribution of the earth and its food is the essence of biblical justice, he maintains. The events of 9/11 set forth two options for us: victory for peace or justice for peace. The Roman Empire modeled the first option and the biblical tradition models the second option. "Peace without love easily turns into brutality, while love without justice often results in banality. In order for the religions of the world to benefit from any dialogue, or contribute to any efforts for global peace, we must opt for the second option."

The editors insert provocative questions at the beginning of each chapter, which helps make the book an excellent text for group study. Church groups would benefit greatly with a careful study and discussion of these fine essays. Stetson University, the editors and the publisher are to be commended for undertaking this project. It deserves a wide audience. ■

Bribing People to Church: Pizzas and \$120,000 Houses

(continued from page 27)

35:40, which have haunted me more than I can describe over the past few days: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Let us never forget the "least of these" while we rest cozily in our \$120,000 house eating pizza. ■

1 "Church gives house to family living in mobile home," Houston Chronicle (Houston Chronicle, January 1,



CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

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