

Christian Ethics Today

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

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The Minister & POLITICS

How to be Political Without Being Partisan

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 2007, 1-5 PM | GRAND HYATT HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

No admission charge; registration not required

PROGRAM

1:00 PM

BRENT WALKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE

Welcome

1:10 PM

JIM WALLIS

President/Executive Director,
Sojourners/Call to Renewal
*"The Minister as a Prophet for
Social Justice"*



3:15 PM

GREG BOYD

Pastor, Woodland Hills Church,
St. Paul, Minnesota
*"The Minister as Pastor and Prophet
of the Trans-Political Kingdom"*



2:00 PM

MELISSA ROGERS

Visiting Professor of Religion
and Public Policy, Wake Forest
University
*"The Minister as a Prophet on
Church and State Issues"*



4:00 PM

TONY CAMPOLO

Founder/President of Evangelical
Association for the Promotion of
Education
*"The Minister and Politics: Prophetic
or Partisan?"*



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KUDZU *by Doug Marlette* www.dougmarlette.com

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“Cancer Saved Your Life!”

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

Note: In response to your many cards, calls, and inquiries about my recent surgeries, this article attempts to explain and interpret these events. For your prayers and concern we are grateful.

Strange words uttered by my urologist two days after my heart bypass surgery and one week after he had removed my prostate gland and joyfully reported only a small cancer in the gland, but none in the margins, the lymph nodes, or the seminal ducts.

However, that was just the prelude.

Let me affirm at the beginning that I am not one who identifies every act of God’s providential care as a miracle. Nor would I ever imply that God treats me differently than you or anyone else needing God’s care. Yet, as I reflect on the events leading up to my surgeries, and as I look back and connect the dots, I have no way to understand or explain the sequence of events other than the purposeful grace of God.

It began last December with a routine physical by my new GP in Denton. Every test was normal, however Dr. Moore noted a suspicious nodule on my prostate. Since my PSA score was a very safe 3.6, he assumed it might be a benign tumor. “Let’s have a urologist check this out.”

A week later Dr. Wiersham examined my prostate and was surprised my GP had even noticed the area. “Probably nothing, but let’s take some biopsies just to be sure.” A week later he informed me that one of twelve biopsies revealed cancer cells! Having just completed two years with Audra’s breast cancer treatments (which gave her the best possible results for no recurrence), I was a bit startled.

Conversations about options led us to decide on the removal of the prostate, with the hope that no cancer cells

were outside the gland, even though the odds of my type were about 60/40!

So, on March 28 my prostate gland was removed and on Friday the pathology report noted only one tumor one centimeter long and, no cancer in the margins, none in the lymph nodes, and none in the seminal ducts. “As far as we can tell, you are cancer free!” I was dismissed on Friday, greatly relieved and filled with gratitude to God.

However, on Saturday I ran a fever of 102 degrees. My urologist thought it was probably an infection, so he ordered antibiotics and asked me to call back in 24 hours. I had just taken the first dose, when the doctor called back and said: “I know you are 45 minutes from the hospital, but just to be safe let’s readmit you and get to the bottom of this infection.”

So on Saturday evening we headed back to Baylor-Plano where we were readmitted and again took all the admission tests we had done just four days earlier.

As I completed the last test, suddenly severe pains crossed my upper back, from shoulder to shoulder. Immediately the ER realized I was having a heart attack and they began their life saving work—nitroglycerin under my tongue, heparin in my veins, and other medications designed to relieve the pain and blockage.

I was surprised and shocked because I had been told only two years ago by a cardiologist in Austin, after extensive testing, that I had a very healthy heart and no problems that he could detect.

All my life I have worked on a heart-healthy lifestyle and diet, jogging three miles a day for 25 years and staying physically fit. My new cardiologist told me later that my lifestyle probably prevented a heart problem earlier—the real culprit was genetics!

How bad was it? I later learned that the chamber called the “widow-maker” was 99% closed! “If you had experienced the attack anywhere but in this Emergency Room, you probably would not have made it!”

Before my prostate surgery I had several long conversations with God. As I told my urologist, if it is God’s will for my life to conclude, I have no regrets—my life has been filled with innumerable blessings. However, if God has more for me to do, I am also ready to stay. I was at peace, buoyed by the prayers and support of many, many friends.

That was in response to the cancer. But now I was on an ER table, as the medical team sent a scope up my artery to determine the extent of the blockage, all within minutes of the pain.

So that’s why two days after my heart surgery, my urologist exclaimed, “You could say this prostate cancer saved your life!” By that he meant, if the nodule felt by my GP had not led him to send me to a urologist, who himself was surprised to discover cancer cells in 1 of 12 biopsies, which led to the surgical removal of my prostate, would this heart condition have been discovered? My surgeon said, “Probably not! If you had this attack anywhere but in the ER room, chances are you would not be here!” Then my urologist pointed his finger skyward and said, “Blame God!” I did.

So you now understand my sense of undeserved grace and overwhelming gratitude. This whole experience has brought so many good things into our lives—I had often stood on the “outside” of intercessory prayer, but this experience put me on the “inside of prayer.” I cannot describe the sense of peace and purpose I experienced, due to your prayers. For our family, this was our finest hours together—

(continued on page 20)

EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Language is like soil. However rich, it is subject to erosion, and its fertility is constantly threatened by uses that exhaust its vitality. It needs constant re-invigoration if it is not to become arid and sterile.”

Elizabeth Drew.

“We’re at a point where global warming is impossible to deny . . . deniers are now on par with Holocaust deniers, though one denies the past and the other denies the present and the future.”

Boston Globe columnist Ellen Goodman.

“The planet has a fever. If your baby has a fever, you go to the doctor. If the doctor says you need to intervene here, you don’t say, ‘Well, I read a science fiction novel that told me it’s not a problem.’”

Vice President Al Gore testifying before House and Senate panels, in response to skepticism from Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) and Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK).

“My responsibilities were to kick-start the economy.”

Former U.S. administrator of Iraq Paul Bremer, explaining a government audit in 2005 that found \$8.8 billion was turned over to Iraqi officials, most of it lost to corruption and waste.

“The president believes that there is a right for people to bear arms, but that all laws must be followed.”

The very first response of the White House to the Virginia Tech shootings, after expressing horror and offering his prayers to the victims and the people of Virginia. President Bush’s initial concern was to reassure his base where he stands on gun control.

“Why, we ask, do Americans continue to tolerate gun laws and a culture that seems to condemn thousands of innocents to death every year, when presumably tougher restrictions could at least reduce the number.”

The Times of London, 4/18/07.

“Four years of war in Iraq have cost the American taxpayer \$351 billion, or \$2610 per taxpayer. U. S. troop deaths number 3,197, Iraqi civilian deaths number 59,000, and 23,417 U. S. troops have been injured.”

Dallas Morning News, 3/18/07.

“In the last four years, about 2 million Iraqis have fled their country, and 1 million more will leave this year, yet the U.S. (who has admitted only 202) and the U. N. have not acknowledged a refugee crisis.”

NBC Nightly News, 3/21/07.

“In a democracy, you do not have the rule of majority. What makes a democracy is when it is safe to be a minority.”

Evangelical author and social activist Tony Campolo.

“The Dallas Morning News Editorial Board has reversed its century-old position on the death penalty, now arguing that the system is too flawed. Thus far in 2007, 49 executions have taken place in the U. S., 48 of them in Texas.”

DMN, 4/21/07.

“For every dollar Americans pay in federal income taxes, 36 cents goes toward past and present military spending.”

Sojourners Online.

“I am not anti-gun. I’m pro-knife. Consider the merits of the knife. . . . you have to catch up to someone in order to stab him. . . . knives for guns would promote physical fitness. Plus, knives don’t ricochet. And people are seldom killed while cleaning their knives.”

Texas author, columnist, and partisan wit Molly Ivins, who died January 31.

“Establishing Rhode Island as a haven for religious freedom, Baptist preacher Roger Williams spoke of the need for a ‘hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.’”

Report From the Capital (February, 2007).

“It costs \$14,600 a year to incarcerate an inmate in Texas—a 25-year sentence would cost close to \$365,000. Correction experts say the costs of trials and appeals in death sentence cases are staggering, sometimes reaching \$1 million per case.”

Dallas Morning News (3/4/07).

“Punctuating a fundamental change in American family life, married couples with children now occupy fewer than one in every four households.”

Sojourners Online (3/4/07).

“We Baptists gotta stick together—after all nobody else will have us!”

Rev. Will B. Dunn in Kudzu, by Doug Marlette.

“American generals have repeated the mistakes of Vietnam in Iraq. The intellectual and moral failures constitute a crisis.”

Lt. Col. Paul Yingling, Iraq veteran and deputy commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. ■

Let Them Grow Together

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

What we call the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mt 13:24-30) is a little story that Jesus told, based on first century Palestinian farm life, about what to do with some weeds that threatened to ruin a crop. He did not tell such tales to entertain his hearers but as a way to communicate with them in a context of controversy. Indeed, the seven parables clustered in Matthew 13 were in response to the mounting conflicts recorded in Matthew 11-12.

To skeptics with closed minds that made it hard for them to give his message a hearing, Jesus reached for fresh images, clear comparisons, even curious riddles in an effort to prompt them to think in different categories. This account, for example, is full of surprises, many of them deliberately enigmatic despite the fact that they are rooted in ordinary experience. So beware: if this sermon is true to the strategy of Jesus, it may try to slip up on your blind side, breach your defenses, and provoke you to ponder some challenging perspectives that you might prefer to ignore. We begin, as did Jesus, with a story that is not easily understood or forgotten.

I. The Story

The plot seems simple enough: a farmer sowed his field with seed to prepare for another crop of grain (v. 24). But no sooner had this work been done than an adversary slipped in under cover of darkness while others slept to sow bad seed among the good (v. 25). No clue is given as to why a neighboring farmer would do such a diabolical thing, except to identify him as an “enemy,” for the ultimate sources of such animosity are hidden deep within the human heart. We are left with the sober realization that even our best efforts can be undermined by spite and jealousy when least expected. There is a mystery to human mean-

ness that defies any explanation.

In order to grasp the cunning of this dark deed, we need to identify the kind of bad seed that was scattered on top of the good. It was not “tares,” as traditionally translated, which is a kind of vetch. Rather, the Greek word here (*zizania*) referred to bearded darnel, which we sometimes call “cockle,” “thistle,” or “cheat.” The problem is that it cannot be distinguished from wheat in the blade but only in the ear after it has ripened enough to make a head which becomes poisonous from hosting a fungus. If harvested and ground together with the wheat, the flour is ruined and the whole crop lost. Because the Hebrew name for darnel was derived from a word meaning “to commit adultery” or “to play the harlot,” it was thought of as degenerate or “bastard” wheat.¹

With this clarification we are able to grasp the dilemma that confronted the farmer once his crop was discovered to be corrupted. The field hands wanted to pull up the wretched weeds immediately so as to keep the field clean and thereby protect their labors (v. 28). But the owner realized that, by now, the buried roots of the wheat and the weeds had become so entangled with each other that to yank out one would uproot the other as well. Concerned not for appearances but for a maximum yield from all their efforts, he wisely decided, “Let them both grow together until the harvest” (v. 30). Then everything could be reaped and the separation take place in such a way that the weeds would be bundled up and dried for fuel while the wheat would be gathered into the barn (v. 30). To be sure, this approach required more time and patience on the part of everyone, but the results would be well worth the wait.

II. The Setting

Why would Jesus tell such an

earthy story and liken it to the grandest theme of his gospel, “the kingdom of heaven” (v. 24)? For one thing, his parable warned against the dangers of a premature separation between good and evil that the Judaism of his day was attempting on every hand. The Pharisees practiced a rigid code of conduct that built a wall of exclusion between them and those less observant of religious Law. The Essenes relocated to a desolate wilderness so that they would not be defiled by what they considered a corrupt priesthood in Jerusalem. The Zealots were agitating for a decisive break with Rome even if it meant all-out war with a fight to the finish. Because of this apartheid mentality, many expected that a primary role of the Messiah would be to gather a purified remnant of the righteous, but here was Jesus consorting with publicans and sinners, harlots and centurions—letting bad weeds infest good wheat!

Closer to home, John the Baptist had prepared for the ministry of Jesus by picturing the coming Messiah with a winnowing fork in his hand that would separate the wheat from the chaff so that the latter could be burned “with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:12). Arrested for these fiery denunciations and facing imminent execution, John sent his disciples to Jesus with the wistful query, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Mt 11:3). This was but a polite way of asking, “Why are you letting me rot in prison without lifting a finger against Herod who may kill me any day?” And the answer of our parable is, “I know you have enemies. I have them too. But, in the mercy of God, it is not yet time for the unquenchable fire. Judgment tarries, but God is patient. Time is on his side, if not on ours. He can afford to wait for a better day.”

Closest to home, a terrible weed

was growing within the innermost disciple band. Judas seemed to have Zealot sympathies, which would have put him at the opposite extreme from a Roman collaborator like Levi. Surely the innermost core of followers needed to be purged of its poisons if the movement was to have any integrity. But if Judas were suddenly uprooted and cast out, who might leave with him because their "roots" were entangled with his? James and John were called "sons of thunder" (Mk 3:17), which suggested an impatient itch to take militant action, and a Simon other than Peter "was called the Zealot" (Lk 6:15). Rather than satisfying those who may have wanted Judas expelled, or angering others who may have shared his misguided dreams, our parable explains why Jesus stuck with him to the very end. After love's last appeal was rejected in the Upper Room (Mt 26:20-25), Judas finally excluded himself from the Twelve by an act of betrayal in which none of the others joined him.

III. The Meaning

In light of these challenges to his ministry from without and within, what new insights did Jesus seek to plant in the minds and hearts of his hearers by telling this little story? Let us look at four of them:

First, inclusivism is a hard sell and its foes abound on every hand. Jesus sought to sow the seeds of the kingdom on a field as wide as the world (v. 38), to universalize the grace of God by making it available to every person regardless of race, gender, ideology, or nationality. But the custodians of the status quo felt so threatened by outsiders that they restricted their legacy to only one small group, arbitrarily limited by ancestry, willing to embrace a common culture. And so Jesus warned, "My kind of kingdom makes enemies. If you follow me, expect opposition (Mt 11:12). Realize that a lot of weeds come with the turf. There is no way for me to broadcast the good seed of unconditional acceptance without provoking those who scatter the bad seed of narrow exclu-

sivism." To this day, most people prefer sameness to otherness. They find more security in homogeneity than in heterogeneity. Especially in times of tension, they would rather circle the wagons and huddle up with their own kind than to risk openness to those who are different.

Second, in this kingdom under siege, often driven underground like seed planted in soil, it is hard to tell friend from foe, for weeds may come disguised as wheat. The devil never likes to be noticed, but works in the darkness as an imitator of God, sowing seed that grow into counterfeit disciples. Because authenticity cannot be determined until their fruits are known (Mt 7:16-20), it is always dangerous to attempt premature separation, which is precisely why it is so difficult to be a zealous reformer. As Robert Farrar Capon put it provocatively:

the enemy turns out not to need anything more than negative power. He has to act only minimally on his own to wreck havoc in the world; mostly, he depends on the forces of goodness, *insofar as he can sucker them into taking up arms against the confusion he has introduced*, to do his work . . . he simply sprinkles around a generous helping of darkness and waits for the children of light to do the job for him. Goodness itself, if it is sufficiently committed to plausible, right-handed, strong-arm methods, will in the very name of goodness do all and more than all the evil ever had in mind.²

Third, the presence of so much ambiguity, even in our most idealistic impulses, calls for the practice of patience to give people and ideas a chance to prove themselves. As Gamaliel wisely counseled when religious hotheads wanted to stamp out early Christianity, "let them alone; for if this . . . undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38-39). Paul reduced this reasoning to an axiom: "Pass no premature judgment" (1 Corinthians 4:5, NEB). As we might put it, "Live and

let live! Wait and see! Since anything new can seem suspicious, at least give it the benefit of the doubt." Our story takes this practice of patience one step further by suggesting that we learn to tolerate differences even when they seem to be the work of an enemy. In such cases, we may need to buy time and put up with what is bad for the sake of a greater good. Our options do not always involve a clear-cut choice between black-and-white; sometimes, like wheat and bearded darnel, both sides seem to be a tattle-tale grey.

Fourth, none of this means that Jesus encouraged an easy relativism that was indifferent to moral reality. Both the story and even more the interpretation come to a climax at harvest-time when there will be an absolute separation between the wheat and the weeds with the former destined for the barn and the latter for the fire. This is but a vivid way of saying, "Judge not" (Mt 7:1) but let God do the judging (Rom 12:19) for, as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats makes clear (Mt 25:31-46), the One who knows the secrets of every heart renders verdicts that are very different from our own. Meanwhile, as we await that final reckoning, we are to "let *both* grow *together* until the harvest" (v. 30) when the fruit of every life is fully known, even if it means that the kingdom of heaven must make its way on earth as an embattled reality contending with alien kingdoms for the human heart.

IV. The Application

These insights may be given the widest possible application because, as the interpretation of our story explains, "the field is the world" (v. 38). I have selected three areas in which the truths of our text are especially relevant for today:

(1) *The individual*. When we experience a transforming encounter with Christ and are ushered by him through the door to the kingdom of heaven, it is easy to be gripped by a certitude that approaches perfectionism. Having found ultimate answers to the riddle of existence, we yearn to remake all of life in conformity to our

new-found convictions. But once we try to implement those impulses, two problems arise. In regard to ourselves, certainty easily gives rise to over-confidence, and over-confidence to pride, and pride to arrogance as if our way is the only way. In regard to others, this sense of superiority then leads to intolerance of those who resist our claims and we end up viewing them as the "enemy." In demonizing anyone who gets in the way of our holy crusade, the poisonous weeds of polarization begin to grow from the good seed of the gospel that was sown in our hearts.

One of the greatest threats to human survival today is a creeping fundamentalism in the culture of every major world religion that would absolutize its understanding of good and evil to the point of justifying violence in the name of the sacred. Whether it be the ultra-Orthodox Jew who gunned down Yitzhak Rabin in Israel, or the Protestant and Catholic Christians who mercilessly murdered one another in Northern Ireland, or the Shiite and Sunni Muslims who daily terrorize each other in Iraq, they are all united with the field hands of old in saying, "Let's pull up and destroy the bad weeds we don't like in order to protect the good wheat that we have." And it all sounds so sensible, even "godly," until we realize how many weeds of bigotry, prejudice, and hatred are sown by such misguided zealotry. There are enough weeds even in the best of us, as Paul confessed in Romans 7, that we dare not reach for the winnowing fork

lest it pierce our own hearts.

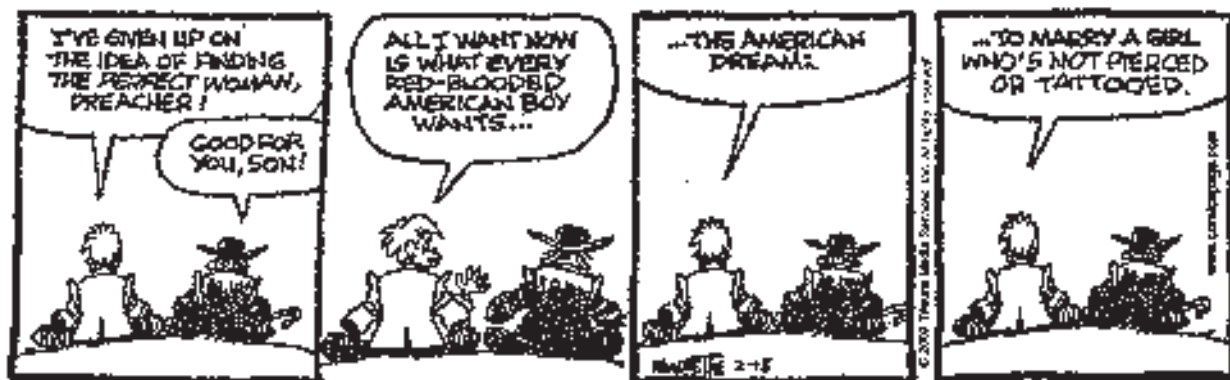
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn experienced evil of unimaginable horror in Stalin's Gulag and devoted his life to exposing its atrocities, yet even in that crusade he came to see that the issues were not so simple:

It was on rotting prison straw that I felt the first stirrings of good in myself. Gradually it became clear to me that the line separating good from evil runs not between states, not between classes, and not between parties -- it runs through the heart of each and every one of us, and through all human hearts. This line is not stationary. It shifts and moves with the passing of the years. Even in hearts enveloped in evil, it maintains a small bridgehead of good. And even the most virtuous heart harbors an uprooted corner of evil.³

(2) *The nation.* The recent presidential campaign permitted the mass media to engage in a year-long orgy of divisiveness on the theory that everybody loves a good fight. The political gurus urged their candidates to disparage their opponents so relentlessly that whoever was elected would be discredited before taking office. When the results were in, the states were divided into red or blue and every voter made to feel like a winner or a loser so much so that some Republicans prepared an obituary on the Democratic Party and some Democrats investigated what would be involved in migrating to Canada. Pundits peering into the

future predicted a massive realignment of America into conservative and liberal camps that would oppose each other ever more bitterly over a whole range of irreconcilable issues. For any who bothered to look, there was no longer any middle ground left, and no one seemed to care. Some even celebrated this disuniting of America which has left us with plenty of *pluribus* and not much *unum*.

But is it wise to divide up our country into a party of wheat and a party of weeds? Every day I deal with those who have nothing but utter contempt for "the other side," whichever it may be. The issue here is not whether you preferred George Bush or John Kerry but the simple fact that only one of them could be elected president of us all. Grateful that we were offered a free choice, the question remains whether the presidential campaign prepared us to unite in support of the candidate who prevailed. The vote was 51% to 48%, some reply, and "to the victor belongs the spoils." But does it make our nation stronger for the 58 million who voted for Bush to disenfranchise the 55 million who voted for Kerry? The wisdom of our story is, "let them grow together"—even if each side thinks that they are the wheat and the other side is the weeds! The two-party system has served our nation well throughout its history. The majority party in office needs the critical scrutiny and informed dissent of the minority party to protect it from the intoxication with power that is the



Achilles' heel of every politician.

(3) *The Church*. You doubtless know that every major denomination in America has been engaged in outright civil war over the past generation, none more so than Southern Baptists. At the root of the conflict is an unwillingness to tolerate some of the sharp differences that characterize contemporary life. Thus we have the culture wars with their pitched battles over such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and social welfare. Or the theological wars over biblical inerrancy, evolution, and the role of women. Or the ideological wars that pit conservative hardhats against liberal eggheads, rural traditionalists against urban innovators, and older preservationists against younger progressives. When this volatile mix of issues is seized upon by religious absolutists, the predictable result is polarization. Nowhere is there a greater tendency to divide all of life into wheat and weeds than in a church with an authoritarian mindset. Remember the medieval Crusades, the religious wars that wracked Europe after the Reformation, and the splintering of Protestantism into a thousand denominations once it reached our shores.

To be sure, there are plenty of weeds in every church, superficial members who join only for the business contacts they can make, or for the free babysitting their children can receive, or for the use of facilities in which to hold their weddings and funerals. But where better for such "counterfeit

Christians" to be? To throw them out only denies them the opportunity to hear and see a witness that might one day change their lives. When the Southern Baptist Convention ostracized thousands of its members as heretics by a self-defined orthodoxy, all that this did was impoverish its own internal life by sealing itself off from the contribution that the excluded part of the family was able to make. The comment of Helmut Thielicke points to a better way:

Must we not rather *love*, in order that in this very venture of love we may learn to realize that wheat is sown even in the most weed-ridden lives and that God is waiting and yearning for it to grow? Dostoevski once spoke this profound and unspeakably helpful word: "To love a person means to see him as God intended him to be."⁴

Do these applications, and the story on which they are built, imply that we are to be moral pacifists who fail to oppose evil until the weeds overwhelm us? No, "let *both* grow together" (v. 30) is the imperative of our text. We are not to give up sowing good seed and let bad seed take the field. If we cannot eradicate evil in our kind of world, neither are we to let it eradicate the good. Rather, we are to be busy growing an ever stronger faith that can more than hold its own even in a weed-choked field. Further, doing this "together" rather than in isolation points us to the life

of dialogue in creative coexistence with those who differ.

After all, people are more than plants, and in the give and take of honest sharing change can occur. Luther Burbank once remarked that "every weed is a potential flower."⁵ All it needs is the right kind of cross-breeding and cultivation such as Jesus offered the human weeds of his day. That is why it is so easy to get in our church but so hard to get out: easy to be accepted because we are welcoming of all whom Christ calls to discipleship, hard to be rejected because we are patient with those who allow weeds to grow in their lives in the hope that one day the good seed will prevail. But what about the weeds that never seem to change? God will know best what to do with them. ■

1 For details see A. B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ*, second edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887), 45-47.

2 Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 102.

3 Cited by Richard John Neuhaus, "Solzhenitsyn's Discovery," *The Religion & Society Report* 2, no. 3 (1985): 1.

4 Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 81.

5 Cited by Charles B. Templeton, *Life Looks Up* (New York: Harper



Bread and Bibles

By Buckner Fanning, San Antonio, TX

Note: This article is excerpted from the author's book, *God Drives A Pickup*, and it may be acquired by contacting Buckner Fanning Ministries at www.bucknerfanning.org.

Almost every day for over thirty years, I have thought of a woman I met three decades ago. She exemplifies the power of one person to make a difference in the lives of thousands. Whenever I read of wars, destruction, poverty, mayhem, tragedy, and man's inhumanity to man—I think of her. The memory of her heroic deed encourages me.

On a beautiful spring Sunday morning in 1969, in Communist Poland I was speaking in the Warsaw Baptist Church. Their gifted pastor, Reverend Pawlik, who spoke fluent English, hosted my visit and interpreted my message to his congregation that day.

During the service, Reverend Pawlik acknowledged the return of Mrs. Kamila Michowski, who had been gravely ill for a long while. Her first Sunday back in church coincided with her ninetieth birthday. The congregation, delighted to have Mrs. Michowski worshipping in her usual second row seat, greeted this beloved woman by singing a robust Polish rendition of Happy Birthday. Later, Reverend Pawlik shared Mrs. Michowski's story with me.

On September 28, 1939, Warsaw fell to Hitler's storming Nazi army. Conquest was only the beginning of the city's anguish. During the Nazi occupation of Poland, Jews, many of whom were deported from regions throughout Western Europe, found themselves penned behind the walls of the Warsaw ghetto. Approximately 40,000 people lived in that area prior to the Nazi offensive. Hitler's demonic plan forced a half-million Jews behind the walls where they vegetated under

dreadful conditions, tormented by hunger and disease. Fifty thousand Jews died within the first month.

Hitler's *Schutzstaffel*, or protected squad, better known—and dreaded—by the initials SS, had been commanded to shoot any Pole considered to be rebellious or politically undesirable. Anyone discovered carrying an item that could be interpreted as a weapon or concealing any sort of anti-Nazi paraphernalia was executed without a trial—often on the spot. Occasionally SS men would leap from a staff car to snatch a suspect. Abrupt arrests by such roaming squads became a prevalent and horrifying event.

During those horrible days of Nazi occupation, Mrs. Michowski, a Christian, would identify herself as a Jew by placing a Star of David armband around her bulky coat. Can you imagine?—a Christian disguising herself as a Jew at a time when any slight provocation could cause a dissident to be summarily shot or deported to a place worse than death!

Under her bulky clothing, Mrs. Michowski hid loaves of bread and numerous Bibles; then, armband in place, she would march past the Nazi guarded entrance into the Jewish ghetto. Mrs. Michowski jeopardized her life to take bread and Bibles to those who were physically and spiritually starving. After she had delivered the Bibles, her Jewish friends smuggled her out of the ghetto into the underground sewers from where she made her way back home. On and on she went, week after week, identifying herself publicly as a Jew so she could bring spiritual and physical food to her Jewish neighbors and friends.

After the war the Baptist church was reconstructed on the edge of the Warsaw ghetto where it once stood. As construction workers were digging the foundation for the new church, they discovered bones of Jews who

had been killed or starved by the Nazi invaders. At the dedication of the church the pastor stood on the reconstructed steps, and with bones in hand, declared, "Our church has been built on the bones of martyrs."

We have martyrs today. Sadly, unlike Mrs. Michowski, we turn our heads and walk the other way, ignoring the thousands of people hungering for both physical and spiritual food.

Mrs. Michowski, who never took just Bibles nor just bread, but always, bread and Bibles, personifies what the ministry and work of the church must be in today's world. With thousands of people, most of them children, dying each day of hunger, our churches must be willing to supply both physical and spiritual bread to those in need. We can no longer sit smugly in our pews. We must put on our arm bands and, with bread and Bibles in hand, confront danger by ministering to those in need. The example of Mrs. Michowski and the bones of the martyrs demand action.

Jesus gave both physical and spiritual bread to the multitudes in His day, and He expects us to be carrying out the same dual ministry in our day (Mt 9:36-37).

Ignoring the Bible's command and the example of Jesus, pastors and members of our country's urban churches continue to cover their eyes, failing to see the poverty and hunger all around them, neglecting the needs of the physically and spiritually hungry of our great cities.

Here is a suggestion: Whenever you read of atrocities or hear of mistreatments or see examples of inhumanity, think of Mrs. Michowski. Remembering her will remind us that we can all make a difference.

What can we do to reduce suffering in the world? Pray for those in distress? Yes. Encourage those whose profes-

(continued on page 24)

Capital Punishment: A Pastoral Perspective

By Steve Bezner, Teaching Pastor First Baptist Church, Kaufman, TX

Serving as a pastor in rural Texas I am often confronted with remnants of frontier justice. Many of my church members own handguns, and not all of the handgun owners are male, I might add. Until recently a local eatery prominently displayed a photograph entitled, “The Last Hanging in Kaufman County.” And at least one Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount concluded with an argument over whether shooting a would-be thief constituted un-Christian behavior. While I do not own a gun, did not approve of the eatery’s photograph, and argued against shooting the thief, my church has accepted me nonetheless.

But nothing could have prepared me for the day that the sister and niece of one of my church members were murdered in cold blood.

The day was difficult from a pastoral perspective. There were multiple family relationships to engage, law enforcement to encourage and pray with, and many town people to comfort. But the days following the husband’s arrest proved to be quite difficult as well, for the district attorney questioned the family on whether or not he should pursue the death penalty. Consequently, the church member whose sister and niece had been murdered ended up in my office asking my opinion on the subject.

When Christians discuss the topic of capital punishment, the debate inevitably centers on reading and interpreting Romans 12 and 13. Paul first encourages believers, “As far as it is possible, live at peace with those around you” (12:18). He also commends them to live without revenge, trusting God to hand out punishment in the end: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay’” (12:19). In short, Paul invokes Jesus’ teachings in the

Sermon on the Mount¹ so that he might remind believers how to live peaceably.

Just as Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies and to bless those who persecute us, Paul reminds believers to leave vengeance to God. Based upon Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 5-6 and Paul’s words at the conclusion of Romans 12, the New Testament ethic seems quite clearly to reflect a position of nonviolence, particularly with a punishment that might be construed as revenge.

But the very next section from Paul seems to contradict this position. Following his treatise on peace, Paul then writes that believers are to submit to the government, “for there is no authority except that which God has established. . . . Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed” (13:1-2). Paul concludes with a statement that has become a key text for those supporting capital punishment: “But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (13:4).

Thus on the one hand, Paul urges believers to exercise restraint from vengeance in Chapter 12, but on the other hand the apostle seems to validate capital punishment in Chapter 13, insisting that God has established the government to carry out divine vengeance. This creates a conundrum for those believers who interpret Jesus’ commands in the Sermon on the Mount and Paul’s words in Romans 12 as instruction against the death penalty on grounds of vengeance. Some might be tempted to say that Paul’s words in Romans 13, particularly verse 1—“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established”—mean that the government has the final say

in matters such as crime and punishment. Verse one, coupled with verse 4—“But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer”—seem to give a biblical mandate for the death penalty. Given this passage, how could a believer disagree with capital punishment? Hasn’t Paul given a *carte blanche* approval to the practice in the name of God and divine justice?

But upon further review, it seems doubtful that few would concede that all governments across time have been good, much less God-centered. From Hitler to Hussein,² dictators have exercised authority that may not necessarily reflect God’s vision for governing. And if there have been governments that have, from time to time, not been God-honoring, it stands to reason that there have been governmental practices that also have not been God-honoring. To be certain, Christians in the United States make regular practice out of decrying policies supported and enforced by the government that are perceived to be contrary to the teachings of the Scripture. Capital punishment, then, may need to be further examined to determine its validity in light of biblical teaching.

Reading and interpreting Romans 12-13, then, becomes central to this discussion for at least three reasons. First, the passage is the only place in the New Testament that explicitly gives believers instruction on how to interact with the government aside from Jesus’ injunction to, “Give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s.” Second, Old Testament passages dealing with capital punishment are often relegated to a *midrash* type status, given the multiple issues handled by the Hebrew Bible (dietary restrictions, death for dishonoring one’s parents) that are no longer considered applicable for

today's Christians. Third, this passage, at least on one level, seems to contradict the teachings of Jesus presented in the Sermon on the Mount regarding peacekeeping, nonviolence, and non-retaliation.

I argue that Romans 13 must be read and obeyed, but explicitly in light of Paul's comments in the previous chapter. It may prove helpful at this juncture to recall Paul's context. As Paul wrote to the Romans there were no—or at least very few—Christians in positions of power across the empire, particularly in the justice system (you will recall that even the politically savvy Sanhedrin had to ask permission from Pilate to kill Jesus). In fact, there are virtually no recorded accounts of believers being in positions of legal authority until after the conversion of Constantine. At the time of Paul's writing, and through the first three hundred years of Christianity, believers withdrew from political life, primarily because they refused to swear allegiance to the state.³ In Paul's day, Christians simply obeyed the government for they had no other options; resistance or revolution meant a swift punishment, most likely death. The Roman government was good in one sense: it provided an orderly and organized society in which Christians could practice and flourish. But the totalitarian power of the Caesar could also mean torture and ridicule, as believers discovered under Nero. Rather than cause problems, believers embodied Paul's instructions, intending to live

in peace, and avoiding the political arena.

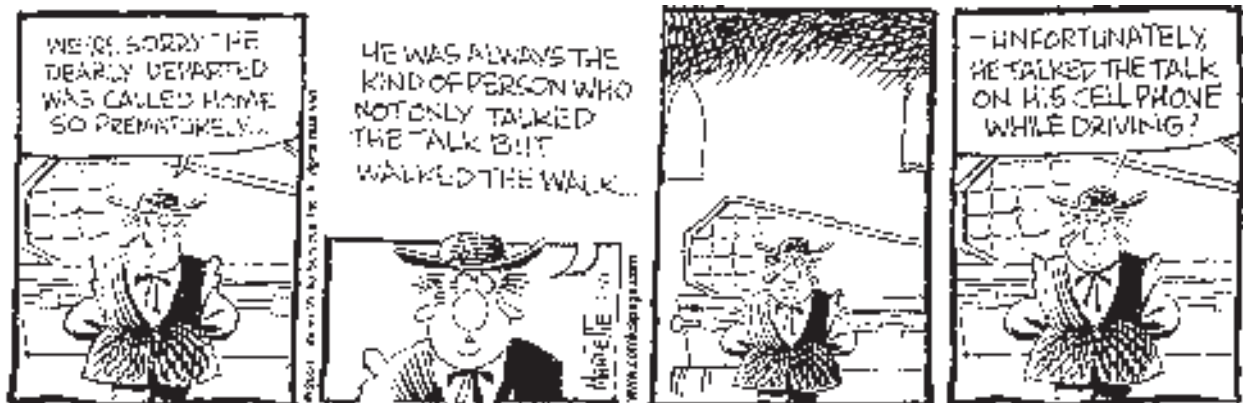
This is significant, for Paul could not have imagined our contemporary American political context in which almost every person running for office claims some sort of allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As a result, Paul could easily state that believers should leave punishment to the government. There were no believers in the government, and given the lowly position of believers at the time of Paul's writing, there was little hope that the church could reform the government. This is not to say that the church did not exercise civil disobedience; they certainly did. But the church had no voice in radically reforming governmental practices of the Roman Empire, particularly regarding capital punishment.

The contemporary American context in the early twenty-first century, however, is wildly different. Currently a professing evangelical Christian holds the most powerful position in the free world. He has appointed, with senatorial confirmation, a new member to the most powerful court in the land. Many conservative pundits have argued if our president appoints a judge that refuses to oppose *Roe v. Wade* then the Bush presidency has been a failure. And they state this for a singular reason: they believe the church, in a free state, should work to reform the state to better reflect the biblical ethic. The implications are simple; many Christians believe that

one must take their faith with them into the workplace, even if that workplace happens to be the government. Those same Christians believe that if one happens to be the president—or another person of great influence—one should allow one's faith to shape policy. Today's American Christians, if they aspire to politics, can reasonably hope to influence policy based on their faith in a way believers in the first century Roman Empire would never have imagined. This contextual difference is important as we read Romans 13 through a contemporary American lens.

So the question regarding capital punishment becomes one of mercy and grace regarding death for those Christians who find themselves in positions of power. Professing Christians can now be found within almost every facet of the government on every level in most every community across the nation. Should these who profess to follow the teachings of the New Testament support capital punishment, even though it appears to violate Jesus' teachings regarding vengeance?⁴ Can the group of people Paul exhorts to live peaceably as far as it is possible, be the same people that request the death penalty, argue for it in a court of law, rule in its favor from the jury box, condone it from the judge's bench, and administer it by injection in front of the watching victim's family?

I am certain that some believers would reply in the affirmative. They would argue that God has established



the government to administer judgment and justice, and that Christians are allowed to do this. They would suggest that Jesus' ethic regarding violence and revenge are intended for personal, not social, issues. They would argue that a government without a sword is useless and emasculated.

But Jesus, it seems to me, created the church to be a peaceable force in a violent world. He intends it to transform the culture rather than condone it unilaterally, particularly in cases of exercising violence. Christians in government carry their Jesus ethic with them into office. And the rule of law cannot trump that grace-laden lifestyle. Additionally, Paul's words regarding vengeance are haunting for Christians serving in a land that exercises the death penalty with alarming regularity. If those who follow Christ are to leave vengeance to God, certainly we must allow space for grace within the punishment of those most serious crimes. Jesus has ordered us to love our enemies; it is difficult to kill those whom we are supposed to love. Therefore, those who take seriously a belief in the afterlife must ponder long and hard the consequences of ending the life of one they deem guilty. To put it more directly: is our desire to terminate a criminal's life done in order to fulfill God's justice or is it done, perhaps unwittingly, in order to speed someone's path toward an eternity apart from God?

The Bible tells of God's redemption of murderers named Moses and

David. Moses killed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew; David ordered Uriah to the front lines in order to hide his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. Both were killers. But both became great forces for the furthering of God's mission in the world, despite their crimes. God often redeems the most unlikely of characters, and the Christian gospel is based on hope in such redemption. From a Christian perspective, the hope of conversion and redemption may be the single greatest reason to stand against execution as a viable form of punishment; we hope that a person might encounter God and be saved.

I counseled my church member to refrain from encouraging the district attorney to pursue the death penalty. I did not do so based on the popular secular arguments against the death penalty—because it has a racial bias, because of the number of innocents put to death, or because of its failure as a deterrent of violent crime. I did so because Jesus and his apostle Paul, instructed me to leave vengeance in God's hands, both in the Sermon on the Mount and in Paul's letter to the Romans—even if that directive runs counter to the prevailing wisdom of my government. ■

1 Biblical scholars and theologians have noted the parallelisms here. See, for example, Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary*

Introduction to New Testament Ethics (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1996) and James McClendon, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Ethics* (Nashville, Abingdon: 1988). McClendon's reading of Romans 12-13 is also immensely helpful.

- 2 Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death for crimes against humanity and hanged in a now infamously videoed manner on December 30, 2006 while I was working on this article. The manner in which the execution was carried out is currently a source of debate and unrest in Iraq.
- 3 Cf. Joe E. Trull, *Walking in the Way: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997), 271.
- 4 Jean Lasserre, *War and the Gospel*, trans. Oliver Coburn (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1962) 162, 171, makes the point quite well by noting the that Sixth Commandment's injunction against killing was not only endorsed by Jesus, but make more serious by the directive that believers ought not speak against or harbor hate against another individual. It seems impossible, from a Christian perspective, to execute one whom we love. This love, particularly coupled with any sort of responsibility toward conversion, or at least hope of conversion, makes capital punishment absurd for those who believe Christ has come to redeem.



On Asking Too Much

By Tripp York, Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies | Elon University, NC

Dan and I went to prison because we believed that Christianity and revolution are synonymous. Jesus Christ was a nonviolent revolutionary; therefore, Christians have a duty to subvert society in order to create a world where justice prevails, particularly for the poor who must be treated with fairness and love.

The quote above comes from Philip Berrigan's autobiography, *Fighting the Lamb's War*: Skirmishes with the American Empire. On May 17th, 1968 Phillip, the first Catholic priest in North America to have ever been arrested for civil disobedience, and his brother Dan (also a Catholic priest), along with seven others walked into the draft board in Catonsville, Maryland, and proceeded to burn draft files. After that, they said prayers and submitted themselves to the government and were eventually sentenced to time in a federal prison. Rather than spend their lives just writing and talking about theology, they decided to perform it. In an attempt to expose to North American Christians the idolatry often demanded of governments, especially in times of war, the Berrigan brothers chose to burn draft files with homemade napalm to symbolically show what was being used on both combatants and civilians in Vietnam. The response of the Federal government to the Berrigan's confirmed their suspicions: For burning paper, you serve time in jail; for burning humans, you're a national hero.

This next story is slightly different but I hope we can locate the connections. In the third chapter of the Book of Daniel, we find the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's vain attempt to have all of those under his command worship his gods. The king, who only moments earlier had just proclaimed his undying loyalty to the God of Israel, creates a massive and magnificent golden statue and demands that

all people of various nations and language, at the cue of his "entire musical ensemble," to fall down and worship it. As the music played, we are told, "all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped" the golden statue (Dan. 3:7).

This is not entirely true. There were a few who refused to bow to such obvious idolatry. Scripture says that there were "certain Jews" who had been "appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon" that had refused the orders of the king. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and their disobedience was quickly reported. This, not surprisingly, made Nebuchadnezzar furious. He sent for the three and immediately commanded them to fall down and worship his creation. If they persisted in their noncompliance they were told that they would be cast into a furnace to be consumed by fire. Alas, our heroes did not relent. They plainly told the king that they felt no need to make a defense for their actions, and, furthermore, if their God so chose to save them from the furnace then God would do it. "But if not," they continued, "be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue you have set up" (Dan. 3:18).

The story ends, as most of us are aware, with the three surviving the fire and the king going mad. What is most unnerving about this tale now is the manner in which it has been so easily domesticated and romanticized for the consumption of the kind of disembodied Christianity prevalent in North America. The first time I heard this story, for instance, I could not have been much older than six, and yet, it was told to me in such a way that I never got the idea that the actions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were either remotely radical or political. Of course, it may be a bit much to assume that at six years of age I

should know anything more than the story itself, but following two decades of immersion into the church I would think that I would be weaned from the milk and fed solid food (I Cor. 3:2). Rare is the occasion that one would hear this story told in such a way that we might find ourselves threatened by something analogous to a furnace (at least a jail cell). Perhaps even more telling is how, despite the fact that these three men were well aware that God may not save them, they still refused to accommodate the king's wishes. Interestingly, they all actually worked in the service of the king. Yet, they were still capable of discerning when a leader had asked that of which cannot be given. I just wonder how this story could be told today so that we too could so easily see when what is demanded of us becomes an occasion for idolatry.

Perhaps this story is much too easy. The idolatry is plain to see even by a six year old child. What may be required, therefore, is a bit of that solid food intended for the mature in body and spirit (Heb. 5:14). That is, what kind of resources would be necessary for Christians today to understand when something is being asked of them that should not nor must not be given to those who call themselves our benefactors? This is something of a rhetorical question for I think we have the resources necessary to make such careful distinctions via scripture and tradition. I say scripture and tradition for we know that scripture is not self-interpreting. Scripture is easily manipulated to suit our own purposes, therefore we rely on tradition, as well as a community of faith—an actual body of believers—to help us interpret scripture well and to hold us accountable when we fail to do so.

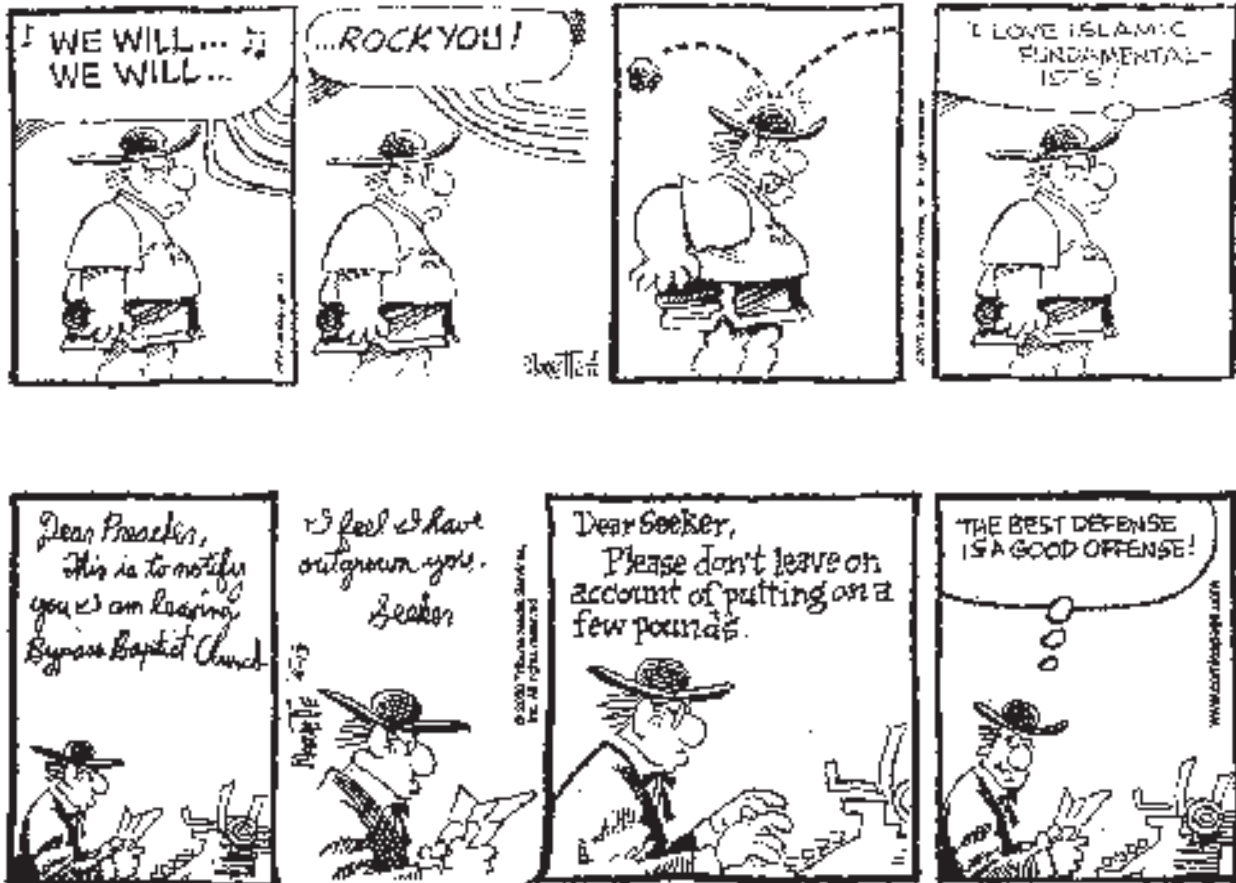
Yet, part of what the above anecdote from scripture teaches us is that our best sources are biographical. The

stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Ruth, Esther and Sarah; Hosea, Amos and Jeremiah; John, Peter, Mary and Paul all constitute a tradition of interpretation that is still exemplified in the lives of those who continue to conform their will to God. This is why the Catholic Church has saints. Saints are those people that the church, as a body politic, has agreed helps us to understand scripture by their very lives. Protestants and Anabaptists may use the word 'saint' a bit differently, but we still look to those who have followed Jesus well as exemplars of what it means to have one's will conformed to God. Though we may not agree with all of the actions performed by those rebel priests the Berrigans, is it not possible to see how, for example, their lives are made more intelligible through the

forementioned story from Daniel (or vice-versa)? If so, what does this mean for how we understand Jesus and how, in turn, we live Christ-like lives? What does it mean to follow the path of Jesus when our respective governments demand total allegiance? When Jesus demands that we love our enemies and our leaders demand that we kill them, whom do we obey? Caesar or Christ? Do we really understand the political statement: Jesus is Lord? If so, why is it not more obvious that all of the Presidents that we will ever have ask more of us than what is owed to them?

Unfortunately, the church is so often co-opted by the project of the state that she is no longer capable of offering a prophetic witness to the peaceable kingdom and, therefore, renders it difficult for the Christian

to realize that her loyalties are being stretched thin. Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters (which is exactly why it is so important for the state to dupe the church into thinking that they are both on the same trajectory). So in a time like this, where it is apparent that whoever is in charge of the White House is going to demand more than what is owed them (our bodies in service to the exact opposite of how Jesus calls us to treat our enemies) we must ask at least this one basic question: How are Christians living in a post-Christian climate, though still residing in a nominally Christian environment, going to be capable of discerning when it is time to say, "But if not [even if God does not intervene to save us], be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods . . .?" ■



Evangelicals on the Left? How Shocking! How Awful!

By John G. Stackhouse, Professor of Theology and Culture, Regent College, Vancouver

Martin Marty recently wrote about evangelicals from his vantage point outside evangelicalism—but within the fellowship of those he likes to call the “original evangelicals,” namely, Lutherans. From within (later-day) evangelicalism, then, I offer this second observation of this burgeoning movement.

I have been wondering why people both within and without evangelicalism are so surprised—and sometimes even upset—about the emergence of a “non-right-wing” evangelicalism in America.

For example, the executive of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) recently endorsed a document produced by a group called Evangelicals for Human Rights that condemns the use of torture, and it calls on the United States government in particular to forswear its use. This action, coming after last year’s declaration of concern about global climate change by evangelicals as prominent as Rick “Purpose Driven” Warren, has aroused shock and awe among many on the right who had previously enjoyed arrogating the term “evangelical” entirely to themselves.

Mark Tooley of “Front Page Magazine” says that “the 17-member drafting committee, called ‘Evangelicals for Human Rights,’ is comprised nearly exclusively of pseudo-pacifist academics and antiwar activists who sharply condemn the Bush administration.” (One notes with bemusement this characterization of, for example, drafter David Neff, edi-

tor of the notoriously non-left-leaning *Christianity Today* magazine. And one asks again the perennial question, What exactly is a “pseudo-pacifist”?)

Indeed, Tooley pronounces the ultimate doom on the NAE and its fellow-travelers: They are on the same leftist path to irrelevancy, if not heresy, as the National Council of Churches—an insult no greater than which can be conceived in these circles.

The same week as this bit of excitement was brewing, Michael Kerlin of Philadelphia’s “Evening Bulletin” wrote of “A Different Kind of Evangelical”—namely, a typical South American evangelical who votes with left-wing political parties because they promise relief and social change from the establishment’s oppression. Mr. Kerlin suggested that as the First Evangelical was touring South America, President Bush might have liked to know that the average evangelical is more likely to vote for the likes of Daniel Ortega or Hugo Chavez than anyone else. He or she would do so because the alternative choices usually mean voting for the old regime of landowners or the new regime of business magnates, not to mention the Roman Catholic hierarchy, which is often identified with both.

Meanwhile, our gaze returns to North America, where evangelicals are excited about the release of the movie *Amazing Grace*, the story of William Wilberforce and the campaign to abolish the British slave trade. [See Movie Review in this issue] But in the context of these contemporary observations,

we might ask whether this evangelical hero would be more likely to line up today with Jim Dobson or Jim Wallis.

Of course, it is anachronistic in the extreme to try to situate Wilberforce in terms of today’s American political landscape. And there wasn’t a lot of socialist theory to attract Wilberforce’s interest—he died in 1833, in the earliest decades of socialist thinking and fifteen years before the *Communist Manifesto* was published. But the abolition of slavery is what anyone would have to call government-initiated broad structural change on behalf of justice—which is what socialism ideally is all about. So it’s certainly not clear that Wilberforce would maintain the current religious right’s narrow focus on the (free, white, prosperous) family, so to speak.

Indeed, as a Canadian who has lived all his life with a third national political party dedicated to democratic socialism and founded by a Baptist pastor; as one with a nodding acquaintance with social democratic movements in Britain, the European Continent, and Australasia; and as one who notes that George W. Bush’s best political friend in the world is a Christian man who leads the British *Labour* Party—well, the idea that evangelicalism should be confined to the American right strikes me as something that could literally happen only in America. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (4/19/07), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

What Is God Doing About Evil?

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

A man was concerned about his elderly father. The father lived alone in a basement apartment in the city and was engaged in a set of practices that disturbed his son. Whenever the son came for a visit he would see that his father had been out rummaging around in the trash and had brought home odd bits of other people's rubbish. The elderly man would retrieve someone's broken toaster, a worn-out coffee pot, a busted tri-cycle, and so-forth and would dump the refuse in the middle of his floor. Daily he would accumulate more and more of other people's tossed-away junk and bring it home. He would then arrange the items in some precise manner and secure them to one another with wire, string, or unraveled coat-hangers. "Why are you doing this," the son would ask? "If I don't," the father replied, "the world will fall apart."

Needless to say, such a response disturbed the son who, after repeated but unsuccessful attempts at reasoning with his father, determined that his father must be placed in some secure institution for his own good. The son contacted a social worker who was to visit the father in his basement apartment to evaluate his condition. Of course when the social worker visited the father he saw for himself the odd conglomeration of useless items strung together with wire, string, and unraveled coat-hangers. "Why are you doing this," the social worker asked? "If I don't," the father replied, "the world will fall apart." That was good enough for the social worker and the father was committed into the hands of professional care-givers that very day.

After his own long day of professional care-giving the social worker himself went home to watch the evening news. The news was disturbing. Conflicts had broken out between formerly peaceful countries. Drastic

shifts in weather patterns threatened flood here and drought there. Wild gyrations in the stock markets were feeding the fears and dreads of skittish investors. The social worker shook his head and comforted himself that he had at least done his part by caring for an eccentric but confused elderly man.

The news, though, got worse. Conflicts escalated, the weather grew more erratic and deadly, and world economies stumbled. Day by day the pattern was repeated with increasing intensity. Could it be? Finally, we see the social worker in the former basement apartment of the elderly man stringing together odd bits of other people's rubbish with wire and unraveled coat-hangers. "If I don't do this," the social worker said to himself, "the world will fall apart."

What might this story have to tell us about Christian ethics? Could it be that the character of God's governance of his creation is of a different sort than often imagined? How does God rule his universe? By what means does God order creation? In light of the threats and challenges to the good order of God's good creation, how is God's sovereign rule expressed? In the face of disorder and corruption, what is God doing? What is God doing about evil?

Let me stress that asking the question "what is God doing about evil?" is different from how the question of the relationship between God and evil is often raised. Philosophers ask, "How can we believe in a perfectly good, perfectly wise, and all-powerful God in the face of the evil and suffering our world knows?" The questions of theodicy are not unimportant, but I am raising what I believe is a more strictly biblical question that assumes a standpoint of faith that God is the good creator of a good creation. And yet the extent of sorrow and evil in our

world needs no great demonstration. A faithful question must certainly be, "What is God doing about such?"

I want to offer a response to that question with reference to Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, finding in Ephesians a helpful and concise resource for themes and emphases that I believe are representative of a much wider witness. I believe it is the task of Christian ethics to ask, "What is God doing about evil?" A faithful response, informed by God's story in Scripture is that *God, through God's redemptive work, is creating a people whose lives, sustained in worship, bear witness to his purposes for creation.* A brief exploration of this statement will indicate what sort of approach to Christian ethics I think is truly faithful to God's engagement with a creation that knows evil and suffering.

This understanding of Christian ethics will ask what in the world is God doing. That is, it will be a theocentric approach to Christian ethics. Many approaches to ethics, and even many approaches to Christian ethics, begin elsewhere. Often enough the first question asked is, "What should I do?" While Christian ethics cannot ultimately ignore that question and its myriad permutations, a Christian approach to the moral life as a whole must begin with the affirmation that our decisions and actions do not take place in the vacuum of an isolated moment but within the context of God's faithful pursuit of the good God intends for all of creation. A theocentric approach to Christian ethics will ask, "What should I do?" but only in light of the larger and specific question "What is God doing about evil?" A theocentric approach to Christian ethics will approach the ethical task in light of God's initiative, God's abundance, and God's agenda.¹ There are many ways in which each of these aspects of a theocentric ethic finds

expression in Ephesians. Let me start with some attention to how Ephesians stresses the *divine initiative* with respect to the moral life.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has much to say about the moral life of Christians. In fact, chapters 4-6 are generally described as containing a heavy dose of what biblical scholars call *parenesis*—or moral exhortation. Paul's moral instruction ranges from stressing those moral virtues that sustain Christian community—humility, gentleness, patience, and love—to encouraging practices and dispositions to be put on display in the household relations of wife/husband, child/parent, slave/master. These chapters follow the first three chapters of the book in which Paul describes how God is at work in the world to achieve its redemption and restoration through Christ.

The division between distinct blocks of material in Ephesians is often described in a manner that cleanly separates theology (chapters 1-3) from ethics (chapters 4-6). In a pluralistic world that prefers to approach moral questions from the standpoint of religious neutrality, the apparent separation of ethics from theology in Ephesians encourages a reading of the text reinforced by an idea of ethics as a project that need not depend on some particular vision of world order, theological or otherwise. In this light, "ethics" is simply the universal quest for moral insight into human action. Does the clear emphasis on moral matters in Ephesians 4-6 underwrite the modern assumption that ethics can be pursued

strictly as a human project independently of a theological framework?

A detailed response to that question would require more time than presently available, but briefly put the structure of Ephesians intends to communicate something very different than the separation of theology from ethics. What does Paul want to emphasize?

It is the case that we live in the world in light of the world we live in. That is, our decisions, our commitments, our daily practices, our way of relating to others, what consumes our energy and time, what rises to the top of our list of priorities, all of how we live in the world reflects our vision of reality—the world we think we live in. As Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon put it, "We can only act within that world which we see. So, the primary ethical question is not, What ought I now to do? but rather, How does the world really look?"² For Christians to live in the world faithfully, we must first be able to describe the world truthfully. It is no small matter that the topic of truth runs throughout Ephesians, for it is this true account of the world that Paul offers in Ephesians 1-3, not some incidental religious talk that we can safely discard as long as we uphold our allegiance to something called values or morality or ethics. For Paul, we can only live in the world faithfully as we describe the world truthfully; and that is what he offers in Ephesians 1-3—a way to describe the world truthfully.

The concern to describe the world truthfully is itself no small matter, particularly when grappling with the issues

of evil and suffering. Every complaint is a cry against disorder. Every groan expresses resistance to "the way things are." To raise the questions of evil and suffering is to question the very order of reality and whether it can be trusted. In her most recent work Susan Neiman argues that modern philosophy, usually assumed to be occupied mainly with matters of epistemology (what can I know and how can I know it?), actually has been most concerned with the questions of evil and suffering. The questions of epistemology are inquiry into "the way things are." And what is the way things are? In a world burdened with earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, terrorism, child abuse, poverty, racism, fetal alcohol syndrome, and Alzheimer's we press the issue: "Is there another, better, truer order than the one we experience, or are the facts with which our senses confront us all that there is? Is reality exhausted by what it is, or does it leave room for all that it could be?"³

The apostle Paul urges us to enjoy a wider vision of reality than what is afforded by the immediate and the apparent and prays that "the eyes of [our] heart may be enlightened, so that [we] might know what is the hope of [God's] calling" (1:18). This calling is all about God's initiative, God's faithful insistence that the world is not abandoned but is the object of eventual transformation. Christian ethics begins with the affirmation of God's gracious initiative displayed in his intent to create a people defined by truth, who know the miracle of forgiveness, and who live in hope of the restoration of



all things in heaven and on the earth (1:3-14). Ephesians 1-3 gives an account of a world in which God is at work, revealing in a world of hostility, enmity, estrangement, and death what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the all-encompassing love of Christ (3:16-17) that gives life out of death and achieves reconciliation even among strangers (2:1-22).

Before Paul says a word about this moral responsibility or that moral obligation, he first describes a world in which any such actions would make sense—one in which God is at work to provide for new life and peace in the gracious creation of a people who are called to participate in a work of new creation. Chapters 4-6 give specific content to the concrete witness of this people in the world, but it is to a people who have responded in faith to the divine initiative—to God's calling—that Paul admonishes, "Walk worthy of your calling" (4:1). A Christian ethic that affirms this theocentric pattern will not ask first, "What should I do?" but will ask first, "What is God doing?" It will emphasize the divine initiative.

A theocentric ethic, however, will also celebrate *divine abundance*. The language of abundance in Ephesians is notorious: believers are blessed with "every spiritual blessing" (1:3); God's grace is "freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (1:6); God's forgiveness is granted "according to the riches of his grace," a grace "lavished upon us" (1:7-8); God's calling has to do with "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe" (1:18-19)—and all this just in the first chapter! Later Paul will speak of "God, being rich in mercy" (2:4), of "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (3:8), and of "the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (3:19). British theologian David Ford announces, "If I were choosing just one theme to emphasize about the God of Ephesians . . . it would be that of abundance—the pervasive sense of lavish generosity in blessing, loving, revealing, and reconciling. This is a

world of meaning in which there is an inexhaustible, dynamic and personal source of abundance and glory with an all-inclusive, universal scope of operation."⁴

What bearing should such an emphasis on divine abundance have on the task of Christian ethics? In other words, how might the account of the divine initiative that reveals divine abundance in Ephesians 1-3 relate at all to admonitions such as, "Do not lie to one another, for we are members of one another" (4:25)?

Another theologian, John Milbank, asks the odd question, "Can morality be Christian?" His odder answer is that "Christian morality is a thing so strange, that it must be declared immoral or amoral according to all other human norms and codes of morality."⁵ How can that be? Because, Milbank argues, discussions of morality and ethics are most often driven by and presuppose a situation of scarcity. The reality of poverty raises the issues of distributive justice. Ethics committees in hospitals establish criteria for whose name gets on the list for organ transplants. Many a college course on ethics has begun with the infamous "life-boat" dilemma, forcing students to assess the value of one life over another and to defend any choices that consign the weak to the watery depths. Is not scarcity a fact of life? Is not scarcity "the way things are?" Must not Christian ethics confront the world as it is?

Milbank and others have argued that Christian ethics must not accept the conventional starting point of any ethical system that begins with scarcity; to do so is to begin from the standpoint of unbelief and is to sanction a practical atheism. In this light we must hear from Sam Wells, who begins a recent work on Christian ethics with this astonishing thesis: "God gives his people everything they need to worship him, to be his friends, and to eat with him."⁶ Do Milbank and Wells not watch the news? Do they not hear the stories of famine and poverty, of privation and lack? At this point, Wells makes a very important quali-

fication: "Everything they *need* does not mean everything they *want*. And everything they need to *follow* him does not mean everything they need to live a long, healthy life free from suffering, disappointment, frustration, or loneliness and full of achievement, recognition, and contentment."⁷ It might be argued that because we are so often concerned (because we do not trust in God's abundance) with pursuing a long, healthy life and safeguarding ourselves against suffering, disappointment, and frustration that we ourselves contribute to the manufacture of scarcity that we believe ethics can address without at all confronting our unbelief. Ethics, in such a context, becomes a means by which we attempt to manage systems of inherent injustice created often enough even by Christians whose efforts at self-protection expose our lack of trust in God's abundance. "Ethics" is the name of the discipline concerned with managing the scarcity created by our idolatry. How we often address issues of world hunger is a good example of this. Thus, says Wells, "abundance is the grain of the universe, and starvation is a symptom of things being badly against the grain. The truth is that the world is not short of food, and the solution to starvation is not making more food (overcoming scarcity); the solution is sharing the food the world already has and reconciling the divisions that lead to ruinous conflict."⁸

The uncomfortable truth is that we often accept as givens certain practices, structures, arguments, institutions, and so forth that begin with a decidedly different set of assumptions than those displayed in the language of abundance in Ephesians 1-3. How astonishing the rationale for work that Paul gives in 4:28! The former thief is encouraged to work "with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need." Paul can only offer such an explanation for the place of work in our lives if he believes that there is more going on in this world than the apparent and immediate nexus of cause and effect. He can only

offer such an account if he believes that our lives are not ultimately safeguarded by our own contrivances, but by the God “who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (3:20).

We live in the world in light of the world we live in. The admonitions of Ephesians 4-6 reflect belief in the world described in Ephesians 1-3, a world in which God is at work through the gospel to bless abundantly, to bestow richly, to dispense lavishly, to work powerfully, all with the intent of creating a people who will reflect God’s goodness and wisdom in this world.

But that is to say that divine initiative and abundance serve the *divine agenda*. God’s action and abundance constitute “everything his people need to follow him.” Scarcity and lack are themselves the products of a disbelief that seeks the good in some order other than that defined by God (cf. Gen. 3). In the doxology that begins Ephesians Paul unveils the order God intends and the agenda outlined for a world trapped in the deceptions of misdirected desire. Without the support of detailed exegesis let me simply suggest that what God is doing in the world is creating a people whose lives are shaped by the truth of the gospel (1:13), who are embraced by and who in turn embody in practice God’s forgiveness (1:7), and who live today in anticipation of God’s ultimate plan for cosmic reconciliation (Eph. 1:9-10). Truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation make up the divine agenda and both grow out of and express the divine ini-

tiative and abundance.

Truth and truth-telling figure large in Ephesians. As Ford observes, there is in these chapters “a pervasive concern . . . with transformative language . . . aimed at building a mature community by ‘speaking the truth in love’ (4.15).”⁹ The entire moral instruction of Ephesians might be summarized in 4:24 where Paul describes the identity of this community in terms of “the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Fundamental among the obligations of this new self and the immediate consequence of assuming such an identity is “. . . laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (4:25).

Truth-telling in any particular instance is itself the child of the larger truth that is described in Ephesians as “the message of truth—the gospel of your salvation” (1:13) or as “the truth in Jesus” (4:21). While the precise connection between truth-telling and “the truth in Jesus” is not made explicit in Ephesians, Paul Griffiths’ analysis of Augustine’s absolute prohibition on lying might help us here. According to Griffiths, Augustine’s “ban on the lie only makes sense in the light of God’s graceful gifts.” For Augustine, the lie can only be avoided when disordered loves (cf. “the lusts of deceit” in contrast to “the truth in Jesus” in 4:21-22) find redirection when life is turned from self to God. But, “a necessary condition for all this is that God gives himself to be gazed at, that God ceaselessly batters our hearts with the gift of

himself.” What better way to speak of “the message of truth—the gospel of your salvation?” For Augustine, then, as I believe it was for Paul in Eph. 4:25, “The lie’s ban has sense and purchase . . . only when understood and expressed as an element in the syntax of grace.”¹⁰

It should be obvious that the divine agenda of truth relates to the agenda of forgiveness. The message of truth—the gospel of your salvation, is both the painful message of our own need and the joyful message of God’s response. We can afford to speak truth to our neighbor because the truth is already out about ourselves—that we are in over our heads in our own sin and “we have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (1:7). These twin truths of sin and grace that meet in forgiveness are basic to the world in which we live. They communicate a divine initiative that bestows a divine abundance that calls forth the particular agenda of creating a people who are familiar enough with the truth about themselves and God’s love that they can “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (4:32).

Christians are quite used to this talk of truth, sin, grace, love, and forgiveness. I am not sure that we have actually caught on to the radical dimensions of the divine agenda voiced in Ephesians, though. We have not fully considered the demands of truth-telling and the work of forgiveness (as challenging as these demands



are in and of themselves) until we consider them in relation to the divine agenda for reconciliation as expressed in Ephesians 1:9-10.

Speaking the truth in love and forgiving as God forgives serve a larger and final feature of the divine agenda, “the gathering together of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth” (1:10). Paul defines in this verse what he calls “the mystery of [God’s] will.” This is the ultimate trajectory of the divine purpose and the main theme of Ephesians: “the summing up and bringing together of the fragmented and alienated elements of the universe in Christ as the focal point.”¹¹ While this grand act of reconciliation awaits its full realization in an age yet to come, it is the divine agenda now and basic to the moral task of the people of God to celebrate God’s creation of a people defined, not by ethnic, national, or religious identities that occasion division and hostility, but by the cross of Christ that has broken down the barriers of division and enmity, establishing peace (2:11-18). The concrete expression of this work of reconciliation is the formation of a people for the worship of God through Christ made up of reconciled Jews and Gentiles. This is the mystery (that humanity, formerly defined by division and enmity can now be reconciled through Christ; 3:6-9) that is made known by a church whose witness of reconciliation is sustained by speaking the truth in love and the practice of forgiveness. It is this mystery—the very existence of such a church—that makes known to the rulers and authorities (whose power and rule are so often secured by the maintenance of division and enmity) the true means of reconciliation (3:10). And it is this mystery—a people reconciled to God and to one another—that is sustained and guarded by the practice of gentleness, patience, humility, and forbearing love—by a walk worthy of the calling (4:1).

What is God doing about evil in the world? God is creating a people called to provide a witness to the

power of the gospel to reconcile—to create a new humanity that practices a peace, not achieved through threat and intimidation, but through truth-telling and forgiveness. What is God doing about evil? Through the message of truth—the gospel of your salvation, God creates a new humanity that embodies an alternative politics to the prevailing order that defines peace in terms of security maintained through threat of violence.

We have grown used to a diminished form of the gospel, one that rests content solely with the truth about our sin and the comfort of God’s forgiveness. But the divine agenda presses on to the goal of reconciliation, the formation of a people in this world that puts the power of the gospel to reconcile enemies on display. This is what it means to be God’s workmanship—God’s *poiëma*: that which has been fashioned by God for a purpose (2:10). The poetics of God’s grace establishes a claim that will seem counter-intuitive to say the least. It is a peculiar notion that God might gather the broken remnants of a fragmented world and bind them together through the cords of truth and forgiveness to fit them for a world-redeeming purpose. But the message of truth—the gospel of our salvation is precisely God’s insistence, “If I don’t do this, the world will fall apart.” ■

1 This emphasis does recall James Gustafson’s *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective: Volume 1: Theology and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), particularly with its emphasis on the divine initiative. The Book of Ephesians, however, will be much more robust in asserting divine abundance and the divine agenda than is Gustafson.

2 Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1989), 88.

3 Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of*

Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 11.

4 David Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113.

5 John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 219.

6 Sam Wells, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christian ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 1.

7 *Ibid.*, 5.

8 *Ibid.*, 8.

9 Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 108-109.

10 Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 225-226.

11 Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 59.

“Cancer Saved Your Life!”

(continued from page 3)

Audra and our three children were strong, supportive, towers of strength.

As strange as this may sound, facing my own mortality has been the most positive and transforming experience of my 71 years. I truly thank God for this illness—it was truly a blessing in disguise.

I now greet each new day with gratitude, hope, and purpose. I treasure family and friends more than ever before. I am learning not to sweat the small stuff and to focus on things that really count.

As I told 250 Christian Ministry students at Oklahoma Baptist University on April 23, above all for the remainder of my days I want to *follow Christ*—to really be a “red-letter” Christian, to join with other believers in redeeming this world as God created it to be.

So, in the words of Robert Frost, “I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep.” What a journey! ■

'The Woman Was Right'

By Sam Hodges, Religion Reporter for the Dallas Morning News

Note: This Q & A article was first published in the November 2, 2006 *Dallas Morning News* and is reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Junia, we hardly knew ya. But thanks to Rena Pederson's new book *The Lost Apostle: Searching for the Truth About Junia* [San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006], amateur Bible students can catch up on the scholarly debate about whether an early church leader lauded in the Book of Romans was a woman.

A former *Dallas Morning News* editorial page editor, Ms. Pederson went at her research like an old pro, tracking down leading New Testament experts and going to Rome to understand better the early Christian community there.

She said she spent three years on the book, devoting nearly all her evenings and weekends.

Her recent day job was doing communications for a Dallas education company. But she just moved to Washington, D.C., to be a speechwriter for Karen Hughes, undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.

Staff Writer Sam Hodges caught up with Ms. Pederson, a Methodist with Presbyterian roots, by phone. Here are excerpts.

What got you started on this book?

I was speaking to a women's group, and the conversation turned to how stories of women in the Bible are not always spotlighted. One of the women said, "Yes, like Junia." We all looked at her and said, "Who?" She said Paul mentioned Junia, praised her as an apostle, but that people don't know her name because her name was later changed to a man's name.

My first reaction was skepticism. I had gone to church most of my life, and paid attention most of the time. But I'd never heard of her. I went home and started looking for the name Junia in the Bibles I had, and the commentaries, and on Internet.

Sure enough, the woman was right. Once you look for Junia, you find her.

Well, who was she?

In Romans 16:7, Paul sends greetings to the church in Rome, and salutes the leaders of that effort. He singles out, among other people, Junia and Andronicus. Andronicus is presumably her husband, because of the way their names are linked. He [Paul] says some very telling things about them. He says that they were kinspeople, which means they were probably Jewish.

He goes on to say that they were Christians before he was, which means that they were among the earliest group of believers. He then says that they were imprisoned with him, which means that they were prominent enough in the Jesus movement to have caught the attention of the authorities and to have been imprisoned for their efforts.

Paul goes on to say that they were noteworthy among the apostles. That is the source of a debate within a debate.

Explain that.

The first debate is whether Paul was really referring to a woman when he mentions Junia—whether it's a male name or a female name. The second debate is whether they were noteworthy among the apostles or merely known to the apostles.

What I discovered as I interviewed scholars was that the consensus was that Paul was referring to a woman, and she was one of the apostles. Not one of the 12. Not apostle with a big

A. But a leading missionary, and a respected leader in the early church.

How did she get turned into a man?

During the Middle Ages, at a time when women's roles were becoming more restricted in the organized church, an archbishop who was the most eminent scholar of the time changed Junia's name in his commentaries by adding an "s" and making it Junias, and referring to Junias and Andronicus as two old men.

But we now know, from philological studies, that there was no such male name as Junias in antiquity. There's no other confirmed example of a religious or secular figure by that name. So it was a fabricated name.

But this archbishop's work had an effect?

After that, that [male] definition prevailed in Bible translations and in commentaries, except for the King James Version. There are still some that have the man's name. But increasingly, the trend is to restore Junia's name.

Why does determining that she's a woman, and re-establishing her as an apostle, matter?

It casts a little more light on the role of women in the early church to reinforce that women did teach, that women were respected as missionaries, that women helped found many of the early house churches.

Her story is important today because we're still arguing about women's role in the church in the 21st century.

Did you know you had a book project from the moment you first heard of Junia?

My curiosity was piqued. It brought out the Nancy Drew in me. I just had to go see if it was so. The more I discovered, the more I thought, People should know about this. ■

The Interaction Between Ethics and Moral Behavior

By Allyson Brown, Houston Graduate School of Theology

Note: In an effort to encourage ethical thinking and writing by seminary students, when the editor visits campuses he invites students to submit articles. This is one such response.

The moral standards of a culture influence the way individuals respond to moral dilemmas and treat others. Ann Vernon defines culture as “a way of life or the totality of the individual artifacts, behaviors, and mental concepts transmitted from one generation to the next in a society; it is visible and invisible, cognitive and affective, conscious and unconscious, internal and external, rational and irrational, and coercive and permissive at the same time. The lifestyle of individuals is dictated by the beliefs and principles established by their culture.”¹ Each individual lives in a community; that culture shapes the decision maker with ethical boundaries and moral standards.

Culture is what binds and divides a society simultaneously. Humans are called to be partners with other humans in their community, even as they are called to be partners with God in the Christian community. Each child of God has a duty to fulfill his or her moral obligations, to do God’s will, and to influence their society.

According to the director at Camp Cheley, “If it is to be, it is up to me.” These ten two letter words combine to form an ethical code by which to live. It is up to each individual in the community to fulfill his or her ethical and moral duties and to instill values to prevent moral decline.

Individuals learn moral standards/ethics in the same way that they learn developmental skills. Values and morals are upheld, shared, communicated and passed on to each generation within a culture; in that respect, culture reflects moral inheritance. An individual’s value system determines

how he tends to behave in situations. According to Michael Josephson, consistency between what one says he or she values and what his or her actions say he or she values is a matter of integrity.² Thus, congruence is a crucial factor in ethics and morality. Accordingly, Carl Rogers postulated that congruent individuals are genuine, authentic, and comfortable in their interactions with others. He emphasized that congruent expression is important even if it consists of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings that do not, appear conducive to a good relationship.³ As such, an individual is “ethical” when his or her words and actions convey and communicate the same message.

The responsibility lies within each individual to teach and communicate moral standards. It is each individual’s responsibility within a community to uphold moral standards that form the value system of that society. Matthew 12: 25 notes, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.”

Jack Anderson believes the greatest danger facing this nation is moral decay. He suggested three rules in response to moral decline in the nation: (i) “If it isn’t right, don’t do it? (ii) If it isn’t true, don’t say it? And (iii) If it isn’t yours, don’t take it.”⁴ The priorities of life are more precisely delineated as a set of guidelines that direct individuals, or make individuals who they are. How individuals define these priorities is contingent upon their moral standards, or their personal code of ethics. Accountability is one way to instill moral principle, as well as responsibility, care, civility, respect, and fairness.⁵ You may ask yourself “what would a person of ethical prudence do in a similar situation?” The connection between the choice an individual makes and the ethics

behind the decision is of significance.

Culture is hindered by a “closed mind.” When individuals refuse to learn and cooperate with one another, it indicates disrespect and a decline in morality. This same mentality in the first century nailed Jesus to a cross because he challenged traditional viewpoints. Their narrow, rigid world could not be disturbed.⁶

Charles Schultz wrote a Peanuts cartoon about the danger and sin of the closed mind. The scenario starts as Charlie Brown is running for his life and Lucy is chasing him with clenched fists. She shouts, “I’ll catch you, Charlie Brown! And when I catch you I am going to knock your block off!” Suddenly Charlie Brown screeches to a halt and says, “Wait a minute, Lucy. If you and I as relatively small children with relatively small problems can’t sit down and talk through our problems, how can we expect the nations of the world to...” Pow! Lucy slugs him and says, “I had to hit him quick; he was beginning to make sense!”⁷ Culture can be destroyed and demoralized by disrespect an unwillingness to consider other points of view.

It is the responsibility of individuals in the community to keep Christ at the center of their culture and to live by His example, so as to illustrate what constitutes ethical, moral behavior. An individual’s words, actions, and attitudes should be morally consistent. A congruent ethical lifestyle strengthens a culture. Moral dilemmas are inevitable in life. It is how individuals respond to these dilemmas that positively or negatively affects culture.

Clinton McLemore illustrates this dilemma in *Street Smart Ethics*. A woman is informed by her supervisor that a division of the company is going to be outsourced in the near future, which meant her position would be eliminated and the positions of the division would be outsourced as

well. One of the members of the team to be outsourced approaches another employee of a different division of the company and asks that employee if she should accept a job somewhere else, specifically asking whether her division is one to soon be outsourced. The quizzed employee's position is secure. But how does the secure employee respond? On the one hand, she has a responsibility to the supervisor to keep such "outsourcing" information confidential, but on the other hand, she also has a moral obligation to her fellow employee not to withhold harmful information. Ethicists assert that in any action with ethical implications, there is always a duty owed to all of humanity. Another example asks, "Would you tell your boss or a friend the truth or would you tell your boss or a friend what he or she wants to hear?" According to Immanuel Kant, when confronting any ethical choice, one should choose as if one's decision were to become a universal standard.⁸ In addition, an ethical person will do his or her best to consider all possible consequences of one's actions.

Ethical consequences, a major category in decision making, are always factors that must be considered when moral dilemmas are confronted. Decisions should be made after balancing the consequences of the actions against the potential of violating a basic moral principle, such as telling the truth. Complex ethical dilemmas can be viewed in terms of what duties we owe to others and the consequences of failing to perform such duties.⁹

According to Donald MacLachlan of the SilverQuest Consulting Group,

business ethics can be defined as a moral conflict(s) requiring an individual, team, or organization to make a choice among two or more options, the evaluation of which must be either right or wrong. Moral conflicts occur within a person's conscience, as well as those involving colleagues, consensus of team, company policy, customary practice, community desires, or civil or criminal law.¹⁰ Normative ethics aid individuals in making positive decisions. Normative ethical systems can be seen as a set of rules or procedures for evaluating the relative merits of alternative options.

Thus, there are two theoretical categories in ethical decision making: deontological theories, otherwise known as theories of intention, and teleological theories, or consequence-oriented theories. Two questions to be answered when making decisions include: (i) identifying the nature of the duty owed and (ii) the likely consequences of making a particular decision.¹¹ An ethical individual minimizes the likelihood of compromising moral standards when making decisions.

Personal morality defines and distinguishes among right and wrong intentions, motivations, and actions. Morality is learned, engendered, and developed within each individual. Such moral standards influence our culture. According to Lawrence Kohlberg, people progress in their moral reasoning through a series of stages. He asserts that individuals can only come to a comprehension of moral rationale one stage at a time sequentially. Kohlberg believed that most moral development occurs through social interaction;

individuals develop insight based on a result of cognitive conflicts at their current stage.¹²

Kohlberg's levels of moral development include the pre-conventional level, the conventional level, and the post-conventional level. The pre-conventional level is the level at which an individual bases right and wrong according to whether or not he or she will be punished or rewarded. The conventional is the level of moral thinking that is generally found in society and is characterized by an attitude that seeks to do what will gain the approval of others. The post-conventional level is a level that most adults never reach, a social contract orientation that is characterized by an understanding of social mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others. The final stage, the morality of individual principles, is characterized by a respect for universal principle and the demands of individual conscience.

According to Kohlberg, moral development occurs when a person notices inadequacies in his or her present way of dealing with a moral dilemma—the person then moves to the next stage of moral reasoning.¹³

To prevent moral decay and human destruction, it is crucial that the people of any community instill values and moral standards in their citizens. The ethical individual often bases his or her decisions on these six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.¹⁴ According to the Honorary Calvin Botley, "an honest person cannot be corrupted and a corrupt person cannot be honest." The most beneficial



way to communicate a behavior and a value is by example. An individual must be congruent; his or her actions and words must convey and communicate the same message. Boundaries must be upheld. There are invisible boundaries within culture, or invisible lines, which set the moral principles from which ethical individuals of a particular culture makes decisions.

Priorities are also a major factor in decision making. If individuals don't focus on moral priorities, their key ethical obligations, they will most likely leave out other less important ones.¹⁵ Individual decisions make up cultural mores. When a culture allows moral standards to be compromised, the character and the integrity of the culture are compromised and the society decays from within. ■

1. Ann Vernon, *Counseling Children and Adolescents*, 3rd ed. (Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company, 2004), 228.
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3. J. Sommers-Flanagan and R. Sommers-Flanagan, *Clinical Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2003), 103-106.
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John Calvin 3:16-21

By David D. Flowers, TheWittenburgDoor

For God so loved the elect, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever of the elect believeth in Him shall not perish in the fire God created for those he hath predestined to burneth for all eternity, but have everlasting life.

For God sent his Son into the world to condemn the heathen to hell and save only those who acknowledge they have no choice but to repent and do exactly as God says.

Whosoever be amongst the elect is not condemned, but whosoever is among the damned stands condemned already because God's sovereignty wills it.

This is the verdict: Light has come

unto the elect, but all the other men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were predestined to be evil.

For everyone who doeth evil must hateth the light, and shall not come into the light because they have no choice but to doeth evil.

So he that doeth truth cometh to the light by the TULIP, that his deeds may be made manifest through reformed theology, that they are all forced by God. ■

Note: This article was first published in *TheWittenburgDoor*, March/April, 2007 and is reprinted by permission. To read more satire or subscribe go to www.WittenburgDoor.com.

Bread and Bibles

(continued from page 9)

sion involves assisting others—preachers, teachers, physicians, counselors, police, firemen, social workers? Yes.

But no matter how hopeless things may appear; no matter how unjust the world seems; no matter how violent, destructive, chaotic, desperate, noisy, frantic, or grave the world appears—remember that nothing can change the ultimate outcome of Christ's victory of love!

My life has been blessed by the experience of meeting and talking with Mrs. Michowski, an angel of

God camouflaged as a Baptist woman, wearing a Star of David, carrying bread and Bibles beneath her clothing, walking boldly past Nazi guards into the horrifying ghetto, and returning to her home through sewers of Warsaw. She reminds me of the power of one. That power becomes atomic when ignited by the light and love of Jesus Christ.

Remember Mrs. Michowski—and the power of one. *You can make a difference!* ■

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CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

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

War: *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006).

The nonfiction book, *Flags of Our Fathers*, by James Bradley, is one of the five best books I have ever read. The author's late father was John "Doc" Bradley, one of the six men who raised the flag in the famous photograph taken on Iwo Jima. James Bradley's book, written after his father's death, is about several related topics. First, it is a biographical tribute to those six flag raisers themselves, based on an immense amount of research to track down old service records and to interview as many contemporaries who served with them as he could find. Second, it is a masterful account of the battle of Iwo Jima and its major significance in bringing a swifter conclusion to the war. And third, it is the best explanation I ever read of the symbolic role played by that photo in our American identity.

When I finally saw the movie, I have to say that I was disappointed. *Flags of our Fathers* received two Oscar nominations for sound editing and mixing, but it was otherwise shut out of the running. On the other hand, Eastwood also directed a companion movie called *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which is far better. *Letters* has been nominated in several major categories, including Best Director for Eastwood, Best Movie, and Best Original Screenplay, among others.

Letters tells the story from the Japanese side, with the spoken dialog in Japanese with English captions, which hindered its commercial prospects. So far it has attracted few viewers. Having said that, the movie is excellent. The cast features the distinguished Japanese actor, Ken Watanabe, as the island's American-educated commanding general. The

story is based on an actual discovery of a buried mailbag deep within one of the island's fortified tunnels filled with the last letters home written by the doomed Japanese defenders. This movie shows clearly the chronology of the events being depicted, and the utter confusion of the Japanese Army and Navy leaders who never coordinated their plans with each other.

Letters makes evident how the sorely outnumbered and abandoned Japanese troops had honeycombed their barren little outpost island with an extensive network of tunnels, barricaded by solid steel doors. On the day of the American beachhead, the Japanese held back their fire until thousands of Marine infantry were on the black volcanic sands, completely exposed, and then they opened their battlements and "unleashed Hell." From their protected defensive positions, they were able to withstand the overwhelming rain of destructive air and naval bombardments from the American invaders for over seven weeks, playing out a lethal, prolonged waiting game. Laboring under a policy of no surrender, only a handful of depleted and starving Japanese personnel survived to the bitter end, to their everlasting shame that they had not also perished with their comrades.

What was the problem with *Flags*? My judgment is, Eastwood and Stephen Spielberg had conflicting visions about what the movie should do, and their collaboration never fully resolved their differences. Spielberg, who had won out over Eastwood in buying the movie rights, took on the job of producer. Eastwood, of course, directed. This may not be exactly correct, but to me as an outside observer, I believe Spielberg had his sights set on a Pacific war epic to go along with his earlier WW II masterpiece, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). In contrast, Eastwood, ever since *Unforgiven*

(1992), has framed his movies around a commitment to debunking and demythologizing.

It is plausible for me to imagine something like this: Spielberg was thinking, "Iwo Jima—massive beach landing, grueling air assault on Mt. Suribachi, warm human stories of humble enlisted men who heroically raised the flag." On the other hand, Eastwood was thinking, "This movie is really about these three surviving flag raisers, just some simple, naive kids still wet behind the ears, who got caught up in a rather cynical government PR campaign to sell bonds in the last days of the war." Whereas Spielberg wanted to build the guys up, Eastwood wanted to cut them down to the real flawed human beings they were. As a result, the sprawling story line seemed to be constantly fighting against itself.

Finally, I was disappointed that the book's brilliant insights into the uncanny power of an image, the flag raising photo, got seriously neglected. The book was one of those "aha" moments about the subject, and it led me to do some deeper reading in a relatively new area of study in my discipline, the theory of visual communication. By rights, in my opinion, that Pulitzer Prize winning shot by AP photographer Joe Rosenthal (who just recently died) should have been the star of this movie.

Eastwood's vision may be true. While our culture has mythologized the battle of Iwo Jima as one of America's finest moments and the U. S. Marine Corps as a group of larger-than-life heroes, in fact the ordinary men in combat on that fateful day were not heroes and not idealists. He sees five of the six flag raisers as callow, inexperienced 19-year olds.

The cast was chosen according to Eastwood's vision. Barry Pepper, the actor who played the super-religious sniper in Spielberg's *Saving Private*

Ryan, drew the role of Strank. He's the one who was a true hero of the real story of Iwo Jima. Like thousands of others, he was subsequently killed in the ongoing combat that lasted well over a month after the flag raising.

The three surviving flag raisers were anti-heroes who happened to be caught by a photojournalist in a routine chore. The resulting photo conveyed a different impression. They were yanked off the line and sent around America on a whirlwind fund raising tour as "Iwo Jima heroes." The first of these three men "Doc" Bradley, the medical corpsman played by Ryan Phillippe. He is shown as a conscientious but callow care giver who exhibited uncommon bravery under enemy fire during the heat of the initial hostilities. He became a most reticent and reluctant spokesman for America throughout the rest of his lifetime, haunted as he was by his traumatic memories of the horrors he had seen.

Rene Gagnon (played by Jesse Bradford) is another shallow, immature character. He was not to be trusted with front line duties. Instead, his commanding officer designated him to serve the office staff as a runner in order to keep him out of the way. On the fund raising tour, he is portrayed as being dominated by his brassy girl friend, who horned in whenever cameras came out.

Pfc. Ira Hayes (played by Adam Beach), the remaining important character, had the most tragic story of all. He was a Pima Indian from Arizona, who also happened to be an alcoholic. Beach is really ten years too old for the part, but his acting skills are the best of the entire cast. He should have been nominated for Best Supporting Actor. In life, as in the movie, Hayes suffered terribly from survivor's guilt. He drank heavily (and publicly) throughout his temporary stateside PR duties. The movie portrays him as being frequently snubbed and offended by the American public on account of his race. Finally he was sent back to rejoin his unit in the Pacific shortly before his fund raising assignment ended, at

his own request.

After the war was over, Hayes returned to the poverty and obscurity of the Gila River reservation. At one point, he hitchhiked and walked from Arizona to MacAllen, Texas, to visit the parents of his buddy, Harlan Block, who was one of the original six flag raisers. Block was never publicly recognized by the U. S. government due to a misidentification. After Hayes reassured Harlan's father that Harlan was really the one in the picture, he then turned around and walked back to Arizona. Soon after that, he died prematurely, due to his drinking.

Christian Ethical Notions Suggested by These Movies. What is a hero? *Encarta* provides this definition, among others: "Somebody who commits an act of remarkable bravery or who has shown great courage, strength of character, or another admirable quality. Somebody who is admired and looked up to for outstanding qualities or achievements." What is an antihero? "Somebody who is the central character in a story but who is not brave, noble, or morally good as heroes traditionally are."

Based on these semantic boundaries, Clint Eastwood may be right in his campaign to downplay Hollywood's turning everything into a grand, inspirational heroic epic—even including, sad to say, such revered stories as the magnificent exploits of the U. S. Marines in WW II. War movies are ideal for staging tales of super heroic feats and larger than life heroes. John Wayne made dozens of such movies in which our troops were not just heroes, but superheroes, with supernatural powers. Early in his film career, Eastwood did, too. But not lately.

Also important, this movie illustrates (or should have illustrated) the amazing power of the visual image. The flag raising photo is reputed to be the most reproduced, most requested, and most significant black and white image ever published. Of course it conveys a message of intrepid bravery and of military victory, no doubt far beyond what the actual event of that particular mundane flag raising

chore that day deserves to carry. Even admitting that we have John Wayne to thank for our false assumptions about how that perfect picture came to pass, due to his totally fictionalized film and hyped up version of that obscure episode during a lull in the action, we must also admit that the image was responsible for selling an awful lot of Victory Bonds. ■

Social Reform: *Amazing Grace* (2006)

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a British politician, philanthropist, and abolitionist. Son of a wealthy Yorkshire merchant, he served nearly half a century in the House of Commons, between 1780 and 1825. *Amazing Grace* is a movie about his unflagging efforts to get his anti-slave trade bill passed. He first began to speak in Parliament against the slave trade in 1789. At first his was a lonely voice, and his bill never got far. In every new session, he re-introduced it. England's far-flung empire was based upon slavery, and nearly all of the Parliament members represented those who profited most from it. Ultimately, it passed all the necessary stages and became law in 1807.

Wilberforce was even greater than the movie indicates. He was one of history's greatest orators during one of the most vital eras in English history, standing tall alongside his friends William Pitt (the younger) and Sir Charles James Fox. Wilberforce accomplished many humanitarian goals during his public service. This included founding the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. After he finally won the battle to halt the slave trade, he broadened his campaign to attack the institution of slavery itself. When he finally retired from political office in 1824, due to poor health, he continued writing and speaking for the eventual emancipation of all slaves. He died in 1833; less than one month after his funeral, Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, which gave all slaves in the British Empire their freedom. Wilberforce was buried in

Westminster Chapel, next to his friend Pitt, and a 102-foot monument was erected to his memory.

Stirring oratory over many decades, *per se*, is not visual enough to make a stirring movie. And a two-hour production is not nearly enough time to depict all of the salient features of such an accomplished person as William Wilberforce. *Amazing Grace*, of necessity, is “based on a true story,” but it is not, strictly speaking, a “biopic.” The movie takes much dramatic license to produce a commercially viable offering. Events that required years are collapsed into single dramatic scenes, characters are reduced into “composites;” individuals who played their part in the larger story are given larger status in order to let them represent the complex work of larger groups, and so on. Parliamentary debates as they existed then are transformed into proceedings that look much more like the “Question Time” for Tony Blair shown on C-SPAN. Adding to the audience appeal, something of a romance is introduced into the narrative by bringing in his chaste five-year courtship of the woman who became his wife during his middle age.

The plot of the movie is driven by Wilberforce’s single-minded focus on the issue of the slave trade. Significantly for the readers of *Christian Ethics Today*, the movie is forthright in attributing his motivation to his early conversion to evangelical Christianity. A product of an Anglican family, Wilberforce came under the influence of the movement headed by George Whitefield, whose booming preaching voice could be heard intelligibly in all seats of a large stadium. At first, he had to be persuaded that, as a Christian, he could continue to serve in politics. His conversion “stuck,” and he remained true to his calling throughout his life. For example, one of his bills was to require the East India Company to carry the Gospel to India. It failed, since the Company realized that religious confrontations would hurt business. The Anglicans did follow through and appoint a Bishop in Calcutta.

The central metaphor of the movie,

then, is the hymn, *Amazing Grace*. Today, the song serves a broad constituency. Many, including myself, may think of it as the “national anthem” of Baptists. Because of its wide popularity, it is now also a standard album cut for recording artists of all faiths or of no faith. The movie reminds us that, originally, the writer of the hymn was John Newton, who was himself a slave ship captain before his tumultuous conversion. *Amazing Grace* is not so much about becoming a Christian as it is about gaining freedom from sin, especially Newton’s sin of trafficking in the worst of all sins in human society, excepting perhaps genocide. John Newton went on to become the leading Anglican Bishop in England, who, ironically, went blind. Wilberforce considered himself to be both his friend and a member of his parish.

Christian Ethics and *Amazing Grace*.

David Bruce, chief reviewer for *Hollywood Jesus*, interviewed Ioan Gruffud, the Welsh actor who portrayed Wilberforce in the movie:

David: Amazon.com lists the song “Amazing Grace” as the most recorded song currently available. What is there about the song that makes it so popular?

Ioan: It is about discovering truth. It is about being blind and then coming to see.

David: What do you hope people will walk away with from the movie?

Ioan: We hope people will be inspired. I hope it will inspire young people to stand alone, if need be, for justice, against racism and bigotry. I hope the film will be more than just entertainment. I hope it is educational and an instrument of change. It shows that a person can change history.

Today, exactly 200 years after Wilberforce’s anti-slave trading bill passed, slavery still exists. Though slavery is not legal or sanctioned by government, many readers may be shocked to learn that slavery still exists, even in America. Humans are literally bought and sold, and their lives vir-

tually meet all the legal definitions of what it means to be held in involuntary bondage. There are some migrant worker camps in Florida and elsewhere that qualify. Also, there are domestic workers who are employed by some affluent American households in many cities under conditions tantamount to enslavement. But little attention is paid to situations in America where victims are U. S. citizens.

Worldwide, millions of people are victimized by a \$32 billion dollar human trafficking problem. The CIA estimates there may be thousands of international transactions daily. Major slave-infested industries include textiles, mining, and agriculture. Women are kidnapped on wholesale levels for the sex industry. Child labor affects some 126 million children in several countries, including U. S. trade partners like China, Latin America and Africa. These and other primitive travesties are subject to ongoing United Nations human rights inquiries.

Amazing Grace, the movie, has an action link at theamazingchange.com where you can connect with groups that are working on the issue. So, the movie holds the potential for being “educational and an instrument of change”—indeed, especially if Christians and churches choose to take it on as a serious challenge. Who will apply their Christian ethics to this situation? Who will become today’s Wilberforce? ■

1 David A. Thomas retired from the University of Richmond in 2004 and now resides in Sarasota, Florida. He invites your comments at davidthomas1572@comcast.net.

Book Reviews

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

Palestine Peace Not Apartheid

Jimmy Carter, Simon and Shuster, New York, 2006, \$26.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

Simply stated, this is mandatory reading for Americans who are interested in world peace. Additionally, it is a blockbuster! It is factual, controversial, informational, unnerving, riveting reading! Until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is settled justly, there can be no peace in the Middle East, and like it or not, the United States has a major role in trying to effect a lasting peace settlement.

Jimmy Carter's interest in Middle East affairs, particularly those related to Israeli-Arab issues is legendary. The most publicized accomplishment in his presidential years was the 1978 Camp David Accords, which developed a framework for peace in the Middle East. Sadat, Egypt's president, and Begin, prime minister of Israel, with Carter as the moderator at Camp David, committed their nations to this framework.

Part of the value of this book is the inclusion of the actual words of this Accord. There are also appendixes which include the very important United Nations resolutions pertaining to this conflict. Carter chose to include the Arab Peace Proposals of 2002, the highly publicized Roadmap to Middle East Peace, and the Israeli response to this important plan. Another valuable resource in the book is a historical chronology of these Middle East developments. For three thousand years biblical backgrounds are combined with ancient, medieval and modern history to prove how complicated and intense these racial and religious conflicts are. It is appar-

ent that the eyes of the entire world are focused on this tiny geographical sliver of land known in Roman times as Syria-Palestina. Today it is Israel versus Palestine!

Since the 1946 United Nations action which recreated Israel as a nation after nearly two thousand years of non-existence, America has been uniquely regarded as Israel's most supportive friend. This action was closely connected to the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. Making a home for Jews would in some way help in this aftermath of one of the most terrible events ever in world history. The pathetic noises from Iran challenging the actuality of the Holocaust question the legitimacy of Israel's existence.

The issues involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are so convoluted, it is all but impossible to sort them out. Some of these are the Israeli contempt for the Palestinian leadership, with Arafat being the focal point of this attitude. There are the terrible and tragic impacts in Israel of the Palestinian suicide bombers. A most serious and complicating fact is the undeniable truth that Israel has built hundreds of Jewish settlements on the West Bank, land which indisputably had belonged to the Palestinians for multiple centuries. Carter makes this the focal point for his flammable use of the difficult word, Apartheid!

Complicating an already complicated scene are other serious factors as well, and Carter plainly and often plaintively goes into them: United States' support of Israel's most recent excursion into Lebanon, the rivalries and conflicts within Palestinian leadership, the inevitable focus on Jerusalem, which Israel has made its national capital. To Moslems around the world, Jerusalem is the third most sacred location because the Temple Mount is regarded as the site where

Mohammed ascended to heaven. On this location are located some of the most sacred buildings in the world to his followers. Near this, of course, is the location of the most sacred site in the world to Jews—the Wailing Wall, the only part of Herod's Temple still standing. This area resonates with meaning to Christians because without doubt many of the key locations in the public ministry of Jesus fit within this same location. How to administer this and fulfill the U.N. mandate of openness and access to all religions is no small feat.

Carter does an admirable job of documenting his and Mrs. Carter's innumerable visits not only to Israel and Palestine, but to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. No other American leader has been so involved in this quandary. Carter bluntly chastises the Islamic people who refuse to acknowledge Israel's right to exist and regards this recognition as an urgently "vital" basis for peace. The 2002 "Road Map for Peace," a plan put forth by the Saudis, agrees.

Equally so, Carter blames the Israeli government for blatantly ignoring U.N. resolutions, as he states forcefully: "Peace will come to Israel and the Middle East only when the Israeli government is willing to comply with international law, with the Roadmap for Peace, with official American policy, with the wishes of a majority of its own citizens—and honor its own previous commitments—by accepting its legal borders" (p 216).

Carter's book has offended the powerful Jewish lobby in the United States. They charge that he has singled out the Israelis unfairly in their effort to protect their very existence as a nation. Read the book and decide for yourself the pros and cons of the arguments about one of the most serious conflicts of this entire century.

The debate inevitably ties the growing conflict of our nation and the Islamic renaissance of these times. Carter has not backed away from his critics and maintains the positions of this book, despite the pressures. President Carter has provided insights regarding one of the most convoluted regions of the entire world, as well as the wisdom and patience needed by all parties involved in the solutions. ■

Speaking My Mind

Tony Campolo, W Publishing Group, Nashville, 2004, \$14.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX.

If ever a book lived up to its title, this one does. Tony Campolo, a committed evangelical Christian, has written a hard-hitting, fascinating, blunt, eye-popping, rousing volume that is guaranteed to make many comfortable evangelical Christians quite uncomfortable and defensive. There will be charges and counter-charges about some questionable doctrinal stances, but the inevitable bottom-line is that Campolo, one of America's most widely-known Christian writers and speakers, ends as he began, a committed evangelical Christian.

Here is a book that carries with it a guarantee that you will have to think about some of the most controversial issues facing Christians today. Campolo speaks his mind on women in ministry, abortion, the gay and lesbian enigmas, Islam, creationism, dispensational millennialism, environmental responsibility, and Christianity in the political arena. Also add some pointed comments about the current evangelical image and the dilemmas of the main-line denominations, and one quickly can conclude that these are issues of exceptionally deep impact—issues that are timely, ethically-oriented and urgently important.

From the beginning of this fast-paced book to its ending, there is no doubt that its author is a solid Bible-believing, aggressively evangelistic, dynamically prophetic Christian

whose final word here and everywhere he ministers is Hope! There are some who will throw the book away in anger about one-third of the way through because inherited prejudices predominate. But hopefully most of the readers will continue with some very serious thinking and action about these major challenges which have divided Christendom now for decades.

Over the years Campolo has written many books which have been quite popular, but perhaps this one may be considered one of his most important. As he deals with these areas of conflict in American 'Christianity, it is obvious that his deeply held convictions, firmly grounded in a healthy Christology, come through on every page. The tone of this book makes it apparent that Campolo welcomes debate and discussion, and this sadly is one of the missing components among Christians today.

The author gives us some very insightful comments on why main-line denominations sadly continue to lose membership year after year, contrasted to "Evangelical" churches who are gaining membership constantly, particularly the Pentecostals and Independent groups. His conclusions are important and he identifies four major reasons: (1) they have an abundance of charismatic entrepreneurial leaders; (2) they are effective in marketing religion; (3) they have learned how to exercise political power; and (4) they have addressed the individualistic needs of America, avoiding taking positions on social issues that would alienate its constituencies (p 13).

One of the strongest parts of the books, and one of the most realistically personal, is the section where Campolo states powerfully his stance as an Evangelical, based on his belief in the authority of Scripture and a transforming relationship with Jesus. You may disagree with his interpretations, but the sincerity of his deep religious faith is undeniable.

There are other chapters in this book which alone merit its purchase: "Is there a Second Chance for Those who Die?"; "Is Islam really an Evil

Religion?"; "Do we Understand why so many People throughout the World Hate America?"

In clear, readable strong language, referring to multiple sources for insight and often confirmation, Campolo makes every serious minded Christian think about these questions. The book ends on a solid note of Christian optimism as the Bible does. Here is a book well worth reading, debating and digesting! ■

Higher Ground: A Call for Christian Civility

Russell H. Dilday, Smyth & Helwys, Macon, 2007, \$17.

Reviewed by Burton H. Patterson,
Southlake, TX.

Russell Dilday, the President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1978 to 1994, delivered the convention sermon to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984, entitled *Higher Ground*. At the time he preached this sermon he was experiencing, from individuals with insatiable egotistic self-interests, a desire for forced uniformity. They were using significant political coercion to obtain what they considered biblical correctness. His sermon was a plea for traditional Baptist principles of autonomous individualism, uniformity reached solely through spiritual persuasion and Christlike humility. In this book Dr. Dilday took the basic points of his convention sermon and expanded them into chapters, fleshing them out by recounting a number of occurrences which transpired during the siege.

Those who lived through the carnage of that Southern Baptist denominational strife, resulting in the separation of fundamentalists from traditional Baptists, will recognize with pain the various events which are elucidated with great clarity by one who was in the middle of the conflict. The principle thesis of the book is a call to all Christians to treat their fellow believers, as they should treat all people, with civility which is perfectly

expressed through *agape* love illustrated in the pages of scripture.

As president of what then was the largest seminary in the world, Dr. Dilday was in a unique position to evaluate the fundamentalists' claims of classroom liberalism, and from his personal knowledge he debunks the preposterous charges leveled at the convention's seminaries explaining the reality of the situation. A strong response is leveled not only at the specious arguments used to promote the fundamentalist agendas but at the political schemes, called "worldly weapons," which were employed to circumvent and exploit traditional Baptist polity.

Recognizing the ruthless "take no prisoners" approach, followed by the convention takeover operators, Dr. Dilday calls for all Baptists to live in a Christlike spirit of humility, to reverse the absence of kindness, and to embody a world view where the burden of one's fellow causes both lament and Christian action. An end to rancorous incivility, rude grandstanding, and ecclesiastical finger-pointing is posited as essential to any restoration of communication between the traditional and fundamentalist factions.

The book includes a complete chapter on "Biblical Forgiveness," which is a model for a semester's ethics study in any seminary. The basic tenants of forgiveness are outlined explicitly and then fleshed out in terminology only a dunce could not grasp. Dilday's review of how the current convention leadership treats traditional Baptists shows the very significant lack of any desire to terminate the divisive separation of fundamentalist Baptists from all other groups of traditional Baptists, which he names "*Authenticus Baptistus*" and groups together because of the freedom chromosomes they share deep in their DNA.

In the book's conclusion, the world view of great American Baptist leaders, both from the centuries past to the present time, relating to the relationships between believers, is capsulated to illustrate that "carnal conservatism", to use Dilday's expression, is not

and should not be the norm. Under the heading of "Constructive Conservatism" Dilday suggests that "the day of huge, bureaucratic, national, denominational organizations is over," with the future of traditional Baptists being regional with greater emphasis on local congregations, associations and state conventions.

Traditional Baptists, who experienced first-hand the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, will recognize and appreciate the great accuracy of Dr. Dilday's descriptions of the interpersonal conflicts which flowed through that period ending the golden years in which the Convention was Christ-centered with a single purpose of evangelizing the world. This book is very worthy of your purchase and your time in reading it. It is highly recommended for those who were on the periphery of the bloodshed and desire to gain—from the pen of one who experienced it firsthand—a greater in-depth knowledge of the controversy, as well as a constructive suggestion for a way forward. ■

The Innocent Man

John Grisham, Doubleday, New York, 2006, \$29.

Reviewed by Audra Trull,

Denton, TX

As an avid reader of John Grisham's books, I was ready to read his "non-fiction" work *The Innocent Man*. This thought provoking book tells of injustice in a very small conservative town, Ada, Oklahoma.

Grisham stated in an interview that after reading the obituary in *The New York Times* on Dec. 9, 2004 of Ron Williamson, a former baseball player who was wrongfully convicted of murder in Ada and came within five days of being executed before a stay was ordered, that he was compelled to write Ron's story.

Grisham researched the fate of a man falsely accused of rape and murder. Although the accused was given many legal opportunities, he was nev-

ertheless convicted of the crimes and sentenced to death.

The justice system did not work for Williamson, even though he was not in a minority class. Ron was a promising pro baseball player with the Oakland A's.

Ron's bad habits overshadowed his Pentecostal religious background. His mother and sisters never gave up trying to help Ron overcome these demons that drove him to mental illness.

The path of injustice is present in Ron's efforts to prove himself innocent. Having no physical evidence, the system still sent Ron to death row because of the testimonies of jailhouse snitches and convicts.

Ron Williamson and Mr. Fritz, a friend of Ron's, were convicted in the 1982 slaying of Debra Sue Carter. Mr. Fritz got a life sentence and Mr. Williamson spent nine years on death row. In April, 1999, an Ada judge noted that DNA tests of semen and hair samples did not genetically match Mr. Fritz or Mr. Williamson and thus he dismissed the charges.

Barry Scheck, the lawyer who founded the Innocence Project (a legal group that uses DNA to exonerate convicts) represented Mr. Fritz.

This book is shocking and it makes one hope that DNA evidence will be required and allowed for all cases, especially capital crimes. The book will aid the general public to realize how important DNA testing has become to exonerate innocent people. ■

FRIENDS OF FOY VALENTINE MEMORIAL ENDOWMENT FUND REPORT

A total of \$169,100 has been given by 115 persons to provide endowment for the future ministry of Christian Ethics Today, in memory of our founder Foy Valentine. Only the interest from this fund will be used, as deemed necessary by the Board of Directors. You are invited to contribute to this Memorial Fund.

Blessed Bread

By James A. Langley, Exec. Dir. Emeritus, District of Columbia Baptist Convention, Washington, DC

"Give us this day our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

A grain of wheat falls in the ground
Without fanfare, struggle or sound,
Close-joined, its tomb and womb is earth,
There it dies, and there given birth.

Gift of the soil and sun, nourished
By snows and rain, it has flourished
By multiple labors unhailed;
Our lives depend that they not fail.

Take not common bread for granted,
Lest presumption should be planted,
Knowing dependence for the least
Shows the way to God's greater feast.

Ask not for your bread for this day,
Breaking the bonds God has in play,
The Giver of bread, sans fable,
Should preside at the world's table.

Staff of life from the Creation,
Daily we raise supplication
That it be granted mutually
For us and all humanity.

Bread from God's good earth holds promise
For all God's children; first premise
Of faith—blest to be a blessing,
Living love by deeds confessing.

Will they believe in Providence
If, starving, find no sustenance?
To the hungry without a crust,
Ev'n Bread of Heaven may seem dust.

Intercessors confront a need
With prayer, but more; they will feed
The hungry, care for the hurting,
Widows, orphans, not deserting.

Divine gift for life—blessed bread!
Our God wants all his children fed;
Why then are many weak and dying,
When bread shared is death-defying?

Children's bloated bellies, their eyes
Glazed and vacant; before one dies,
Too weak to stand on spindly legs,
With mouth agape a morsel begs.

Crying until the tears run dry,
No bread or consolation nigh;
Agony's abyss, written deep,
Help begins when with them we weep.

But will the love we claim languish
While children slowly die in anguish?
We must pray to be forgiven
If to feed them we've not striven.

If they survive in weakened state
They face a no less cruel fate,
Already prey to disease and pain,
Hunger also cripples the brain.

Advocate for the voiceless poor,
And let your voice rise to ensure
That the selfish do not prevail
Against aid they seek to derail.

Stress need to high and low places,
Stir the nation to its graces,
Aid more aligned with our great wealth,
Bringing many to hope and health.

When before our Maker we stand,
Answers God will surely demand—
At the Last Judgment, it is said,
Did you love, did you share your bread? ■

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

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- 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
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