

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

Alleluia

"No one can celebrate a genuine Christmas
Without being truly poor.
The self-sufficient, the proud, those who,
because they have everything, look down on others,
those who have no need, even of God—
for them there will be no Christmas.
Only the poor, the hungry,
those who need someone to come on their behalf,
will have that someone.
That someone is God,
Emmanuel,
God with us.
Without poverty of spirit there can be no abundance of God."

—*the late Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador*

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Solstice

By Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

Note: This Christmas article published in December, 2005, was Foy Valentine's last before his death on January 7, 2006, and it represents his rare talent as a true wordsmith.

Like Jerome Kern's ole man river that "jus' keeps on rolin' along," old man sun just keeps on running its successive journeys across the sky, east to west, day in and day out, from winter through spring to summer and then through fall and back again to winter, so on and so forth.

Now, in this circadian rhythm there is, as we all have been taught, a winter solstice and a summer solstice with points in between which observers of such natural phenomena have named the vernal equinox and the autumnal equinox, spring and fall. Of all these observable events, none is quite as portentous as the winter solstice. Which at last gets me somewhat closer to a point which is loosely lodged in my little mind. We're not there yet, to be sure, but we're moving on.

Solstice means literally sun standstill. It is a stage in the sun's apparent movement in which the days in the winter stop getting shorter and begin again to get longer and conversely, of course, in which the nights stop getting longer and begin again to start getting shorter. The winter solstice is reached each year in the northern hemisphere about December 22, while the summer solstice occurs about June 22.

All around the world ancient observers marked the solstices carefully and with astounding accuracy. Anasazi, Olmecs, Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, Babylonians, Chinese, Greeks, Persians, and Romans all seem to have found special ways to mark the winter solstice with celebrations.

The early inhabitants of the smallish island that was to become known as England seem to have been par-

ticularly cognizant of the winter solstice. Far more than their southern European neighbors in Greece, Italy, and Spain, those early Anglos focused on December 25 as a time for special celebration. The long winter nights were beginning to be gradually shortened and the days began to grow gradually a little longer. Darkness began to be overcome by light. Cold began to give way to the sun's welcome warmth. Accordingly the solstice was celebrated with bonfires, merrymaking, feasts, and non-lite versions of mead. The festivities were apparently not unlike those of other cultures around the world.

As Christianity spread, the formerly pagan celebrations related to the winter solstice came to be gradually appropriated as a natural occasion for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Within a few hundred years after his advent, there was absolutely no consensus as to the actual date of Jesus'

birth. Wide, and often wild, speculations about the date went on for many decades. Finally, however, the rather arbitrary date of December 25 came to be generally accepted as a good time to mark the anniversary of his birth.

Because it was tied so closely to the time of the winter solstice, there was general satisfaction about the timing; and the old customs and policies and practices gradually segued into today's Christmas celebrations.

Our Christian beliefs related to Mary and Joseph, the incarnation, the actual birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, the guiding star and the visit of the wise men with their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh for the new born baby Jesus were all melded into the winter solstice celebrations which were already in place. Old pagan festivities marked by feasting, lighted candles, the giving of gifts, singing,
(continued on page 8)

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“It would disturb me if there was a wedding between the religious fundamentalists and the political right. The hard right has no interest in religion except to manipulate it.”

Rev. Billy Graham, Parade (1981).

“When Christians claim special knowledge of God’s truth, when they advance wedge issues, when they divide America between ‘people of faith’ and their ‘enemies,’ Christians become not the means of peace but the cause of conflict.”

Former Senator John Danforth (R-MO) in Faith and Politics.

“I’m not calling for or predicting the end of conservatism, . . . but we may be seeing the downfall of movement conservatism—the potent alliance of wealthy individuals, corporate interests, and the religious right that took shape in the 1960s and 1970s”

Paul Krugman, New York Times columnist on the Nov. 7 elections.

“The debate is over. The science is clear: Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard.”

U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona.

“National Christian leaders received hugs and smiles in person and then were dismissed behind their backs and described as ‘ridiculous,’ ‘out of control,’ and just plain ‘goofy.’”

David Kuo, conservative Christian who helped run the White House’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, in his book Tempting Faith.

“I have it out there proudly because those who messed the name [Baptist] up have taken it off their churches. . . . if for no other reason, truth in advertising.”

Dr. Bill Self, Pastor of John’s Creek Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA (Baptists Today, 11/06).

“Corporate America is deliberately destroying the middle class to support its globalized greed.”

CNN Financial Journalist Lou Dobbs in his book, The War on the Middle Class.

“Iraq’s health minister estimated that 150,000 civilians have been killed in the war—about three times higher than previously accepted estimates.”

Assoc. Press, (11/9/06).

“From 1979 to 2001, the after-tax income of the top 1% of U.S. households soared 139%, while the income of the middle fifth rose only 17% and the income of the poorest fifth rose only 9%. Last year American CEOs earned 262 times the average wage of the worker—up tenfold from 1970.”

James Kurth, Dallas Morning News, (10/15/06).

“Asymmetrical warfare against the government.”

The Pentagon’s “double-speak” definition for attempted suicides at Guantanamo prison.

“There are 37 million US Americans who live below the poverty line, and 13 million of them are children. 45 million US Americans have no health insurance. More than two billion people on the planet live on less than US \$2 a day. We spend a billion dollars a week on the war in Iraq. . . . We spend more on our prisons in the US than we do on education.”

W. Kenneth Williams, Baptist Peacemaker (Fall, 2006).

“How much is a ‘Billion’? A billion seconds ago it was 1959. A billion minutes ago Jesus was alive. A billion hours ago our ancestors were living in the Stone Age. A billion days ago, no one walked on earth on two feet. A

billion dollars ago was only 8 hours and 20 minutes, at the rate our government is spending it!” *CDoremus Email.*

“America is becoming known as a nation of gluttony and obesity, and churches are a feeding ground for this problem.”

Purdue sociology professor Ken Ferraro, who also noted 27% of Baptists are obese (the most overweight group). Chicago Sun Times, 8/25/06.

“The U.S. last year produced nearly half of the weapons sold to militaries in the developing world.”

Sojourners Online (11/13/06).

“That cannot be true religion that needs carnal weapons to uphold it.”

Roger Williams, The Bloody Tenet of Persecution.

“An assessment of terrorism by U.S. intelligence agencies (National Intelligence Estimate) has found that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has helped spawn a new generation of Islamic radicalism and that the overall terrorist threat has grown since the Sept. 11 attacks.”

Report released by the House Intelligence Committee (9/20/06).

“A pacifist is a person who realizes that in striking another, you harm yourself more—this is the moral consequence of violence.”

Ethicist John Howard Yoder.

“Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.”

St. Francis of Assisi. ■

The Role of Religion in Politics

By Barack Obama, U.S. Senator for Illinois

Note: This article is adapted from the Keynote Address delivered on June 28, 2006, in Washington, D.C. at the Sojourners/Call to Renewal Conference and may be found in its entirety at <http://obama.senate.gov/speech>.

Today I'd like to talk about the connection between religion and politics and perhaps offer some thoughts about how we can sort through some of the often bitter arguments that we've been seeing over the last several years.

I do so because, as you all know, we can affirm the importance of poverty in the Bible, and we can discuss the religious call to address poverty and environmental stewardship all we want, but it won't have an impact unless we tackle head-on the mutual suspicion that sometimes exists between religious America and secular America.

For some time now, there has been plenty of talk among pundits and pollsters that the political divide in this country has fallen sharply along religious lines. Indeed, the single biggest "gap" in party affiliation among white Americans today is not between men and women, or those who reside in so-called Red States and those who reside in Blue, but between those who attend church regularly and those who don't. Conservative leaders have been all too happy to exploit this gap, consistently reminding evangelical Christians that Democrats disrespect their values and dislike their church, while suggesting to the rest of the country that religious Americans care only about issues like abortion and gay marriage; school prayer and intelligent design.

Democrats, for the most part, have taken the bait. At best, we may try to avoid the conversation about religious values altogether, fearful of offending anyone and claiming that—regardless

of our personal beliefs—constitutional principles tie our hands. At worst, there are some liberals who dismiss religion in the public square as inherently irrational or intolerant, insisting on a caricature of religious Americans that paints them as fanatical, or thinking that the very word "Christian" describes one's political opponents, not people of faith.

Now, such strategies of avoidance may work for some progressives. But over the long haul, I think we make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in people's lives—in the lives of the American people—and I think it's time that we join a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic democracy.

If we're going to do that then we first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. Ninety percent of us believe in God, 70 percent affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38 percent call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in evolution. This religious tendency is not simply the result of successful marketing by skilled preachers or the draw of popular mega-churches. In fact, it speaks to a hunger that's deeper than that—a hunger that goes beyond any particular issue or cause.

Each day, it seems, thousands of Americans are going about their daily rounds—dropping off the kids at school, driving to the office, flying to a business meeting, shopping at the mall, trying to stay on their diets—and they're coming to the realization that something is missing. They are deciding that their work, their possessions, their diversions, their sheer busyness, is not enough. They want a sense of purpose, a narrative arc to their lives. They're looking to relieve a chronic loneliness, a feeling sup-

ported by a recent study that shows Americans have fewer close friends and confidants than ever before. And so they need an assurance that somebody out there cares about them, is listening to them—that they are not just destined to travel down that long highway towards nothingness.

I speak with some experience on this matter. It wasn't until after college, when I went to Chicago to work as a community organizer for a group of Christian churches, that I confronted my own spiritual dilemma. I was working with churches, and the Christians who I worked with recognized themselves in me. They saw that I knew their Book and that I shared their values and sang their songs. But they sensed that a part of me that remained removed, detached—that I was an observer in their midst. In time, I came to realize that something was missing as well—that without a vessel for my beliefs, without a commitment to a particular community of faith, at some level I would always remain apart, and alone.

As the months passed in Chicago, I found myself drawn—not just to work with the church, but to be in the church. For one thing, I believed and still believe in the power of the African-American religious tradition to spur social change. Because of its past, the black church understands in an intimate way the biblical call to feed the hungry and cloth the naked and challenge powers and principalities. And in its historical struggles for freedom and the rights of man, I was able to see faith as more than just a comfort to the weary or a hedge against death, but rather as an active, palpable agent in the world. As a source of hope. Perhaps it was out of this intimate knowledge of hardship—the grounding of faith in struggle—that the church offered me a second insight. You need to come to church in the first

place precisely because you are first of this world, not apart from it. You need to embrace Christ precisely because you have sins to wash away—because you are human and need an ally in this difficult journey.

It was because of these newfound understandings that I was finally able to walk down the aisle of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago one day and affirm my Christian faith. It came about as a choice, and not an epiphany. I didn't fall out in church. The questions I had didn't magically disappear. But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side, I felt that I heard God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth.

That's a path that has been shared by millions upon millions of Americans—evangelicals, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims alike; some since birth, others at certain turning points in their lives. It is not something they set apart from the rest of their beliefs and values. In fact, it is often what drives their beliefs and their values.

That is why, if we truly hope to speak to people where they're at—to communicate our hopes and values in a way that's relevant to their own—then as progressives, we cannot abandon the field of religious discourse. Because when we ignore the debate about what it means to be a good Christian or Muslim or Jew; when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about

our obligations towards one another; when we shy away from religious venues and religious broadcasts because we assume that we will be unwelcome—others will fill the vacuum, those with the most insular views of faith, or those who cynically use religion to justify partisan ends.

In other words, if we don't reach out to evangelical Christians and other religious Americans and tell them what we stand for, then the Jerry Falwells and Pat Robertsons and Alan Keyeses will continue to hold sway.

More fundamentally, the discomfort of some progressives with any hint of religion has often prevented us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. If we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice. Imagine Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address without reference to "the judgments of the Lord." Or King's "I Have a Dream" speech without references to "all of God's children." Their summoning of a higher truth helped inspire what had seemed impossible, and move the nation to embrace a common destiny.

Our failure as progressives to tap into the moral underpinnings of the nation is not just rhetorical, though. Our fear of getting "preachy" may also lead us to discount the role that values and culture play in some of our most urgent social problems. After all, the problems of poverty, racism, the uninsured, and the unemployed are not simply technical problems in

search of the perfect 10-point plan. They are rooted in both societal indifference and individual callousness—in the imperfections of humanity.

Solving these problems will require changes in government policy, but it will also require changes in hearts and a change in minds. I believe in keeping guns out of our inner cities, and that our leaders must say so in the face of the gun manufacturers' lobby—but I also believe that when a gang-banger shoots indiscriminately into a crowd because he feels somebody disrespected him, we've got a moral problem. There's a hole in that young man's heart—a hole that the government alone cannot fix.

My Bible tells me that if we train a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not turn from it. So I think faith and guidance can help fortify a young woman's sense of self, a young man's sense of responsibility, and a sense of reverence that all young people should have for the act of sexual intimacy.

I am not suggesting that every progressive suddenly latch on to religious terminology—that can be dangerous. Nothing is more transparent than inauthentic expressions of faith. Some politicians come and clap—off rhythm—to the choir. We don't need that. In fact, because I do not believe that religious people have a monopoly on morality, I would rather have someone who is grounded in morality and ethics, and who is also secular, affirm their morality and ethics and values without pretending that they're something they're not.



What I am suggesting is this: secularists are wrong when they ask believers to leave their religion at the door before entering into the public square. Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, Williams Jennings Bryant, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King—indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history—were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause. To say that men and women should not inject their “personal morality” into public policy debates is a practical absurdity. Our law is by definition a codification of morality, much of it grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Moreover, if we progressives shed some of these biases, we might recognize some overlapping values that both religious and secular people share when it comes to the moral and material direction of our country. We might recognize that the call to sacrifice on behalf of the next generation, the need to think in terms of “thou” and not just “I,” resonates in religious congregations all across the country. And we might realize that we have the ability to reach out to the evangelical community and engage millions of religious Americans in the larger project of American renewal.

Some of this is already beginning to happen. Pastors, friends of mine like Rick Warren and T.D. Jakes are wielding their enormous influences to confront AIDS, Third World debt relief, and the genocide in Darfur. Religious thinkers and activists like our good friend Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo are lifting up the biblical injunction to help the poor as a means of mobilizing Christians against budget cuts to social programs and growing inequality. Across the country, individual churches like my own and your own are sponsoring day care programs, building senior centers, helping ex-offenders reclaim their lives, and rebuilding our gulf coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The question is, how do we build on these still-tentative partnerships between religious and secular people

of good will? It’s going to take more work, a lot more work than we’ve done so far. The tensions and the suspicions on each side of the religious divide will have to be squarely addressed.

I want to look at what conservative leaders need to do—some truths they need to acknowledge.

For one, they need to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving not only our democracy, but the robustness of our religious practice. Folks tend to forget that during our founding, it wasn’t the atheists or the civil libertarians who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment. It was the persecuted minorities, it was Baptists like John Leland who didn’t want the established churches to impose their views on folks who were getting happy out in the fields and teaching the scripture to slaves. It was the forbearers of the evangelicals who were the most adamant about not mingling government with religion, because they did not want state-sponsored religion hindering their ability to practice their faith as they understood it.

Moreover, given the increasing diversity of America’s population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of non-believers.

And even if we did have only Christians in our midst, if we expelled every non-Christian from the United States of America, whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? Would we go with James Dobson’s, or Al Sharpton’s? Which passages of scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is okay and that eating shellfish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount—a passage that is so radical that it’s doubtful that our own Defense Department would

survive its application?

This brings me to my second point. Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God’s will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.

This is going to be difficult for some who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, as many evangelicals do. But in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice. Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what’s possible. At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It’s the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God’s edicts, regardless of the consequences. To base one’s life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime, but to base our policy making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing.

Finally, any reconciliation between faith and democratic pluralism requires some sense of proportion. But a sense of proportion should also guide those who police the boundaries between church and state. Not every mention of God in public is a breach to the wall of separation—context matters. It is doubtful that children reciting the Pledge of Allegiance feel oppressed or brainwashed as a consequence of muttering the phrase “under God.” I didn’t. Having voluntary student prayer groups use school property to meet should not be a threat, any more than its use by the High School Republicans should threaten Democrats.

So, we all have some work to do here. But I am hopeful that we can bridge the gaps that exist and overcome the prejudices each of us bring to this debate. And I have faith that mil-

lions of believing Americans want that to happen. No matter how religious they may or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack. They don't want faith used to belittle or to divide. They're tired of hearing folks deliver more screed than sermon. Because in the end, that's not how they think about faith in their own lives.

Many Americans are looking for a deeper, fuller conversation about religion in this country. They may not change their positions, but they are willing to listen and learn from those who are willing to speak in fair-minded words, those who know of the central and awesome place that God holds in the lives of so many, and who refuse to treat faith as simply another political issue with which to score points.

I have a hope for America that we can live with one another in a way that reconciles the beliefs of each with the good of all. It's a prayer worth praying, and a conversation worth having in this country in the months and years to come. ■

Solstice

(continued from page 3)

decorated evergreen trees, yule logs, and rejoicing were all assimilated into our Christian celebrations related to the birth of Jesus Christ.

Why not?

Our great and good God who kindled the fire in the sun, who tilted the earth on its axis, who started it to spinning, and who ordained its orbit around the sun is the same great and good God whose redeeming grace in the fullness of time manifested itself in the incarnation, a baby in a manger.

In celebrating Christmas, there is a good reason to be still a while and ponder the wonders related to the natural phenomenon of the winter solstice. Christians can not only affirm but also celebrate the astronomy, mathematics, science, and all the impressive learning that explains the solstices. The Encyclopedia Britannica elucidates the matter: "Each solstice is upon the ecliptic midway between the equinoxes and therefore 90 degrees

from each" and my Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Tenth Edition further obfuscates the subject by defining solstice as "either of the points on the ecliptic at which its distance from the celestial equator is greatest and which is reached by the sun each year about June 22nd and December 22nd."

Well, DUH. I really didn't want to know that much about the solstices. Still, without benefit of a graduate degree in astronomy, we can celebrate the handiwork of God in fixing the solstices as he has done; and we can celebrate the hard work of scientists in trying to help us understand the general workings of the system.

At this special season, then, consider a couple of closing thoughts.

Celebrate the solstice. It's Creator has given humanity a fantastic gift. To this gift we have attached all manner of accouterments and appendages which we do not necessarily have to reject or even complain about and, indeed, to which we may rightly say a joyous YES: Christmas trees, colored lights, fruitcakes, fireworks, roast turkeys and figgy puddings, peppermint candy, roaring fires, and Santa's ubiquitous Ho-Ho-Hos.

Focus on the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus, God means to be reconciling the world to himself. Dayspring from on high has visited us. Humanity itself has been touched with a miracle. It is the miracle of redemption, of new heavens and a new earth. So, at this solstice season, "Remember Jesus Christ" and mind him.

Merry Christmas. ■

FRIENDS OF FOY VALENTINE MEMORIAL ENDOWMENT FUND

A few months after Foy Valentine's sudden death on January 7, 2006, several of Foy's closest friends established a memorial endowment fund to provide long-term support for the Journal he founded. One of Foy's deepest concerns these last ten years has been the financial base for *Christian Ethics Today*.

Foy insisted (and the present editor concurs) that the Journal should always be sent, free of charge, to anyone requesting it, as long as "finances and energy allow!" The CET Board feels only the interest accrued from this fund, and only then if absolutely necessary, will undergird the basic budget (now at \$85,000 annually).

As of December, 2006, 93 persons have given \$159,325 to the FFV fund, including these friends who contributed since the last issue: Buckner Fanning, Richard Kahoe, and Larry McSwain.

If you have not contributed, please consider helping to fulfill Foy's dream of a Journal "to inform, inspire, and unify a company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness."

For this special gift and for your regular support of the basic budget needs of *Christian Ethics Today*, we give thanks. Without YOU the Journal would not be possible. (All gifts are tax deductible) ■

The Haggard Affair: Overlooked Issues

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

Is there anything left to say about the Haggard affair? Probably you are weary of the story, broadcast for weeks by the media. The mega-church pastor and president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) who resigned both positions after a former male prostitute charged that monthly for three years Rev. Ted Haggard had met him in a hotel room, where Haggard also acknowledged buying crystal meth from the gay man.

My first response was a mixture of Grief—Disappointment—Sadness—and Concern.

On my desk are ten reports, ranging from the Religious News Service to Newsweek magazine. I have read them all. Yet, something troubles me deeply. In all these accounts—both secular and religious—key issues have been omitted or misunderstood. Issues vital for understanding, preventing, and responding to clergy sexual misconduct were overlooked or sometimes misinterpreted.

Ministerial ethics has been a lifetime interest. During twenty years as a pastor, I witnessed numerous moral failures of friends and colleagues. Fifteen years of teaching Christian ethics followed, including the development of a course in ministerial ethics and a basic textbook.¹

In 1998, Texas Baptists appointed a 15-member committee to study Clergy Sexual Misconduct and to bring a report to the convention about responding to this increasing problem. I was asked to serve as consultant, doing the basic research for the educational materials, as well as assisting in the production of a 45-page booklet.²

Thus by experience, training, and focus of study, clergy sexual misconduct has been a central concern, leading to numerous conferences and speaking engagements.³ Most ministers and laity, especially in Baptist/evangelical circles, are shocked to learn the extent of the

problem. Reliable research over the last two decades verifies that sexual abuse by clergy has reached “horrific proportions:” 12-13% of ministers admit to sexual relations with church members and another 37-39% acknowledge sexually inappropriate behavior.⁴

The purpose for noting these overlooked issues is to assist clergy, laity, and churches to better address clergy sexual misconduct. Major reasons for failure are: (1) a lack of understanding of the nature of the problem; (2) a failure to initiate prevention strategies; and (3) inappropriate responses when misconduct occurs.⁵ Noting certain mistaken ideas and inadequate responses in the Haggard affair will illustrate the importance of properly understanding and confronting clergy sexual failure in any church.

Although news reports never give the complete story, and although investigations continue into the extent of Ted Haggard’s misconduct, the information in the media thus far reveals a number of mistakes by the church, its members, and interested parties. Though unintentional and well-motivated, these mistakes made ministerial misconduct a greater possibility and damage to the church and to individuals much more probable.

Superficial Accountability. The most obvious failure of New Life church, and one common to most megachurches, is the lack of accountability. Major denominations vet clergy credentials and have elaborate systems of guidelines, policies, and procedures that, to a large degree, protect parishioners and discipline errant ministers.

However, for evangelical megachurches with superpastors, it is different. Ministers are celebrities who have little or no oversight, other than boards stacked with relatives, friends, and personal lawyers who wouldn’t dare contradict the pastor, notes Bill Martin, a Rice University expert on evangelicals.

“The pitfall with the megachurches . . . is it’s so easy for a person to consider him- or herself above accountability,” Martin said. “If that accountability is absent or reduced, then trouble is on the way.”

The elders of Haggard’s 14,000 member church seemed to turn the matter over to an “Overseer Board,” made up of clergy from various churches around the country—pastor-friends from Louisiana to California to Arizona. To their credit, the Board did issue a public statement that Haggard “has committed sexually immoral conduct” and agreed with him that he should be dismissed. My question: How can minister-friends who live hundreds of miles away oversee this pastor or adequately investigate charges of misconduct?

Limited Liability. Many have noted the discrepancies between Ted Haggard’s confession, the claims of the accuser Mike Jones, and the conclusions of the church and its members. Policies and procedures for churches investigating charges of clergy malfeasance demand full disclosure of the truth. This is absolutely necessary for all parties involved, especially for the church. Without a public disclosure of the facts, the church will suffer, yielding to gossip, misinformation, and often the re-victimizing of the falsely accused, or the victim, and always the perpetrator’s family.

Did Pastor Haggard sin? Yes. He agrees as does his investigators. But what exactly was the pastor’s sin? Original denials followed by vague generalities only confuse. His admission to a “massage” from a male escort in the hotel room and to “buying drugs but later throwing them away” (remember, this admission was from the front seat of his auto, with his wife by his side and two children in the back seat), confuses more than clarifies. What are church members to believe about their pastor? Full disclosure is a must.

Atmosphere of Denial. Common to all charges of sexual misbehavior by ministers is the response of denial. Church members rally to defend their preacher. Initially the victim is blamed—“she seduced our pastor” or “he is lying!” Sometimes if the charges prove to be true, the pastor’s wife may be blamed as an “inadequate spouse or sexual partner.” Even the church is accused of “overworking” the minister to the point of vulnerability.

Any and all of these may be true, but the minister cannot escape responsibility—the ordained is in the position of power in any relationship and he or she must know and keep the boundaries of ethical sexual conduct. Yet denial is the pattern.

Initially, Haggard denied the relationship, but when evidence proved he had met the male prostitute monthly in a hotel room and bought drugs from him, the three-year leader of the NAE expressed sorrow for being a “deceiver and liar.” In a letter to his church, he expressed sorrow and disappointment for “the betrayal and hurt [and] the horrible example I have set for you.” Yet he continued to deny a sexual relationship or drug use.

The new interim president of the NAE, Leith Anderson (pastor of a Minnesota Baptist megachurch), added to the denials. “Most evangelicals . . . will understand that if there are 45,000 churches [in the NAE], that 44,999 of them have leaders that did not misbehave and that one person misbehaved and that that is an anomaly.” While I would agree that the majority of ministers are not guilty of sexual deviance,

Rev. Anderson’s assumption is blatantly naïve in the face of the facts—about 12% of his members (over 500) are probably involved in a sexual affair with a church member and as many as 15,000 might admit to “sexually inappropriate behavior.”

Most grievous to me is the statement by Gayle Haggard, the pastor’s wife (and who of us is not sympathetic for her and feels her grief?). In a humorous comment to the church’s women, she noted those who thought her marriage was “so perfect I could not relate to women who are facing great difficulties know that this will never be the case.” She closed by pledging her commitment to her husband: “My test has begun; watch me. I will try to prove myself faithful.” Where did that idea come from? Although I understand her mixed feelings, is not denial obvious?

Flawed Theology. A footnote to the entire sordid affair is what seems to be evidence of a flawed theology. Since reading a profound theological explanation by Roger Olsen (Truett Seminary professor) in *Christianity Today*, which linked the flawed theology of Pentecostalism (his own heritage) with the moral downfall of ministers like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker, I have reflected on his thesis. (And let me add that I know many more Baptists than Pentecostals who have fallen!)

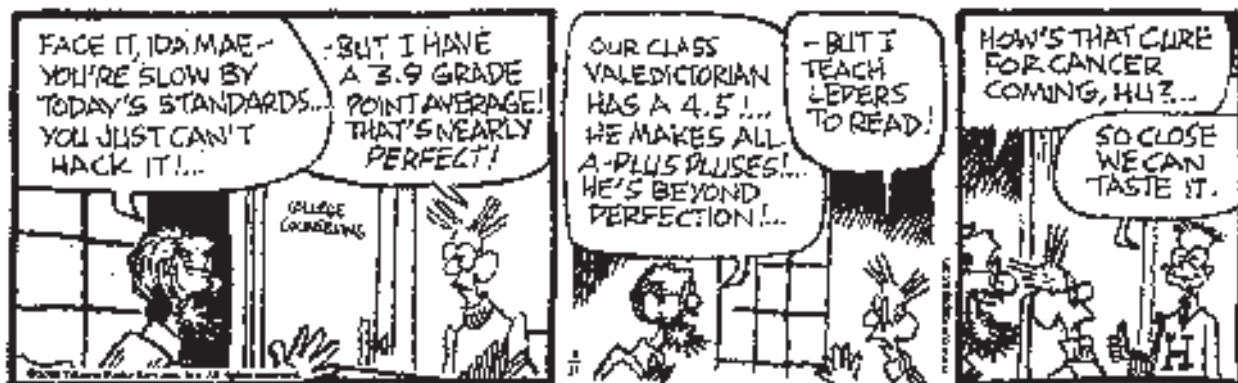
Listen to these comments by Ted Haggard: “I have fought these demons all my life. . . . There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I have been warring against it for all of my adult life. . . . The accusations leveled against me are not all true, but

enough of them are true that . . . I have been removed from ministry.” To be a Christian is “to be in a constant state of war.”

I remember Jimmy Swaggart’s description of his regular meetings with a prostitute in New Orleans. After each visit, he confessed that he would repent and feel forgiven and assume he was cured. But in a few weeks Swaggart would be back at the motel, watching the exotic dancer. Is there a flawed theology that convinces some ministers that they need only to “repent” and “pray” to solve this problem. Is the problem simply an “attack of Satan” or the work of “demons,” rather than one’s own human nature and inner weaknesses?

Myopic Restoration. According to an Associated Press story, restoration will include “prayer, and perhaps the laying on of hands. There will be counseling and a confession. And there will be advice, confrontation and rebuke from ‘godly men’ appointed to oversee the spiritual ‘restoration’ of the Rev. Ted Haggard.” Haggard has agreed to a process “that could last as long as five years.”

Who are these “counselors” who will oversee the restoration process? Are they trained, experienced, and skilled in this special area of clergy sexual abuse and misconduct? Are they aware of the nature of clergy sexual failures, and the difference between wanderers (one-time offenders), predators (sociopathic manipulators), pedophiles, and homosexuals? Do they understand that clergy sexual exploitation is not primarily about sex—it is an abuse of power



in a highly destructive manner?

The news reports indicate the ones overseeing restoration are fellow-mega-pastors—two are mentioned, Jack Hayford of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, CA, and Tommy Barnett of First Assembly of God in Phoenix. Both declined to discuss Mr. Haggard's program. If experienced counselors trained for counseling clergy with these specific problems are not used, rehabilitation is unlikely.

Afterchurch Realities. A pastor in the Northwest, who served a congregation after the previous minister's moral downfall, wrote his D.Min. dissertation on the "Afterchurch." I have also been pastor of an "Afterchurch," and I verify his conclusions about the difficult and long process of ministering to a congregation after their pastor has been guilty of sexual misconduct.

It appears New Life Church, like most congregations who face ministerial failure, is on the verge of several mistakes. First, they immediately called T.V. pastor Ross Parsley as "worship pastor." With high-sounding comments, he called on the people "when tragedy and crisis strikes" to "truly decide if you are a worshipper of the most high God."

Now all I know about Parsley is what I have seen on T.V. (and that is bad enough), but this comment proves to me he doesn't have a clue as to the needs of this Afterchurch. New Life needs a pastor who can help them deal with their grief and confusion as they face one of the greatest tragedies of their life—not a sermon on being faithful!

A church statement also said that Parsley will lead the church "until a permanent replacement for Mr. Haggard is chosen by the end of the year." Someone assumes that as soon as a new pastor comes (in two months!), the crisis will be passed and the church will move on as if nothing has happened. Dream on.

Anyone who has dealt with an Afterchurch will verify that it takes just as long for church restoration, as it does for the offending pastor. Often a church is in turmoil for 2-3 years,

sometimes longer. In the Afterchurch I pastored, we were still struggling with some aftereffects in the fifth year after the event.

Wounded Victims. Clergy sexual misconduct is often one of those secrets of church life concealed from public scrutiny. A "code of silence" is sometimes enforced. Most people deny or ignore an incident. But this is destructive.

The focus of attention is usually on the minister. Colleagues and parishioners either come to his defense, or if guilty, offer empathy and grace. Not a few find in time their sadness turns to anger and resentment.

But there are many other overlooked victims. What about the minister's spouse? The wife is devastated—her marriage is in jeopardy, her calling and ministry dissolves, her children are asking questions, her days in the parsonage are numbered, the family income is affected, and most of all, she asks, "Who is this man I married?"

It is not uncommon, by the way, for children in this marriage to rebel against God and church, often indulging in risky behavior—drugs, illicit sex, and heavy drinking.

Other ministers also feel the impact of ministerial immorality. Like waves from the wake of a passing ship, clergy sexual misconduct washes muddy waters across the reputation of ministry at large. Indeed, all ministers and churches are hurt, when one minister fails.

Tony Campolo notes another important truth. After we get over our anger and prayerfully weep for brother Ted, his family, and the congregation, we must not overlook the suffering of Mike Jones, the male prostitute who blew the whistle on Haggard. On a blog site (*belief.net.com*, Nov. 9, 2006), Campolo notes, "It is all too easy to ignore the suffering of Mike Jones . . . [he] will also be hurt. His life will never be the same. He will always be scorned and a marked man."

Campolo then asks some tough questions: What drove him into prostitution? Does the church bear any responsibility toward him? How will all

of this impact the gay community?

One news story carried a statement made by Mike Jones to reporters: "I am sad for [Haggard] and his family. I know this is a tough day for him also. I wish him well. I wish his family well. My intent was never to destroy his family. My intent was to expose a hypocrite."

Yes, both Ted and Mike are facing the dark side of their humanity. Both need what only God and the people of God can offer—prayer, grace, and hope for a better tomorrow. In the midst of this sordid affair, let not the church or its leaders overlook issues that may well determine the ultimate healing and health of a great host of people who have suffered the pains of this ministerial failure. ■

- 1 *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders 2nd Ed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) is co-authored with James E. Carter.
- 2 *Broken Trust: Confronting Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, Dallas: Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, TX 75246. The new chapter (7) in the second edition of the text *Ministerial Ethics* is an expansion of my basic research and writing for this booklet.
- 3 In 2006, the author has addressed this subject at ministerial ethics conferences at Truett Seminary/Baylor and the McAfee School of Theology/Mercer, as well as to 12 colleges and universities since 2000.
- 4 See Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 164-165. Equally disturbing is the fact that this rate of abuse among clergy generally exceeds the client-professional rate for physicians and psychologists.
- 5 See *Broken Trust*, 23-42 for specific suggestions and sample policies and procedures for churches.

A War of Words About War

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Alasdair MacIntyre's opening parable in *After Virtue* has enjoyed amazing staying power among moral philosophers. I wish I had a dollar for every time it has been retold. Repeated in numerous contexts, the parable tells of a civilization that destroys the discipline of science and rids itself of scientists, but continues to circulate the vocabulary of science. In so doing, the people of this civilization mistake the use of certain terms and phrases for the actual practice of science. The long-standing assumption is that this parable in some way describes the American state of affairs with regards to the discipline of morality. MacIntyre's point is that the language of right and wrong is still with us, but the practice of virtues has long been forgotten. His assessment of the moral scene has, notwithstanding a few detractors,¹ been the dominant account for the past twenty years.

However, something unexpected happened in the wake of September 11, 2001. The White House, many political pundits, ministers, and grass roots leaders instantly responded to the atrocity with strong moral rhetoric.² President George W. Bush, in his historic address to Congress on September 20, proclaimed a "war on terror" in Afghanistan and around the world, calling the perpetrators of the 9-11 attacks "enemies of freedom" who "hate our freedoms."³ After a military scouring of Afghanistan, attention was turned to Iraq, where again national leaders invoked the moral language of accountability (to weapons inspectors), freedom to the oppressed Iraqi people, and the need to remove a wicked and cruel dictator from power. The rhetoric about war on terrorism has proved to be much more than speech-making—it has become serious moral commitment. American Armed Forces took direct action in Iraq, as they did in Afghanistan, and young men and women stepped forward to serve their

country with remarkable courage and patriotism.

So, in response to this burst of moral language and action, the time has come to ask if MacIntyre's vision still represents reality. Is there real moral fiber in America today? Is there a "common good" toward which most citizens are working, or is there no agreed upon goods worth pursuing, except the personal advance of the individual? Is there a viable, public moral tradition that is shaping virtues and values of the "average American" (if there exists such a species to begin with) or have relativism and individualism reduced all virtues and values to personal preferences?

The initial premise of this essay is that, contrary to the inference of MacIntyre's tale with regards to the fate of moral philosophy, serious thinking about right and wrong at the popular and academic level has *not* collapsed or disappeared or gone defunct. Popular ethics is alive and well, if at times rather diffuse and accommodating. As the September 11 crisis has made clear, there is a broadly identifiable American ethos grounded in a strong sense of justice, freedom, pragmatism, and utility. The aim of this paper is not to detail this American ethos, but to consider its relationship to the Christian voice. My contention is that the reassertion of the American tradition has put Christian ethicists, pastors, and moral theologians in a quandary as to how to respond. There is a peculiar *awkwardness* in recent Christian thinking about war, violence, and the virtues. Indeed, the one common thread that ties together the majority of responses to the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq from the Christian community is their awkwardness, which stands in contrast to the popular American sentiment of freedom and justice.

The Triumph of Pragmatism

The church is often looked to for

wisdom and advice in times of crisis. When this happens, Christian leaders often feel obliged to respond in a non-sectarian, and sometimes even non-religious fashion, so as to reach the broadest audience possible. Two examples of this approach are Jean Bethke Elshtain, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at University of Chicago, and George Hunsinger, the Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Both are public intellectuals of enormous prestige. Both have written numerous articles and essays on the current U. S. policies in Iraq and Afghanistan; in fact, from February to April of 2004, they carried on an exchange over these issues in the *Christian Century*.⁴ While each takes a radically different view on the U. S. war on terror to make their different cases, each appeals to the American values of justice and freedom and the American virtues of pragmatism and utility.

In her book-length defense of President Bush's aggressive response to terrorist threats and attacks on America, *Just War Against Terror*, Jean Bethke Elshtain wants to make clear that, in the words of Hannah Arendt, "politics is not the nursery."⁵ She contends that many Christian moralists and pastors have responded to the politics of terror and security in a way that is infantile and naive, as if they were in the nursery not in the cold, hard world of reality. For instance, she cites the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Reverend Canon John L. Peterson, for his condemnation of U. S. bombings and invasion of Afghanistan, what he calls America's "new colonialism", as outrageously simplistic and irresponsible.⁶ Elshtain also chides Tony Campolo, representing the more evangelical Christians, for his unjustified and historically inappropriate comparison of the Bush foreign policy with the Crusades of the medieval era.⁷ She urges

Christian intellectuals and pastors to leave their nursery-like ideals and enter the real world of complex international politics. Christians must abandon wistful longings for a nonviolent utopia where turning the other cheek and praying for one's enemies is the extent of one's duty. To this end, she calls for a revival of the great Christian Realism tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.⁸ John Richard Neuhaus echoes Elshtain's pleas for a more realistic, gritty Christian discipleship that, "in obedience to the command to love the neighbor...defend[s] the innocent by engaging in a just war against a murderous aggressor."⁹ The action follows directly from the principle; defending thy neighbor is a necessary, practical requirement of loving thy neighbor. It is a simple matter of pragmatics.

Elshstain clearly states that she does not "desire a fusion of religious and political power, for such is an invitation to idolatry."¹⁰ Instead, she insists upon a rigid division between church issues and state issues. The American state is "secular" in nature, although this does not necessarily imply that the society itself is "secular" in the sense of "godless."¹¹ At any rate, in order to preserve and respect the secular nature of the state, one must approach state issues from a religiously neutral and unbiased perspective. The question about war on terror is not, according to Elshtain's definition, a religious one. The question is: "What is America's special burden in light of its extraordinary power?" If this is the guiding question, then surely the answer must be that America's moral burden weighs heavy. By virtue of being the world's superpower, America has a responsibility to intervene on behalf of other people groups oppressed and without power; this is in addition to the assumed burden of protecting U. S. interests abroad. The issue has nothing to do with one's religious affiliation or even one's moral preferences, the issue is one of *practical necessity*.

On the other side of the debate, George Hunsinger, a professional theologian and Karl Barth scholar by trade, opposes the U. S. policies of intervention, preemption, and polic-

ing. Hunsinger's reasons for opposition are not explicitly religious or confessional—at least in his published pieces—rather, like Elshtain, they are forthrightly pragmatic. Early on in the debates, Hunsinger made a clearly articulated case against an invasion of Iraq. In a notable 2002 piece that has been reproduced in a number of venues, "Iraq: Don't Go There,"¹² Hunsinger laid out an impassioned plea for restraint.

In that article, he addresses the burden of America power by asking if the U. S. is justified to invade: "Does Hussein actually possess weapons of mass destruction? And if so, do they pose a clear and imminent danger to the U. S. or its allies?"¹³ He answers both questions in the negative. But, what if one were to look at the same body of evidence and conclude just the opposite? Would Hunsinger have to concede that intervention in Iraq is warranted? He offers no moral virtue or theological principle to guide the reader in his or her judgment of the data. One can infer that Hunsinger's ultimate desire is peace by peaceable means. But, he never suggests what might prevent a nation from intervening in the politics of another nation if they indeed had solid evidence that that nation posed a threat.

Addressing those who nonetheless believe Hussein does pose an immediate threat, Hunsinger poses a third question: Does America have a "reasonable chance of success?"¹⁴ He believes that any invasion of Iraq would be costly, both in terms of money and soldiers, and that it would entail a prolonged occupation with no clear exit-strategy. In this line of reasoning, Hunsinger is representative of many of the anti-war arguments bantered about for the past couple of years by Christians and non-Christians alike. Hunsinger does not offer a Christian or even a religious perspective. His argument could be made by anyone, anywhere. The guiding philosophical principle of his argument is the same as Elshtain's: pragmatism.

Arguably, both make legitimate claims to just war criteria when they pose their cases for and against military action. Elshtain goes to great

lengths to justify the military operations in Afghanistan on just war principles. Likewise, just war criteria guide Hunsinger's evaluation of U. S. war policy. But since when has the Christian position on war and violence been decided by the pragmatics of just war theory, reasonable chances of success, practical necessity, and homeland security? Anyone who reads the ongoing debates in Christian circles over peace-making and violence might easily get the impression that the centerpiece of Jesus' ethics was his theory of just war!

Seriously, there is a sense that any Christian consideration of violence and politics that does not address the just war tradition is somehow defective. Indeed, Darrell Cole intentionally describes the just war position as a "doctrine," because of its longevity within the Christian tradition.¹⁵ But, as William T. Cavanaugh reminds us, just war criteria first appeared not as an independent standard for judging any hypothetical nation's military activity. Rather, the tradition "developed as a form of moral reasoning *within* the Church, most often in the context of the confessional. Whether or not a war was just had an effect on the length of penance that was imposed on those who had killed as an act of war (with penances of up to one year imposed on soldiers who killed, even in a just war)."¹⁶ A petition to the just war tradition, either for or against the American foreign policy, is not the final or perhaps even the most important court of appeals for the Christian. Further, in my opinion, it is used by Elshtain, Hunsinger and others as a Christian gloss on an issue that has already been decided by the pragmatic criteria of necessity, security, and feasibility.

So, the real issue is not the just war tradition, but pragmatism. The theoretical debate over the value and viability of moral pragmatism is longstanding and undecided. But, at the level of application in the public square, pragmatism surely fails. One example will suffice. In the Raleigh *News and Observer*, an editorial was submitted by Kimberly Yaman entitled "Questionable Anti-Terror

Tactic: If we're going to hold children hostage, how about some standards?"¹⁷ Yaman investigated a *Wall Street Journal* report by Jess Bravin and Gary Fields claiming that "Americans have access to two of [Khalid Shaikh Mohammed's] elementary-school-age children." According to the report, "The children were captured in a September raid."¹⁸ Yaman's research, which included contacting various senators offices, and the U. S. Department of Defense, elicited no denials of the reports, "saying only that commanders have the discretion to do what they believe is necessary."¹⁹

My concern is not with the alleged practice of abducting children of terrorists to use as leverage, which is certainly deplorable if true, but with Yaman's own criticism of the practice. She rightly condemns the practice as "barbaric," but then she reflects:

I recognize that the United States is unlikely to stop using the tactics of detaining children to get to their parents. If that is so, *sheer pragmatism* calls for rules ensuring oversight and some degree of transparency to the process.²⁰

For the remainder of the editorial, she enumerates ways to make the practice of kidnapping children "transparent." Yaman's editorial reveals the hollowness of "sheer pragmatism" in the face of complex moral issues. She is morally offended by the practice, but admits to having no justification for her offense beyond her own squeamishness. She confesses that her sensibilities do not serve the practical necessity of the situation. Pragmatism demands that we do what is necessary, that we follow the most efficient and effective course—the course that generates results. We must swallow our fears and "do what it takes." All standards and principles and moral values are secondary to practical necessity, so "If we're going to hold children hostage," we can apply "standards" only as a bureaucratic afterthought.

Certainly, neither Elshtain nor Hunsinger are as simplistically pragmatic as Yaman. Yet, insofar as their arguments are indebted to and founded upon an appeal to transparency of procedures, reasonable chances of success,

and the empirical necessities of homeland security, they suffer from a similar malaise.

The Courage of Achilles

The anxiety that Christian ethicists feel is that, if they abandon the logic of practicality and efficiency in order to adopt a more Gospel-centered discipleship-ethic of faith, hope and love, then they will be labeled sectarian, or worse, fundamentalist. When one enters the public square, one must speak in the common dialect of the square. One cannot lean on peculiarly Christian arguments, rather one must reach for more universal standards of freedom, justice, and feasibility. This kind of thinking has been shredded by Stanley Hauerwas and others on dozens of occasions.²¹ But there is another anxiety: the anxiety that if we finally declare allegiance to Jesus and the nonviolent way, then we must simultaneously condemn the American military and American soldiers—many of whom are also Christians—for their engagement in violence. This puts American Christians in an odd position of appearing ungrateful for the sacrifices of the men and women of the armed services and for the freedoms we enjoy because of those sacrifices. So, must Christian non-violence be unpatriotic? If we follow the peaceable way of Christ, must we condemn the American ways of justice and freedom, which unapologetically involve violence, as wicked and cowardly?

A line from the late James McClendon's *Ethics* seems fitting at this point. In his discussion of virtues, McClendon comments: "The courage of Jesus is not the courage of Achilles."²² Both Jesus and Achilles demonstrate courage, and at some level, both should be praised for their courage. We should not say that Jesus had courage and Achilles had something less than courage, but rather we must affirm that they both exhibited true courage, though certainly not the same kinds of courage. Jesus' was the courage of sacrifice, Achilles' was the courage of combat. Courage is not a universal category; the Gospel writers define it differently than Homer. Similarly, it seems unproduc-

tive for Christians to censure the violence of American soldiers in the name of a higher way of peace. We should recognize that young men and women like Pat Tillman, the soldier who voluntarily gave up his NFL contract to join the fight for freedom in Afghanistan, are exhibiting true courage, not ignorance or heathen aggressiveness. What they do for their country is very courageous, noble, and just, and it should be applauded as such. Karl Barth might have said the American military, fighting for justice, freedom, and democracy, represents a profound secular parable of the Kingdom of God.

While acknowledging the courage of freedom and justice attached to armed service for one's country, Christians must admit that the way of military service conflicts at a number of points with Christ's way of peace. Christians are committed to the peaceable reconciliation of the world in Christ. Christian Relief Services, World Vision, and other Christian peace and relief organizations offer alternative ways to serve. But, lest it be missed, the theological issue at stake behind the Christian refusal of violence, which includes military violence, is key. As Jacques Ellul has pointed out, violence is part of the "natural" and "necessary" operations of nations. So, Nicholas Rengger may be correct when he says that, "We can agree that the United States was right to strike back at those that had attacked it, agree also that such a response, inasmuch as it was limited and proportional, was just."²³ But if the "we" in Rengger's statement is a Christian "we," then the statement, as such, is incomplete.

Christians should recognize that nations will defend themselves—when America does this she is following the natural, necessary, and practical order of things. But the nation of God, Christ's body, the kingdom of the saints here on earth does not live by such a strategy. Christians have been freed by Christ from the pragmatic trap of what is *natural* and *necessary*. Christians, according to Ellul, "must struggle against violence precisely because, apart from Christ, violence is the form that human relations normally and necessarily take.

In other words, the more completely violence seems to be of the order of necessity, the greater the obligation of believers in Christ's Lordship."²⁴

The Christian stance cannot be reduced to a question of pacifism or just war. The first question must be: Has Christ really freed us from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2)? Has Christ freed us from the necessity of nature and violence? The Christian engagement with the powers that are in the world must flow unapologetically from the new law of the Spirit, the product of which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on. The Christian *polis* is sustained by the weakness of the one who was crucified but raised from death.

Christians are summoned to the peaceable reconciliation of the world in Christ. Commitment to Christ must be our starting point for considering questions of war and peacemaking. The outcome of this commitment is that our highest priority shifts from justice, which is central to American civic life, to redeeming love (2 Cor 5:19-20). The highest affirmation of the follower of Christ does not involve the phrase that "all men are created equal," as laudable as that truth is, but the declaration that "God so loved the world." This is the announcement that inaugurates peace on earth and good will toward all. ■

- 1 Most notably, Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 204 and most recently, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), esp. 122, 125.
- 2 John Richard Neuhaus captures the spirit of the response from many involved in politics and religion when he wrote in December, 2001, "This is war. Call it a sustained battle or campaign, if you will, but the relevant moral term is war." John Richard Neuhaus, "In a Time of War," *First Things* (December 2001), 11. Of course, not all responses were as patriotic or clear-cut. The immediate reaction from the art community was mixed. Terry Teachout reports on the various post 9-11 responses from

- musicians, artists, playwrights, and actors in "Prime-Time Patriotism," *Commentary* 112.4 (Nov 2001), 51-4.
- 3 President George W. Bush, *Our Mission and Our Moment: Speeches Since the Attacks of September* (Washington, D. C.: White House Printing Office, 2002), 10, 11.
- 4 George Hunsinger, "Fog of War," *Christian Century* 121.3 (February 10, 2004), 11; "Iraq: An Exchange," *Christian Century* 121.7 (April 6, 2004) Jean Bethke Elshtain responded to "Fog of War," 57-60 and George Hunsinger replied 61-65.
- 5 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 2.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 99-111.
- 9 John Richard Neuhaus, "In a Time of War," 14.
- 10 Jean Bethke Elshtain, Reply to Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Griffiths, *First Things* 136 (October 2003), 47.
- 11 Elshtain, *Just War*, 37.
- 12 The article was first published in *Christian Century* 119.17 (August 25, 2002), 10-11, was reprinted in *Christian Ethics Today* 41 (October 2002), 4, and can also be found at Common Dreams Newscenter, www.commondreams.org. He also read a version of this at a Bonhoeffer section meeting during the American Academy of Religion annual meeting in November, 2003. Hunsinger follows a similar line of argument against any pre-emptive war in Iraq, asking such questions as, "Did Saddam Hussein gas the Kurds?" in "Before the Shooting Starts" in *Christian Century* 119.21 (October 9, 2002), 8-9.
- 13 Hunsinger, "Iraq," 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Darrell Cole, "Good Wars," *First Things* 116 (October 2001), 27. When confronted with this assertion in a letter to the editor by Stanley Hauerwas and Alexander Sider, Cole replied, "I see no reason to dispense with the term 'just war doctrine.' If a high degree of coherency among many theologians is necessary for a body of reflection to be called a 'doctrine,' then there would be

- few if any Christian doctrines."
- 16 William T. Cavanaugh, "Terrorist Enemies and Just War," *Christian Reflection* 12 (2004),
- 17 Kimberly Yaman, "Questionable Anti-Terror Tactic," *News and Observer* (March 29, 2004).
- 18 Jess Bravin and Gary Fields, "How Do U. S. Interrogators Make a Captured Terrorist Talk?" *The Wall Street Journal* (March 4, 2003), B.1.
- 19 Yaman.
- 20 *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.
- 21 Hauerwas and Paul Griffiths' co-authored response to Elshtain in *First Things* was in many ways unusual and inadequate because it did not put forward the critique of translating Christian values into universal values that has become so characteristic of the Hauerwas project. The vast majority of the correspondence published in the following issue of *First Things* was critical of the Hauerwas-Griffiths review (see *First Things* 139 (January 2004), 2-18). The reason (though not explicitly stated in the letters to the editor) seemed to stem from the fact that Hauerwas and Griffiths engage Elshtain on Elshtain's own terms of public discourse and national good. For the greater part of the review, they attack her understanding of America, its power and its responsibilities, not, as one might hope, her understanding of the Christian church's responsibility and power in the face of terror. Only in the second to last paragraph do Hauerwas and Griffiths make a vague reference to "her elision of the boundary between the category 'Christian' and the category 'American.'" Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Griffiths, "War, Peace & Jean Bethke Elshtain," *First Things* 136 (October 2003), 43.
- 22 James McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 115.
- 23 Nicholas Rengger, "Just a War Against Terror? Jean Bethke Elshtain's Burden and American Power," *International Affairs* 80.1 (2004), 115.
- 24 Jacques Ellul, *Violence*, translated by Cecelia Kings (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 127-8.

Democracy in Iraq: Is it Possible?

By Charles Luke, Superintendent of Schools Gainesville Independent School District, Texas

With all of the posturing regarding the installation of free elections and the opining by the Bush administration that such elections are indications of the further development of a democratic form of government in Iraq, little real progress towards a democracy in that country is evident. This is not surprising, since democracy in most free countries has taken centuries to develop. That the Bush administration, and any future U.S. administration, has an uphill battle in this arena, is an understatement. The current approach to the installation of democracy, coupled with an unrealistic timetable, ensures the failure of a truly democratic government to take root and grow in Iraq. There are several fundamental principles regarding a democracy that should be considered by the current administration.

First, democracies almost always begin from within, originating from a political evolution that dictates shared power. Early democracies, including the constitutional monarchy that developed from early feudal England, have all been fueled by power seizures of specific groups interested in protecting and controlling their various spheres of influence. As the interests of those societies became more diverse, it became apparent that a monarchy or dictatorship would no longer suffice to rule them. Regional expression cried out for a different form of governance.

This leads to a second principle of democracies—that they have long developmental histories. The democracy of the United States did not emerge as it is today within a few short years. Our democracy has taken centuries to develop, directly traceable to the democratic development of England. The development of a primarily two-party system, a bicameral legislature, a stronger form of federalism, and even the inclusion of all of

our citizens in the democratic process did not formulate as it is today over a few years, but over a long period of time. It is fair to say that our democracy is still developing and may look very different within another century.

Next, democracies are cultural affairs. Democracies have typically come from the evolutionary thought development of the Western mind with its strong bent toward categorization, separation, and compartmentalization. Eastern thought historically tends to favor less separation in making sense of the world, preferring rather to see the world as a more blended place. To expect the culture of the Arab world in Iraq to embrace democratic principles and develop them at an accelerated pace is unrealistic.

So, what can the Bush administration do to foment the rise of democracy in the Middle East, and in particular in Iraq? Alon Ben-Meir in his article “Democracy of Convenience?”¹ recommends several steps.

First, Meir says the administration should pursue all changes gradually. Given their long history of authoritarian rule, during which Islam has been the dominant factor, Iraqis are more prone to favor the rights of the collective over the rights of the individual. Since democracies are based on individual rights, this concept will have to be given time and incentive to take root.

Second, provide economic incentives for the local communities of Iraq. Economic incentives must be ensured that affect the daily lives of Iraqi citizens through the development of hospitals, libraries, schools, and agricultural and business development.

Next, encourage the development of democratic institutions including a free press, free and liberal organizations, a fair court system, and a strong legal basis for human rights protection. These institutions have emerged

in most democracies only after many years and tend to lead to the development of political parties representing the diverse opinions of the citizenship. In Iraq it will be important that these institutions develop separate from governmental control to ensure their integrity.

Fourth, reform the educational institutions of Iraq. In order to ensure sustainable democracy in the region, it will be necessary to educate the next generation of Iraqis in the tenets of a free and democratic system, the value of free opinion, and the love of personal civil liberties.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Ben-Meir advocates that the Bush administration must convince the Iraqi people that the U.S. actually has their best interests at heart. While “winning the hearts and minds of a people” is a phrase that invokes the ghosts of failure that embodied American involvement in Vietnam, that is exactly what the current U.S. government must do in order to ensure a movement toward true democracy in Iraq. The best way to do so is by giving them an interest and control in the development of their own country that allows gradual change, provides local economic incentives, allows the development of supportive institutions, and provides for continued sustainability through education. Ultimately, in order to take root, any democratic system must connect to and improve the human condition. ■

1 Ben-Meir, Alon. *Democracy of Convenience?* November 7, 2005. Downloaded from http://www.alonben-meir.com/articles/democracy_of_convenience.htm.

Is There A War On Christmas?

By J. Brent Walker, Exec. Dir. Baptist Joint Committee, Washington, D.C.

Are “Christian haters” and “professional atheists” engaged in an all-out war on Christmas, as FOX News anchor John Gibson claims? I don’t think so—unless one is prepared to say that President Bush and the First Lady are leading the effort. Last year’s White House greeting card extends “best wishes for a holiday season of hope and happiness.” No mention of “Merry Christmas” from the First Family.

About a dozen holy days are observed by various religious groups between Thanksgiving and New Year’s. For decades we have been confronted by that “December dilemma” of how to acknowledge and celebrate winter religious holidays, usually in the context of the schools, in a way that is constitutional and culturally sensitive. People of good faith, including the Baptist Joint Committee, have worked long and hard to develop guidelines that comply with the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the First Amendment’s religion clauses, and respect the amazing religious diversity in this country.

There is widespread agreement that:

- Holiday concerts in the public schools can and should include religious music along with the secular, as long as the sacred does not dominate.
- Religious dramatic productions can be presented in the public schools as long as they do not involve worship and are part of an effort to use religious holidays as an occasion to teach about religion.
- Free standing crèches, as thoroughly religious Christian symbols, should not be sponsored by government, but Christmas trees and menorahs are sufficiently secular to allow their display without a constitutional problem.

Having settled many of the legal issues, some are now bent on fighting battles in a culture war against an enemy that does not exist. Some on the religious and media right lament political correctness run amok by calling a Christmas tree a “holiday tree” and extending “seasons greetings” instead of “Merry Christmas.” In fact, they have threatened lawsuits to rectify such indiscretions and, in the private sector, encouraged a boycott of merchants that fail to use the right words.

What irony and how sad to be picking a fight over what to call a season that for many celebrates the coming of the Prince of Peace. We would all do well to take a deep breath and exercise some common sense as we think and talk about this season.

Christmas is Christmas and a tree is a tree. There’s nothing wrong with calling it what it is: a Christmas tree. And it is perfectly appropriate to extend a specific holiday greeting such as my Jewish friends do when they wish me a “Merry Christmas,” and I return a “Happy Hanukkah.”

But often it’s quite appropriate to wish another “happy holidays” or “season’s greetings.” It’s just a matter of good manners and common courtesy. If I am talking to a person whose religious affiliation I do not know, I will employ the more general greeting. And the same goes for merchants who have advertised goods to Americans of many religious traditions who may or may not celebrate Christmas.

None of this disparages Christmas one iota or diminishes my enjoyment of it in the least. Then why are these culture warriors bound to start a brouhaha in the midst of the love, joy, peace and hope of Advent?

It’s part of a concerted effort to affirm the mythical “Christian nation” status of the United States. (By the way, the Puritans and many other religious people well into the 19th century

refused to celebrate Christmas because they thought it was unchristian and not supported by Scripture). So, in the words of the title of the Beatles song, “I, Me, Mine,” it’s all about ME and the brash assertion of MY supposed right to impose my religion on others.

Moreover, and I hope it is not a too jaded thought, these bombastic diatribes about a war on Christmas attract publicity and make for good fund raising. (If the truth be known, the Christmas spirit is threatened more by runaway commercialism—beginning just after Halloween, than by any supposed cultural hostility to a holiday that more than 90 percent of our citizens celebrate.)

No, we do not need government promoting our religious holidays to the exclusion of others. Nor do we need a corps of purity police trying to dissuade our efforts to respect the religious diversity that is the hallmark of this country.

To all of our readers, then: Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a Joyous Kwanzaa, Martyrdom Day of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Bodhi Day, Maunajiyaras Day, Beginning of Masa’il, Nisf Sha’ban and Yalda Night, Yule and Shinto Winter Solstice, and Ramadan! Or, happy holidays! ■

Note: This article was originally published in Report From the Capital (Nov-Dec 2005), newsletter of the Baptist Joint Committee, Washington, D.C., and is used by permission.

Evangelicals and Election Day

By Martin E. Marty, University of Chicago Divinity School

With regard to the recent election—was it a seismic or glacial change?—I want to make one observation or suggestion. (It's in the "watch your language" category.) Ever since my article "The New Christian Right" appeared in the *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook 1981*, I've quietly argued that in political contexts the term "the New Christian Right" should be used in place of "Evangelicals," which is what the public media have chosen to use—and which they regularly misuse. The "Christian Right," then as now, I wrote, spoke only for "a minority of evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Protestantism," and included some "Roman Catholics, who shared some of the New Christian Right's viewpoint," especially against abortion. That "minority," of course, has since grown.

If these together do not make up all of "evangelicalism," many evangelicals also are not fully at home on the political right. That was clear back when many took up the "it's the economy, stupid" theme in the Clinton years. Columnist Andrew Greeley and Michael Hout, in their important little book *The Truth About Conservative Christians*, provide ample

sociological data to show that class, region, party, and self-interest also go into the mix of "evangelical" voting patterns, and only a minority of evangelicals is hard-Right. Reviewing the 2004 elections, they wrote that religion remained the story "because it suits both the interests that want to further the influence of their brand of religion . . . and those who want to raise money to stop them." Each spooks out the other, most media, as well as many of us in the public.

The 2006 election was a partial de-spooker. Many in the Christian Right showed their frustration before, during, and after the election, feeling that their candidates and party did not deliver. On Greeley lines, we can read more declarations of independence from the Christian Right by many evangelicals, especially as they now put energies into other issues that they find religiously important (e.g., the environment, immigration policies, etc.). In 2004, had a couple tens of thousands of Ohioans voted differently, commentators would likely have said that the Right had met its limits and would fade. Instead, reporters had only asked voters in exit polls whether they had voted their values.

Many said "yes." But who wouldn't, and who didn't, vote their values? That question was a blunt instrument. Now we shall look to John Green, Greeley and Hout, and Chris Smith, among others, to sharpen the tools of measurement and focus our lenses.

My take: The Christian Right took shape in the 1980s with the motives of the "politics of resentment," its members having long felt, and been, disdained. In the years of the Reagan charm, they found it easy to gain power, so they moved to the "politics of will-to-power," still voicing resentment. Many sounded as if they should and maybe could "win it all" and "run the show."

They have now begun to learn what mainline Protestants and mainline evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and humanists know: No one is simply going to "run the show" in the American pluralist mix, as we watch shifting powers face off against other shifting powers, which is what happened again last Tuesday on election day. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (11/13/06), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Why Pastors Dread Talking About Money

By Tarris D. Rosell, Assoc. Prof. of Pastoral Theology & Ethics Central Baptist Theological Seminary, KS

Stewardship programs and pastors don't mix any better than oil and water. The way it's put by many ecclesial stewardship and mission promoters is that preachers have a perennial problem talking to parishioners about money. Contrary to conventional wisdom, I think that a better stewardship program is not the answer to this problem; nor will it be resolved by motivational talks to pastors about why they ought to talk stewardship with their people. The answer lies rather in morality and ethics.

Actually, I don't know whether or not it would be factually accurate to claim that preachers don't talk much about money. It seems to me that in my own sermons and those of my pastors, we have not infrequently addressed financial and material concerns. There is a good biblical case to be made for doing so. Depending on how and what one counts, I'm told there are somewhere between 800 and 2500 biblical references to wealth and poverty. Many such sayings are attributed to Jesus (who, in contrast, seems not to have said one thing about homosexuality). Surely we ought to be preaching and teaching about the things Jesus taught also, as well as on issues of biblical concern.

What surely is true, as well, is that

pastors often do experience a sense of discomfort when speaking or preaching on financial giving relative to the church's budget and program. This may not be a matter of timidity or insufficient training, however. Might our discomfort be instead a matter mostly of personal morals and professional ethics?

It is a point of pastoral sensitivity when we are hesitant to shame financially challenged congregants into tithing behaviors, or when we are sympathetic to the economic situations of those for whom even minimal giving would be impossible without additional borrowing. The widow's mite ought not to be placed in the offering plate if it really belongs to a legitimate creditor; and denominational stewardship programs don't often address the preliminary problem for many North Americans of consumer debt and chronic deficit spending. Some of the latter is not from moral turpitude so much as systemic oppression or bad luck. One major hospitalization in this country, where healthcare access is tied to employment based medical insurance, can put a middle class family over the edge and into virtual indentured servitude to medical creditors or their collectors.

Despite what we say about percent-

age giving on a spectrum starting with the widow's mite, wealthier givers tend to get off comparably easy. An eroding middle class cohort of congregants may be the only ones really expected and exhorted to give sacrificially. While those of much means receive accolades for their measure of tithes given out of abundance, the increasingly less affluent receive little more from ethically insensitive preachers than a challenge to do more. Other pastors who eschew shaming the relative poor are to be commended.

Some church members in every socioeconomic bracket are exceedingly generous souls, but feel called of God to respond to support appeals beyond that of just the church. If they are able to give away as much as ten percent of their income, it may be divided between the church, the Scouts, United Way, a homeless shelter, the local rape crisis center, and the nonprofit organization for which they work.

Is this wrong? An ethically astute pastor knows otherwise. What sort of arrogance is it that would claim and proclaim moral and fiscal hegemony of my own congregational agenda over that of a hundred other worthy charitable causes in the community and world? Why should the church not have to make its case for legitimacy of



support right alongside all the other nonprofits whose humanitarian services make the world a better place for all of us to live?

A ministry ethics issue at the heart of pastoral discomfort with stewardship programs is that pertaining to an inherent conflict of interest. When the preacher talks to her people about money that will ultimately end up as pastoral salary, discomfort is ethically appropriate. In small congregations, and some large ones, the biggest budget item is the pastor's compensation package. How does one avoid conflict of interest ethics code violation, and inducing congregants' cynicism, when the exhortation to give money "to God" clearly entails an economic benefit to the exhorter?

This also goes against the ethical grain of pastoral service. We who are called of God to serve the Church as pastors do so without assessing fees or hope of financial gain. The Church provides the clergy with salary support so that we are free to practice for free, charging nothing to those who need pastoral care. Most pastoral counseling specialists and some spiritual directors do practice their ministry arts on a fee-for-service basis, but they have never resolved adequately the profes-

sional tension and moral dissonance this creates. Likewise, the ethically sensitive pastor becomes understandably uncomfortable when asked to ask the congregation for budget money that significantly includes pastoral salary and benefits.

If stewardship promotion really is not about the budget or raising money, as promoters will protest, then let's do the program in February after the annual meeting and leave out the pledge cards. No? Then it is about money after all, which of course is not a bad thing.

Only the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. And indeed someone or some group in every organization must attend to the budget. That someone would be the president, CEO, executive director, development or institutional advancement personnel in most nonprofits. Ought this role to be filled by the pastor within a church, or does that special calling and code ethically exempt one instead from fundraising of this sort? Maybe the only fundraising to be done by pastors is that exclusively designated for external mission, or else untainted capital campaigns not aimed at personal kingdom building. We have not given sufficient thought to that pos-

sibility, grounded in ministry ethics.

There is yet another possibility to consider. It may be that the love of money is the biggest reason many of us clergy feel discomfort in the role of financial stewardship promoter. I am referring now to our own idolatry, not that of parishioners. They too are prone to make and worship golden calves, if rather less prone to part with the precious metals requisite for congregationally casting one. Yet, few North American preachers, including this one, live anywhere near a lifestyle reminiscent of the Christ we otherwise claim to emulate and follow.

Those clergy who live simply on account of a sort of forced poverty may feel uncomfortable addressing monetary matters from the pulpit because of personal resentment at congregations deemed stingy. Chosen poverty, or at least a radically simplified lifestyle, likely would have a different effect upon stewardship preaching. It may render such preaching unnecessary, given that actions speak louder than words and the most powerful sermon is one that is lived. Perhaps then it is not a better stewardship program that is needed by many of us, but more moral integrity of pastoral stewardship practices. ■



Let's Kill the Death Penalty

By Tom Teepen, Columnist Cox Newspapers, Atlanta, GA

The U.S. Supreme Court has relieved the nation of the considerable international embarrassment of being just about the only nation that still executed juveniles, but that welcome progress still begs the larger question of the death penalty itself.

In recent years, the high court has been tiptoeing back toward that core issue in small steps. In 1988, it barred the execution of juveniles under 16. Three years ago, it ended the execution of the mentally retarded.

It now is barring the execution of 16 and 17 year olds, the court relied on the "evolving standards of decency" measurement that it has applied to such matters for the last 50 years but also, as it did in the issue of retardation, cited international practices. Since 1990, the seven other nations that still executed juveniles have abandoned the practice.

Most Americans are little aware of just how revolted most of the world has been at our persistence with juvenile executions.

But while even the mention of international norms sent the court's chief dissenter, Antonin Scalia,

into one of his patented Yosemite Sam tantrums, that factor was cited only incidentally. The ruling was rooted in customary, very domestic jurisprudence. The majority noted that in recent years, five more states have on their own foresworn juvenile execution, leaving just 20 with the practice, and the ones that retain the option are resorting to it with increased reluctance and less frequency.

That adds up to the "cruel and unusual punishment" that the Constitution's Eighth Amendment forbids, an evolving judgment. The majority also found, soundly and in line with science, that juveniles have "a lack of maturity and underdeveloped sense of responsibility." They are vulnerable to peer pressure and have unformed personalities, all of which, the court concluded, makes them less culpable than adults for the same actions.

The death penalty remains twisted by a whole array of distortions.

Most crucially, we now know, thanks to the development of DNA evidence, that the process produces fatal errors in an appalling number of

cases, and there is no sure hedge against that.

The death penalty executes minorities in such disproportion that the disparity invites suspicions of prejudice.

Lousy lawyering is deadly, mostly to low-income defendants.

The death penalty fails to take even severe mental illness into account.

And the penalty is applied unevenly among the states. Of the 22 juveniles executed in the United States since 1976, 13 were concentrated in Texas. Surely life and death decisions shouldn't depend upon geographical happenstance.

The death penalty both ill-becomes us and ill-serves us. No study has ever been able to show that it discourages the crimes it punishes. Murder does not flourish where it has never been applied and murder does not rise where the practice has been ended.

The blunt truth is that the death penalty is simply vengeful and exists in this country to a degree otherwise unknown among developed nations as the product of demagogic and vindictive politics, not of reasoned justice. ■



A Letter to Fellow Baptists

By David Scholar, Professor of NT and Associate Dean, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA

Dear colleagues and friends,

There is considerable talk these days about biblical authority and soul freedom and their relationship to each other; I would like to offer some brief reflections on this from my life experience and study.

Both biblical authority and soul freedom have been Baptist distinctives since our beginnings in the early 1600s; most Baptists have treasured and nurtured these commitments over the centuries in many different contexts.

Both of these commitments are important and are not opposed to each other; it is never a matter that one of them “trumps” the other. In fact, they work together to safeguard all that is precious to us—the clear and sole authority of Scripture in an environment in which ecclesiastical authorities do not dictate to us what the Scripture teaches. Soul freedom is actually, from a Baptist perspective, the commitment that guards and protects the commitment to biblical authority over against other kinds of authority.

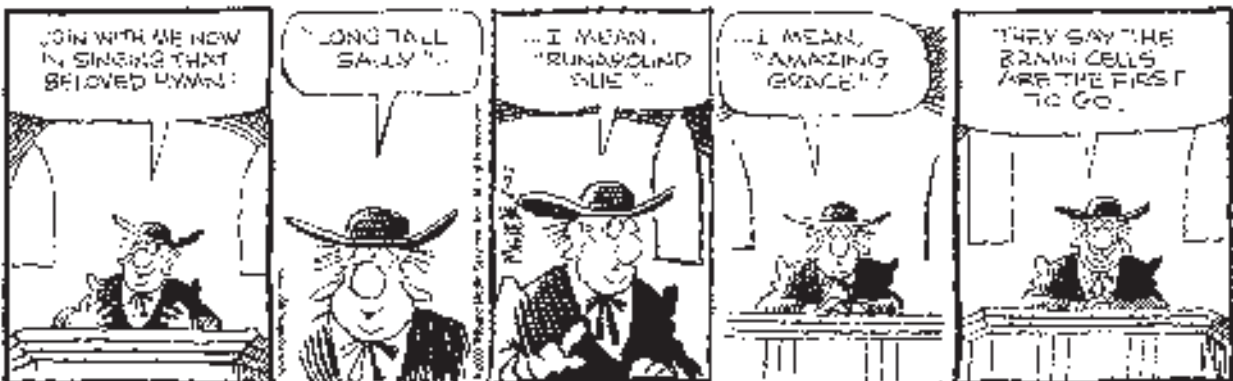
Our history makes it clear that we have recognized from our beginnings that differences arise among us as to

what the Bible teaches on various themes and in multiple contexts. We now understand quite well that the Bible does require interpretation; that is the responsibility that goes hand-in-hand with the commitment to biblical authority. And, as a Baptist, I embrace soul freedom, which allows me the option of my struggle with biblical interpretation in a context in which I want also to preserve the right of my other Baptist friends to engage in their struggles of interpretation.

I grew up in the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. When I entered my adulthood and seminary, I realized that the commitment of the GARBC to biblical authority was actually an enforced commitment to a particular interpretation. I found my new haven of hope in the American Baptists in 1961. I embraced the ABC, knowing both its commitments to biblical authority and to soul freedom. I learned immediately that this meant there were persons within the ABC with whom I had substantial theological differences. But, I had the freedom to champion my understandings of the implications of biblical authority in our denomination, which I have done over the years (e.g., on the

issue of the ordination of women and their full participation in the ministry of the church).

I have never regretted my 1961 decision. Further, I see nothing today that is substantially different than it was in 1961—there were and are some substantial differences in how various American Baptists understand biblical authority, but we have not abandoned that commitment. In fact, our various policy statements speak to many crucial issues in the mainstream of orthodox Christian teachings on sensitive issues. It is our commitment to soul freedom that gives us the opportunity to be genuinely committed to biblical authority. It is crucial that we do not think that our ABC family has failed us in these strong, basic commitments; we do not need to enter again into the disruptions of 1932 and 1947. As a strong evangelical committed to biblical authority, I understand that we weathered those storms and built a family that is a reflection of our basic commitments, which means, of course, a family in which there are some disagreements, but these pale in light of the commitment to love, integrity, soul freedom and biblical authority. ■



CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

Reviewed By David A. Thomas, Assoc. Prof. of Rhetoric, Emeritus, University of Richmond¹

Earthcare: *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006)

"This is not a political issue. It is a moral imperative." Al Gore

Documentaries are quintessential social texts. Although they are movies, they are not just entertainment. Documentaries are nonfiction and journalistic in intent. They mean to inform us and persuade us to take decisive actions. Primarily concerned with conveying information or advocacy, they always try to incorporate as much cinematic interest as possible into their messages.

An Inconvenient Truth is a secular sermon about saving the environment. The movie opened in late May, 2006, on a limited number of screens and grossed less than \$500,000 for the weekend, but over 200 reviews were published that ranged from 74 percent favorable (Metacritic.com) to 91 percent favorable (rottentomatoes.com). Political commentaries have been slower to come forth, but Al Gore commented with bemusement that even Bill O'Reilly seemed to approve of his message. Word of mouth is working: an estimated three million people had attended the movie by August, 2006; and as of that date, it is still in distribution and attendance seems to be holding its own.

One critic astutely noted that the movie is less a documentary than it is a rock concert movie without the music. There is something insightful in that comment. The documentary subject is a multimedia lecture that Gore has been giving around the world for the last several years. "Since the 2000 election, I must have given this lecture a thousand times . . . at least a thousand times," he guesses in one aside. The camera follows him from campus lecture halls to civic auditoriums, showing him *schlepping* his own luggage through airports and hailing taxi rides

to his speaking dates around the globe. There are close-ups of his concentrated facial expression as he gives interviews to local radio and TV interviewers of every ethnic complexion.

In this movie, Al Gore's performance bears little resemblance to his previous wonky debater persona from his 2000 presidential campaign. Think instead of the opening public lecture scene of *The Da Vinci Code*, where Tom Hanks is using some great PowerPoint slides to explain his theory of "the symbology of the sacred feminine." Instead, you get to hear Gore's entire hour-long global warming lecture before the movie ends. Gore the public lecturer is every bit as loosely professorial as Hanks' character, the Harvard professor, Robert Langdon. More importantly, Gore's top notch multimedia presentation is equally state-of-the-art.

Jeff Skoll's movie production company with a social conscience, *Participant Productions*, is the reason this movie exists. Skoll, a youthful billionaire EBay retiree, launched his new movie studio a year ago with a huge splash, releasing four movies, all of which figured in the Oscar races. *Participant's* vision statement reads, "Changing the World One Story at a Time. Participant believes in the power of media to create great social change. Our goal is to deliver compelling entertainment that will inspire audiences to get involved in the issues that affect us all." The firm's first movies were *Good Night and Good Luck*, *Syriana*, *Murderball*, and *North Country*. All four of these movies received Oscar nominations, which has to be a record for a brand new movie studio's initial productions. Importantly, as a whole, they also made a lot of money, proving that "message" movies need not be losers.

An Inconvenient Truth certainly meets one of the criteria in the compa-

ny's mission statement: it will inspire audiences to get involved in the issues that affect us all. In fact, it may scare the socks off of you. Compared to *Syriana* and the other movies mentioned, though, it falls somewhat short of the "compelling entertainment" part—unless you are a retired college debate coach who tends to vote against Republican candidates, like *moi*. Personally, after all those years of sitting through hundreds of classroom debates, I can really get into a well crafted public policy argument. As lectures go, from any perspective, the Al Gore global warming slide show must be given high marks.

The movie begins—and ends—with a pastoral scene of the river on the Gore farm in Tennessee. *An Inconvenient Truth* uses nature in its unspoiled state as both the movie's context and its goal. Immediately, the viewpoint shifts to the "rock star" Al Gore's moment of truth just as he enters stage right, before he begins presenting his multimedia lecture to a college audience. "I'm Al Gore. I used to be the next President of the United States . . . [Audience laughs]. I don't think that's particularly funny." Then he starts showing gorgeous slides of Earth taken from space, projected on a wall-high screen.

Before the movie ends, we will have seen his lecture in its entirety. But it will be interspersed with several flashback human interest scenes depicting Gore's personal story of how he became so passionate about this project.

The viewer must not overlook the crucial importance of these personal interludes in the flow of his argument. Naturally, this part of the movie includes a brief précis of his political career and especially his near-election to the Presidency, but the emphasis is not intended to restore his political viability for the future. It is much more about his lifelong interest in

global warming that began before his political career. He makes it clear that he had pursued that specific issue throughout his service in Congress and the Senate. It has continued to be his full time pursuit since leaving public office. Through some family movie clips, we glimpse some of the critical life-events over the last six years that are at the heart of his new vocation as a freelance professional public environmental advocate.

The Global Warming Lecture. Based on my college teaching experience, I can testify that there is a huge difference between lecturing with the aid of PowerPoint and lecturing without it. Al Gore's slide show is a model of multimedia lesson construction. A New York magazine movie critic was one of several who suggested that when readers run across a negative review of *An Inconvenient Truth*, they should look to the political affiliation of the writer. It is hard to fault the presentation unless you simply have it in for Al Gore. I daresay most such negative reviews, when they come forth, will not appear on the arts and culture pages of the newspaper. Rather, look for them as syndicated political columns and op-ed think pieces, since the movie targets the anti-environmental policies that undergird the present Republican worldview.

In this movie, Gore's central arguments are that global warming is a scientific fact, and accelerating rapidly is a trend towards the point of no return. The cause of global warming is CO₂ emissions. The consequences of global warming are dire. There are many direct effects of global warming, most all of them bad for human habitation. Gore focuses on changes in weather patterns resulting in bigger and more frequent hurricanes, faster melting of the glaciers and ice caps, drastically rising sea levels, and paradoxically, more widespread severe droughts. Many species of flora and fauna are endangered by climate shifts, while vectors of viruses and other diseases are mushrooming. Super diseases are springing up everywhere.

Almost all of the causes of global

warming relate directly to human energy consumption patterns, namely, auto combustion exhausts and coal-fired power plants. Another major source of CO₂ air pollution is the burning of the rain forests as a land clearing technique.

All is not lost. The trend towards global warming can be slowed and even reversed. All of the chief solutions available to us entail major policy changes on a global scale. It is imperative to reduce the discharge of CO₂ emissions by drastically regulating auto manufacturers' mpg standards, cutting back on household energy use through more energy efficient houses and appliances, and by choosing to use less AC and heating power (thermostat setting). Getting serious about recycling will also make a significant contribution to energy savings. New carbon capture technologies for smokestacks must and will become mandatory.

Gore debunks the wishful thinking that all of this climate change is simply cyclical and will cure itself. He establishes that nothing in his lecture is controversial from the point of view of science. However, much work has to be done to change people's attitudes towards their consumption patterns. He warns that if we don't, we must suffer more Katrinas, more widespread droughts, more vanishing inland seas, and more eroding coastlines. All of these phenomena are increasing at an alarming pace, and we are already far beyond the stage when such things can be ignored as an acceptable cost of continued economic development. The action steps he mentions, and others, more draconian, are necessary for human survival on a global basis.

Two separate political issues are involved in bringing about change. First, we need to make major changes in our preferences and habits concerning our personal cars, housing patterns, and consumption patterns. This is true especially in the U. S. because our nation consumes the lion's share of the world's fossil fuels to sustain our rich standard of living. Other countries have already adopted

stringent mpg standards. Yet the U. S. has resisted putting in laws that might hurt Exxon-Mobil and the General Motors Company.

Second, countries in the developing world must also reduce their aspirations. China, for example, is a nation of 1.6 billion people on the cusp of raising its economy to the level of the developed world. India is the same. Capital intensive growth in the underdeveloped world, such as modern transportation, housing, etc., calls for enormous investments in manufacturing, steel and building materials, more fresh water, expansion of power plants, and especially, burning the oil, gas, and coal fuels to make it all happen. Moreover, China has the largest coal reserve in the world. As China, India, South America, and the rest of the Third World continue to gear-up, America's soon-to-come massive cut-backs in energy consumption patterns will seem very modest by comparison with their enormous expansion in the rest of the world.

From the scientific point of view, nothing in the movie is in question. It's all true. Insofar as one lecture can be an effective persuasive piece of rhetoric, every claim Gore makes is backed up with credible, indeed, indisputable, evidence. Not only that, but with the high tech presentation tools he uses, his points are made with pictures and production qualities, and even humor that one would wish every teacher could learn to use.

From the political point of view, though, everything in the movie is controversial. Unfortunately, the movie makes it appear that only Republicans are opposed to the cures. There are brief sound bites from President Reagan ("It's just the forests to blame!"), the first President George Bush ("Save a few owls and lose all our jobs!"), and Senator Imhofe ("It's all a hoax!") The present administration is mentioned in context of the global warming theme. Every country in the world signed the Kyoto Treaty except two, the U. S. and Australia. And Gore points out that although President Bush pledged to reduce CO₂ emis-

sions in the 2000 campaign, it was a pledge he has yet to keep.

It's a really, really frightening movie. That is, unless you believe, like President Bush's political advisers and speech writers, you can make all of the scientific conclusions go away merely by drawing a red line through them. In a particularly damning clip, Gore shows a *New York Times* graphic news report of how President Bush's environmental chief altered the Bush administration's own EPA report to change a definitive scientific finding. He redlined out the report's hard hitting conclusion, and revised it to say that global warming is merely speculative. The public disclosure of that dishonest—and dangerous—manipulation of the facts led to the man's "resignation," whereupon he moved to a higher-paying job with Exxon-Mobil the very same day.

The fact is, we are all guilty of living in denial about our culpability for the sorry mess we have created. It's not just Republican leaders. We are all addicted to oil and gas and coal. But the day of reckoning will come sooner or later. At current rates, global warming will melt the remaining ice caps and raise the sea level by twenty feet, creating a hundred million refugees around the world in the near term, possibly within our lifetimes.

What Can Churches Do? There are two basic categories of actions that churches can take. First, and most importantly, the churches must make global warming a topic of moral, ethical, and theological concern, and preach accordingly. Conservative churches that are now in the Republican fold on social issues like abortion must reject the bogus political connection between being environmental and being liberal. Environmental degradation must become a major focus of the church's mission in the world. Preachers and theologians must make this connection unmistakably a Christian issue. God's earth itself is in jeopardy, and that is the case as a result of man's exploitation of energy sources to feed our consumption habits. We are all in the path of inevitable destruction.

The church is in possession of a "bully pulpit" that could be more effective than movies or politicians. Now is the time to begin incorporating environmental themes into the lectionary. (Perhaps this is special pleading from the "movie guy," but consider also the value of sponsoring movie-discussion nights about this movie.)

Second, and equally important, the church as a social institution must look to itself as an energy consumer. Every practical step suggested for individuals or companies to do applies as well to the church. Consider how much electricity the church uses merely to provide heating and air conditioning in its sanctuary on Sunday nights. One major metropolitan church shut down all Sunday evening activities in its sanctuary, shifting its regular Sunday night services to its compact chapel facility. In that instance, all its members continued to be served with no loss in attendance; but its annual power bill went down over \$100,000. Gas guzzling church vehicles can be replaced with smaller vans and sedans that feature more efficient engines, hybrids if possible, on the regular replacement schedule. Recycle everything.

Measures such as these must be thought of as the beginning, but not the entire solution. Denominational conventions should feature seminars and workshops to explore other practical measures aimed at energy savings. If thousands of churches took the lead in protecting their own corner of the environment, it would make a measurable impact on the overall picture.

Christmas Eve: *Joyeux Noël* (2005)

Joyeux Noël is a foreign film made in France, UK, Germany, and Romania. It was nominated as Best Foreign Film for an Oscar and for a Golden Globe. It is unambiguously anti-war. More than that, it is a story of the transcendence of the spirit of Christ over war in a certain time and place in history. On Christmas Eve, 1914, at several points along the front, the field commanders on both sides

declared a temporary cease-fire. They did so to celebrate Christmas together in the no-man's land that lay between their trenches. A bloody, brutal, hand-to-hand battle previously raged between them for two months.²

The movie fractures the standard war movie genre's format of showing everything from one side's perspective. Here, three armies are engaged in a barbaric trench war.³ Thankfully, scenes of slaughter are shown only briefly. *Joyeux Noël* does not privilege one army over another, because the war *per se* is not the subject of the movie. The war is merely the setting for the personal story of the men caught in it. Each of the armies is represented in exactly identical ways. All of the characters are cast and depicted as being likeable, regardless of their national identity. There are no intrinsic cues for us to know who to root for. The movie does not explain or even mention the political issues.

When war breaks out in the beginning of the movie, we are introduced to a few representative characters from each of the three countries—Scotland, Germany, and France. We follow them through their enlistments into warfare in the trenches. Each nationality's characters in the movie always speak their lines in their native tongues. When they are not shooting at each other, they glare at each other—they are situated scant yards apart. They can hear their enemies shuffling their playing cards in the night.

On the German side, one of the soldiers is a famous operatic tenor. His singing co-star (and lover) before the war persuades the Kaiser to allow her to visit him during Christmas, so that they might provide a recital for the morale of the troops. Kaiser Wilhelm had already ordered 100,000 Christmas trees to be distributed to the troops along the front line. On Christmas Eve, with those candle-lit Christmas trees mounted atop their trenches, the Germans begin their musicale.

As the beautiful music reverberates across the lines, first the Scots begin to accompany the tenor on their bagpipes. Then the French begin to sing along. The tenor emerges from his pro-

tected position and takes a stance in the midst of the killing zone. He holds aloft one of the trees as he sings. In a surreal way, one by one, troops from all sides come out from their trenches to surround him, listening reverently.

History declared that ninety percent of all of the known WWI “Christmas truces” occurred under the cover of music.⁴

The Scottish priest, Father Palmer, (serving with the troops from home in the capacity of a stretcher bearer) then steps forward to conduct a Christmas mass. He proceeds, using his poor Latin.⁵ All the soldiers from either side, devout or not, stand shoulder to shoulder together in worship. The musical highlight of the film then transpires: his partner soprano is asked by the priest to sing *Ave Maria*. All listeners are transfixed by the moment, both in the scene, and in the theatre. The next day, the soldiers continue their truce. First they bury their dead who had been lying where they had fallen. Then a football is introduced and the games begin between the athletes from the opposing forces. The men share photos of their wives and families back home. Finally, headquarters begins artillery bombardments again. Only this time, each army’s commander informs their enemy counterparts when they are

about to be shelled, and invites them to come over and wait together in safety until the salvos end.

Of course, this fraternization cannot be tolerated. Each army, in turn, has its top brass to come down and ship all their soldiers to other posts, replacing them with completely new units in their trenches. Even the Bishop comes to the front and orders Father Palmer back home to Scotland. Father Palmer protests that he conducted the Christmas service as he felt led by the Lord Christ to do. While the Bishop delivers a blistering sermon to the effect, “Jesus came to bring a sword, and he commands you to kill all of the enemy’s people, good or bad,” Father Palmer calmly removes the cross from his neck and hangs it on a bedpost.

The soldiers on all sides were no more and no less than ordinary men. They were done with war, personally, after that unforgettable Christmas Eve together. Each nation’s war leaders cannot tolerate fraternization with the enemy, who must be demonized, dehumanized, and destroyed.

No man’s land was not that strip of frozen mud between the opposing trenches. It was the uncrossable gulf that yawned between the troops at the front and the old, fat general staffs at the rear who ordered them to mount

the battlements and sacrifice themselves to enemy machine guns. It also separated the Church’s faithful servants from her leaders in the hierarchy, who were as jingoistic as the warmongers who started the war.

- 1 David A. Thomas retired from the University of Richmond in May 2004. He now resides in Sarasota, Florida, and invites your comments at davidthomas1572@comcast.net.
- 2 The events portrayed were real, though the characters in this story are fictionalized. The setting represents just one specific battlefield, but the “Christmas truce” of 1914 actually broke out spontaneously at several places along the front.
- 3 For dramatic effect, only three countries play a role in this story. However, it was World War I, and there might have been as many as six countries or more fighting at any given time and place in its history.
- 4 Production Notes.
- 5 It is unclear from his vestments and his incorrect Latin, whether he is Catholic or Anglican. Perhaps, like the sculpted servicemen of ambiguous military branch assignments gazing from afar at the Vietnam Memorial, this priest’s character is envisioned generically to represent a chaplain of any denomination. ■



An Alternative to War!

By Jerry L. Barnes, Pastor/Professor (ret.) Grove, OK

How can we know peace in a world
so saturated
with death and dying?

Every new century is stained
by the blood
of thousands of innocent victims
by lust-for-power leaders
who engage in deceit and lying!
As long as it is not their sons and
daughters who do the dying!

My heart grows heavy when I recall
the vacuous meaning of it all...
of death and dying,
suffering and tears,
of shattered dreams
and wasted years.

Indeed! My mind is deadened by
fatigue when I try to recall. . .
the twisted, tortured reasons
for it all!

Was it WMD or Nine/Eleven?

Or, was it oil?

Was is the "Religious Right?"

Islam?

Or, was it oil?

Or,

Haliburton?

Or,

Were national leaders trying
to cover cowardice in
another war in another time?

The One,

with an extended

AWOL!

The Other,

FIVE DEFERMENTS

Well?

Wearily, I journey onward in my quest
for the
Peace-Maker
Who
greet us all with
His soft-spoken,
Shalom!

Against this backdrop of suffering and death,
let me suggest an alternative to war!

Over a half century ago,
I encountered the Maker of Peace at
Sniper Ridge and Triangle Hill
in still another war!
In His inimitable way,
He greeted me with His
soft-spoken, Shalom!

I knew, then, I would never forget
the haunting challenge of His
winsome words:

"Blessed are the peacemakers
for they shall be called the sons and daughters
of God."

When the Peace Maker continues His journey
along the WAY,

And, we continue our journeys
along the WAY,

I pray—
He will leave His
SHALOM!
as a lynch pen
in our relationship. ■

Christmas, 2006

By Al Staggs, *Chaplain and Performing Artist* Sante Fe, NM

Lights everywhere,
Manger scenes
On the lawns of churches and houses,
Christmas is here again.
But the lights cannot
Alter the darkness in our land,
The message of the Prince of Peace
Has been lost.
It has been rejected
In favor of the national policy
Of war,
Of torture,
Of greed
Of stealing from the poor.
And we beheld His glory,
The image of an Iraqi baby
Born in lowly Baghdad.
We bring Him gifts
Of White Phosphorous,
Rockets, machine guns and grenades.
The Advent season observances
Have little to do with meaning
And much to do with form and custom.
His birth has been dramatized,
Commercialized,
Trivialized.
It's irrelevant to our time.
We can only see Jesus from afar,
2000 years ago.
Let us leave Him there
To save our conscience,
To happily delude ourselves
That we are children of the One
Who came to bring Peace on Earth.
How can we dare honor the child
Who came to liberate the oppressed
When, by our policies, our votes,
Our lifestyles, we give evidence
That we are from the family
Of the oppressors.
That poor little child,
That refugee
Born under the specter of Roman domination
Has little in common with us,
The dominators.
The manger scene doesn't fit,
It's out of place.

It should be to us
An offense,
An indictment
Of all that we have become.
We cannot sing loud enough
To drown out the cries from Mosul,
From Fallujah, from Abu-Ghraib,
From Guantanamo
And from the homes of grief-stricken
Families who've lost their loved ones
On the fields of battles
That should have never been waged.
We don't need the spirits of drink
In this season
For we have already become intoxicated
On our power
And our military might.

And it's in this season
That we offer our billions
To confirm where our real trust lies,
Not in God,
But in our arms.
We've given the arms dealers
A blank check
And offered pocket change
For the needy.
There's no room this Christmas
For the likes of Jesus and his family,
Not in our budgets
nor in our hearts.
We'll collect our baskets of food for the poor
But it won't make a dent in the lives
Who have been robbed by our policies
And our systems of greed
That rewards more to those who have
And robs those who have next to nothing.
We may as well just sing nursery rhymes
This Christmas
Rather than pretend that we honor the Christ child
With our old familiar carols.
They cannot be heard over the wailing
Of all those who are victims
Of our national hate
And our national greed.
So this Christmas I will remember the Christ child
And I will grieve. ■

Hubris Is a Fortress

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

“Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18

Hubris is a fortress wherein self-deception rules,

shutting out opinions of those it deems fools,
from whose lofty towers pennants are flying,
but unseeing and uncaring about the wider world’s crying,
as long as its ramparts are unbreached,
and its flagrant fallacies not yet impeached,
its high standing given due deference,
and proud lineage treated with reverence;
vainglorious, it scorns humility as beneath its dignity,
a mark of weakness unworthy of its brilliancy;
its pomp and heraldry impress the undiscerning,
more pompous than weighty, time makes clear the turning;
isolation often blends arrogance with naiveté,
inimical to truth and menace to society.

With moat filled and drawbridge raised,

vanity disdains contrary counsel, tho’ opposing views may widely be praised;
driven to control, master of all its surveys,
to rule at all costs is the message it conveys,
thereby many may suffer—or a nation misled,
and robbed of wise and just ways that would stand them in good stead;
if the autocrat is infallible, why consult,
or why, then, should the people question the result?
In the high-ceilinged banquet hall all bow to the great one,
when and whatever he wills, his will must be done.

Armored against correction and corruption

by the common breed,
shunning all but its narrow creed,
self-centered is the pattern of its life
‘til denial of others’ rights is rife,
the supercilious lay claim where none is due,
and arrogate dominion which mocks the true;
trumpets from the towers, echoing from hills to plain,
sound the superior claim that others are in vain;
all-powerful, it need not answer criticism,
sure that its self-appointed mission is God-given,
boastful of its lavish and exclusive ways,
and blinded by its sycophant followers’ praise,
oblivious to a haughty spirit that galls,
arrogance knows not that its greatest enemy
is within its walls. ■

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CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

A Journal of Christian Ethics

"We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers."
—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation publishes *Christian Ethics Today* in order to provide laypersons, educators, and ministers with a resource for understanding and responding in a faithful Christian manner to moral and ethical issues that are of concern to contemporary Christians, to the church, and to society.

PURPOSES

- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for Christian social ethics
- Interpret and apply Christian experience, biblical truth, theological insights, historical understanding, and current research to contemporary moral issues
- Support Christian ecumenism by seeking contributors and readers from various denominations and churches
- Work from the deep, broad center of the Christian church
- Address readers at the personal and emotional as well as the intellectual level by including in the Journal narratives, poetry, and cartoons as well as essays
- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics

Christian Ethics Today was born in the mind and heart of Foy Valentine in 1995, as an integral part of his dream for a Center for Christian Ethics. In his words, the purpose of the Journal was "to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness."

When the Center was transferred to Baylor University in June 2000, the disbanding Board voted to continue the publication of *Christian Ethics Today*, appointing a new editor and a new Board. The Journal will continue to be published five times annually.

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

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

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