

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 13, Number 3 Aggregate Issue 65 Summer 2007

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

EthixBytes	2
Remembering Herb Reynolds' Forgotten Vision <i>Robert Parham</i>	3
If I Were 21 Again <i>Joe E. Trull</i>	4
Romans 13: The Patriotic Version <i>David D. Flowers</i>	8
What God Has Put Asunder, Let No Man Join Together <i>William L. Self</i>	9
Deacons and Deaconesses <i>Henlee Barnette</i>	12
A Presidential Apology? <i>Daniel Malotky</i>	13
A Theology (and Ethic) for Radical Believers <i>Curtis W. Freeman</i>	14
A Political Shift for Southern Baptists? <i>James L. Evans</i>	18
Camping Theology: Panentheistic Meditations <i>Tarris D. Rossell</i>	19
A Post-1 Timothy 2 Women <i>Carolyn B. Edwards</i>	20
Confessions of a (Sinful) Father <i>Burton H. Patterson</i>	22
Original Sin and Limbo <i>Fisher Humphreys</i>	23
CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES	Reviewed by David A. Thomas... 25
Movies and TV: The Queen (2006)	
Good and Evil: Children of Men (2006)	
BOOK REVIEWS	
Four Books By Three Atheists <i>Reviewed by John Scott</i>	28
The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century	
<i>Reviewed by Darold Morgan</i>	31

KUDZU *by Doug Marlette* www.dougmarlette.com

IN MEMORIAM

DOUG MARLETTE 1950-2007

"Cartoonists are a window into the human condition." Doug Marlette, 1988 Pulitzer Winner.

EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Those who would sacrifice essential liberties to gain temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

Benjamin Franklin

“I’ve spoken of the shining city all my political life. . . . In my mind it was a tall, proud city . . . God-blessed and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; . . . and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and heart to get here.”

Ronald Reagan’s Farewell Address to the American People (1989), which summed up his view of the United States.

“If tyranny and oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.”

James Madison.

“At crucial moments we have been startlingly dependent on having a chief executive who demonstrates what I call presidential courage—the bravery and wisdom to risk his popularity, even his life, for a vital larger cause.”

Michael Beschloss, author of *Presidential Courage* reflecting on Presidents Lincoln and Truman in *Newsweek*, 5/14/07.

“Although the public thinks 44% of men and 36% of women are unfaithful to their spouses, twenty years of extensive reliable sex research concludes only 16% of marital partners

have ever had an affair in their lives, and only about 4% did last year.”

Pamela Tuckerman, author of *Lust in Translation: Adultery Around the World* on *NBC Today* (4/23/07).

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., quoted by *Jim Wallis* who noted we spend billions of dollars on the war in Iraq, while 37 million Americans are living in poverty and 3 billion people worldwide live on less than \$2 a day.

“Farm workers who pick tomatoes for Burger King’s sandwiches earn 40 to 50 cents for every 32-pound bucket of tomatoes they pick, a rate that has not risen significantly in 30 years. Workers must pick two tons of tomatoes to earn \$50 in one day.”

Sojourners Online (6/15/07).

“According to Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the program sponsored by The Carter Center to eradicate the Guinea worm in Africa has reduced cases in his country from 656,000 to 48.”

Carter Center Report, February 4-16, 2007.

“The honest answer is ‘yes.’ There are times that I have fallen short of my own standards [and] of God’s standards.”

Newt Gingrich, in response to a question by *James Dobson*, admitting that he had an affair while leading the impeachment charge against Pres. Clinton.

“It seems like [Paige Patterson] can do whatever he chooses, even if it’s unethical—even if it’s not the Christian thing to do.”

Dr. Sheri Klouda, reflecting on her dismissal as professor of Hebrew because

women are not allowed to teach in the School of Theology at Southwestern Seminary.

“I’m prepared to continue to kick their fanny until the last day I’m alive on this earth because they have mistreated too many people.”

Sen. Trent Lott, criticizing insurance companies *State Farm* and *Allstate* for their “arrogant” and “mean-spirited” treatment of policy holders after Katrina, *Bloomberg News* (5/21/07).

“This is not the ‘coalition of the willing,’ but the ‘coalition of the billing.’”

Peter Singer of the *Brookings Institute*, quoted on *PBS Radio* concerning the 180,000 private contractors in Iraq, who are paid higher salaries with tax dollars than our 130,000 military personnel there.

“You are leaving here as our basic constitutional principles are under assault—the rule of law, and independent press, independent courts, the separation of church and state, and the social contract itself. . . . America’s a broken promise. America needs fixing. So I look out on your graduating class and pray someone or more of you will take it on.”

Journalist Bill Moyers speaking to Southern Methodist University graduates.

“The older I get the more I admire and crave competence, in any field from adultery to zoology.”

Legendary journalist **H. L. Mencken**, quoted by *Geo. Will* in relation to Iraq.

Correction for EthixByte quote in the Spring Issue 64: In 2007 (as of June 20) Texas had executed 17 (not 49) and the other 49 states had executed only 1. ■

Editor: Joe E. Trull

Publisher: Christian Ethics Today Foundation,
9608 Parkview Court, Denton, TX 76207
(940) 262-0450; Cell: (940) 230-6931

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY is produced in the U.S.A. and is published five times annually and mailed from Dallas, Texas, where third-class postage is paid. Articles published in CET reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily the viewpoint of CET or the Editor. Send corrections and change of addresses to P.O. Box 1165, Argyle, Texas 76226.

Remembering Herb Reynolds' Forgotten Vision

By Robert Parham, Executive Director of the Baptist Center for Ethics Nashville, TN

Herb Reynolds envisioned nine years ago a forerunner of the New Baptist Covenant, a 2008 gathering of Baptists in North America. The former Baylor University president called his vision the Baptist Convention of the Americas.

Missing from the accolades in news stories about his death last May is one of the most important matters that goodwill Baptists ought to remember about Reynolds' impressive career of preserving the best of the Baptist tradition through existing institutions and the creation of new entities.

In November 1998, Reynolds spelled out an idea for a pan-Baptist organization at the Texas Baptists Committed annual breakfast.

The Baylor University chancellor foresaw a lean staff, located in Texas, what he considered the half-point between the tip of South America and Alaska. He underscored the centrality of technology and missions. He articulated the need for educational resources and seminary-trained clergy. He emphasized the importance of ethics and suggested a new way for corporate decision-making for the body.

Some of the specifics for his 13-

point outline must be seen today as illustrative potential, not concrete recommendations. Clearly, technology has leaped light years ahead of what he envisioned.

Some of his organizational suggestions were too Texas-centric to be appealing to the broad sweep of Baptist bodies. A few of his organizational ideas never developed into viable channels, but his final point is still a breathing reality.

"As we view the world's stage and our global involvement, we might want to partner in various ways with the Baptist World Alliance if that body remains free of the forces of Fundamentalism," said Reynolds.

He recommended that the Baptist Convention of the Americas work with the six regional bodies of the BWA, one of which is the North American Baptist Fellowship.

Today, NABF is at the heart of the New Baptist Covenant and clearly the most viable option for housing future collaborative efforts among goodwill Baptists in North America.

Reynolds concluded his 1998 speech with the hope he might stimulate the thinking of Baptists "in very

large terms about how we . . . can best chart our course for the 21st century."

"All of us need to learn the difficulties of the last 20 years behind us and embrace a far-reaching vision to win the world for Christ and to serve others to the glory of God," he said. "God help us to advance the cause of Christ by remaining a bastion of freedom for Baptists and for people everywhere," he said.

The Baylor leader believed enough in his idea to spend his own money to register the name of the Baptist Convention of the Americas.

Reynolds' vision was received with less consideration than it merited, as often happens to visionaries.

Yet nearly a decade later, Reynolds attended the Jan. 9, 2007 meeting at The Carter Center, where the 2008 gathering was announced.

The group photo has him standing in the front row, exactly where he deserved to be. One of the real leaders of a movement come of age. ■

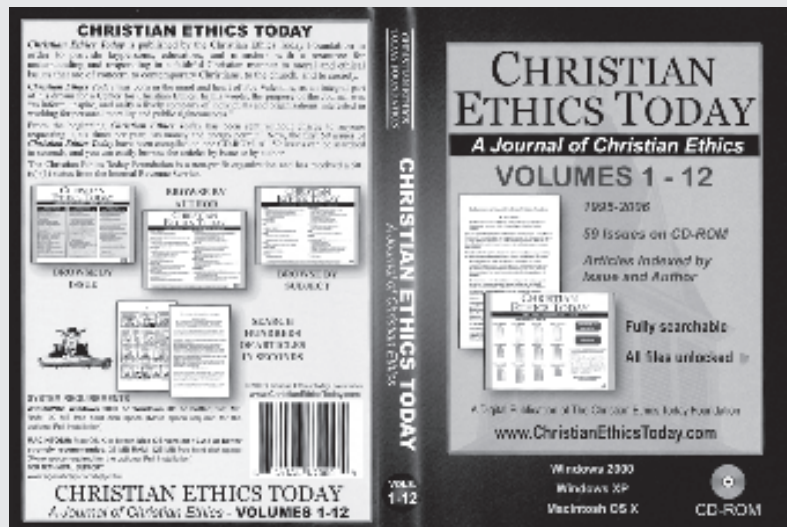
This article is reprinted by permission from the May 29, 2007, Ethicsdaily.com site of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

NOW AVAILABLE

Every issue of CET
1995-2006 Numbers 1-59
All 60 issues on CD-ROM

All Issues Indexed by Subject,
Author, and Issue

The CD Will Be Sent For
A Contribution Of \$50 Or More



If I Were 21 Again!

By Joe E. Trull, Editor *Christian Ethics Today*

Note: This speech was delivered at the Christian Ministry Banquet at Oklahoma Baptist University on April 23, 2007, where the editor received the Christian Ministry Alumnus Award for 2007, for recognition as “Outstanding Alumnus of Oklahoma Baptist University, Leading Christian Ethicist, Influential Professor, Author, and Pastor, Exemplary Role Model.”

Dean McGough, distinguished faculty, family and friends, and most importantly Christian ministry students at Oklahoma Baptist University. I am both humbled and honored for the unique privilege of speaking to this special group.

And, I really don't deserve the award. I can think of scores of graduates who deserve this more than I. But, I also didn't deserve to have prostate surgery and heart bypass surgery within the same week about a month ago, so I guess I will accept the honor with gratitude.

I'm sure I seem alien to you. I come from another country, the past. You may feel like one of my seminary students who refused to read any book written before his birth year—another evidence of original sin! I know it is hard to relate to my world—our generations hardly speak the same language. When I was a student on this campus fifty years ago, bunnies were still small rabbits and rabbits were not Volkswagens. A ‘chip’ was off the old block, hardware meant a hammer and nails, and software wasn't even a word. We did not know of ipods, tape decks, artificial hearts, word processors, or dot.coms. Fast food was what the Catholics on campus ate during Lent, and ‘making out’ referred to how we did on our exams. Grass was mowed, Coke was a drink, Cheese was sliced on ham sandwiches, and pot was something you cooked with. I come from a for-

eign country; I come from the past.

Yet, we do have some points of connection. This campus for one. Its traditions. Its history. This place on the map where you and I were first introduced to a newer and larger world—a world of ideas, challenges, and opportunities—and introduced to professors who taught, mentored, and nourished us toward maturity.

Over my life I have traveled a long way from my boyhood home on 45th street in Oklahoma City, and yet I have never left that ground of my being—I will always be an “Okie.” But a more important part of my past is a church—a group of Christians called Southside Baptist then, who loved me into the kingdom and nurtured and supported me through my college years as their first “preacher-boy.” Without them I would never have made it even through my freshman year.

You see, I was not raised in a Christian home. My first experience with a preacher was when the Southside Pastor and an evangelist came to our house to discuss religion. My Dad, who was an agnostic, literally ran the preachers out of our house. (I interpret his antagonism partly due to the horrors of World War I, which scarred him physically and emotionally).

A few years later a layman named L.D. Jones offered to take me and my brother and sister to S.S. and church each week. I think my mom was glad to get us out of her hair for two hours. In his class I first learned that “God so loved the world he gave his Son . . .” (Jn 3:16). At age 13, I made a profession of faith, and about three years later my pastor Loren Belt helped me interpret some inner urgings saying, “God may be calling you to preach!” I had absolutely no idea what he meant.

“The best way to find out,”

he said, “is to let you speak this Wednesday evening at our prayer service.” Being 16, I was game for anything and said, “OK!” I began my 10 minute devotional with the story of the first time I heard John 3:16 five years earlier from my best friend, H. C. Owenby. His dad was a preacher. One day after baseball practice we were standing in my driveway, when he quoted the verse and asked me if I believed in Jesus. I was about 11 years old and told him honestly, I did not understand.

Years before my first sermon, H.C. had transferred to a different school—I had not seen him in several years. Yet, as I told this story during my first sermon, the back door opened and in came H.C.—someone had told him I was preaching my first sermon. I finished the introduction, then I looked H.C. in the eye and said, “I know you thought you failed that day when you tried to tell me about Jesus—but you didn't. Thank you!”

That's enough background for you to know my basic history, but this information is also important for a crucial point I want to make shortly.

So now let me talk with you about, “If I Were 21 Again”—by that I mean, here are some principles for Christian ministry that I wish someone had told to me when I sat where you sit today—a few ideas that I hope will make your history as a minister of Jesus Christ even better.

The apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4: “Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; . . . But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

Be Real

My first word of advice may

sound rather mundane—Be Real! But it is actually very basic for a meaningful ministry to people. Parishioners will forgive poor sermons, forgotten appointments, and failed programs—but they want a pastor who is a real person. Read the gospels and see if Jesus does not come across as a real human being—so real, in fact, that some followers began to doubt his divinity.

By “real” I mean many things—honest, truthful, accessible, vulnerable, empathetic, and above all, a person of *integrity*. When James Carter and I worked on our co-authored book *Ministerial Ethics*, which you have been given, we discussed many possible words to describe the ethical life of the minister. The one we chose that captures the essence of Christian ministry, we believe, is *integrity*.

In his hotel room the night before he delivered the first Yale lectures on preaching, the famous minister Henry Ward Beecher cut himself badly while shaving. Biographers have suggested the reason was the contradiction between the person he saw in the mirror, a pastor awaiting trial for adultery, and the message he was about to preach. His life at that point lacked integrity.

In vivid contrast was the testimony of George Wharton Pepper, one of the few laypersons to deliver the Yale lectures, who said: “It is impossible to exaggerate the weight that the man in the pew attaches to the integrity of the preacher.” No professional is expected to model integrity as much as a church minister.

After noting ministers are not superhuman and are subject to the same human faults and foibles, ethicist Karen LeBacqz states: “The minister is expected to embody trustworthiness in such an integral way (i.e., to have such integrity) that even the slightest failure becomes a sign of lack of integrity. This does not mean the minister is permitted no faults. It means that the minister is permitted no faults that have to do with trustworthiness.”

The apostle Paul uses the phrase,

“above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2) to describe the minister. That is basic. “This above all,” writes Shakespeare, “to thine own self be true.” The one thing no one can take from you is your integrity—you have to give it away. Never, never, never, like Esau (Gen 25:3), sell your birthright for a bowl of stew, or a better church, or a denominational job, or personal security, fortune, or fame. Like Jesus, be real. Be true. Be a person of integrity.

Be Nice

This second suggestion may sound simplistic—Be Nice. Philip Wise, chair of our CET Board of Directors and pastor of Second Baptist in Lubbock, TX., spoke on Pastoral Ethics at Truett Seminary last year at a conference which CET sponsored. His title—Be Nice!

Philip shared a story told by our mutual friend, Fisher Humphreys, professor of theology at Beeson Divinity School. In the early 1990s Stanley Hauerwas, the most renowned ethicist of our day who teaches at Duke, was to speak to the faculty. While Fisher transported him from the airport to the campus, Hauerwas said something like this, complaining about his Methodist church: “God is nice—that’s all the theology we Methodists have. You be nice—that’s all the ethics we Methodists have.” And Fisher replied, “Stanley, I’m a Southern Baptist, and nice would be progress for us!”

When I arrived at OBU fifty years ago, I soon learned from the upper-class preachers that if you want to get a church or preach, you had to be orthodox: separated from the world and sound in doctrine. Interpretation: “Give up dancing and movies, and become a premillennial dispensationalist.” Well, I had already renounced dancing, which was easy for me with my clumsiness; I saw my last corrupt movie—a Dean Martin-Jerry Lewis comedy—my freshman year. And, even though I couldn’t spell it, I espoused premillennial dispensationalism.

The worst part of this “orthodoxy” was an incipient Phariseeism—a judg-

mental attitude toward those with whom you disagree—those ‘worldly’ preachers who have not seen the light, for whom we prayed and with whom we had no fellowship. Although I felt some discomfort with that, if the leading preachers said it was so, and if the evangelistic pastor of a large Arkansas church, who always preached in a white suit and white shoes and who was heard each evening on XERF, Del Rio, Texas, said it was so, maybe it was!

In more recent days this sectarian spirit has divided Southern Baptists, as our early debates over the Bible have expanded to Calvinism vs. Arminianism, private prayer language vs. glossolalia, gender equality vs. female submission, and clergy sexual misconduct. As these issues arise in seminaries, mission boards, and denominational agencies, there seems to be much anger, rancor, ugly words, and unkind actions.

Be nice. Whatever your position on these issues, be nice. However much you disagree with fellow ministers, be nice. And yes, you may find at times some of your own church leaders oppose your ministry and disagree with your leadership—but, be nice!

Stay Healthy

My next word may seem hypocritical, coming from one recovering from prostate surgery and four heart bypasses, all in the same week—yet I say, Stay Healthy. In my defense, my doctors claim my active athletic life—running three miles daily for 25 years and playing tennis most every day—along with my fish and fowl heart healthy diet, probably kept me alive. My cardiologist said, “The one thing you could not choose was your father—your major problem is genetics!” My urologist said over my ICU bed, “You know, this prostate cancer saved your life!” That’s another story that I will write about in the next issue of CET, but I simply want to give thanks to God for arranging for me to be in the best possible place when my heart pains began.

I first thought of this advice for young ministers, to stay healthy, while

attending the OBU homecoming last year. I discovered that many of my classmates were gone. I was particularly upset to realize several of the finest and best ministers of my era died in their forties and fifties, most of heart attacks. I knew most of them well. Though successful in ministry, many were overweight, inactive, and lived a life filled with stress. I regret their life was cut short, for they had so much to offer.

In *Ministerial Ethics*, James Carter begins chapter three, The Minister's Personal Life, by noting the minister of God has an obligation to take care of his body—she or he must not sacrifice physical, mental, or emotional health on the altar of service to the church.

I tend to be a workaholic. In my first years of ministry, I was working 70-80 hours a week doing good things for God, but neglecting my health and my family. A friend called me to accountability: "Joe, the church is not God. If you don't take care of your body, your family, and your emotional health, you won't last very long in the ministry."

Stay healthy. Take care of yourself and you will lengthen your days in service to God.

Nurture Your Marriage

A corollary to this last point is the need for every minister to nurture his or her marriage.

Dean Merrill observed in *Clergy Couples in Crisis*, that a failure of a minister's marriage is considered a tragedy, in many cases a fatal tragedy as far as continuation in ministry is concerned.

But divorce is not the only issue. The quality of the marital relationship between a minister and a spouse must also be considered. On April 9, 2007, in the small western Tennessee town of Selmer, a quiet, unassuming preacher's wife stood trial for the first degree murder of her 31-year old pastor-husband, struck dead by a single blast from a 12-gauge shotgun as he lay in bed. She told police she just snapped after constant criticism built up. "I was just tired of it."

Christian counselors David and Vera Mace have done extensive research and interviews of clergy couples over many decades. They discovered that clergy families face many unique problems—financial pressures, unrealistic expectations, and a fish-bowl existence to name a few. However, of all the issues listed, time spent together is the key ingredient of a happy home life. According to the Maces, 68 percent of the wives surveyed listed a lack of time alone together as the greatest difficulty in adjusting to being married to ministers.

So, nurture your marriage. The most important gift you can give your children is a happy home life. One practical word of advice: plan to take your wife and each child on a date at least once a month, or even weekly if you can afford it. Do something they like to do with just them—go somewhere that they enjoy. And remember, taking the family to Glorieta for a week of conferences is not a vacation—that's work.

Make Peace With Your Past

James Flaming, who was for many years pastor of First Baptist of Abilene, Texas, followed by many years at First Baptist of Richmond, Virginia, once told me a strange question he always asks when interviewing potential staff members. "Do you have any unresolved problems with your parents or family?" He added, "I have found across the years that the Christian ministers who have difficulty are usually those who have never made peace with their past."

This was also my experience. When I completed my first decade as pastor of a great church in Austin, Texas, I was called to Dallas-area church that had grown in 10 years from 100 members to almost 2000. Without giving you all the details, the first few years were horrific—the pastor had left under a moral cloud and within a few years I discovered two other staff members had been sexually involved with members.

I was especially upset that no

one seemed to understand or accept my leadership. Some accused me of spreading lies about the previous pastor, others claimed I was not "loving" like Brother X (who hugged everyone). The deacons had asked me to keep my distance, especially from several troubled female members who had become emotionally involved with the previous minister during counseling.

I was ready to resign, when I signed up for a Personal and Professional Growth Conference in Nashville, an intense two weeks with four church administration specialists who were skilled at helping ministers.

I learned many things about myself. Perhaps the most important was that I was running from my past—I saw my parents, my background, and my family as the very opposite of my calling—something I needed to forget and erase from my vita.

Even my name was an embarrassment. Joe—how common! Why did my parents not name me Joseph? No, I was just plain ole Joe! My middle name Earl was taken from my father's best friend, a liquor dealer in Houston. And Trull—the word means strumpet, trollop, a prostitute—not much of a pedigree for a preacher I thought, although a seminary professor did remind me when he learned of the derivation of my name, "Well, Jesus had Rahab the harlot in his ancestry, so you are in good company."

However, it was at this conference that I finally made peace with my past. One of the three counselors, who himself was an illegitimate child, said to me, "Joe, you are not the only person in the world who has been [blanked] on." He then uttered words that changed my life. "Don't you realize," he said, "God called you because of who you were and where you came from. You can be Dr. Joe E. Trull and mingle with educators and lawyers and doctors, and you also are Joe Trull the teenager from south Oklahoma City, who understands what it is like to be on the outside of

the church and on the underside of society; you can relate to people who live in that world.”

So I say to you, take a long, hard look at your past. If there is any unresolved conflict there, deal with it. Making peace with your past can free you for ministry.

Stay Competent

Now I am going to get a little academic—you also have an ethical obligation as a minister to Stay Competent. Traditionally, doctors, lawyers, and ministers have been considered professionals who render a valuable service to their community, as well as to their clients. In my research for the book *Ministerial Ethics*, I discovered the value of codes of ethics for ministers. You can read Chapter Eight for the details, but it is worth noting that most major denominations—Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples, American Baptists, and others—developed codes of ethics for their ministers, spelling out the ethical obligations clergy owed to themselves, to their congregations, to their colleagues, and to their community, in order to be a good minister.

Every one of them included an obligation for the minister to stay competent. The Presbyterian Code of Ethics reminds ministers “to reserve sufficient time for serious study in order to thoroughly apprehend his message, keep abreast of current thought, and develop his intellectual and spiritual capacities.”

My major professor and mentor, Dr. T. B. Maston, often told students, “Keep the Bible in one hand and *Newsweek* in the other.” The minister must be able to faithfully proclaim the Good News of the Gospel in a language relevant to our world.

Last week I was reading the April 9 issue of *Newsweek*, in which editor Jon Meacham describes a four-hour conversation he arranged between Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback

Church in California and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, and Sam Harris, congenial author of two books espousing atheism and a PhD neuroscientist. The question they discussed: Is God Real?

As I read the ten-page article, I could not help but wonder: How many ministers, including myself, could wage such a debate? But do you know what? Those parishioners sitting in your pews face these questions each day. They are struggling to find meaning in a world of greed, violence, war, and ethical dilemmas. As a church leader, you must stay competent—not that you will have answers for every question, but you must be able to provide insight and guidance for your congregants in their search for God’s will.

Follow Christ

My final word is much more profound than it may sound—Follow Christ. As I enter my seventies, I find myself preaching and teaching some of the same themes I did when I was 21. But now they mean so much more. So with this word to follow Christ.

Jesus himself made clear to many who wanted easy discipleship, “If anyone wants to follow me—to go where I am going—that person must first say ‘No’ to self, and ‘Yes’ to the cross, and then keep on following me every day” (Lk 9:23). Demanding words.

In my first seminary New Testament class, my professor noted how much he disliked the “red-letter” versions of the New Testament, the ones that put Jesus’ words in red ink. His reason was that “red-letter” Bibles implied the rest of the Bible was not as inspired as the words of Jesus—“Every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is equally the inspired Word of God,” he affirmed. I understood and accepted his thesis.

However, in time I have changed my mind. In fact, today I like to

call myself a “red-letter Christian.” Certainly the entire Bible is our best revelation of God and God’s will for humanity. Yet the Bible also affirms that the best and fullest revelation of God came in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. The writer of Hebrews (1:1-2) begins his book by noting that God spoke in various ways to the prophets, but God’s final and best revelation has come in Jesus Christ.

That is why I say to you, follow Christ. The entire Bible must always be understood in light of the life and teachings of Jesus. Your ministry should reflect the ministry of Jesus—your concerns, your priorities, your values, your walk and your talk must be as a follower of Jesus.

T. B. Maston once asked our seminar group, “If you knew Jesus were going to be in Ft. Worth this Saturday, where would you go to look for him?” After a few answers he responded, “Jesus would probably not be at one of our churches, or at this seminary, or even in the homes of prominent persons in this community. No, to find Jesus you would probably have to go where there were needy people that no one noticed, who needed him. That’s where we find Jesus in the New Testament.”

Who will you follow? The “successful” CEO-preachers in their mega-churches who have developed marketing techniques to impress the multitudes and build their own kingdoms—they have their reward. Or will you join Jesus in ministering to those hungry and hurting multitudes who reach out of their need to touch the hem of his garment.

Because of who you are, and because of what you have learned in this place called Oklahoma Baptist University, I think I know where you will be. Bless you in your ministry. ■

Romans 13: The Patriotic Version

By David D. Flowers, *Satirist*, The Woodlands, TX

Everyone must give full support to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The government that exists has been established by the Almighty.² Consequently, he who rebels against the government is rebelling against what God has divinely instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.³ For rulers hold no threat to those who do what they deem as right, but for those who do what they deem as wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then pledge your full allegiance and do not ask questions, then he will protect you.⁴ For the government is God's servant to do only good. But if you do wrong, be very afraid, for the government does not kill and blow people away for nothing. The government is God's servant, an agent of truth, justice, and the American way for all those who need democracy.⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to fully support the government, not only because of the fear of being blown off the map, but because everyone would despise you if you didn't.

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the government is God's missionaries, who give their full time to spreading the gospel of God's peace by violence and oppression in the name of democracy.⁷ Give everything you have to the government because "Caesar is Lord." If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect;

if honor then honor; if killing for the government, then kill for the government.⁸ Freedom is not free!

⁸ Let some debts remain outstanding, especially if it is for your comforts and hedonistic lifestyles, for he who kills for the sake of worldly comforts has fulfilled the law.⁹ The commandments, "Do not have only one wife," "Do not leave your family helpless," "Do not be content," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Do what thou wilt in the name of love."¹⁰ Love means you may have to kill your neighbor. Therefore this kind of love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our freedoms are always being threatened by the axis of evil that have breached the peace on our sacred soil.¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us vote the Democrats out of office with their secular laws and place conservative Christian Republicans in their rightful place of power.¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the days of our forefathers, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in treason and rebellion.¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the red, white, and blue as the Lord Jesus Christ, and do *not* think about how to live like Christ in every way.^c ■

^a This does not apply to the American Revolution. The Word of God does not apply when chains of tyranny are placed upon free people who have been endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.

^b Our own Lord Jesus said we are to "give to Caesars what is Caesars." Give him your taxes and your whole being for his worldly kingdom purposes. The Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world are one. War is a necessary evil. It must be done. We should be proud we killed people for our freedoms, but we should not feel like we have to talk about the gruesome effects of war. We should be proud, but we should find little pleasure in killing innocent civilians. If you are feeling guilty and ashamed for your actions... just read Augustine's *Just War* principles. "Blessed is the man who lays his life down for his brother in arms." There is power in the blood of soldiers and in the blood of Jesus.

^c1 John 2:6 does not mean that we should really live like Jesus. Some people believe we should live like Christ and the apostles, but this is a common misconception. There is no way we can live like Christ. Therefore, we conclude that we try to live like Jesus as best as we can. This is where we learn to compartmentalize our faith and not become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. Praise God for the illumination of our forefathers and their documents (The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, the Jefferson Bible, and the writings of Benjamin Franklin). We reject any claim that the God of our founding fathers was the god of deism. These men were good men that read their Old Testament and the history of the Holy Roman Empire. If the Son has set you free . . . you are free to do whatever you want in the name of peace.



What God Has Put Asunder, Let No Man Join Together

By William L. Self, Senior Pastor, John's Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, GA

Text: John 18:36; Matthew 22:21

When you attend church this or any other Sunday, you are validating a noble experiment that has made these United States the most religiously diverse nation in the world.

You are neither compelled to attend a certain church, nor are you restricted from attending. The worship you engage in, the hymns you sing, the sermon you listen to are not regulated by the government. We are guaranteed by the First Amendment the freedom to worship as our conscience dictates. We have religious liberty. We have the separation of church and state.

However, for the last two decades this freedom has been under attack. On this weekend we underscore our birthright of religious freedom as we celebrate the birth of our nation.¹

Secular forces are defending the First Amendment to the extent that they will go to jail for it and Christians are, for the first time in their history, hearing their leaders calling for its destruction.

The strange and arresting feature of this controversy is that it is being introduced into our political life by those whose tradition is to fight and die for religious liberty.

When the shouting is over, those who have weakened this separation will be called upon to answer to history for their violation of this sacred trust.

Lessons of History

The struggle between church and state is long and varied. It reaches back to the high moments in the Old Testament and continues through the New Testament in church history and on into the present day.

The Hebrew children were placed in the fiery furnace because the state imposed a system of belief upon them that they could not accept. Daniel was placed in the lion's den because he refused to cease praying as the state had directed him to do. Other Old Testament writers specifically warned against reliance upon secular support (see 2 Chron. 16:7; Isa. 30:1-12; Isa. 31; Jer. 27).

In the New Testament, the church/state struggle becomes more vivid. It was a coalition of church and state that crucified Jesus. Rome and the infant Christian faith were constantly at odds, and John on the Isle of Patmos identifies the Roman State as the anti-Christ.

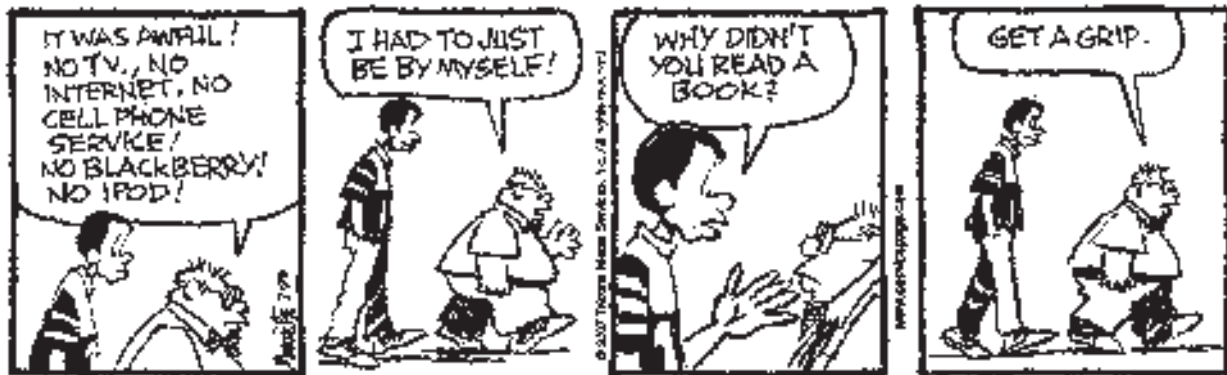
A great loss to both church and state came in 325 when the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity as the religion of the Empire. The clear lesson here is that the church lost its prophetic voice as it became responsible for the establishment, and the state lost its conscience as church and state became one. The church became powerful, wealthy, and totally secularized, formally and

morally bound to the state to secular aspiration it fully shared. The church becomes, in an arrangement like this, old and drab, dismal and discredited, as well as depressing and oppressive. History is replete with illustrations of this danger.

This happened again in France in the 18th century, England and Germany in the 16th century, Italy in the 19th century, and Russia and Mexico in the 20th.

And now those who have benefited the most from religious freedom are trying to stampede the American voter and turn back the clock on the issue of separation of church and state in the 21st century. If this stampede continues, history reminds us that in every nation where there has been a loss of religious liberty, the clerics oppressed the people and a strong anti-clerical reaction resulted. We must either head it off at the pass or we will need to clean it up after it has gone by.

At this season of the year, if enough people speak, if religious liberty can be highlighted effectively, the weight of public opinion will rise up and stop the stampede. History thunders loud to our day. Separation of church and state is best for both church and state. As nations go, we have done rather well at working out a plan for the relationship between church and state, and this is possible because we take both religion and government seriously.



Abuses of Church and State

At issue is religious liberty. In a nutshell, it is quite simply that people must be free to decide their attitude to God and must not be victimized for their opinions, however mistaken their opinions may seem to be. Religious liberty guarantees each of us liberty to freely argue according to our own conscience, above all other liberties.

The only truth that a person fully accepts is truth for that person, and no effort to force people to believe will change that. Christ sought to persuade people, but never compel or coerce. The clear lesson of history is that when church and state go to bed together, they do not make love. They do not produce offspring. The lesson of history is that one always rapes the other.

The pinnacle of the church dominance of the state was in a period of time from 1077 to 1213. In 1077, Pope Gregory VII met Henry IV of Germany in Conossa, Italy. For three days, Henry groveled in sackcloth and ashes in the snow outside the castle walls before the Pope would receive him and hear his confession.

John I of England in 1213 was humiliated by Pope Innocent III and acknowledged that his kingdom was only a fiefdom to Rome.

A recent example is the tragic surrender of the German state to Adolph Hitler, by the German church, some

say because Hitler neither smoked nor drank. That surrender will always haunt us.

The American Scene Today

After World War II, the church/state scene was relatively quiet for two decades. After reviewing my files on the subject, I concluded that after the election of John Kennedy as President, not much was discussed about church and state in our national life. Now this issue has reappeared.

The religious right has learned well from the liberal politicians and church leaders of the 1960s. Focusing on voter registration, civil disobedience, and sensitive emotional wedge-issues, those challenging church-state separation have utilized the strategies of civil rights movements with their own innate talent for organization. Couple this with zeal and a deep desire to save America from secular paganism, and we have a serious movement that cannot be casually dismissed.

A growing political activism by church people during the past two decades, in reaction to the Supreme Court ruling on prayer in public schools and later rulings on abortion, human rights, and IRS rulings on the tax-exempt status of church schools.

Add to this a gnawing feeling that something has changed in America, that we are no longer a Norman Rockwell Saturday Evening Post society. We are no longer "apple pie and Chevrolet, sidewalks and shade trees."

We are no longer the land of John Wayne, Bing Crosby, Clark Gable, Robert Young, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. We have now become the America of Jane Fonda, Oprah Winfrey, Jay Leno, Tom Cruise, Britney Spears, and Bill Clinton.

Our values are shaped by the media, with the TV talk show becoming the new American Sunday School. "Do your own thing" and "if it feels good, it can't be bad" are the major lessons being taught in the media.

During the 1960s we freed ourselves from excessive ethical and cultural structure; into that vacuum has marched a new generation, not comfortable living existentially. They are now opting for a more totalitarian structure than any they have surrendered. In brief, we are ripe for totalitarian rule. We observe every phone booth, hoping to spot the Superman who will deliver us from the oppressive potpourri of "do your own thing."

Between this social revolution and the hostage-taking incident in Iran, I noted an article in the *New York Times*, which observed that the social revolution in Iran was a religious movement. Basically, it was a retreat from the confusion of the secularism of the 20th century that had been created by the Shah's regime. The desire for simpler times and a clear morality and stability provoked the people to reject the government that produced secularization.



While this may be an over-simplification, I think there is a parallel here in our own rise of the new religious political right. Perhaps we are experiencing the same social change. Rapid secularization and technological advances have produced complex problems, with no clear standards for dealing with them. Look at how the internet has been used for internet porn and solicitation. Some religious leaders have been seduced into being pawns in the revolution to return to a more simple day. God's people have been offered the kingdoms of this world, which the new politics really cannot give.

We are quickly sacrificing our spiritual birthright for the pottage of political influence.

What Shall We Do?

One of the real significant flaws in this new movement is that the evangelical right has elevated issues to the level of doctrinal belief, and their litany of issues has become a creedal test. What you believe about abortion, stem-cell research, prayer in public schools, the Ten Commandments in courthouses, etc., has now become the litmus test for doctrinal purity. It must be reasserted clearly that issues rise and fall, they come and go, but the gospel is forever. Issues such as Vietnam, the bombing of Cambodia, and draft evasion, which were supreme issues of the 1960s, have now disappeared. We must be careful never to hook our

wagon to temporal issues, but rather the church's wagon must be properly hooked to the principles of the gospel. "His kingdom is forever."

To the extent that Christians in general are becoming politically active and involved in the entire political process, we are on solid ground, politically and theologically. But we must not equate either political party with Christian morality exclusively. All political parties are equally sinful. Each party has positive and negative factors in its platform. Politics is a process for deciding who has the power. That may not necessarily be evil, but neither is it necessarily Christian.

The church must resist the temptation to sacrifice her first love—evangelism and missions—for political power. Jesus had the same temptation. Let us not forget the embarrassment of Billy Graham when he endorsed Richard Nixon, and Norman Vincent Peale when he opposed John Kennedy's election.

The people of God must not be used for secular purposes. We must not submit to being tools in the hands of political power-brokers. This is a day for us to re-educate our people concerning the nature of religious liberty.

Let us remember that Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. By now my kingdom is from another place" (John

18:36).

"Then He said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'" (Matthew 22:21).

Roger Williams, in his analogy of *A Ship at Sea—Liberty of Conscience*, has given a good model for church-state relations:

There goes many a ship at sea with many hundred souls in one ship whose weal and woe is common And is a true picture of a commonwealth or human combination of society.

It hath fallen out sometimes that both Papists and Protestants, Jews and Turks

May be embarked in one ship

Upon which supposal I affirm that all the liberty of conscience that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges:

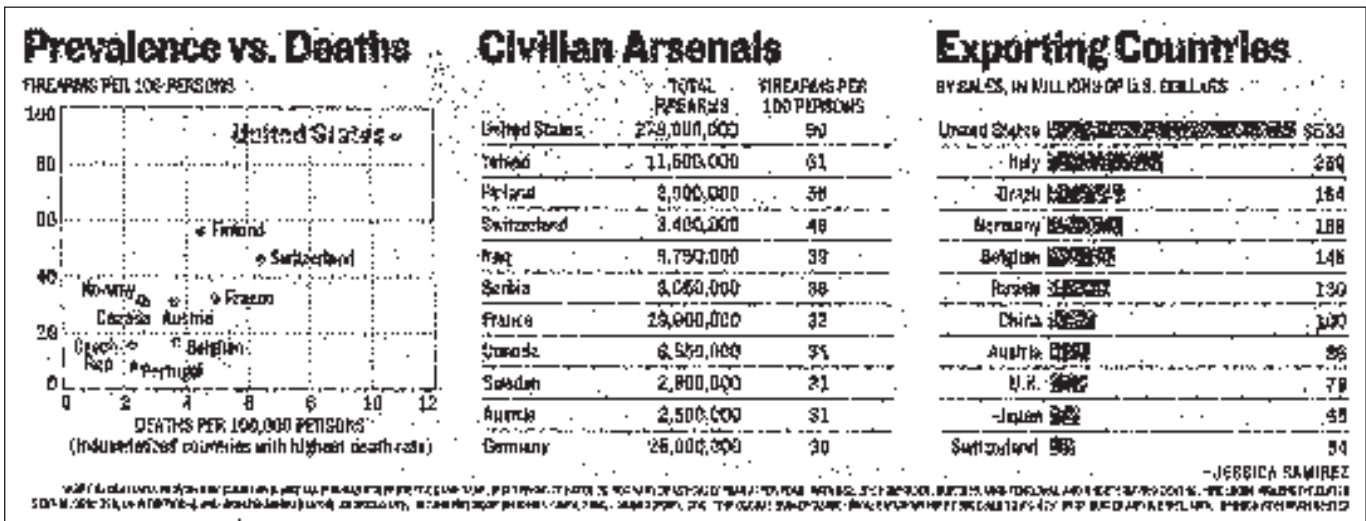
That none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews or Turks

Be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship,

Nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they have any.

What God hath put asunder, let no man join together. ■

1 This sermon was preached on July 2, 2006



Deacons and Deaconesses

By Henlee Barnette, Deceased Professor of Christian Ethics, Emeritus Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

“What are the Greek words for deacon and deaconesses?” This question comes from a member of the laity who is just now becoming aware of the theological conflict in her denomination over the role of women in the church. She adds, “Just thought that knowledge might come in handy.”

Deacons

The character and function of deacons appear in the New Testament in several places, especially in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Read these verses, carefully focusing on verse 11. Note that the Greek word for deacon is *diakonos*, which means “minister” or “servant,” one of the major orders in the church.

Qualifications for male deacons are the same as those for female deacons. Notice in verse 11: “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” Note well that the phrase “their wives” does not appear in the Greek. The word here is *gunaikas*, which means “women”. Verse 11 actually reads, “Likewise” (*hosantos*)—that is, the same standards for men deacons applies to women deacons.

One of the arguments against women serving as deacons is based on verse 12: “Let the deacons be the husband of one wife.” This verse clearly means one wife at a time (monogamy) and by implication applies to women deacons who are to have one husband at a time.

There is an abundance of scholarly support for my comments above. The great Greek scholar Dr. A. T. Robertson, formerly Professor of Greek at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, gets it right when he interprets verse 11, “Women as deacons,” though he seems to be a bit surprised! He is forced to this view because the word “likewise” (*hosantos*) is used as in

verse 8. And it is not women in general, but technically women (See A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, Vol. IV, 1931, 575).

Other translators also have it right (See *The New American Standard Version of the Bible*, *The Amplified Bible*, *The New Testament in Basic English*, *John A. Broadus New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, and *Williams New Testament* [C. B. Williams, 1869-1937, was a graduate and Dean of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago]).

Even Roman Catholic scholars have it right in the *New American Bible*. They translate *gunaikas* as “women” in 1 Timothy 3:11 because the word is used absolutely. If “wives of deacons” were meant, a positive “their” would be expected. Moreover “women” are introduced by the Greek word *hosantos*, “similarly” as in the passage about deacons in verse 8. The parallel suggests that women too exercised the same duties.

Some translators try to have it both ways (see *Oxford New English Bible* where in verse 11 *gunaikas* is translated “wives,” but in a footnote it puts “deaconesses.”

Deaconesses

In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is referred to as a *diakonon*, a minister, deacon (or deaconess) of the church. Dr. Robertson declares the only question here is whether it is used in a general sense or a technical sense (See Phil. 1:1.). He appears to prefer deaconess because she is a minister of the church at Cenchreae. In apostolic and later literature there are numerous references to deaconesses.

Roman Catholic scholars (in the *New American Bible*) identify Phoebe as a minister of the church. It has the imprimatur of the Archbishop of Washington. There have been dea-

conesses in the Catholic Church for centuries.

As we have seen, the *King James Version* of the Bible has “wives,” not women deacons, in 1 Timothy 3:11, and the KJV designates Phoebe as a “servant” of the church in Romans 16:1. Why?

In 1611, King James of England appointed a committee of scholars to translate the Bible. Anglican priests on the committee, in order to prevent women from serving as deacons, translated women in verse 11 as “wives” and deaconess as “servant” in Romans 16:1. The story appears in their “Translation Notes,” which were placed under Royal Seal for 350 years. By order of Queen Elizabeth II they were opened in 1961.

One of the Anglican priests admits *gunaikas* in verse 11 was translated “wives” to prevent women from becoming deacons. He noted that they themselves were all deacons before becoming priests. He goes on to say, “If we let the women be deacons, the next thing you know they will want to be priests.” (Cited by theologian Dr. Wayne Ward who read “Translation Notes.” *Baptists in Transition*, unpublished paper, June 11, 2001, 1-2.)

Some translators of the Bible may, in some cases, express bias in their work. In the two passages we have studied, translators have reflected their chauvinism and fear of women becoming bishops, pastors, or overseers in the church. They resort to *eisegesis* (reading into Scripture) in hermeneutics to maintain dominance over women in church and life. Patriarchal in thinking, they use Holy Scripture as a tool to keep women “in their place.” ■

Note: Dr. Barnette sent this article for publication in CET shortly before his death in 2004.

A Presidential Apology

By Daniel Malotky, Assoc. Professor of Religion and Philosophy Greensboro College

President Bush has acknowledged on several occasions that mistakes have been made in Iraq. His statements, however, have been framed to present him as a strong leader who is willing to take responsibility for his actions. None of his public remarks has constituted an apology, and he scrupulously avoids any suggestion that the invasion as a whole was a mistake.

In these non-apologies, we confront a tragic gap between the ideal and the real. Repentance is at the heart of the faith this president so publicly espouses; the intersection of spirituality and morality, for Christians, lies in the ironically positioned capacity for admitting one's moral failure. The redemption that the President surely desires is only possible by shedding the sense of his own—and, by extension, America's—inherent righteousness by admitting wrongdoing.

That the president has not even started down this path, however, has deeper causes than frustrated liberals typically suppose. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr proclaims that all of our religious and moral ideals are illusions. They are illusory, according to Niebuhr, not because they are necessarily false, but because they cannot be fully realized. Articulating a central tenet of Christian Realism, Niebuhr asserts that our highest ideals are relevant, but that we inevitably fall short in our attempts to implement them.

Too often, however, we become fixated on the mitigating imperfections of the world, found in our institutions, our enemies, and ourselves. In our rush to be realistic, we overlook practi-

cal possibilities that are consonant with our deepest beliefs. In despair over our limitations, we neglect to do the good that could in fact be done.

Real-world examples of public apology, like those integral to the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa, provide some indication that this despair is unfounded. While the process has hardly established complete justice in South Africa, it has facilitated the transition from a repressive white-minority regime to majority rule in a manner that is striking for its peacefulness. Though less obviously motivated by religious principles, Governor Schwarzenegger's apology to Californians and his subsequent reelection suggest that our ideals need not operate heedless of political realities.

This worldliness could also be found in a presidential *mea culpa*. The president has nothing to lose politically. He is a lame-duck president with an approval rating fixed in the thirties. The war in Iraq has already cost Republicans control of Congress, and it will continue to exact a heavy political cost through the next election cycle if nothing substantial changes.

A confession would provide his Republican colleagues some political cover, but it also would provide the best opportunity to achieve the president's goals in Iraq. More than any other proposed strategy, it would rob enemies of the United States of their ability to claim the moral high ground. As long as the insurgents can raise legitimate questions about our intentions, they can cast themselves as nationalist warriors or martyrs for Allah. A confession would deflate this moral balloon, for

paradoxical though it may seem, the president would grab the high ground in the eyes of Iraqis and the rest of the world by conceding it.

If Niebuhr is right, of course, we should not expect a full-blown confession from President Bush any time soon—the countervailing realities, like the attending requirement to acknowledge blood on his hands, must seem overwhelming—but we can still push for an approximation. If he does not feel capable of admitting that his administration, intentionally or not, misled the American public about WMD and Saddam's ties to al Qaeda, he might at least acknowledge that in the wake of 9/11, he was too eager to embrace any scrap of evidence, however contrived, to support his preconceived notions. If he will not admit to questionable intentions for the invasion, he might at least confess that his administration was too ready to believe the rosy pictures they painted about being greeted by Iraqis as liberators.

Liberals might not be satisfied with anything less than a “Jimmy Swaggart” moment, but even a limited confession would help. Though moral failure, as Niebuhr shows, often arises by proceeding as though the gap between the ideal and real does not exist, we are not well served by assuming that the gap leaves us in an amoral wasteland, in which survival (political or otherwise) becomes the *only* relevant criterion for determining our course of action. ■

This article originally appeared in Sights (3/8/07), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

A Theology (and Ethic) for Radical Believers and Other Baptists¹

By Curtis W. Freeman, Research Professor of Theology and Baptist Studies Duke University Divinity School, Durham, NC

Despite the fact that the direct and spiritual descendents of the Radical Reformation now constitute a majority of Christian groups in North America, their perspective is vastly underrepresented in systematic theology. It is common to find standard accounts of theology identified as broadly Catholic or Protestant, but who speaks for those whose understanding of the faith is none of the above? Anyone who has asked this question or has wondered why this branch of Christianity has produced so little theology will welcome these books.

The completion of McClendon's three volume *Systematic Theology* (*Ethics* 1986 revised 2002, *Doctrine* 1994, and *Witness* 2000)² constitutes the life work of one of the most widely respected but rarely consulted theologians in America. Brethren and others in the Believers Church tradition will recognize the authenticity of one who speaks their language and gives voice to their convictions. Like his friend and colleague, John Howard Yoder, McClendon understood what it meant to be an outsider participating in Protestant and Catholic conversations.

Perhaps this sense of otherness heightened McClendon's sensitivity to the "struggle" of theology, which he says begins with "the humble fact that the church is not the world." Those within established church traditions may misunderstand this admission as a sectarian retreat into otherworldliness, but as McClendon explains, no escape is possible "inasmuch as the line between church and world pass right through each Christian heart." This conviction that the theology of the church is not the standpoint of the world has long been held by free churches, which McClendon identifies as his community of reference. He innovatively denotes them as "baptists," using the lower case "b" to include such diverse groups as *Täufer* and Baptists to Pietists and

Pentecostals. This standpoint is summarized in a hermeneutical motto called "the baptist vision." *This is that*: the church is the apostolic community, and the commands of Jesus are addressed to us. *Then is now*: we are the end time people, a new humanity anticipating the consummation of the blessed hope.

From the perspective of standard-account Christians, the baptist vision seems to get everything backwards: Christian life before Christian faith, ethics before doctrine, convictions before reasons. This backwardness, however, is not merely a difference for the sake of difference. It reflects the reversal of perspective in "the view from below" where baptists first learned to see things. McClendon reminds us that our radical foremothers and forefathers rarely acquired a majority consciousness that presumed to speak for everyone, due in no small measure to the fact that their heritage was rooted in soil watered by the blood of those who dared to differ. The life and thought of the spiritual descendents of radical believers like Michael Sattler, Claesken Gaeletochter, Roger Williams, and Alexander Mack has always been socially disenfranchised and religiously marginalized from the theological mainstream.

II

This vision makes McClendon's *Systematic Theology* different. In the typical Protestant and Catholic accounts, theological ethics (or moral theology) comes after apologetics and dogmatics, but McClendon proposes that ethics stands first. Beginning this way implies a pedagogical (and catechetical?) priority for ethics, not a logical one, because this particular order follows the pattern of Christian experience that faith is lived out before it is thought through.

The scope of this radical vision evidently did not even become clear to McClendon until after two decades he finished the project. In the final edi-

tion of *Ethics*, which he significantly revised after the completion of volume three, the title of chapter two changed from "What is Ethics?" to "What Sort of Ethics?" The extent of the difference becomes apparent to anyone who compares the two editions. In the original, McClendon muddled his way through a survey of recent Christian ethics, theoretical accounts of decision-making, and how some ethicists go about their work. It had enough of the familiar philosophical markers (like utilitarian and deontological theories) to be recognizable as "ethics." In the second edition the treatment of philosophical ethics is held until the final chapter which retrospectively reflects on "why narrative ethics?"

Central to the first edition, which began as an article in a technical journal for professional ethicists, was a three stranded structure of the *splanchnic* (or organic) strand where morality is grounded upon response to environment, the *somatic* (or communal) strand in which a rule or way of life furnishes community guidance for employing social practices, and the *anastatic* strand that indicates how revisionary events direct moral transformation. This three stranded structure remains, but it is reconfigured so as to make explicit why the gospel story does not require theoretical accounts of morality to count as ethics.

In the original edition McClendon described how the field of Christian ethics as practiced by both Protestants and Catholics has led to an emphasis on "decisionism" rather than attention to the gospel "story." The revised edition reveals that McClendon came to understand just how much his own thinking was still under the influence of "Constantianism" when he began writing. Whereas in the first edition McClendon stated that "Christian ethics" refers to "theories of the Christian way of life," his second attempt to

describe what sort of ethics Christians are committed to does not begin with “ethics” or “theories” at all. Instead he starts with the gospel and unravels its three stranded moral structure which he identifies as the way, watch-care, and witness.

The way Christians are called to follow has its roots in the way of old Israel which was paradigmatically exemplified in Jesus as the way of the cross, and indeed, of nonviolence. This way requires a community of fellow pilgrims who provide the watchful care over fellow travelers along the journey, and finally witness to those not (yet) on the way. McClendon then shows how in the first millennium of Christianity these motifs became institutionalized: the way in the example of the saints, watch-care in the practice of penance, and witness in the canon of Scripture. He further displays how in the second millennium all three motifs were interiorized by Catholics (Thomas Aquinas), Protestants (Martin Luther), and baptists (John Bunyan).

By so narrating the story McClendon is then able to show “Christian ethics” to be an “invention” by constantinianized Christians committed to the project of Enlightenment rationalism as a means of justifying the moral content of the gospel. Given the waning (and perhaps passing) of modernity McClendon proposes to reclaim the three gospel motifs for postmodern existence: (1) the way as the Easter procession (the anastatic strand), (2) watch-care as the renewal of the community of care (the communal strand), and (3) witness as the stress on embodied existence (the organic strand). He hopes that just such an explication of the vision can bear truthful witness to the topsy-turvy order of the new creation where the last comes first, the least is greatest, and the meek inherit the earth.

There are many minor editorial changes in the revised edition of *Ethics* that will be overlooked by all but the most careful of readers. One that I did not miss, because it was a matter of much conversation between us, is his description of liberty as one of the five distinguishing marks of baptists. In the

first edition he identified liberty with “soul competency,” a term first introduced in the 1920s by Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins. In the second edition “soul competency” recedes into the background as a “related theme.” Also in the first edition McClendon made a glancing critique of soul competency as not sufficient “to do justice to the shared discipleship that earlier baptists had embraced,” but in the revised edition he characterizes soul competency as “Mullins’s anthropocentric motto” that “was framed too much in terms of the rugged American individualism of Theodore Roosevelt to do justice to the shared discipleship baptist life requires.” There are other major changes. Chapter nine on “Resurrection Ethics” retains the same title in both editions, but the order and content in the much improved revision is hardly recognizable as the same chapter. The section on *Koinonia* at Schleithem is shifted from the end to the beginning, and the chapter concludes with a wonderful description of “the difference made by the resurrection.” It indicates how McClendon’s mind changed in the decades between the writing and revising of volume one—a change for the better to be sure. The revision retains the rich biographical narratives of Sarah and Jonathan Edwards, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Dorothy Day that so wonderfully display the three strands, but make no mistake—the revised *Ethics* is a very different volume which sets the stage more clearly for the whole *Systematic Theology*. Anyone who read the first edition and assumes that the revised one is not worth (re)reading is missing a wonderful new book that is McClendon at his best.

III

How must Christians live to faithfully follow Jesus Christ the risen Lord? This is the question of *Ethics*. What must the church teach to be the authentic community of disciples now? That is the question of *Doctrine*. Because the church as a confessional community has been authorized by Christ to extend his teaching ministry the doctrinal question is unavoidable (Mt 16:15-19), and because the church as a gathered community seeks to continue in the way,

watching over one another and bearing witness to friend and stranger, this teaching authority must be exercised for the church to be the church (Mt 18:15-20).

McClendon contends that for the church to exercise its teaching office well requires the correlative practice of Bible reading. But if the “this is that” and “then is now” hermeneutics is to be practiced by all Christians, is not the baptist vision open to subversive forces contrary to the gospel? That this is so requires only the utterance of the word “Münster” which no matter how softly spoken never ceases to awaken the slumbering opponents of radical biblicism. McClendon’s proposal entails a recovery of the plain and spiritual sense of Scripture by attending both to widely shared convictions and historical-critical rules while centering on the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He thus counters the anti-enthusiasm critics with a biblicism that is Christ-centered and faithful to the gospel.

The connection between hermeneutical theory and the practice of Bible reading is clarified at the end of *Doctrine* through the story of Roger Williams. John Cotton and the Massachusetts Bay Puritans believed that their commonwealth fulfilled the types of Israel in the Old Testament which justified the use of civil power by church authorities to punish those like Williams with whom they disagreed. Against this view Williams argued that Israel was a type of Christ’s church, not the Puritan colony. He thus obliterated the basis for any union of church and state based on the Old Testament. By fulfilling all the offices of ancient Israel (prophet, priest, and king), Christ who proclaimed, served, and ruled though suffering love shows the Puritan government to be scripturally invalid. McClendon concludes that for Williams since the figures and types of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ: “From Jesus onward, government interference in anyone’s faith, be that faith false or true, constituted disobedience to Jesus himself.” McClendon’s ability to tell a story in simple Hemingway-like prose leaves readers wishing that *Doctrine* had more of the deliberate use of narrative that he

employed in *Ethics*. Yet to have done so would have increased the length of an already long book by another third.

As the baptist vision in *Ethics* seems upside down (or is it right side up?), so the view in *Doctrine* initially appears backwards. Whereas in the typical arrangement of doctrinal *loci*, eschatology comes last, in the baptist vision the last comes first. This “beginning with the end,” as McClendon explains, is not arbitrary. The fact that baptists from Hans Hut to Tim LaHaye have been inclined toward chiliasm of one sort or another suggests that eschatological doctrine is of particular interest (and importance) to radical believers. With the resurrection of Jesus as the hermeneutical touchstone McClendon describes what the church must teach to clarify “the new that comes in Christ.” Eschatological doctrine then sustains the practice of costly discipleship grounded in the conviction that the just God will vindicate the righteous in the end. McClendon engages a wide range of theological conversations, but he consistently demonstrates that the beliefs and practices of radical believers such as new birth or original sin do not fit the standard Catholic and Protestant accounts without theological reconfiguration.

The chapter “Jesus the Risen Christ” is the center piece of *Doctrine*. McClendon shares with D. M. Baillie the observation that modern historiography has brought an end to the haunting docetism that explained away Jesus’ humanity as simulation rather than reality. Yet the historical purge of docetism has not been free of fallout. From the old quest for the historical Jesus to the continuing quest of the Jesus seminar, historical-critical investigation into the human life of Jesus has stretched the old two-nature Christology to the limits. McClendon proposes a two-narrative model as an alternative approach: one the *kenosis* story of God’s self-giving and the other the *plerosis* story of divine fulfillment in human up-reaching. Jesus embodies both stories, and as McClendon helps us to see, the gospel witness is that these two are at last indivisibly one.

Of particular importance is the centrality of McClendon’s reading of the primitive Christian hymn in Philippians 2:5-11. Following a line of patristic interpretation, he takes the hymn as an example of earthly *living in Christ*, not the more common understanding of an incarnational story about the heavenly *leaving of Christ*. By so rendering the hymn as a model of Christ’s servant Lordship (and correlatively as an example of servant discipleship for those who follow Jesus in the servant way), McClendon avoids the lingering doceticism of the two nature model which the kenotic Christology attempted to address by attempting to explain how deity can “empty” itself. Anticipating the possible misunderstanding (and misrepresentations) of readers who might take this two narrative approach to regard Jesus simply as the “lucky winner” adopted by God, McClendon affirms “that there was never a time when God did not intend to raise Jesus from the dead, never a time when the whole story pointed to anything less than the ultimate exaltation of this One.” Careful readers need look no further for his orthodoxy, but careless ones may miss the seriousness with which he takes the challenge of historicism. As the two-nature model provided previous generations of Christians with a useful account of the faith, McClendon hopes that his two narrative Christology might enable the contemporary church to faithfully teach what entitles Jesus to be our Lord, or why the confession of Christ’s Lordship is consistent with the conviction that God is one, and finally how Christ-like the lives of disciples are to be. *Doctrine* is an excellent account of the faith for Christians that wants to know what the church must teach to be the church now.

IV

If *Ethics* points the way for disciples who follow Jesus in the Easter procession and *Doctrine* describes the watch-care of the disciple community for one another, *Witness* is a conversation with those not (yet) on the way about the new world that has begun through Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Because genuine conversation takes seriously the ques-

tions and concerns of one’s conversation partners, it proceeds *ad hoc*. So it is with this book which lacks the simple elegance of *Ethics* and the systematic structure of *Doctrine*. Nevertheless, *Witness* provides an important example of the sort of deep conversations about art, music, science, and philosophy that Christians must engage in if they take seriously the commission to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20).

Like *Ethics* and *Doctrine*, *Witness* seems to put things in reverse order too. It became common in the modern era for critical theology to begin with a prolegomena as a foundation for doctrine and ethics. The obsession with a preliminary justification of beliefs in the standard-account theologies was motivated in part by a desire to hold on to the status quo Christian establishments that were being questioned by a rationality loosed from revelation. Such theology accepted the premise that meaningful language must be in universal terms shared by everyone. In different ways both liberals and evangelicals bought into this agenda that transformed the gospel into a set of ideas that could be made credible and defended and, so it was thought, would conquer the ideas of the Enlightenment.

But rather than convincing skeptical opponents that Christianity was the most rational choice, the apologetic strategy often had the opposite effect of putting theologians on the defense and diverting attention from content to method. This preoccupation with method became an annoying habit (as Jeffrey Stout once observed) like a speaker repeatedly clearing his throat without ever saying anything. By putting off critical questions until the third volume, and in effect by saying something first without a lot of throat clearing, McClendon pursued a different strategy than the standard accounts. Here he joins the heirs of the Radical Reformation who rarely acquired a majority consciousness that assumed they should speak for everyone and consequently maintained that theology needs no foundation other than the confession of faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11).

More specifically McClendon’s order

follows a pattern laid out by Harold Bender in his classic essay *The Anabaptist Vision*. Bender described the Radical Reformation as a movement which at the core was the belief that the essence of Christianity is discipleship. McClendon's three volumes reflect this conviction, but the emphasis on living the faith should not be mistaken for a fideistic irrationalism that excludes thinking the faith. Decades before the language and ideas of postmodernity became the *lingua franca* of both academic and popular theology McClendon worked on cutting the Gordian knot that tied nonfoundationalism with relativism. Granting the then outrageous (but now consensus) premise that no one floats in mid-air or sees from a God's eye point of view, McClendon defused the claim that this then means that no beliefs are better than any other. Using the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin (viz., *How To Do Things With Words*) McClendon displayed how religious convictions are justifiable. Theology that is true to its task then is referential and intelligible to some particular community. This argument is set forth in his groundbreaking book *Understanding Religious Convictions* (co-authored with James M. Smith and published in 1975, revised in 1994).

In the first edition of *Ethics*, which followed the publication of *Convictions*, McClendon envisioned that the subject (and title?) of the third volume would be the more standard-account-like "philosophical theology" or "apologetics," but in the second edition he explains that the final volume pertains to the "stance vis-à-vis the world that the church must maintain in order to be truly the church." This "stance or standpoint" he called "witness," which was his choice for the title of volume three. The modification in nomenclature is another indication of how his mind gradually changed over the course of writing this *Systematic Theology*.

Chapter one offers a preliminary description of a theology of culture which is crucial to understanding the nature of the Christian witness to complex cultural expressions such as science, literature, music, and art. Readers

are wisely guided to see that the most faithful gospel witnesses are those that neither entirely reject nor wholly affirm the contemporary culture. McClendon maps the trajectory of such a theology of culture which first seeks to understand and connect with deep questions embedded in cultural expressions, then makes use of these cultural idioms to construe the world through the Christian story, and finally seeks to embody gospel practices in the church as a culture of hope remade by grace.

That McClendon's three step trajectory draws from theologians Paul Tillich, Julian Hartt, and John Yoder is evidence of the eclectic theological method that is sometimes described as "postliberal." This model which concedes the cultural dependency of all forms of gospel witness seems to imply that all claims then are merely culturally relative. Here again McClendon draws upon the richer account developed in *Convictions* of the standpoint which he called "perspectivism." According to this view, convictional conflict is "expected but not inevitable, fundamental but not ultimate, enduring but not inherently ineradicable."

The central chapter of *Witness* examines the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. McClendon's account does not simply suggest that Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy may be utilized by Christians in their conversations with contemporary culture (a common claim that is true enough), but rather that Wittgenstein as an authentic Christian provides a paradigmatic gospel witness for the church in this postmodern era. McClendon carefully attends to the philosopher's biographical narrative to make his case. Whether the stronger point about Wittgenstein's Christianity is sustained, readers will find such matters as the explanation of "forms of life" as "practices" to be very helpful.

The final chapter is a retrospective consideration of the theme of the entire volume which considers the place of theology in the university. McClendon explores such a project by reflecting on the one envisioned by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* where theology serves to examine the

deep convictions of culture and history. Theology for Newman was not merely a field of knowledge, but a condition for it, which as McClendon shows is necessary not only in religiously affiliated institutions, but in so-called secular ones as well.

I was one of a group of three who read *Witness* in draft form. In my letter to Jim (dated 5 November 1999) I reminded him that his audience would be "students like the young Curtis Freeman who picked up *Ethics* and said, 'This is the book I've been waiting for.' These folks are out there, and they are legion. They *will* read *Witness* with great profit. It is a theological map to guide them through the maze of postmodernity with the encouragement to do more and better work than you have done." Sadly he did not live long enough to see the truth of that assessment borne out, but if its reception by my students is any indication, then those of us in the Free Church tradition may well look back on these volumes as the most important theological guide for the way forward.

I hope the same is true for those who read this journal. Jim McClendon was not merely a baptist doing theology, nor was he just doing theology as a baptist. He did baptist theology. If you only read one systematic theology in your life this is the one you have been waiting for. It is a theology for radical believers and other baptists too. He is one of our own. ■

1 This article previously appeared in the journal *Brethren Life and Thought*, volume 50 (Winter-Spring 2006): 106-15.

2 James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986; revised ed. 2002); *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994); and *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

Editor's Footnote: It is worth noting that McClendon describes T. B. Maston as "My first, best teacher of ethics" (*Ethics*, 63).

A Political Shift for Southern Baptists?

By James L. Evans, Pastor First Baptist Church, Auburn, AL

For the past three decades Southern Baptists have been, for the most part, faithful political conservatives. Like other believers on the religious right, culture war issues have made them reliable supporters of the Republican Party. This party loyalty has been especially evident during the annual Southern Baptist Convention, with visits and calls from sitting presidents having become routine. This year President Bush was beamed in via satellite.

In spite of all that, however, this year's convention could mark the beginning of a subtle shift away from party loyalty and toward political independence. A group of moderates within the fundamentalist ranks of Southern Baptists is seeking to move the denomination to become less political.

Take Frank Page, for instance. Page is serving his second term as president of the 16.5 million-member denomination. In his first term he moved the denomination slightly away from the rigid fundamentalism that has characterized the group since the late 1970s. His appointments to boards and commissions included Baptist leaders outside the tight inner circle that has virtually dominated convention politics. This year he appears to be doing the same thing about national politics.

Because of Page's role as convention president, Republican presidential candidates are calling on him. Everyone in the race on the Republican side knows they cannot win without evangelical support, and Baptists are the largest body representing that group.

And Page is meeting with candidates. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Page told reporters that when given the opportunity he would be glad to talk to candidates about their salvation. But he said there would be no endorsements. Noting that he also wants to talk to Democratic candidates, Page said, "The nation's leaders need to hear a Christian viewpoint."

If Baptists are moving away from blind partisan loyalty, it could seriously jeopardize Republican chances of keeping the White House. The margins in the last two elections were razor thin. The defection of a voting bloc the size of Southern Baptists would be catastrophic for them. Republicans will obviously be working hard to keep these sheep in the fold.

If Baptists adopt a more moderate stance on social issues, the temptation for Democrats will be to mimic Republican candidates of the past few years and cater to evangelicals. We are already seeing some of this with Democratic candidates speaking freely

about their faith. For example, in a recent CNN debate where religion was the specific topic, John Edwards was asked about the biggest sin he had ever committed.

If Baptists choose to stay on their present path of partisan loyalty, they will continue to politicize their faith. The politics of denominationalism has already de-railed a major mission thrust that began in the 1970s and was intended to carry the message of Jesus to the whole world. Now the rancor of politics and religion is beginning to affect growth: membership numbers have flattened out for Baptists in recent years. And why wouldn't they? After all, who wants to be baptized into the Republican Party?

Only time will tell if the pendulum is swinging back toward the middle for Baptists. They will certainly remain conservative theologically. But if they broaden their social concerns to further include matters such as poverty and the environment, they could greatly help political discourse in this country move in a positive direction. They may even improve their own image in the process. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (6/28/07), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Camping Theology: Panentheistic Meditations

By Tarris D. Rosell, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology in Ethics Central Baptist Theological Seminary, KS

Panentheism is a theological perspective found, to varying degrees, in the Christian feminist writings of Sallie McFague and Marjorie Suchocki, other process theologians such as John B. Cobb, in the creation spirituality of Matthew Fox, and perhaps also the American Jewish theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel. It is an approach to thinking about God that comes in handy when theologizing on one's annual family camping trip.

The panentheistic blurring of sacred and secular gives rise to theological writing options without end. If "all is in God," a construct given weight by the Apostle Paul's Areopagus speech to Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:16ff), one could write "a theology of ..." almost anything. Not enough of us have been so inclined, distracted as we are by all that humans have created.

I write my panentheistic "theology of camping"—or maybe just theologizing while camping—from a site at 8500 feet elevation in the Colorado Rockies. A God who "does not live in temples made by hands" (Acts 17:24) is encountered more readily while meditating outdoors in the temple of that which God made. A divine being who is not "like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill" (Acts 17:29)—might be experienced better and more accurately described while removed from human artifacts and immersed in the divinely ordered natural world. It is all

sacred space out here.

Immanuel Kant contemplated with "increasing admiration and awe . . . the starry heavens above" as a modernist antidote for rationalistic materialism (in his Conclusion to *Critique of Practical Reason*). A postmodern camper rediscovers the ineffable while looking up at a night sky unpolluted by city lights. We reach out and find that God "is not far from each one of us. For in [God] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28).

This sort of theology is not the animism, polytheism, nor pantheism of some other religions. The Christian panentheist does not find gods everywhere nor God in everything. All is not God nor is God all that is. I look at the enormous craggy rock jutting out from the earth above my campsite, at the snowcapped mountains off in the distance, and it is not deity that I see.

We use the descriptor "majestic" for such a scene as this and it is apt, as much so as when this term is sung in praise of the mountains' Creator. But I rather easily make the distinction between the majesty of creation and the majestic all-encompassing One who "made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24). Too easily, I forget about both when confined to home, office, classroom, or the relatively low roof of a church building.

Like our common God-talk, I might use anthropomorphic language for the mountain, or the large pine tree

that now gives me shade. He is a grand old man, and she spreads her branches to protect all those who come near. As we often do in reference to deity, I sometimes personalize natural objects and even speak to them with awe and in admiration of their grandeur. In gratitude for the mountain's steadfastness or the tree's protective shade, I offer thanksgiving both to them and to the One.

With Saint Francis of Assisi, we might call our fellow creatures or creations by sibling titles, "Brother" or "Sister", as I do here when a full moon appears on the eastern horizon at midnight and the sun just a few hours later. Brother Sun and Sister Moon are indeed magnificent and seem beneficent, shedding light and radiance, warmth and energy on mere mortals like me.

But they are not gods; neither do I understand them as divinely inhabited. Inhabiting the divine is more than enough.

I think such God-thoughts when gazing in wonder at paintbrush and bluebells, big horn sheep on a hillside, a herd of elk grazing the tundra at 12,000 feet above sea level, a pair of coyotes darting across the valley below, and rainbow trout swimming or jumping upstream so as to spawn in still waters from whence they came. Even cawing crows at dawn, tiny chipmunks scurrying to and fro upon this Colorado earth, and the abundance of



ants instill respect for all that is. These are not-so-subtle reminders of our creaturely status together as living co-inhabitants of the divine.

This in-God experience is especially tangible while camping with my life partner and our four teenage and young adult children. Out here we are less distracted, more related—the family we intend to be in God.

On day hikes we ooh and ah together at each bend in the trail offering new and breathtaking vistas. We snap photo memories to view and share later; and we make allowances for each others' physical weaknesses when the trail gets steep or grows long. We offer one another water and bread for the journey, communing as one body in this Body of God.¹

Around the campfire at night, family members share our various God-thoughts, things that would go unthought or unspoken in busier times and places.

I must confess that our family does what hardcore campers might derisively refer to as “car camping.” It does involve a tent—all six of us together. No pop-ups, RVs, or cabins for us! But we go to tent-sites accessible by car and in proximity to dozens of other car campers. We may not have water and electricity at our site, but such amenities are not far off, and our cell phones still ring up here.

Discovering gratis accessibility to wireless internet a day or so after arrival, I surf the internet, check email, type a camping theology on my laptop at our campsite. Miles away from any “temples made by hands,” human invention still intrudes.

Yet even this partial retreat from what is called civilization is sufficient for pantheistic theological reflection. Even while car camping, one might see nature in God and encounter that theos in whom “we live and move and have our being,” who truly “is not far from each one of us.” ■

1 See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 1993.

A Post-1 Timothy 2 Woman

By Carolyn B. Edwards, Bandera, TX

More people filled the pews than usual for a Sunday evening service at my little country church. A visiting preacher had started a series of revival sermons that morning, and had stirred enough interest to garner a good turn-out at 6 p.m.

“We Baptists have gone soft on doctrine,” he asserted, promising to clarify some foundational doctrine for us.

He selected 1 Timothy 2 as his text. Of the 40 minutes he spoke, he spent at least 20 explaining what doctrine was and why it was important not to deviate from it. Then he got into the text.

He briefly touched on the first few verses of the chapter, even making jokes about the dress code and hair style restrictions presented by Paul in verse 9.

Soon, he reached the meat of his message, verse 12. For 15 more minutes he hammered home the dangers of allowing women to “teach or have authority over men.” This is important “doctrine,” he said, “and we are ignoring it to our peril.”

The clincher? “This is the way it is in my house,” he said, smiling, “and I want to tell you, my wife is glad that’s so! God would bless women who set their hearts on being good wives and mothers,” he added.

His wife was not present, so I couldn’t check with her, but I did wonder how he took Paul’s suggestions to a young preacher as to how to lead a church body and apply that to his marital relationship. I didn’t spend a lot of time worrying about that question however, since I was almost paralyzed in my pew by his main point. All around the church I heard hearty “Amens,” and saw supportive nods.

My problem with the message? For almost 10 years, I had been teaching a Sunday School class for adult women *and men*. If 1 Timothy 2:12

was doctrine, I had been in serious disobedience to God’s will for almost a decade. For over half of those years, I had been team-teaching with another woman, older and wiser than I in Bible knowledge with a history of mission service in South America and the Middle East and a heart for carrying out the Great Commission. We had taken over the class after the former teacher, also a woman, decided to be the church music leader. None of us had ever questioned God’s leading us to teach that class.

The class grew. We regularly reached the capacity of our classroom and had to move to a larger space or send some of our people out to teach or start new classes. I believed that was God blessing the work.

Teaching led to my own personal growth as a Christian. My students motivated me to dig deep into God’s Word, and I found joy in developing a loving closeness with my Lord. Again, I believed it to be God pouring out His blessing.

But that Sunday evening, I listened to a man say my work violated biblical doctrine! Surely, God would not so bless or the Holy Spirit so lead, a work that was not part of the Truth. I worship a great God who can use any tools to accomplish divine purposes, but this message struck me to the core as absolutely wrong! If not God leading, then who?

As I listened to the preacher expound on his point, I got to thinking of other ways my church violated this doctrine. Do we not learn from music? Then surely we violate Paul’s teaching if we have women leading the music or singing in church when there are men present. I believe people over 13 should be treated in many cases as adults. Therefore, I would have to concede that any Sunday School class or youth group containing males 13 or older should, to be

doctrinally correct, be taught only by men, right? What about committees? Would we be biblical only if we had no women serving as chairs, especially of committees that included male members? I looked around my church and wondered where we would find all the men willing to step into the shoes currently filled so capably, creatively and joyfully by women.

Emotionally rocked by this revelation from the preacher, I wondered, too, what my role really was in this church. He had emphasized that women should serve as wives and mothers. I had been widowed for almost 10 years, eliminating that role. My children were grown, so my mothering talents were scarcely needed. Having reached my 50s and lived through the hot flashes of menopause, I felt free for the first time in my life to devote more time to expanding my spirituality beyond those two important areas of service. God gave me the gift of teaching and I believe He called me to teach this particular class. What work could I now do?

I wondered, too, why verse 12 on female submission was doctrine, but, according to his presentation, not verse 9 that dealt with clothing and jewelry?

I went home that night too stunned to speak with anyone. I lay awake for hours, trying to understand what I had heard preached as doctrine in my

church and reconcile it with my experience as a teacher and worker in that church.

I did not attend any more of the services led by this guest preacher.

On Wednesday, I slipped into our regular mid-week service. Our pastor mentioned briefly that he had a few problems with what the visitor had said and promised to speak on them the next Sunday night. I felt a weight move off of my heart. OK, I thought, we'll get this cleared up!

Much to my dismay, on Sunday evening, my pastor stated his agreement with the visitor's view of women's service in the church.

Well, who am I, a lay person not saved until I was almost 30, to question two seminary graduates raised in the church? I called the church secretary and said that because I had been in violation of God's will for so long, I would no longer teach the Sunday School class. I also dropped out of the Easter cantata preparation and transferred my Sunday School membership to an all-female class. In trying to be obedient, I felt terribly disobedient, but I know feelings are not always a good standard for judgment.

As the news spread through our small congregation, my phone began to ring. Why? They asked. Well, they had heard the two sermons, too. Did they not hear what I heard? Well, yes,

they reluctantly agreed, that is what the two men said. I asked the music leader how she could continue to teach men in the church through music. "It's something I really love to do," she shrugged.

My pastor called wanting to know if he had offended me in any way. "Well," I replied. "I've just been told that my work as a teacher of a mixed-gender class is a violation of biblical doctrine, so in good conscience I couldn't see how I could continue in disobedience to God."

"Oh, I didn't mean for you to quit teaching," he said.

"You know," I said, "it's either doctrine or it's not doctrine. Which is it?"

He mumbled something along the lines of if my husband said it was OK for me to teach, I could do it. Of course, he knew I had no husband to give that permission. Did I need to be married to follow or know the will of God?

Within a short time, I left that church and began searching for another church home. I haven't found it yet.

And in the dark hours of the night, Satan laughs in my heart and tells me he misled me for almost 10 years while I thought I was held in the palm of God's hand doing His work for His good purposes. It is the hardest spiritual battle I have ever fought. ■



Confessions of a (Sinful) Father

By Burton H. Patterson, CEO The Foundation for the Advancement of Christianity Southlake, TX

As I sit back and contemplate my life of late, I find that I have a lot to confess. I really had not realized how bad my sins were until I read of the recent revelation to the president of what used to be the nation's largest theological seminary.¹ After much soul searching it was revealed to him that a woman could not teach a foreign language to a man in an educational institution devoted to the higher learning of things ecclesiastical. I recognized immediately that I had not sufficiently honed my vision of sin.

Doing what every good father should do I immediately decided to determine the extent of my sin. To do so quickly I searched the internet for a list of faculty members from the school whose president had received this recent revelation. I found that school had a few members of the feminine persuasion on the faculty in Music and in Christian Education. Thus I reasoned there must be a link between a woman teaching men some subjects and not others. To get to the bottom of this I retreated to the highest authority available—God's Word.

I started in 1 Timothy 2:11 where Paul taught that he did not permit women to teach or have any authority over a man. I noted that Paul said that *he* did not so permit, but *he* did not set forth his statement as dictum for all time. That made me feel better. Then I also noted that he said a woman could not teach a *man*, but Paul did not say 'child' or 'youngster' and that also

made me feel better. However, the computer has expanded my poor attempts at scriptural interpretation by making commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and lexicons readily available, and I looked more closely at the word "man" and found it meant any male human and that in the Jewish society of Paul's day a woman was not permitted to teach any male, "not even teach the youngest children"² not even a very young boy—oh my, do I have a real sin problem now.

Deciding to move on to another scripture I looked in vain for additional support for this recent revelation that a woman could not teach a foreign language, or anything for that matter, to a man. My, my, my, what a revelation—I found none. One sentence out of sixty-six books (eighty if you are an Episcopalian). Then I remembered, I am but a layman, and surely God's revelation to the president of a seminary trumps my knowledge. Also, the president's revelation that his predecessor's faulty interpretation of scripture that a foreign language could be taught to a man by a woman, while things scriptural could not, also must be given much weight. To follow the teaching of this great leader now I must not allow any of my male children ever to be taught by a woman, and that must include potty training!

I considered the depth of my sin. I had permitted my son to attend a church where in cradle roll a woman read Bible stories out loud. Surely that was not a

great sin since he could not understand anything while still in the crib. But then there were the years following while in the kindergarten class. Every teacher I could recall was a woman. Horrors! Even the activities outside of Sunday School—like Vacation Bible School, Choir, Mission Trips—everything had been led by women. The Women's Missionary Union had caused me to sin by letting my son participate in their missions-day activities. In the fact the only saving grace that came to mind was the Royal Ambassadors. At least they had a male leader. I am undone. I am a man of unclean child rearing.

As I sat in my proverbial ashes and rent my metaphorical clothes I realized I had to confess a much greater sin. I had permitted my son's mother, a female, to read the Bible to him and teach him Bible stories as he grew up. Not only had we sinned in letting her teach him about the Bible, we also had permitted her to tutor him in math and English. Then it occurred to me that I was continuing in sin. My wife was doing the same thing to our grandsons. She was teaching them Bible stories and not only doing it in our home but in the third grade class at church. Will God ever forgive me? ■

1 Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, TX.

2 Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible, Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p.66, Westminster Press, 1975.



Original Sin and Limbo

By Fisher Humphreys, Professor of Theology Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL

Limbo

On January 19 Pope Benedict XVI approved a report from an International Theological Commission of thirty Roman Catholic theologians which said that there is good reason to believe that babies who die without baptism go to heaven. Two weeks ago that report was published on the internet. This has alerted many people to the fact that the Catholic Church is in the process of dropping its long-standing teaching that unbaptized children go, not to heaven, but to a place (or condition) known as “limbo.”

Limbo was never a formal doctrine. In the 1950s the church began quietly to drop its teaching about limbo; the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the Catholic Catechism (1992) said nothing about it; and Pope Benedict, when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger, expressed serious doubts about it. It is not surprising that the Catholic Church is now officially moving away from it.

Those of us who are not Catholics may applaud this move. Most Protestants rejected limbo because we are averse to creating speculative doctrines without any biblical justification.

But limbo is closely connected to another teaching with which most Protestants have been sympathetic, namely, original sin. Catholics reasoned that, since unbaptized infants cannot go to heaven because they bear the stain of original sin, and because God is too merciful to send them to hell, there must be another place, limbo, to which they go.

The towering figure in the history of the doctrine of original sin is Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

Augustine

Augustine's Latin phrase “*peccatum originale*,” *original sin*, is not found in the Bible.

It has been used by theologians in two distinct ways. It is sometimes used

in the quite natural sense to refer to the first sin committed by human beings, the story of which is told in Genesis 3.

But in the west, especially after Augustine, the phrase came to be used not only of that first sin but also of the effects of that sin on the descendants of Adam and Eve. Augustine and the western church after him said that all human beings inherit original sin at their birth.

There are two versions of the effects of the first sin. One is a common-sense idea, namely, that the actions of parents have effects on their children. For example, when an alcoholic does not work to support his family, he hurts his children as well as himself. It is not difficult to see that the religious disobedience of the first human beings to God would have serious consequences for their descendants.

But Augustine added something to this idea. He said that following the fall of our first parents all human beings inherit not only a general problem but a guilt problem in particular; he believed that the entire human race is in solidarity with Adam not only in the consequences of his sin but in the sin itself.

That idea is more problematic. It is difficult to see how the sin of parents could render their children guilty.

Augustine elaborated this doctrine while engaging in a controversy with the English theologian Pelagius. Pelagius was extremely optimistic about the ability of human beings to live good lives without God's grace. The entire church has benefitted from the fact that Augustine insisted against Pelagius that the human predicament is more intractable than that, and that it is only by the grace of God that human beings can ever be saved.

The question is, did Augustine go too far when he said that human beings inherit guilt? For an answer to that, we must turn to the Bible. We will begin

with what the Bible teaches about our human predicament in general.

The Bible and

Our Spiritual Predicament

The Bible teaches that there are two components to the human predicament. To use the language of detective stories, we are both perpetrators and victims. Perpetrators commit crimes such as stealing. Victims are the persons against whom the crimes are committed—those whose money is stolen, for example. Spiritually we are both perpetrators and victims.

We are perpetrators because there are occasions in our lives when we know right from wrong and have the power to choose the right rather than the wrong, but we choose to do the wrong. We are responsible for what we have done, and, because what we have done is wrong, we are guilty. God condemns what we have done, and we are liable to be punished for it. The Bible is filled with references to our wrong-doing; a representative passage is Romans 1.

Let us call this part of our problem “sins.” If it were possible to eliminate all human sins (it is not), the world would be a very different place.

But it would not be perfect. The Bible tells us that there is another component to the human spiritual predicament. We are victims; we are enslaved by evil forces and powers that have us in their grasp, as a spider web can have a fly in its grasp. No more than the fly can we escape.

The Bible speaks forcefully about these powers. A traditional list of them includes the world, the flesh, and the devil, all of which are mentioned in Ephesians 2. To these we may add others such as suffering and death.

All human beings are victims of these powers. The powers enslave us before we begin to commit sins; an infant who does not yet know right from wrong nevertheless suffers and may die. That infant was born into a

fallen world, a world which will cause the infant to suffer. This fallen condition into which we are all born is a consequence of the sin of our first parents.

The Bible and Original Sin

Recognizing that the human problem includes both evil powers and human sins is a helpful background for the Bible's teaching about original sin. There are three principal texts about original sin.

The first is Genesis 3, which teaches that Adam and Eve were driven from the garden and punished for their sin. It says nothing specific about their children, but we naturally assume that their children were born, not in the garden, but in a world where the ground must be worked by hard labor and children must be born by hard labor.

The second is Psalm 51:5. The tradition is that David prayed this psalm when Nathan confronted David about his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and of murdering her husband Uriah. David wrote, "I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me." While it is certainly understandable that Augustine and others who think that original sin includes guilt would see their view in this verse, it is not certain that David intended that; he may simply have been expressing a profound awareness of his sinfulness and need for God's forgiveness. The Jewish people understand the psalm that way; they have no doctrine of original sin.

The final passage is the most important of the three; it is Romans 5:12-21.

It was this passage that led Augustine to his convictions about original sin.

Interestingly, he worked with an inaccurate Latin translation of the passage. Verse 12 says that sin came into the world through Adam and that death spread to all *because* all sinned (Greek: "eph hoi pantes hemarton"). But Augustine's Latin translation mistakenly rendered "eph hoi" with "in quo" (*in whom*), so his Bible read that sin and death came to all through Adam *in whom* all sinned.

The passage states that all human beings are condemned to die as a consequence of Adam's sin; it is not certain that it adds that all are guilty because of Adam's sin.

To use the distinction introduced above, the passage says that all are victims (of death, in this case) because of Adam's sin but not that all are perpetrators (guilty) because of Adam's sin.

Baptists and Original Sin

Having considered what the Bible and Augustine have said, we may now consider what Baptists have said.

The Baptist Faith and Message of 1963 and 2000 says simply that Adam transgressed and fell from his innocence and that consequently "his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin." Many Baptist theologians in the twentieth century, including E. Y. Mullins, W. T. Conner, and Dale Moody, said that what we inherit is an inclination or tendency to sin.

However, some Southern Baptist theologians have retained the Augustinian view and asserted that

human beings inherit guilt as well as other consequences from our first parents. In doing this they are in the tradition of earlier Baptists who, like themselves, have been influenced by John Calvin, who shared Augustine's views.

One of the problems which Baptists today have with Augustine's view is that it was linked to other ideas which most Baptists today reject. I will mention three examples. Augustine taught that God predestines some people to salvation and not others; he taught that original sin is transmitted by sexual desire ("concupiscence"); and he taught that baptism washes away original sin. Since most Baptists reject these ideas, it is hardly surprising that they would resist the associated idea that original sin includes guilt. Instead, they believe that original sin is a tendency to sin.

Conclusion

Such Baptists can welcome the fact that the Catholic Church, in rejecting the idea that God will not give the full gift of salvation to infants who die unbaptized, may have moved a step closer to the view of most Baptists that we inherit the consequences of the sins of those who went before us but not their guilt. We may all hope for those who die in infancy that God will in grace liberate (redeem) them from the powers—including death—that enslave them and all of us. Our reasons for this hope are not that children need no salvation, for they do, but that God loves all people and wants all to be saved, and that Jesus welcomed the little children who came to him. ■



Christian Ethics and the Movies

Reviewed By David A. Thomas,¹ Assoc. Prof. of Rhetoric, Emeritus, University of Richmond

Movies and TV: *The Queen* (2006)

Movies and TV as America's Epistemology. Neal Gabler, the popular culture and media critic who often appears on TV talk shows, authored *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* in 1998. His description of the importance of movies transformed my theory of rhetoric and films. According to Gabler's analysis, movies in America are directly responsible for a tectonic shift in the ways we think, and communicate, about reality. Formerly, philosophers would have been correct in describing writing as our primary epistemological form. That is, for serious ideas, *i.e.*, the things we think about, and *what* we think about them, we needed books. But when people started going to movies in preference to reading books, suddenly our epistemology shifted from print to the narrative, dramatic, and visual forms.

Narrative has always been around, of course. Our religion is based on the narratives in the Bible—but even so, those stories always existed for us in printed form. They still do. Christians, like Jews and Muslims, are “people of the Book.” Personally, I also see movies as social texts. To me, movies like the “Jesus film,” or Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ,” or last Christmas’ “The Story of the Nativity,” are neither more nor less than yet other translations of Scripture, like the *Good News Bible* or the NIV. I think millions of viewers would agree. More persons have viewed those religious movies than have ever read the same stories in the Good Book itself. (Just as more people got their only version of Kennedy’s assassination from Oliver Stone’s *JFK* than from the Warren Commission Report, which was widely published but little read.)

Movies, Gabler asserts, are the most significant model for understanding modern epistemology for a number of reasons. It cannot be denied that humans think in dramatic formats, including plots and characterizations. Ninety percent of human conversation conforms much more to what we might term “gossip” than about what we might term “ideas.” Yet TV, the child of the movies, can also claim pride of place among the sources of not only what we think, but how we think about things.

To be sure, there are significant differences between movies and TV, both technical and environmental. Movies are better than TV, and they are viewed on huge screens in dark theaters with audiences of strangers. TV is viewed on small screens in ambient light (or daylight) at home, alone or with only other family members or friends, in half-hour episodes. Above all, TV is heavily larded with commercial interruptions.

TV presents both stories and information, called “news,” which in turn is visual and narrative rather than verbal. There have been some indelible TV images in my life that I daresay are also true for all Americans – namely, the live news reports of Vietnam war images, of 9/11, of Katrina, and maybe a few other broadcasts.

***The Queen* as a Hybrid TV Movie.** What I want to say about this movie has to do with epistemology. It tells us almost all we know about Queen Elizabeth II during the funeral of Diana. Not only that, the movie shows us *how* we are expected to think about her. What I want to show, first, is that this movie uses TV techniques to do it.

(I could go on and on about the qualities of the movie itself. The reviewers loved it: *Rottentomatoes*, a major online movie review aggregator, records an unbelievable 98% favorable

ratio among all reviews listed. Helen Mirren, as Elizabeth, won every award on the planet for her acting, including the Oscar. You should see the movie. Moreover, it’s “clean,” so you can safely choose it for a church discussion group.)

Yet consider just how much of this movie is TV-based.

First, there had already been *twenty* previous movies based on the story of Diana’s death—on TV.

Stephen Frears, the director, has been a TV director since 1968; his acclaimed career as a feature film director only took off in the last decade or so. And so far, all of his theatrical movies adapt well to the small screen. Likewise, Peter Morgan, the screenwriter, is primarily a TV script writer—excepting his other notable movie of this year, *The Last King of Scotland*.

Helen Mirren, the actress, is a relatively minor movie star. In winning the Oscar, she bumped off Meryl Streep, arguably the greatest screen actress of our time. But Mirren is a huge TV star, in Britain. There, through the years, she was frequently cast in TV productions like *Masterpiece Theatre* and various Shakespearean epics for TV. She has made over 90 TV appearances, including her most famous role as the lead investigator on the prime time mystery series, *Prime Suspect*, which just completed its seventh season. This year, of course, she also won the Emmy for her HBO movie role as *Elizabeth I*.

And consider the movie itself: it is liberally intercut with actual TV footage from Diana’s life, and especially, from the funeral and the events surrounding it. Much of the movie is also shot so as to look like TV. The whole approach of the movie, and the key to its success, is the strategic choice to reveal the personality and character of Elizabeth in a kind of *Upstairs, Downstairs* dramatization of her pri-

vate life behind the scenes—her clunky sensible shoes and tweedy skirts, her pillow talk with the stuffy Prince Phillip, and so on. The climactic scene in the movie, in which Queen Elizabeth, at long last, finally consents to speak directly to the masses of people around the world about Diana's death, is a straight recreation of her speech as she gave it on TV.

I would love to comment at length on how the movie revealed the youthful Boomer, Prime Minister Tony Blair, as he interceded between the media and the poker-faced, utterly dignified, Silent Generation Queen. To overcome her resistance to entering the modern world, he firmly advised her to reveal more of her humanity and personal feelings than, as Queen, she thought it her duty and her responsibility to show. I would love to say a lot more about *The Queen's* cinematic achievements in its own right. But you can find a hundred competent reviewers elsewhere who will tell you all those things.

Christian Ethics and the Meaning of *The Queen*. Let me summarize the thrust of my comments: *The Queen* is a clear-cut illustration of just how pervasive both movies and TV have become in our consciousness of reality. The importance of this epistemology cannot be overemphasized. Because of our lengthy history with movies and TV, our pews are filled with people who live their lives according to scripts they write in their heads, just like the movies. When they see the scenes of a real event like 9/11, they say, "*It was [what?] just like a movie.*" And just as importantly, the preacher in the pulpit is possessed by the exact same worldview, and comes to the same judgments about what is real, and what counts for reality.

Keep in mind, many churches now use TV. They broadcast their regular Sunday morning services. They use videos in Sunday Schools and training classes. They (I hope) are sponsoring movie discussion groups. My question is, *how* are churches using these media tools? And, *how much*

better could they be, if they only took the time to step back and learn newer, more effective ways of doing it? ■

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.

Good and Evil: *Children of Men* (2006)

Children of Men, a lesser known movie that was mentioned at last year's Oscars, was one of the more global entries. Adapted (loosely) from a novel by P. D. James, and written and directed by Alfonso Cuarón of Mexico, the story is set in London. It stars British actor Clive Owen supported by his fellow Brit Michael Caine, and also supported by American actress Juliette Moore. *Children of Men* was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Editing, and Best Cinematography, but it came up short of winning any Oscars. Some critics named it among their Top Ten Picks of the year.

A dark sci-fi thriller hailed as our generation's *Blade Runner*, *Children of Men* is a dystopian picture of a bleak new world in the near term future. Set in the year 2027, the scene is dominated by the circumstance that humans have lost fertility, and there are no more children. Human extinction looms. Civic unrest dominates. Given the futility of having families, and the aging of the population, you don't have to worry about any gratuitous sex scenes. No one seems much interested in it. Everyone's mood is burdened with despair and hopelessness, verging on the suicidal.

Danger is everywhere, and there is no joy. Nations are isolated from each other. Britain's tyrannical dictator has adopted a draconian policy to get rid of all illegal aliens, called refugees or "Fugees." There are ongoing battles between insurgents and the government, which shoots on sight. Brutal shootouts crop up suddenly at unpredictable intervals. The Fugees retali-

ate with IEDs and Uzis. Factories, no longer responsible for clean air and water, constantly discharge smoke into the atmosphere, and drain filthy water into the gutters. Sidewalks are piled up with uncollected garbage. Graffiti covers the walls, pockmarked by gunshots and explosions. The sky is grey with soot and smog. Though shot in color, you almost remember it as a black-and-white production.

As the movie opens, the protagonist Theo (Clive Owen) enters a coffee shop where a TV bulletin is announcing that "Baby Diego," in Argentina, the youngest human being on earth, is dead at age eighteen. The people in the coffee shop are grievously engrossed by this news. As Theo steps outside and pauses to mix a shot of whiskey into his coffee from his ever-present pocket flask, a bomb blows up the coffee shop from which he has just left. Immediately, an old van screeches up beside him. Armed masked men jump out and hustle Theo into their vehicle, kidnapping him.

You sense that living in the world of *Children of Men* is sort of like life in Baghdad.

Theo has been selected by an insurgent group called the Fish to carry out a mission of hope. The group settled upon Theo because their leader, Julian (Juliette Moore), had been married to him in the distant past. When their own infant child died in "the flu pandemic", they broke up. Though she has been in hiding ever since, she still trusted him. Given Theo's chronic depressed, alcoholic lifestyle, that says it all about 2027 Britain.

When Theo learns the nature of the mission that the Fish have in mind for him, he gains a new lease on his life. One of the young Fugee women, named Kee, had somehow become pregnant. The Fish want to smuggle her out of harm's way. The hope for humanity's future rests on Kee's safety. As a hunted Fugee, her chances are nil, unless the Fish can protect her and spirit her out of the country to an island haven under the control of a shadowy entity called The Human Project.

Having cleared up the mystery of what's going on in the plot, the movie shifts into the mode of a perilous road trip, wherein Theo serves Kee as her bodyguard and travel arranger. Without detailing all the plot twists and turns, let's just say that their trip is fraught with as many cliffhangers as the old "serials" I used to watch at the Saturday matinees. Theo is assisted by his sidekick Jasper, an aging ex-hippie (Michael Caine). After many shootouts and other assorted crises, the movie ends when Theo finally manages to get Kee into a rowboat, just as the *Tomorrow* looms into view out of a fog bank, ready to take these very vulnerable refugees to their own new tomorrow. Alas, Theo himself can't make it. As it turned out in the year's Best Movie Oscar winner, *The Departed*, a lot of people die in *Children of Men*. To say more would be unfair to readers who look forward to seeing the movie. For mature viewers, I can highly recommend it.

Dystopia and Utopia. Encarta defines *utopia* as an ideal place or state where everyone lives in harmony and everything is for the best. Conversely, a *dystopia* is an imaginary place where everything is as bad as it possibly can be. Think of heaven or hell on earth. Science fiction is characterized by dystopian stories of people trying to escape or to overthrow the bad conditions. Besides *Blade Runner*, other examples that come to mind are *The War of the Worlds*; *Handmaid's Tale*; *Brave New World*; and *Fahrenheit 481*. Dystopian fiction satirizes and critiques society on several levels. First and foremost is the political. Governments are uniformly dictatorial and oppressive, often centered around a personality cult of an evil leader. But they also highlight economic and class discrimination. Also, they expose the hypocrisies and pathologies of religion.

The Bible, as literature, can be approached as a repository of numerous utopian and dystopian themes. *Genesis* begins in Eden, but mankind

descends to such a state of dissolution that God determines to destroy everyone in the Flood and re-set the human race from scratch. *Exodus* recounts the story of the Children of Israel's escape from slavery. Jesus preached in parables to illustrate the Kingdom of God, a better place and state of affairs. You can argue that the quintessential dystopian story in the Bible is the *Apocalypse*, known to us as *Revelation*, with its angels, horned dragons, pestilences, spiritual warfare, and the lake of fire and brimstone, as the backdrop for an ultimate Christian hope for that new kingdom of God to come.

Children of Men is about as graphic a depiction of *Revelation* as a movie can be. The movie's religious images are decidedly mixed. Organized religion, as depicted in the movie, is manifested in two separate sects of street preachers, the "Repenters" and the "Renouncers," both of whom seem preoccupied with affixing blame on someone for the world's sterility and lack of hope, and proclaiming the judgment of God. Both Theo and Jasper disclaim belief in divine causes. But Kee's baby is the literal embodiment of the hope of the future of humanity. And Theo, well, his name means *God* in Greek. Theo's character in *Children of Men* is an example of the literary type called the "Christ Image," or the willing servant who sacrifices his own life for the good of all.

I cannot recommend the movie as a good selection for a church movie discussion group. The language is profane, and the pervasive violence is very graphic. Personally, I found the movie to be shocking and sometimes offensive. But that was my first viewing. (I had the same kind of responses the first time I read the book of *Revelation*.) The meaning of *Children of Men* lingered in my mind afterwards, to the extent that I wanted to go back to see it again. Just as with my experience with *Do the Right Thing* and other disturbing movies, I found the second viewing much more rewarding. ■

The World Is Flat

(continued from page 31)

India, which is all but unknown to the average American. His observations on "The Curse of Oil" are timely and applicable. His analysis of "Militant Islam" merits serious attention. India is home to more Moslems than any other country in the world, save Indonesia. With terrorism being spawned by "the poverty of dignity," producing humiliation and frustration, it is past time for Americans to be aware of both the numbers of Islamic people in lands where globalization is alive and well and the dangers of a "protectionism" that can run out of control. The implications of globalization mandate understanding, judicial restraint, and political wisdom far beyond the average.

Friedman has not lost confidence in American leadership. The case is far from lost in these growing pressures that come from so many various sources in the world. With wise, perceptive political and business leaders in America, this new flat world without borders offers a challenge without precedent. These years ahead offer not only great peril but great opportunities, and this author genuinely believes that America can rise to the challenge. Missing, of course, in this secular book, is the Christian concept of ultimate hope which is rooted in the Judeo-Christian framework of America. Granted America has had the genius in business, inventiveness, and trade. What seems to be the fresh order of the day is an updated version of the historic Protestant Work Ethic, rethought, reapplied, and reenergized now. Any way the peruser of these words may conclude, here is a book well worth reading. These issues are here to stay! ■

Book Reviews

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

Four Books By Three Atheists:

The God Delusion

Richard Dawkins, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 2006, \$27.

God is Not Great: How Religion Spoils Everything

Christopher Hitchens, Twelve, New York, 2007, \$25.

The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason

Sam Harris, W. W. Norton, New York, 2005, \$14.

Letter to a Christian Nation

Sam Harris, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2006, \$17.

Reviewed by John Scott,¹

Dallas, TX.

The world's leading intellectual atheist for decades was Antony Flew. In 2004 he changed his mind and accepted the existence of God (*Christian Ethics Today*, "Another Atheist Finds God," Fall 2005, 15). As if reacting to that news, the four books listed above have since been published. They defend atheism and vilify religion. Each has spent time as No. 1 on the *New York Times*'s list of best sellers in the nonfiction category. So I read them in view of the New Testament passage: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is within you."

The Authors

Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, is now regarded as the world's leading advocate for atheism. He is a science professor at Oxford University.

Hitchens, author of *God is Not*

Great, is a prolific British writer who recently became a U.S. citizen. He gained wide attention as a political leftist who nevertheless spoke out vociferously in favor of the war in Iraq. He is an amazingly quick thinker with a penchant for outrageous insults, as when he called Mother Teresa "a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud." When on TV Hitchens is the master of one-liners and sound-bites, but that doesn't carry over to his book. It contains so many long and sarcastic flourishes and innuendos, it's hard to ferret out clear arguments for his atheism, other than his revulsion for hateful religious people.

Harris, author of *The End of Faith*, is a graduate in philosophy working on a doctorate in neuroscience. His book starts out in a clear direction but then wanders into a wilderness of speculation about everything from Eastern mysticism to the subject of his doctoral studies: whether there might be a neural basis for belief, disbelief, and uncertainty. His second book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, responds to some criticisms of his first one, but adds little of substance.

Although written in distinctly different styles, all these books cover essentially the same territory. So I will mainly focus on just one of them: *The God Delusion* by Dawkins. It is more likely to recruit the undecided than the other three books, as they mostly preach to the choir (or however you're supposed to use that analogy with atheists).

Threshold Question No. 1

While reading books by atheists over the years—beginning in 1957 with *Why I Am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell—I learned to look for answers to two threshold questions. The first one is: Does the author acknowledge *any possibility* that God exists?

The answer is virtually always, *yes*.

Some atheists make that concession reluctantly, but Dawkins is straightforward about it. For example, notice the word *almost* in what he calls his main conclusion: "God almost certainly does not exist." When asked if his use of the word "almost" was intended to leave open the possibility that God *does* exist, Dawkins candidly acknowledged that "any scientist would leave open that possibility . . . We can't be dogmatic and say it is certain that God doesn't exist."

So atheism is a decision, not a discovery. An atheist isn't certain there is no God, but chooses to guess there isn't. An agnostic is one who doesn't choose to make a guess, either way. In lieu of the word guess, a scientist might say *hypothesis*. Dawkins calls it an *assumption* when he defines a "strong atheist" as one who says, "I live my life on the assumption that [God] is not there."

In short, atheists do not claim to be infallible. They acknowledge they could be wrong, so the existence of God is at least a possibility.

Threshold Question No. 2

How does the author deal with "Pascal's Wager"? That's a line of reasoning that's been used by many people, but it's named for the brilliant scientist Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) who puts it in one of his famous essays. It can be summarized like this: "One who is not absolutely certain about the existence of God has three options: (1) be a person of faith, by choosing to guess God does exist; (2) be an atheist, by choosing to guess God does not exist; or (3) be an agnostic, by not choosing to make a guess. Here are some possible outcomes:

- If the person of faith has made a correct guess, he could live to rejoice because he did. If he has made a wrong guess, he will never know it.
- If the atheist has made a correct

guess, he will never know it. If he has made a wrong guess, he could live to regret it.

- The agnostic is the only one who can be sure he has not made a correct guess, as he hasn't made one. And he could live to regret that.

So choosing faith appears to be the only option with any possibility of a good outcome. Pascal considered that to be a no-brainer. Pascal also pointed out that faith is the best option for being worthwhile and happy in the present life as well.

Dawkins scoffs at Pascal's Wager, but for two wrong reasons. He begins with an accurate summary of Pascal's advice, but then shifts into a false assumption. He says Pascal was trying to make a case for conjuring up a forced belief or certitude in the existence of God. But Pascal said nothing of the kind. To the contrary, he began by assuming (at least in that essay) that we are "incapable" of being certain God exists. Then Pascal addressed the question: In view of that uncertainty, what should we do about any possibility that God does exist? Pascal concluded that wisdom requires a better-safe-than-sorry guess, or if you prefer, hypothesis or assumption.

Dawkins's second false assumption is that Pascal thought the only thing one must do to play it safe is to "believe" in God. Dawkins belittles that notion, saying that God would surely require more—such as "kindness, or generosity, or humility." But Pascal would agree with Dawkins on that point. To place Pascal's bet one cannot stop with the hypothesis or assumption that God exists. One must make it a *working* hypothesis or an *operating* assumption. An idle guess is not enough. A person must actually live as if the guess is true, *just as a scientist can test an unproven hypothesis by acting as if it is true*. Indeed, it is not unusual for scientists to prove something is true as a result of an "act as if" experiment notwithstanding having had serious doubts beforehand.

The famous medical doctor-psychologist-philosopher-Harvard professor William James (1842-1910)

observed that many of our personal beliefs—both religious and non-religious—result from living as if they are true before we really know they are. Some of the most important, and pleasurable, facts of life can be known in no other way.

Bad Things Done by Religious People

Concluding his discussion of Pascal's Wager, Dawkins asks, "Is it possible, finally, to argue for a sort of anti-Pascal wager?" Dawkins suggests it might be safer to bet God does *not* exist and thereby avoid "the evil consequences that can flow from religious belief and observance."

Then Dawkins tries to make the case that the world would be a better place if all religion vanished and we all became atheists. To support that view Dawkins quotes Sean O'Casey: "Politics has slain its thousands, but religion has slain its tens of thousands." But how does he account for political purges such as those by Stalin that led to the deaths of an estimated *30 million* of his own people? Stalin was an atheist and dictator of the largest nation in history with an enforced doctrine of atheism.

Dawkins absolves atheism of any responsibility for such atrocities by saying [I'm not making this up] that the perpetrators were not influenced by their atheism, but were motivated "by economic greed, by political ambition, by ethnic or by racial prejudice, by deep grievance or revenge," or they were just insane or otherwise demented. "Individual atheists may do evil things but they don't do evil things in the name of atheism," he explains.

While practicing law 40 years I heard many people strain beyond the limits of veracity in efforts to justify their preordained conclusions. But none of them outdid this effort by Dawkins so far as I'm concerned. Does he really think we're naïve enough to believe that Stalin's being an avowed atheist did not leave him more open to murdering those millions than if he had been a devout member of the Russian Orthodox Church? If Dawkins himself had been one of those sent to

die of starvation in Siberia, would he have not welcomed, indeed prayed for Stalin's religious conversion? Even if Stalin's atheism did not directly motivate such atrocities, at the very least it enabled them by not putting any restraints on his evil desires.

Nevertheless, Dawkins excuses atheism for the evil acts of atheists on the grounds they must have had other motives. *But he refuses to grant that same defense to religion*. Religious excuses have been used throughout history to hide non-religious aims. And the underlying causes of many so-called "religious" conflicts are not really religious—such as the economic tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the territorial disputes between Israel and its neighbors. And religion is no exception to the rule that all great institutions can attract some fanatics, fools, and frauds. But that's also true of governments, and even charities, and most certainly universities, including the one where Dawkins serves on the faculty.

All of these authors persist in speaking of "religion" as if it is one monolithic entity. They point to some regrettable doctrine or practice of one religious person or group as if it were a fly in "the" religious soup. For example, Hitchens accuses the Dutch Reform Church of helping to maintain apartheid in South Africa, but he fails to mention the role of the Anglican Church in ending it. Harris mentions the refusal of some members of the denomination known as Christian Scientists to accept medical help, even to save their children. But that tiny minority hardly represents the entire Christian religion, which is divided into an estimated 37,000 denominations.² And some of those so-called denominations are actually categories of separate groups, such as the 35 different kinds of Baptists just in the U.S.

Nevertheless, these atheists repeatedly recite various misdeeds by religious people and groups as evidence against all the others, *but they explicitly refuse to do the same concerning atheism*. (I must say, however, I also think

it's unfair to judge all atheists by the actions of those who are infamous for their evil ways. I've done volunteer work with an atheist to help some people with disabilities. He's very kind and does enough charity work to put many Christians to shame.)

Good Things Done by Religious People

In trying to make the case that the Christian religion had done more harm than good, all these authors ignore massive amounts of evidence to the contrary. Christians were the prime movers behind the establishment of charities, hospitals, universities, personal freedoms, and even the advancement of science.³ Recent in-depth studies show that people of faith donate far more money and volunteer many more hours to charities, even to secular charities, than secularists; and they give a lot more blood as well.⁴ Only three percent of the people in India are Christians, yet Christians provide almost 30 percent of the health care in that country. Moreover, studies show that people who are religious and charitable are likely to be much healthier, in every way, than those who are not.⁵

One of the good things done by religious people is to stop bad things being done by others, including other religious people. Take slavery, for example. Many Christians in England and the U.S. once owned slaves, but other Christians led the abolitionist movements in both countries. And Christians are still trying to wipe out slavery in other places. Between 1995 and 2000 Christian Solidarity International freed nearly 21,000 Sudanese slaves by the peaceful means of buying and freeing them. I'd like to see someone try to convince those former slaves they would be better off without Christianity. But, believe it or not, these authors say "enlightened" atheists would fill that void with more good deeds, and fewer bad ones.

Science and Religion

Dawkins refers to an old survey indicating that a 40 percent minority of scientists believe in God. He must not have been aware of a more recent

survey by Elaine Howard Ecklund, Ph.D. sociologist at Rice University, that puts the figure at a two-thirds majority among scientists on the faculties of 21 elite research universities in the U.S. But such surveys don't really matter anyway, as God's existence obviously doesn't depend on a majority vote by scientists.

Dawkins discusses his favorite subject at great length—Darwinian evolution. He seems to think that a belief in evolution almost precludes a belief in God. Perhaps that is why some Christians devote huge amounts of time and money to oppose the teaching of evolution. However, these efforts may be backfiring. The intensity of Christian opposition to evolution signals to some young people that if evolution is true, then there must be no God. As many of those young people have already been persuaded that evolution is a proven fact, that may explain in part, the recent spike in atheism among young people. In any event, a different approach has been suggested by Francis Collins, the medical doctor, preeminent scientist, and former atheist who is now a committed Christian. In his book *The Language of God* Dr. Collins explains why a belief in evolution is in no way inconsistent with a belief in God.

Aside from evolution, Dawkins points out that the history of religion is strewn with mistaken beliefs about the physical world. *But that's also true of philosophy, science, and medicine.* Nevertheless, Dawkins implies that no competent scientist can believe in God. Yet his own scientific credentials pale in comparison to those of many scientists who do believe in God.

Believers include Nobel Prize winners in physics, chemistry, medicine, and physiology who have spoken openly about their faith. The book *Spiritual Evolution* (Templeton Foundation Press, 1998) contains personal religious testimonies of preeminent scientists, including S. Jocelyn Bell Burnell, whom Dawkins recognizes as a great scientist without seeming to be aware of her religious faith. The cover story in *Newsweek*

on July 20, 1998, was "Science Finds God." It reported that many scientists, including some former atheists, believe in God. *Time* ran a similar story in 1992.⁶

Bad Arguments by Some Believers

Dawkins also points out why certain arguments made to prove God's existence are not valid. Then he implies that this refutation proves God's *non*-existence. But an invalid argument doesn't prove the opposite of its conclusion. In fact, it just doesn't prove anything. Such an argument may even reach a correct conclusion, albeit for a wrong reason.

Unanswerable Questions

Atheists often ask unanswerable questions about why God does and does not act in certain ways, as if to say, "If God existed we could read God's mind and know all the answers!" This reminds me of a question I asked my Dad when I was a child: "Does outer space have a boundary, and if it does, what's on the other side if it's not more space?" Dad explained that our minds can't grasp either answer, but that doesn't prove either answer is wrong, or that there's not some other explanation beyond the boundaries of our minds.

Sure enough, some theoretical physicists later came up with another theory: that space is a curved and closed system. I don't have the foggiest notion of what that means, but that doesn't prove them wrong. Just as our hands cannot lift every object we can touch, so our minds cannot answer every question we can ask. Such questions are just that—questions, not answers. If we refuse to believe in anything until we have all the answers about it, we will never believe in anything. Everything is a mystery beyond a certain point. That includes God. It would require delusional arrogance to think otherwise. ■

Recommended Reading

Lengthy books may be written to rebut, point by point, the four books in question. But the following books already contain enough hard data and sound reasoning for that purpose:

➤ *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* by Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D. (Free Press, New York, 2006), \$26.

➤ *Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry* by Vincent Carroll & David Shiflett (Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2002), \$15.95

➤ *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* by Alister McGrath (Doubleday, New York, 2004).

1 Copyright 2007 John R. Scott. This review contains some material from a forthcoming book *A God for Skeptics*.

2 *Christianity Today*, July 2005, from the article "Is Christ Divided?" by Timothy George.

3 *Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry*, by Vincent Carroll & David Shiflett (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

4 Arthur C. Brooks, *Who Really Cares?—America's Charity Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 2006). This book reports on extensive research that shows people of faith are far more charitable in every way than secularists. My review of this book appeared in *Christian Ethics Today*, Winter 2007, 29.

5 Arthur C. Brooks, Chapter 7: "Charity Makes You Healthy, Happy, and Rich," 137.

6 "Science, God and Man," *Time* magazine, December 28, 1992, 38-44.

The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century

Thomas L. Friedman, New York, Farrer, Straus and Girous, 2005, \$27.50.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan, Richardson, TX

Anytime Thomas Friedman writes a book, go out and get it! You will not regret it—ever! His writings are simply required reading in today's

world. Freidman is a winner of several Pulitzer prizes and other major awards. His work as a columnist for the New York Times is known and quoted around the world. This newest book, a best-seller from the moment of publication, speaks to one of the most important issues confronting our nations—Globalization!

This is that phenomenon which has resulted from the convergence of three famous inventions less than twenty years ago. These are the personal computer, the world-wide web, and that dazzling and seemingly endless array of complicated soft-ware programs which keep on coming our way. All of a sudden there are no boundaries between nations in the world because of an information revolution, as Friedman eloquently states, on a par or perhaps beyond, as powerful as Gutenberg's printing press or the Industrial Revolution itself! Basically, the world is flat!

Globalization has resulted in unnumbered American jobs lost to India or China or Eastern Europe not only because of massive savings but also because of a surprising level of efficiency, research, and resourcefulness. Misunderstanding these effects of globalization and the additional chapters yet to be written about it is leading to a tinkering with a pernicious protectionism both in America and Europe which may result in some very harmful and difficult problems.

The title of the book is ingenious for it encompasses the past, present, and future of globalization and these multiple related issues that are here to stay.

Freidman has a rare gift of taking obtuse and abstract concepts and restating them so lucidly and simply that understanding can actually become a reality. Like it or not, changes about how business will be done around the world, clashes between cultures, and political upheavals all are involved in this information revolution. Here is a very readable volume which should be required regarding the impacts of these inevitable developments.

If Freidman's conclusions are cor-

rect, one almost automatically concludes that one's definition of a professional is up for grabs. Business leaders, labor union officials, leaders at all levels of American educational systems, workers in jobs especially sensitive to these global factors are just some of those who need stringently to mull over Freidman's conclusions. Religious leaders also need to have an ear to the ground here because they must wisely minister and mentor multitudes of their church members impacted by these factors.

Of major interest in the book is Friedman's multiple conversations and interviews with key business and political leaders in lands where globalization is moving forward at unbelievable speeds. None is more prominent than India. If the suggestion for required reading is valid in America, that same suggestion should apply to the Indian leadership, particularly in the sensitive areas regarding the culture surrounding the issue of the Untouchables, the conflicts between Hindus and Moslems, and the encouragement attendant regarding an emerging democracy. Much progress has been made, but much has yet to be realized.

Friedman has not lost faith in the American genius, rooted in our land's glorious freedoms and nourished by our historical educational institutions which are still the envy of the entire world. He eloquently, even fervently, appeals to every level of American life to return to the disciplines of study, inventiveness, and the old-fashioned values of hard work and visionary commitment. Through these avenues America moved to the head of world leadership. Friedman tells us honestly that the gauntlet of change has been hurled at us, primarily from India, China, Japan. America still has the extraordinary benefits of its historic freedoms, but the day of coasting on the accomplishments of the past is over in this flat world!

In addition to the impact of globalization, the author also touches on other very important issues. He bluntly assesses the caste system in
(continued on page 27)

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Philip Wise, Chair

Pat Anderson
Tony Campolo
Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler
Carolyn Dipboye

Aubrey H. Ducker, Jr.
Fisher Humphreys
Darold Morgan
David Sapp

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

• OUR ADDRESSES AND PHONE NUMBERS HAVE CHANGED

Joe E. Trull, Editor
9608 Parkview Court
Denton, TX 76207-6658

Phone: (940) 262-0450
Cell (940) 230-6931
New email: jetrull@grandecom.net

VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE: www.ChristianEthicsToday.com

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

Post Office Box 1165
Argyle, Texas 76226

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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