

Christian Ethics Today

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

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Faith and Social Justice

By Jim Wallis, Editor in Chief/CEO of Sojourners Washington, D.C.

Some years ago on a trip to the U.K., I walked through the historic Holy Trinity Church on Clapham Common in South London. This Anglican parish was the home church to William Wilberforce, the abolitionist parliamentarian who wrote Britain's anti-slave-trade legislation, Wilberforce and a group of Christian fellow parliamentarians and lay people known as "the Saints" were behind many social reforms that swept England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The current vicar was very proud to show me around. On the wall were pictures of these typically English-looking gentlemen who helped to turn their country upside down.

Finally, the vicar pointed to an old, well-worn table. "This is the table upon which William Wilberforce wrote the antislavery act," he said proudly. "We now use this table every Sunday for communion." I was struck—here, in dramatic liturgical symbol, the secular and the sacred are brought together with powerful historical force. How did we ever separate them? What became of religion that believed its duty was to change its society on behalf of justice?

William Wilberforce and his group of friends profoundly changed the political and social climate of their time. Wilberforce was a convert of the religious revivals that transformed 18th-century England. His life and his vocation as a Member of Parliament were profoundly changed by his newfound faith; Wilberforce became a

force for moral politics. His mentor, John Newton, who worked in the slave trade before he became a minister, became well known for writing the beloved hymn "Amazing Grace." Later, he used his influence as a religious leader to lead the battle against slavery. In the light of his efforts, we can read his immortal words "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me" not merely as a testimony of private guilt and piety, but also of turning away from the sin of trafficking in human flesh. His conversion produced a social and political transformation as well as a personal one.

The same became true of Wilberforce, who first heard Newton speak when he was young but regarded his real conversion as confirmed following a series of conversations in 1785-86. At the conclusion of their conversations, Newton said: "The Lord has raised you up for the good of the church and the good of the nation." Two years later Wilberforce introduced his first anti-slave-trade motion into Parliament. It was defeated, and would be defeated nine more times until it passed in 1807. It was a historic and moral victory, but Wilberforce wouldn't be satisfied until slavery was abolished altogether. A new Wilberforce biography notes, "probably the last letter" John Wesley ever wrote encouraged Wilberforce: "Oh, be not weary in well-doing. Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might." Wilberforce continued working tirelessly toward that goal, year after year. Finally, in 1833, the House of Commons passed a bill abolishing slavery, and Wilberforce died three days later, his work finally done.

Similarly, in 19th-century America, religious revivalism was linked directly with the abolition of slavery and movements of social reform. Christians

helped lead the abolitionist struggle, efforts to end child labor, projects to aid working people and establish unions, and the battle to obtain voting rights for women. Here were evangelical Christians fighting for social causes, an activity that evangelicals have not been associated with in more recent times. Nineteenth-century U.S. evangelist Charles Finney didn't shy away from identifying the gospel with the antislavery cause. He was a revivalist and also an abolitionist. For him, the two went together.

Wilberforce's life is a testament to the power of conversion and the persistence of faith. I have often said that I am a 19th-century American evangelical born in the wrong century. But now, a new generation of evangelical students and pastors is coming of age. Their concerns are the slavery of poverty, sex trafficking, the environment, human rights, genocide in Darfur, and the ethics of war and peace. Whether they know it or not, they are really 19th-century American evangelicals (or 18th-century British evangelicals) for the 21st century.

Recently, I was preaching at an evangelical Christian college in the American Midwest. I called for a new generation of Martin Luther Kings and William Wilberforce. Afterward, two young women were waiting to talk to me at the end of a long line of students. When they finally got their turn to speak, they looked me straight in the eye and said, "We are going to be the next Martin Luther King Jr. and William Wilberforce, and we just wanted to tell you that." I told them I was glad to meet them now before they became famous! But they were serious, and so was I. The history from earlier centuries can inform a new generation of Christians in the struggle about how to reunite faith and social justice for our time. I know

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Editor: Joe E. Trull

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

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have the right to do and what is the right thing to do.”

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart.

“He was literally one of a kind—and a real Baptist. He could see the ironies and the contradictions (in political or religious life) so clearly and then reduce them to just a few strokes in a cartoon.”

James Dunn, in response to the death of cartoonist Doug Marlette. Dunn and another Baptist preacher, Will Campbell were the inspiration for preacher Will B. Dunn in Marlette’s *Kudzu* cartoon.

“[Jesus] isn’t talking about just going or not going to Hell after you die. He’s talking about a radically different way of living. He’s talking about changing the world and living in a subversive and radical way in this world. That’s what . . . the ‘kingdom of God’ involves.”

Brian McClaren interview in *The Wittenburg Door* (July/August, 2007).

“America never belonged to God. We were never a godly nation. . . . There are no good old days where we were truly operating by kingdom principles. Nothing is to compete with God . . . God is the beginning and the end.”

Greg Boyd, responding to ‘Take America Back to God’ in *The Myth of a Christian Nation*.

“Paying for sex, in whatever form, is both illegal and repulsive. It reveals a view of women as commodities that is relevant to lawmakers’ public responsibilities.”

Ruth Marcus, *Washington Post* columnist outraged by Sen. David Vitter’s (R-La) link to a prostitution ring in D.C.

“The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has settled for \$660 million a lawsuit brought by over 500 victims of cler-

gy sexual abuse over the last 70 years, dwarfing the \$85 million paid for 552 claims by the Archdiocese of Boston.”

NBC News, 7/15/07.

“I am Shiite. My uncles and cousins were murdered by Saddam’s regime. I wanted desperately to get rid of him. But today, if Saddam’s feet appeared in front of me, I would fall to my knees and kiss them.”

“Ali,” a Baghdad resident (*International Herald Tribune*)

“If you believe Jesus is coming soon, why do you need body guards, a house in the most expensive, exclusive gated community in San Antonio, a ranch, \$1 million a year tax-free income and three Mercedes?”

Robert Flynn (*The Wittenburg Door*, July/August 2007) in an imaginary interview with John Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Church San Antonio.

“You don’t get it. . . this will be a political document, or it will not be released.”

A senior Bush administration official to **Dr. Richard Carmona**, Surgeon General from 2002-2006, to prevent release of a report linking poverty and poor health (*The Washington Post*, 7/29/2007).

“Texas has executed 402 people since capital punishment was reinstated 21 years ago (four times the number of the second state Virginia) and 374 people are now waiting on death row, five of them scheduled to die in September.

Dallas Morning News Editorial (9/2/07), calling for a moratorium on this “greatest moral challenge facing lawmakers in Texas.”

“We must repent concerning the more than 2 million Iraqi refugees (among whom over 400,000 are Christians) in Syria and Jordan who are living in des-

perate conditions . . . We must repent for being active agents of war, rather than being true children of our God of peace . . . We must repent for indulging, actively or passively, in playing God; or for encouraging and voting for politicians who consider the world to be a chessboard and a stage for their political whit.”

Martin Accad, Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut, Lebanon, when asked about the state of the Baptist world six years after 9/11 in *Soundings*.

“Consumerism has become the American world view—the framework through which we interpret everything else, including God, the gospel, and church.”

Skye Jathani (*Leadership*, Summer, 2006).

“We are called to be fools for Christ, not ‘damned fools’.”

William Sloane Coffin.

“Nearly a half million unwanted pregnancies, including 200,000 that would end in abortion, could be prevented if Medicaid coverage were expanded to include contraception for low-income women.”

Guttmacher Institute, *guttmacher.org*, 2006.

“Tell me how this ends.”

Question asked by **Gen. David Petraeus** in 2003, when he led the Army’s 101st Airborne Division into Iraq.

“Make the most of all that comes and the least of all that goes.”

Ruth Bell Graham’s advice to her daughter Anne (*The Christian Century*, 7/10/2007). ■

A Pious Proposal: The F Word vs. the J Word

By William Griffin, Biographer, Novelist, Playwright, Translator, Alexandria, LA

I've never read a word I didn't like. Educated beyond my competence, I've amassed a huge vocabulary. I've taught myself to pronounce each and every word, including "pejorative" (there are at least three approved ways).

I can enunciate each and every letter in succession to form the word "pejorative" as a whole; listening to recordings of British actors like Gielgud, Richardson, and Olivier decades ago taught me how, and in the process I eradicated my Bostonian accent.

I've done my best to pass on my love of words to my three children. When they were young and impressionable, without my wife's knowledge or consent, I called them together for a family conference. No, it wasn't going to be on the birds and the bees, about which I knew comparatively little; it was on something far more important, I thought; the F word.

I wanted the F word and other similar words to be part of their active vocabulary, even if they never had an inclination to use them. Nor did I want them to be intimidated when they heard these words, classified by non-lexicographers as "dirty" words, sprung on them by their peers. Reason? There's no such thing as a bad word; admittedly, some words acquire bad meanings, but that's another issue entirely.

I knew also, from spending my professional life dealing with words of all sorts (many of them in book form as an acquiring editor at Macmillan and Harcourt), that words are merry messengers, Marx Brothers, Katzenjammer Kids, Sacha Baron Cohens, sometimes bouncing and behaving, sometimes rascally and misbehaving, always up to no good. Among them, the F word.

And of course I knew from John the Evangelist that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was

God, and that the Word of words has come down to us in spoken and written form in a cascade of words. How odd of God, but that's another issue entirely.

History of the F Word

The F word is found in the works of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence among others, but it hasn't been found in the OED, SOD, EDD, and MWCD until recent years.

It must be said that the eccentric British lexicographer, Eric Partridge, happily remembered for *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional Language* (1937), *A Dictionary of the Underworld, British and American* (1949), and *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (1958), splendid volumes all, has always included the F word.

Locus classicus of the F word as spoken may be found in the works of comedian George Carlin. A frequent guest on television shows in the 1960s and 1970s, he compiled a list of the "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television"; the F word was among them. Carlin later expanded the list to 200 such words.

Eventually, the FCC got involved; the U.S. Supreme Court was consulted; and the seven unspeakables are now included in the annals of the Supreme Court (FCC v. Pacifica Foundation, 1974).

Since that time the FCC has kept the F word off prime-time network television with some success. And yet, today, through the magic of the zoom lens we see, even if we don't hear, the F word being shouted with utter abandon by the finer coaches of our better collegiate and professional teams.

As for hearing the F word, we continually see it bleeped from television shows and movies. How do we know? One doesn't have to be Miss Marple or Marlee Matlin to read actors' lips.

Slips in the spoken language continue. A couple of years ago at an awards ceremony Bono of U2 was caught by an open mike saying the F word in its adverbial form ("f—ing marvelous"). At the beginning of 2006, Howard Stern, the foul-mouth Frank of radio and television, swore off the F word on the ground that it was no longer funny. And so the parade continues.

All this having been said, I must affirm and support people who form groups to bar the F word or its sisters and brothers from current use on public media, even though I may not agree with them. And I admire their persistence in pursuing the FCC.

Ironically, allowing the free use of the F word is the only sure way to insure its demise. It has been so repetitively and thoughtlessly used that it numbs the very ears who are offended.

Now to my pious proposal. It has to do with shifting massive Christian energy from one goal—a very good goal, it must be said—to another, worthier goal.

PROPOSAL: *The FCC should allow the full and audible use of the F word; in return, the FCC should banish the blasphemous use of the J word, Jesus.*

J Word

As background, some years ago Alan King conducted a series of interviews meant to be an oral history of comedians, especially stand-ups. In conversation with Jerry Seinfeld, King, a rather splendid comedian himself, said to his guest, "Unlike other comics today, you work clean." By that he meant that Seinfeld didn't use the F word or its correlatives in his routines. But later in the same interview both used the J word in a casual, expletival sort of way.

Historically, the Jews have suffered at the hands of Christians, especially

the Roman Catholics, of which I am one; much of that misery was inflicted in the name of Jesus. It's no wonder that some Jews speak of our Lord and Savior in a less than generous way. I can only follow the example of John Paul II, and apologize to my Jewish friends for these historical sins, not caused by me particularly but by my denomination in particular.

Lest I give the wrong impression, such Jewish infractions are infinitesimal when compared to those of the Gentiles and to those found on cable television networks, which are unencumbered by any censorship.

As for the traditional television networks, their censors, at the massive insistence of the censorious among their audience, bleep the F word. Oddly, they're no longer bleeping the J word as expletive, and the Christian audience isn't uttering a peep of protest. Isn't it time to reverse the process, to remedy the greater wrong?

As a lifelong member of the publishing community I'm a libertarian when it comes to the use of words. Hence, I wouldn't restrict the use of the J word in whatever context, holy or unholy. Ironically, though, allowing the free use of the name is the only sure way to insure its survival.

Problem

But a personal problem arises. My whole spiritual life is based on the word *Jesus*. In the Old Testament there's the second commandment. In the New Testament there's Philippians 10:2: "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."

I spent eight happy years as a Jesuit (member of the Society of Jesus). The religious order did nothing to exaggerate devotion to the holy name, but the name of Jesus was always surrounded with great warmth.

In the litany of the holy name, which dates to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Jesus is invoked as, among other things, father of the poor, treasure of the faithful, good shepherd, true light, eternal wisdom, infinite goodness, our way and our life.

There's the Jesus prayer, a repetitive prayer dating back to the fifth or sixth century. It would seem to have its source in the gospel of John. Paraphrasally rendered from the Greek, "Up to this point, my dear friends, you haven't used my name when you asked for something. Use it; it works; it really works" (16:3).

The Jesus prayer has many forms.
Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner....

Jesus, make haste to help me....

Jesus, have mercy on me....

When all is said and done, "the name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer" (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997).

One could do worse than spend the rest of his her life exploring the wonders of this holy name.

In conclusion, my pious proposal would seem to be a reasonable and honorable trade-off, restoring the F word to die of overuse and restraining the J word used as expletive so that it may live.

Afterthought

Every blasphemy bothers me, unsettles me to the point of wanting to deck the blasphemer. To maintain some sort of spiritual balance, I've had to come up with a mischievous if mystical thought. Suppose that, when the J word is tossed around with reckless abandon during the course of a comedressed-as-you-are, bunkhouse brawl, Jesus isn't offended. Not only that, suppose he comes, as he comes to all those who utter his name in moments of need or praise. Is that so far-fetched? If the New Testament is any indication, Jesus has done some of his best work with unpromising people in questionable surroundings. A pious thought! ■



Jus Post Bellum in Iraq

By Charles P. McGathy, Chaplain U.S. Navy (Retired), Madison, NC

Note: Chaplain McGathy is a D. Min. student at the Houston Graduate School of Theology and he is also the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Madison, NC.

What does winning look like? It is a simple question, yet a profoundly difficult one to answer. Even so it is a question that must be asked and answered by legitimate states before they go to war against other states. Otherwise the moral dilemma that results will be a quagmire that defies escape.

What are the moral responsibilities of victors in war? That is the question posed by former Navy Chief of Chaplains, Rear Admiral Louis V. Iasiello. In his thought provoking article published in the *Navy War College Review*, he moves the discussion of “Just War Theory” one logical step further and discusses the responsibilities the U.S. has in post-war Afghanistan and Iraq. In prophetic words written in 2004, Admiral Iasiello said: “As recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq attest, nations must fight wars with a war termination vision and plan carefully for the post-conflict phase. Doing so, or failing to do so, may make or break efforts to restore order, heal hostilities, and rebuild societies.¹

War termination is a fundamental principle taught to military officers at their respective war colleges. Most of these officers have read and studied the writing of Carl von Clausewitz. Regarding the termination of war he wrote the following: “No one starts a war or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so, without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. . . . Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the value of the sacrifices made for it

in magnitude and duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.²

By now it has become overwhelmingly obvious to the American public and to the rest of the world, that there was no clear war termination vision from the Bush administration. As early as September 2003 General Wesley Clark accurately stated regarding the war in Iraq, “We’re in there without a strategy to win, and without a strategy to exit properly.”³ Furthermore, the preparation for *Jus Post Bellum* clearly was lacking or based upon grossly inaccurate forecasts. U.S. policy failed to account for ancient religious and cultural divisions given fresh energy in a “liberated” Iraq.⁴ If winning looks like a peaceful and functioning nation where the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation with former enemies defines victory, then it must be reexamined if there has been or ever can be victory in Iraq.

Just for the sake of argument, let’s say we won. An evil dictator has been removed and his cruel reign of terror ended. Had that been the political objective, then the war’s aim would have been met and victory rightfully declared. Things are never that simple though. It now seems that the actual aim of the administration was to establish a western styled democracy in the Middle East that could effectively counter balance the extremist governments of Iran and Syria. Perhaps a cooperative Iraq could insure the flow of oil to the rest of the world? The prewar protest, “It’s all about the oil” make sense to more and more Americans as the post bellum strategy continues relatively unaffected by a lack of progress. The complaint that “The U.S. cannot afford to lose in Iraq” is about more than national pride, it is about economics.⁵

The narrow vision that predicts

that utter chaos will erupt if the U.S. proceeds with withdrawal (even if a deadline for withdrawal is announced) is built upon an essentially racist idea. Doubt is cast on the idea that the peoples of Iraq and of the Middle East itself have the capability of political resolution apart from the armed presence of a superpower. The Arab League which has a vested interest in peace has been given little role in helping to quell the civil war between the peoples of Iraq. It makes sense to allow the Arabs a greater opportunity to broker peace. Instead the U.S. is continuing on a course that more and more looks like a permanent occupation of Iraq. At least that is the perspective of many of the occupied.⁶

Life, by the way, has not gotten better for the average Iraqi. Security is a major difficulty. Electricity and water are less plentiful. There are even gas lines at the pumps in an oil rich nation. Corruption and greed have left post war Iraq in shambles.⁷ Our service men and women are doing an outstanding job, but they are too few and their war-fighting skills are not up to the task of reconstructing an “Islamic democracy” (whatever that may be).

Is there any wonder the American people are so frustrated and upset by all of this? Is this what they thought winning would look like? Polls indicate that the justification for this war was based upon a manufactured spin. Most Americans would not have supported a war based upon economic advantage. Just war theory proposes, in part, that we do not fight wars to gain financially. Just war is about self-defense against an aggressor state. When all else fails war may be chosen as the “lesser of two evils.” War is not excused so that a nation can establish another, more friendly government or because it offers economic advantages.⁸

It should not be assumed that war,

just or otherwise, can establish good governments or offer economic advantage. At best the outcome is a roll of the dice. War is a hammer. It is a clumsy and brutal tool not designed to accomplish the delicate lacework of building a nation or producing good will; only diplomacy and acting with justice can accomplish those ideals. Soldiers are not police, or diplomats, or civic engineers. In the end they are the blunt instruments of force best suited for the destruction of an enemy's ability to resist political pressure.

As the lines become increasingly blurred and the answer to the question of what winning looks like grows murky, it is the soldiers who are being asked to do things they are poorly equipped to do. The fact that they do such a fine job is not a testimony to the wisdom of the political leadership, but the remarkable versatility of the American fighting man and woman. In order to correct our course and establish order, the Iraqi people themselves must participate. The prolonged presence of occupation troops may actually prevent the establishment of national efforts to self-govern.⁹

That of course raises ethical issues. Has the *Jus Post Bellum* strategy of the U.S. actually enabled Iraq to dysfunction as a self-governing nation? Has the refusal to set a withdrawal time line been an unwise, even an unjust post-war decision? Even worse, has it revealed an ulterior motive on the part of the invader nation? Perhaps it really is about keeping oil flowing? Maybe deposing an evil dictator and destroying weapons of mass destruction were justifications for war spun by politicians to gain popular support when the real motivation was based upon economic factors? Those concerns never would have persuaded the nation to go to war.

Sadly, it is the young men and women of the armed forces who are caught in the middle. While they continue to insist that "they can win this thing," the occupied Iraqis, angry at the chaos they call home, plant explosives and strike out at the infidels who have invaded their nation. These "infi-

dels" most likely have never had a college class in political science. It's a no win for them. Our political leadership failed them when they failed to consider the question, what does winning look like?

So for whom has the war been a win? Who might have a very clear idea of what winning looks like? Well in the words of "Deep Throat" from the Watergate era, "Follow the money." James Paul, writing for the *Global Policy Forum* comments, "After the Iraq War of 2003, the United States and United Kingdom oil giants are certain to gain privileged access to Iraq's oil resources. Excluded from control over Iraqi oil since the nationalization of 1972, Exxon, BP, Shell, and Chevron will now gain the lion's share of the world's most profitable oil fields. Few outside the industry understand the huge stakes in Iraq, which amount to tens of billions in potential profits per year."¹⁰

In the end, is that what winning looks like? If so can the war be ethically justified?

If however, as Chaplain Iasiello suggests, winning is the reestablishment of justice then our strategy must make a decided shift. Justice ought to be the goal. Iasiello says, "It would be constructive if both the victors and the defeated entered this post-conflict phase in a spirit of regret, conciliation, humility, and possibly contrition. Such a mind-set may further the healing of a nation's trauma and thus enhance efforts to seal a just peace."¹¹ If that is what winning looks like we can still get there. It means a change of heart and a change of direction. ■

1 Louis V. Iasiello, "Jus Post Bellum: The Moral Responsibilities of Victors in War," *Naval War College Review*, Summer/Autumn 2004, Vol. 57, No. 3/4.

2 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

3 "Clark: Americans 'Embarrassed'

by Bush," *CNN*, 29 September 2003.

4 The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy of the General Assembly Council Presbyterian Church (USA), *Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 10.

5 Zvi Bar'el, "An Occupation with Democracy," *Haaretz.com*, available from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=300617>; Internet; accessed 11 June 2007.

6 Michael Rubin, "That Occupation Feeling," *National Review Online*, 18 April 2005.

7 William Fisher, "Iraq Left to Rebuild Itself," *Inter Press Service*, 29 March 2006.

8 Brian Orend, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2005 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

9 Hamdan Yousuf, "Does the Iraq War Promote Iraqi Self-Determination?," *An Address to the Heritage Foundation*, 5 December 2005.

10 James A. Paul, "The Iraq Oil Bonanza: Estimating Future Profits," *Global Policy Forum*, 28 January 2004.

11 Iasiello, *ibid.*

The Day I Knew We Had Lost the War

The day I knew we had lost the war I was serving as a Navy Commander in Rota, Spain. Accounts of torture along with pictures from Abu Ghraib prison had been released for the entire world to see. Shocking photos were displayed on the Armed Forces Network broadcast of CNN. The details were printed in *Stars and Stripes* and *The Early Bird*. I was walking to my chapel office with a cup of *café con leche* warming my hand, when the impact of the breaking news hit me. I paused, looked into the Spanish sky, and muttered, "The war is lost."

There could be no mistake. This was bad, really bad. The meaning of what had happened at that prison was even more devastating than the mistreatment, which was all by itself reprehensible enough. Soldiers from the United States of America had purposefully engaged in activities designed to humiliate Muslim men. Furthermore, they bragged about it. The photos revealed much more than a young woman holding a naked Iraqi by a leash. Later it would be revealed that this was not isolated acts by a few rogue soldiers, but a reflection of a policy change that allowed and even encouraged mistreatment of prisoners.¹ And someone took photos. They announced our defeat. The war was over. We had lost.

It's a question of ethics. At stake is the attempted infusion of ethics from a nation that claims to be committed to democratic principles, among which is the free exercise of religion, verses fundamentalist extremists who advocate their brand of theocracy as the only proper ethic. In this ethical slug fest the ultimate prize is the sympathy of the people of Iraq. Ours is a nation with the ethic of respect for others, even those who differ from the majority. This is more than a simple toleration by a dominant religion over minority faiths. Instead the American religious ethic is freedom of all religions, no one religion is in a position to "tolerate" another; all expressions of faith are considered equal. Church and state are separated. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights are documents that speak in those ethical terms. They

describe how we believe people ought to be treated.

We gave away the moral high ground at Abu Ghraib. Perception isn't reality, but it is through perception that we lost this war. In their (the Iraqi people) eyes America became the new evil empire.² Our system of ethics, even democracy itself, is now judged inferior by much of the Muslim world to that which is offered through Islamic theocracy. At Abu Ghraib we used the beliefs of Iraqi prisoners against them.³ Our representatives in military uniform were caught violating one of our primary national ethics when we disrespected their religion. Chances are we will never get the Muslim in Iraq to believe that democracy is superior to his tribal conception of religious law. We have lost that war.

How could I say such things? I find it hard to believe myself. On September 11, 2001, I was with the Marines. As a chaplain at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego I struggled to find some way to minister to my comrades. We gathered around and watched in stunned horror as the towers collapsed in New York and the Pentagon burned. Some around me had relatives who worked in those towers and others knew friends in Washington. While we kept vigil by the television set, drill sergeants on the other side of the depot continued their task of making young men into Marines. I wondered what the future would hold for them. It was an ominous day.

We all wanted to do something that would correct this injustice, protect innocent lives, and most important of

all see good triumph over evil. How do we decide what is the ethical thing to do? "Nuke them 'till they glow," but who is "them?" Even if we could identify who was responsible, is military force the best response? These were the questions I pondered while we as a nation buried our dead and comforted one another.

I've been out of the Navy for almost a year now. For over two decades I served my nation by caring for men and women in military uniform. I have counseled them on countless occasions regarding personal ethics. Rarely has their individual struggle over the justice of war been the presenting problem. I suspect that is changing these days. As more and more servicemen and women struggle over the meaning of their sacrifices, I would anticipate that chaplains are being called upon now, more than ever before, to help them deal ethically with their participation in an unpopular war.

A confession: I supported the invasion of Iraq. I hoped and prayed until the first bomb was dropped that Saddam Hussein would come to his senses. The war could be avoided if only he would allow unfettered inspections and assure the nervous world that no weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were left in Iraq. It seemed so simple, but Saddam wouldn't budge. I later came to the conclusion that the Iraqi dictator couldn't admit any degree of weakness in front of the fragile nation he held together through intimidation.

My government assured the world that there were indeed WMDs and they were on their way to us thanks



to Saddam. If he couldn't deliver them personally he'd make sure Al Qaeda got the nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons so that they could broaden the war against America.⁴ Although Saddam hadn't started the terror war on the U.S., he certainly appeared as if he was ready and able to help. We were forced; it seemed, into a difficult and ethically precarious decision, at least for those of us who subscribe to Just War theory.⁵ As reasonable and responsible Christians we need some way to decide the right thing to do. In light of the threat of WMDs possibly being used in terror acts against our nation, preemptive war seemed the only answer.

I wasn't the only one in uniform who thought such things. I was there the day President Bush took off from Naval Base Coronado to declare on the carrier deck, "My fellow Americans: Major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq the United States . . . prevailed."⁶ We all expected that it wouldn't be long now before the preemptive war would be entirely justified as cache after cache of WMDs were discovered and neutralized. So we waited. And waited.

Recently I read *Making Ethical Decisions* by Michael Josephson. It's a short booklet designed to help an individual understand the basics of ethics and hopefully adopt six pillars of character. The sixth pillar is citizenship. Josephson describes a good citizen in part as an individual who "stays informed on the issues of the day, the better to execute her duties and privileges as a member of a self-governing democratic society."⁷ The dilemma for the American citizen soldier is growing more difficult because the more they learn the harder it is to perform their duty with a clear conscience. Not only are the numbers of dead and wounded ascending, but the number of military personnel returning with mental problems has exploded.⁸ These are the hidden casualties, the post traumatic shock victims we identified and recall from the Vietnam experience. And these are only *our* dead, wounded, and mentally shattered. The civilians of Iraq have suffered even more (reported civil-

ian deaths resulting from the U.S. led invasion number between 64,879 and 71,042 as of 6 June 2007).⁹

Soldiers can think. Because they now know that the primary rationale for the war was a colossal mistake at best, a self-serving and shameless lie at worst, they are left with an ethical struggle. Most often it is expressed in the simple question, "Why are we here?" Ethics will just not go away.

Then along came Abu Ghraib. It was just too much for some of us. Whatever it is our government is trying to accomplish over there can never happen in light of those photos. To modify an old proverb, "One picture is worth a thousand terrorists." Unfortunately there were lots of pictures. The war is lost. I think Tony Campolo put it best when he said we ought to admit our mistake, ask for forgiveness, and help to end the bloodshed. In other words, act ethically.¹⁰

I am proud of my friends who serve faithfully. They genuinely represent the best of our nation. Because they are on active duty they cannot speak out and express their opinions as freely as I can. Not all agree with me, but there are many who do, much more than can be imagined. These are the talented, dedicated citizen soldiers who are now deciding against a career in the military.¹¹ In part their decision-making is based upon family separation, but I also believe it is due to the failure of this war to pass the ethical test.

We have lost this war not because of the failure of our soldiers, sailors, airmen or marines. It was the ethical failure of our nation to act according to our own principles. Instead of fighting a war on terror, perhaps we should consider fighting a war on injustice. That, I think is how our struggle should be framed. It is also a right war to fight.

In another war at another time the question of winning or losing finally came down to an ethical formulation. Through the simple brilliance of Abraham Lincoln our nation came to understand what it was really fighting for; what the war was really about. He put it this way, "our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation,

conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure."¹² Once again our nation is being tested. Will we live up to the principles by which we were birthed? That is the war we must never lose. ■

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3 U.S. Army, "Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800th Military Police Brigade," May 2004; available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4894001>.

4 Juan Cole, "The Lies that Led to War," *Salon*, 19 May 2005.

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6 George Bush, *Remarks by the President from the USS Abraham Lincoln*, at sea off the coast of San Diego, California, 1 May 2003.

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8 Ben Wasserman, "One Third of War Veterans Suffer Mental Problems," 13 March 2007.

9 Available from <http://www.iraq-bodycount.net/database/>, 6 June, 2007.

10 Tony Campolo, *Keynote Address at Religious Emphasis Week*, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC, 22 January, 2007.

11 Gene-Thomas Gomulka, "Retention Ups and Downs," *The Military Family Network*, 13 April 2006.

12 Abraham Lincoln, *Lincoln: Passages From His Speeches and Letters* (New York: The Century Company, 1901), 190.

On Journalism and Democracy

An Interview With Bill Moyers

Throughout his career in print and broadcast journalism, Bill Moyers has blended a passionate interest in the workings of politics with a strong interest in religion. He is perhaps best known for the many interviews and reports he has produced and narrated for the Public Broadcasting System, including the “Faith and Reason” series in 2006. He has received over 30 Emmy awards for his documentary work and was given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

Moyers began his career as a participant in politics. He was an aide to Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and served as deputy director of the Peace Corps under President John F. Kennedy. Later he was special assistant and then press secretary for President Johnson. At an earlier stage in life he attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and was ordained as a Baptist minister.

You were part of the Johnson administration during its escalation of the Vietnam War. What perspective does that experience give you on the current administration and this war in Iraq?

Both Lyndon Johnson and George W. Bush made the mistake of embracing a totalistic policy for a concrete reality that requires instead a more pragmatic response. You shouldn’t go to war for a Grand Theory on a hunch, yet both men plunged into complex local quarrels only to discover that they were treading on quicksand. And they learned too late that American exceptionalism doesn’t mean we can work our will anywhere we please. While freedom may be a universal yearning, democracy is not alas, a universal solution—there are too many extenuating circumstances.

Both presidents rushed to judgment on premature and flawed intelligence—LBJ after the Gulf of Tonkin

incident, Bush in conflating the terrorists attacks of 9/11 with the activities of Saddam Hussein. Each thought anything less than all-out victory would stigmatize his presidency. And in both wars, as the American people watched the casualties mount and the horrors unfold—Abu Ghraib had its precedents in Vietnam—they saw the abstractions invoked by each president to justify the conflict confounded by the coarseness of human nature laid bare by war.

Vietnam cost far more in lives—American and Vietnamese—than Iraq has so far. What came out of it was not democracy but capitalism with a communist face—something that was likely to happen anyway, as it did in China. Iraq, on the other hand, has destabilized world affairs more than the Vietnam War ever did. Long after I am gone my grandchildren will be living with the consequences of this unilateral and preemptive war in the Middle East.

If the Bush administration were to ask you for your advice, what would you say to them?

Well, I did give President Bush advice once: on a broadcast I urged him to make Al Gore head of homeland security—in other words, turn our response to the terrorist attacks into a bipartisan effort, make the fight against terrorism an American cause, not a partisan battle cry.

What would I say now? Fire the ideologues and assign them to scrub the floors at Guantanamo for penitence. Stop confusing neocon pundits with Old Testament prophets. Read the Bible for humility’s sake, but for policy’s sake commit to memory the report of the Iraq Study Group. Don’t sacrifice any more soldiers to prove you’re in charge; get the soldiers out of the line of fire between Sunnis and Shi’ites. And remind your hirelings

democracy as the occasional necessity of deferring to the opinions of other people.

What kind of response did you get from your speech to cadets at West Point, in which you spoke about the limitations and liabilities of war making?

For 30 seconds after I finished there was just silence in that large auditorium, and I thought: “You really blew it this time. You not only lost them, you insulted them.” Then one by one, cluster by cluster, row by row, the cadets started standing up and applauding. I had to struggle to contain my emotions. I would like to tell you it was because they agreed with me. The truth is, I think, that they appreciated hearing a civilian talk openly about what they constantly wrestle with privately—the conflict of conscience required in obeying orders from leaders who have taken leave of reality. They listened like no audience I’ve had in a long time. And afterward they kept me up late in a lively give-and-take.

Earlier in the day I met for over two hours with a score of top cadets who were on their way to compete for Rhodes and Marshall scholarships and the like. They wanted to talk about the environment, science, philosophy, politics, and history. The cadets are smart, disciplined and sophisticated people. One just hopes they get the civilian leadership they deserve.

How do you assess the health of the news media? What concerns you and what gives you hope?

There’s some world-class journalism being done in our country by journalists committed to getting as close as possible to the verifiable truth. Unfortunately, a few huge corporations now dominate the media landscape. And the news business is at war with journalism. Virtually everything

the average person sees or hears outside of her own personal communications is determined by the interests of private, unaccountable executives and investors whose primary goal is increasing profits and raising the company's share price. One of the best newspaper groups, Knight Ridder—whose reporters were on to the truth about Iraq early on—was recently sold and broken up because a tiny handful of investors wanted more per share than they were getting.

Almost all the networks carried by most cable systems are owned by one of the major media conglomerates. Two-thirds of today's newspaper markets are monopolies, and they're dumbing down. As ownership gets more and more concentrated, fewer and fewer independent sources of information have survived in the marketplace. And those few significant alternatives that do survive, such as PBS and NPR, are under growing financial and political pressure to reduce critical news content.

Just the other day the major morning broadcast devoted long segments to analyzing why Britney Spears shaved her head, and the death of Anna Nicole Smith got more attention than the Americans or Iraqis killed in Baghdad that week. The next time you're at a newsstand, look at the celebrities staring back at you. In-depth coverage on anything, let alone the bleak facts of power and powerlessness that shape the lives of ordinary people, is as scarce as sex, violence and voyeurism are pervasive.

At the same time we have seen the rise of an ideological partisan press that is contemptuous of reality, serves up right-wing propaganda as fact, and attempts to demonize anyone who says otherwise. Its embodiment is Rush Limbaugh. Millions heard him take journalists to task for their reporting on the torture at Abu Ghraib, which he attempted to dismiss as a little necessary sport for soldiers under stress. He said: "This is not different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation....You ever heard of people [who] need to blow some steam off?"

So we can't make the case today that the dominant institutions of the press are guardians for democracy. They actually work to keep reality from us, whether it's the truth of money in politics, the social costs of "free trade," growing inequality, the resegregation of our public schools, or the devastating onward march of environmental deregulation. It's as if we are living on a huge plantation in a story told by the boss man.

What gives me hope is that in a market society, sooner or later some entrepreneur is going to figure out how to make a fortune by offering people news they can trust. Millions of Americans care about our democracy, they want high-quality information because they know freedom dies of too many lies, and surely in this new age of innovation someone's going to figure out that good journalism can be profitable.

You seem to have a very strong populist perspective. Where does that come from?

If I had been an embattled farmer exploited by the railroads and bankers back in the 19th century, I hope I would have shown up at that amazing convention in Omaha that adopted the platform beginning: "We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin." Those folks were aroused by Christian outrage over injustice. They made the prairie rumble. If I had lived a few years later, I would hope to have worked for *McClure's*, the great magazine that probed the institutional corruption of the day and prompted progressive agitation.

The Great Depression was the tsunami of my experience, and my perspective was shaped by Main Street, not Wall Street. My parents were laid low by the Depression. When I was born my father was making \$2 a day working on the highway, and he never brought home more than \$100 a week in his working life. He didn't even earn that much until he joined the union on his last job. Like Franklin Roosevelt, I came to think that government by

organized money should be feared as much as government by organized mob. I'd rather not have either, thank you.

I am a democrat—notice the small d—who believes that the soul of democracy is representative government. It's our best, although certainly imperfect, protection against predatory forces, whether unfettered markets, unscrupulous neighbors or fantastical ideologies—foreign or domestic. Our best chance at governing ourselves lies in obtaining the considered judgments of those we elect to weigh the competing interests and decide to the best of their ability what is right for the country. Anything that corrupts their judgment—whether rigged elections or bribery masked as campaign contributions—is the devil's work.

Can you name a single issue that concerns you the most these days?

Inequality. Nearly all the wealth created in America over the past 25 years was captured by the top 20 percent of households. Meanwhile, working families find it harder and harder to make ends meet. Young people without privilege and wealth struggle to get a footing. Seniors enjoy less and less security for a lifetime's labor. We are racially segregated in every meaningful sense except the letter of the law. And survivors of segregation and immigration toil for pennies on the dollar compared to those they serve.

The Nobel laureate Robert Solow is not a man given to extreme political statements. He characterizes what has been happening in America as nothing less than elite plunder: "The redistribution of wealth in favor of the wealthy and of power in favor of the powerful."

This wasn't meant to be a country where the winner takes all. Read the Declaration of Independence, the preamble to the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address. We were going to be a society that maintained a healthy equilibrium in how power works—and for whom.

Although my parents were knocked down and almost out by the Depression and were poor all their lives, I went to

good public schools. My brother made it to college on the GI bill. When I borrowed \$450 to buy my first car, I drove to a public university on public highways and rested in public parks along the way. America was a shared project and I was just one of its beneficiaries. But a vast transformation has been occurring, documented in a series of recent studies. The American Political Science Association, for example, finds that “increasing inequalities threaten the American ideal of equal citizenship and that progress toward real democracy may have stalled . . . and even reversed.”

So here is the deepest crisis as I see it: We talk about problems, issues, policy solutions, but we don't talk about what democracy means—what it bestows on us, the power it gives us—the astonishing opportunity to shape our destiny. I mean the revolutionary idea that democracy isn't merely a means of government, it's a means of dignifying people so that they have a chance to become fully human. Every day I find myself asking, Why is America forsaking its own revolution?

You once remarked that seminary was a detour in your life. Why did you go to seminary and what difference do you think it made for you?

I knew at age 15 that I wanted to be a journalist—then, a little later, a political journalist. That's how I wound up spending the summer of 1954 on Lyndon Johnson's staff in the Senate. I wanted to learn the game at the feet of the master.

But I came home feeling unsatisfied by that experience, and I interpreted my angst as a call to something more fulfilling—the ministry, actually. I thought of the pastorate or a professorship. I spent four years getting my master of divinity before finding myself back in politics and government and then back again in journalism.

For a while I thought I had made a mistake, that I would have been better off if I had spent those four years in law school or getting a Ph.D. But as the years unfolded I realized what blessing seminary had been. I had

a succession of remarkable teachers who believed that a true evangelical is always a seeker. T.B. Maston,¹ one of the great souls in my life, taught Christian ethics and more than anyone else helped me to see into the southern enigma of having grown up well loved, well churched and well taught and yet still indifferent to the reality of other people's lives. I learned about historical criticism, the beauty of the Greek language, and the witness of my Baptist ancestors to the power of conscience. That detour turned out to be quite a journey.

Later on, when I realized how almost every political and economic issue I dealt with in government and then as a journalist intersects with moral and ethical values, I was grateful for those years in seminary. They still inform my life.

So much is being written and said about the alliance between the religious right and the Republican Party. What role do you think religion should have in the public arena?

Whose religion? Christian? Muslim? Jew? Sikh? Buddhist? Catholic? Protestant? Shi'ite? Sunni? Orthodox? Conservative? Mormon? Amish? Wicca? For that matter which Baptist? Bill Clinton or Pat Robertson? Newt Gingrich or Al Gore? And who is going to decide? The religion of one seems madness to another. Elaine Pagels said to me in an interview that she doesn't know a single religion that affirms the other's choice.

If religion is the voice of the deepest human experience—and I believe it is—humanity contains multitudes, each speaking in a different tongue. Naturally, believers will bring their faith into the public square, translating their unique personal experience into political convictions and moral arguments. But politics is about settling differences while religion is about maintaining them. Let's realize what a treasure we have in a secular democracy that guarantees your freedom to believe as you choose and mine to vote as I wish.

Some people on the left think the Democratic Party needs to be more explicitly religious. What do you think about that counterstrategy?

If you have to talk about God to win elections, that doesn't speak well of God or elections. We are desperate today for cool thinking and clear analysis. What kind of country is it that wants its politicians to play tricks with faith?

As you look back on your work, what gives you the most satisfaction?

The happiest years of my life were the time I helped to organize the Peace Corps and served as its deputy director. We really did believe that we were engaged in the moral equivalent of war.

My long career in journalism has been a continuing course in adult education, and I have been fortunate to share what I have learned with so many others. We journalists are beachcombers on the shores of other people's experience and knowledge, but we don't take what we gather and lock it in the attic. Like a pastor in the pulpit, we're engaged in a moral transaction. When people give us an hour of their lives—something they never get back—we owe them something of value in return. Keeping our end of the bargain isn't easy, but it's deeply satisfying. ■

1 A hand-written letter sent from Bill Moyers to the present Editor of *Christian Ethics Today* said succinctly, “You are doing the Lord's work and I value every edition of the paper. Dr. Maston would be proud of you.”

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Remembering: Yad Vashem and Ramallah

By James Gaffney, Prof. of Theology, Univ. of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN

My first visit to Jerusalem was just after the 1967 war and my most recent one shortly before the 40th anniversary of that event was celebrated and lamented by the city's Jews and Arabs respectively. During the latter visit, local news focused briefly on a group of German Catholic bishops who paid an invited visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's principal monument to the Shoah (Holocaust) which I happened to visit just after them.

Yad Vashem is an extraordinary place, which serves many functions related to remembering and understanding that historic atrocity. For the ordinary visitor, perhaps most moving is a remarkable exhibit that traces the history of anti-Semitism through the Common Era, the circumstances of Jews just before the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust itself as experienced in various parts of the world, and the subsequent hope represented by the State of Israel. The exhibit is eloquently housed in a kind of zigzag tunnel, whose tortuous shape evokes the recurring turbulence of Jewish history, before finally opening over green Judean hillsides onto Jerusalem visible in the distance.

The German Catholic bishops saw, presumably, what I saw at Yad Vashem. I assume they were similarly moved. I assume also that their German nationality gave added poignancy to their viewing countless scenes of genocidal horror located in their homeland and the lands it dominated and exploited.

But the German bishops did not end their tour at Yad Vashem. In the evening they were escorted through a check point into the Israel-occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank, specifically to the city of Ramallah, very close to Jerusalem and currently the seat of one of Palestine's two rival governments. Residents of that city, like those of other Palestinian towns, have constantly experienced oppres-

sive restraints, social and economic frustrations, and maddening humiliations, considered to be inflicted or occasioned by Israeli occupation, and exacerbated by the incompetence and corruption of their own divided political leadership.

On returning shortly thereafter to their South German dioceses, the bishops were interviewed by the press. The observations attributed to one of them proved highly volatile. Bishop Gregor Maria Franz Hanke, of Eichstaett, was quoted as saying they had seen "photos of the inhuman Warsaw Ghetto at Yad Vashem in the morning" but went on to add "in the evening we go to the Ghetto in Ramallah—that blows your lid off!" He is reported also to have remarked that some of the treatment of Palestinians, presumably at checkpoints, would be abusive by humane standards applied to animals.

These comments, in the *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, evoked an indignant response from the administration of Yad Vashem which appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, stating that the bishop's remarks "illustrate a woeful ignorance of history and a distorted sense of perspective." That was echoed in the German newspaper by Charlotte Knobloch, president of Germany's Central Council of Jews, who accused the bishop of "political exploitation and demagoguery" (a phrase that made many subsequent appearances).

That the offence might have a broader context was brought out by M. Freund, in the Jerusalem paper, claiming that "we are witness to an increasing array of insults, invective, and verbal abuse hurled at the Jewish State by prominent Europeans. . . . Hanke had the gall to compare Israel to the Nazis, and likened Ramallah to the Warsaw Ghetto. This from a man whose nation systematically murdered millions of innocent Jews."

The director of Yad Vashem

expressed his disapproval not only to the press, but to the leading German Catholic churchman, Karl Cardinal Lehmann. He does not seem to have communicated with Bishop Hanke himself. The portion of Cardinal Lehmann's reply released by Yad Vashem stated that "the 'oppressive situation' in the West Bank, 'in the shadow of security forces and walls in Bethlehem' was reflected in some harsh statements of which some were certainly not appropriate." Yad Vashem's accompanying observation appears accurate, that the Cardinal's reply "fell far short of condemning the bishop's comparison."

But what was the "bishop's comparison?" In what has been quoted no explicit comparison is made. One is, however, rather clearly implied. Whether "appropriate" or not—that word which has become a cherished resource for avoiding both logical and ethical discourse—the bishop's remarks express a sense of shock occasioned by what seemed to him an ironic contrast. What he had just seen at Yad Vashem was a memorial expressing a people's profound moral indignation at massive, appalling cruelty and injustice. What he shortly afterwards saw at Ramallah was representatives of that same people seeming insensitive to moral indignities, admittedly on a much smaller scale, in which they were implicated. His unsubtle reaction—what "blows your lid off"—is not hard to understand. Neither is it very easy to discredit. He is certainly not saying, "You Jews are no better than the Nazis were." But he does seem to be saying, "How can you, of all people, after the horrors you have endured, appear so dismissive of this people's misery and your role in prolonging it?" Jews in Israel have heard that question before. They have often answered it. But their answers are of many kinds, expressing deep differences.

The bishop's implied comparison was certainly not quantitative. He may or may not have known or kept in mind that the Warsaw Ghetto became the "storage place" of half a million victims, where thousands starved each month, thousands more were destined for gas chambers, and resisters were massacred and driven to suicide. Quantitatively there is no comparison to Ramallah, whose numbers are so much smaller, whose people were merely deprived of freedom, hope, security, provisions, opportunities, and respect, and where tragic injury and violent death are much less frequent. No doubt the bishop should have remembered this. Probably he should have mentioned it. But his failure to do so does not invalidate his moral distress.

The experience of injustice commonly does, in conscientious persons, deepen sympathy with victims of injustice, and quicken efforts to assist them. Of this, it is hard to think of better examples than the many modern Jews of Europe and America whose efforts and achievements in pursuit of civil rights and human rights have been so conspicuously disproportionate to their numbers. Sometimes it is otherwise, as with many freed American slaves resettled by religious philanthropy in West Africa, who lost little time in becoming themselves slaveholders.

I find it curious that the moral indignation expressed over the bishop's remarks contain no hint of serious moral argument. The critics were satisfied to express outrage that enormous wrongs suffered should be even associated with lesser wrongs done. They dismissed the unwelcome comments with unsupported accusations of ulterior motives—"political exploitation and demagoguery". They imputed guilt by association on grounds of the bishops' common nationality with persecutors of a previous generation.

But if we set aside the defamatory

rhetoric that accompanied it, the basic objection still deserves examination. Is it wrong to invoke the memory of great collective suffering, even of suffering that exhausts the superlatives of moral outrage, in support of moral dismay at tolerating the oppression of others on a much more modest scale? I cannot see why it is, and I would suggest one venerable Jewish precedent for doing so.

In at least seven separate passages of the Torah, God's injunction to treat alien and disadvantaged persons with kindness and justice are immediately reinforced by the reminder that the whole people of Israel were once aliens and slaves in the land of Egypt. Although the point of this reminder may seem obvious, it is also made quite explicit. Thus in Exodus (23.9), "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." I know of no Jewish commentator who has anticipated outrage at comparing the historic ordeal of Egyptian enslavement, the biblical paradigm of oppression and point of departure for Israel's whole conception of being saved and chosen, with local abuse or neglect of vulnerable strangers. Is there something about the magnitude of the Holocaust that trivializes this biblical comparison? Is there something about it that disallows that admonition, "for you know the feelings of the stranger"?

Do Israeli Jews "know the feelings of the stranger?" Many unquestionably do. But, in the opinion of one of them, an extraordinarily well qualified observer, most do not. Most Israelis' analytical ability is impaired by their collective political consciousness and unwillingness to take the cumulative Palestinian pain from this *Intifada*, and the Oslo years that preceded it, into account. Israeli political consciousness has refused, and continues to refuse, to grasp the sum total of the details, characteristics, actions,

and consequences of ongoing Israeli rule over another people. When one tries to talk of the "totality" known as the occupation, the media—our social barometer—respond with resentment. . . . Today, reports on "Palestinian suffering" are perceived as national treason. Israelis conclude that the suicide bombings are the result of a murderous tendency inherent to the Palestinians, their religion, and their mentality. In other words, people turn to bio-religious explanations, not socio-historical ones.

Amira Hass, the *Haaretz* reporter who wrote these words, has taken the surest and hardest way to "know the feelings of the stranger." Herself a descendant of Holocaust victims, she lives, immersed in those feelings, in Ramallah. She is the only Israeli reporter in Palestine who spends each day in the world she tries to make comprehensible to that incredibly different world just beyond the checkpoints.

The well-supported belief that the Shoah exceeds in maleficence all other recorded instances of mass atrocity conveys many lessons the world cannot afford to forget. But to exceed is not to transcend. Cruelty however extensive and cruelty however limited are not incommensurable. And to be reminded of one by the other is not dishonorable.

Those of us who resist the prohibition to compare, in due measure and with due respect, the victims of the Shoah with the victims of Israeli occupation, may perhaps be pardoned for pointing out one neglected contrast. The former are dead. The latter are alive. The former are an outrageous memory. The latter are a moral emergency. About the former something should have been done. About the latter something can be done. If it is done it will be by those who "know the feelings of the stranger." And in Israel brave voices of such people can still be heard, over the din. ■

The Temple and Tatoos

By Molly Trull, Hickman H.S. Senior, Colombia, MO

My face cringes with disgust involuntarily, as I walk past the tattoo parlor inviting teenage customers in with a cheery neon open sign suspended in the window. I don't even bother looking into the crumbling walls of a building I am sure is full of pain and dead skin, but instead I shift my attention onto the restaurant next door; tattoos have never been appealing to me.

An older man in a beat-up leather jacket stands at a corner, puffing black smoke through a cigarette. I glance at him briefly as he climbs onto his bright red motorcycle and speeds off, sputtering a trail of equally black smoke. I don't know why he isn't showing off the dark tattoos I know he's sporting on his now wrinkled arms. Maybe he's hiding an ex-girlfriend's name. At the time, the idea of a tat must have seemed romantic to him and his girlfriend. Maybe she got a matching one. He may like the memories that come with his tattoos: being young, being free, and being in love. However, by now the ink beneath the man's skin must have seeped into his life, and the name of his ex-girlfriend of a broken relationship will remain on his forearm even in his grave.

I often group tattoos with cheap nachos and old men on motorcycles. My friends, on the other hand, used to buzz with excitement over the idea of turning 18, just so they could legally rebel against their parents and get a tattoo.

"My mom went with me and I got my bellybutton pierced!" my friend

called to tell me in junior high. While piercings were not as taboo as tattoos in my family, I remembered my grandmother sporting un-pierced ears and telling me that a body is a temple.

"That's . . . nice," I forcefully told my friend, reasoning with myself that she *only* pierced her bellybutton. I grimaced when I imagined it getting infected and bleeding pus out of the coveted hole. At least that kind of wound could heal. A few beats later, the inevitable came.

"Maybe she'll let me get a tattoo next!" I remained silent after this confession, not wanting to upset her or discourage such a unique form of artistic expression.

Tattoos have seemed to dwindle out of the unthinkable rebellion as time goes on and other opportunities to torture parents arise, but I always tend to dwell on the past. Magazine racks flash tattoos placed so nonchalantly on a front cover. I've tried to turn my head away from the offensive form of expression, but tattoos are everywhere.

When Kabala became the new "to-do tattoo," my friends laughed as celebrities stained their skin with wrongly-backwards Hebrew letters meaning meaningful things such as "peace" and "life." I laughed along, but deep down I could feel my stomach acid snarling with disgust, urging bile to come up through my throat. But this reaction was more than an acid reflux, for from a very young age, the untouchable, unthinkable, and unethical nature of tattoos was drilled into my small head. I never understood

why, but I was conditioned to know that tattooing of any kind on my body was oxymoronic, just as I knew that I wasn't allowed to learn German or learn Wagner pieces on the piano.

It wasn't until I learned about the Holocaust that I began to piece the jumbled conversations with my family together. "Why would *any* Jew get a tattoo?" I heard a relative saying. Perhaps to rebel, or maybe because everyone else got one. However, if I wanted to rebel against my parents, I might buy a motorcycle or dye my hair purple; I'd *never* get a tattoo. There are enough marks left on the world from the Nazis, and after they labeled people with numbers written in blood-red hearts that they embedded deep into the skin of their wrists, tattoos do not seem to me a rebellion, but rather conformity in more ways than one.

I remember one summer at my grandmother Klein's house; I lost an earring while picking bloody mulberries with my bare hands. My feet and my hands were stained purple with the juice of the berries which had also stained the cement sidewalk. I searched for the lost piece of jewelry on my recently purpled knees. My grandmother bent down to help me, and I asked her why she didn't have her ears pierced. Her voice wavered with pain as she replied, "My body is a temple." Temples are sacred places, and any form of graffiti is sacrilegious. ■

Note: This article was first published in *The Hickman Review* (Colombia, MO: Vol. XIX, 2007, 86).

Ethics in Ministry

By David Sapp, Pastor, Second Ponce deLeon Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA

Note: This speech was delivered at the Ethics in Ministry conference sponsored by the Christian Ethics Today Foundation at the McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta, on October 6, 2006.

When as a teenager I first heard the term “ministerial ethics,” I wondered what in the world this could be about? Were some ministers unethical? Did they lie to their deacons? Did they steal from their churches? My image of the clergy was so innocent that I could not imagine immoral clergy. (This, by the way, says a lot for my childhood ministers.)

So one day, as a young person aspiring to ministry (we were called “preacher-boys” then), I happened on a book about ministerial ethics in the Baptist Book Store. I scanned the table of contents and discovered to my great relief, that the book was not about ministerial *ethics* at all, but was rather about ministerial *etiquette*. It had to do with things like not starting a church in another church’s back yard, how to handle invitations to go back to previous pastorates for weddings and funerals, the necessity of treating your predecessors with respect, and other such regularly ignored niceties.

It was somewhat later when more egregious breaches of ministerial ethics caught my attention. At my summer job at the local bank, I asked my boss about our ministerial customers. “I know they don’t have much money,” I said, “but I bet they are among our most dependable and honest customers.”

“No,” he replied, “they are among our worst clients. Many of them are just careless with their finances, but some are downright dishonest.”

That day I began to notice the splashier sins of the clergy, the Elmer Gantry stuff: sins having to do with sex and money. The fact that min-

isters were supposed to be above such temptations, and the fact that they were such public figures, made their exposure downright titillating. Soon afterward I began to notice less splashy, but perhaps equally harmful sins among ministers: broken confidences, hidden alcoholism and drug abuse, and the ever-prevalent sin of the idolatry of self.

Finally, I became a minister myself. Sitting in the seat of supposed holiness, I learned anew that the serpent “was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God made” (Gen. 3:1). So if it might be bold to offer a few admonitions, let it be known that they come not from any academic or professional expertise, but from long struggle, from wrestling with a devil, and sometimes with an angel who turned out to be God.

Tell the Truth

I did not know at the beginning how hard it was going to be to tell the truth, but it did not take long to find out. I was in college in the sixties, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and I served a small, rural church as a student pastor. I remember like it was yesterday sitting in the living room of a family in our church and listening to a spirited discussion of the race issue. All of a sudden, the lady of the house looked at me and said, “I don’t know how you feel about the race issue. I know a lot of ministers don’t feel like *people* do about it.”

I found myself suddenly choking as she waited for a response. My skin went clammy and my palms began to sweat. All I could think of was being fired from my first church and scorned in the very county where my grandparents were well-known and well-liked citizens. To my great shame, I simply nodded. I arrived back at my dorm room that night feeling like I was Peter and had just denied Christ three times. My con-

victions on race were strong, but not strong enough. In the face of vested opposition, my courage withered like a dried up shrub.

I soon discovered, however, that while cowards are rarely alone, I had a lot of company, and it included most white Southern ministers. We eventually found our voice, of course; but coincidentally, we just happened to find it at about the same time it became safe to speak.

I learned some other things about truth-telling as well. I learned that telling the truth does not matter if nobody hears the truth. And I learned that in order for people to hear truth from you, you have to be connected to them. Not a single Old Testament prophet hailed from Babylon. They were all the children of some crazy shepherd who happened through your village during last year’s drought. And I also learned that you can’t always tell the whole truth at one time. It makes people gag and they spit it out. And one more thing: you have to say things in ways that gain a hearing. That is part of the responsibility of proclamation.

But the most important thing I have learned is that people simply won’t hear the truth if you don’t speak the truth. “How shall they hear without a preacher?” They won’t hear the truth about race if we don’t speak it. They won’t hear the truth about poverty if we don’t speak it. They won’t hear the truth about war if we don’t speak it. Telling the truth is our moral responsibility.

Know the truth

We cannot tell the truth that we do not know. And yet many of us in ministry know only the truth that we knew the day we were called. We have been too frightened of losing our place in the world to let God teach us anything new.

When I was a teenager aspiring to

the ministry, one of the more noted pastors in Georgia came to preach at my home church. One night after the service I was talking with him about my dreams. "Whatever you do," he said, "don't get a Ph.D. It will cut you off from your people." In other words, don't learn too much. Don't burden yourself with the truth that doesn't play in Peoria. Avoid it like the plague. What he said to me was, close the canon as soon as you leave this church tonight!

The right path, however, runs in the opposite direction. The minister has an ethical responsibility to keep the canon of truth or revelation open for his or her entire lifetime. Barbara Brown Taylor said in *Leaving Church* that she was more certain in her early ministry than she is now, and more convinced that her task was to help others become more certain too. I suppose most of us were like that at some point, but then at least some learn what once struck us as contradictory: that final certainty is lethal to truth. Final certainty blinded the Pharisees; it condemned Galileo; it cripples the fundamentalists; and it continues to undermine the gospel every time Christians resist the discoveries of science. Once you are certain, once your canon is closed, God can no longer teach you anything. You may still get yourself called to a big church, or you may establish a gigantic ministry, but you will be useless to the Kingdom.

Late in his life, Thomas Aquinas stopped writing. He quit because he said he could no longer write after

what he had seen. So what did he see? We may well never know, but we do know this: His eyes were wide open, and he saw something—some new truth? Some fresh revelation from God? Whatever it was, it made all the difference.

To be ethical, a minister must be committed to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Integrity calls for an openness which is uncomfortable, disconcerting, and endangering to one's livelihood and one's place in the community. **Love the people.**

I hold to a theological tenet that some of you may think strange. I believe that when I stand before the Father, He will not ask me how many members are in my church. He will not ask me the size of our budget, or the number of our baptisms. I believe He will ask, "How much did you love your people?"

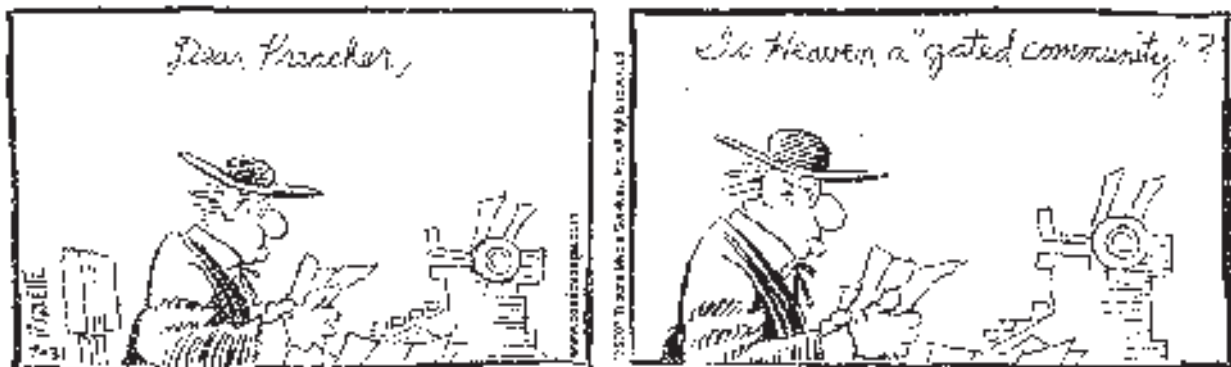
Unless you love them, there is no ministry. Unless you love them, you cannot know the needs of their hearts. Unless you love them, you cannot know how to speak to them. And get this—unless you love them, they will not hear you. In every church I have served, I have noticed a strange phenomenon: as the years pass, the people tell me that my preaching keeps getting better. I have heard this for so many years that it would be easy to be seduced by the lie. I would like to think that I have improved *some*, of course, but it is not so much the preaching that changes as the relationships. When people know you

love them, and when they love you in return, amazing improvements in communication occur.

Simon Peter is the one whom our Catholic brothers and sisters believe was the chief pastor of the early church. In the last chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus asked him three times, "Simon, do you love me?" Three times Simon Peter declared his love. "Then feed my sheep, tend my lambs," Jesus commanded. If you love me, Simon, you must love them.

The word "pastor" means shepherd, and that connotes a tender and caring relationship with a congregation. That concept of the pastoral role has taken a beating lately. Some believe it has no relevance in a post-modern world. Pastors are now seen to be nothing more than preachers and vision-casters. Let someone else love the people. The preacher is to appear on Sunday morning with a word from on high, surrounded by body guards to keep the people away. Or, the preacher may not even show up. He or she may just appear on a giant screen. Someone at our church suggested putting up a big banner outside that says, "Live preaching!"

This model is quite adequate if our goal is to provide religious entertainment or instruction. But it is not adequate if we believe that the power of the Gospel is incarnational. It is not adequate if we believe that Jesus actually *died* for people. Post-modernism may have made its mark on the world, but it has not changed the reality of love. Philosophies change.



Insights change. Trends change. Cultures change. Prevailing mind-sets change. Human nature does not change. People still need love. God is still love. And love is still the power which changes lives, and hearts, and minds. The mere invention of video and Power Point can never change the incarnational nature of the Gospel.

Care for the Institution

The pastoral care of institutions has received far too little academic attention, and it receives far too little attention from many of us who are practicing ministers. Much of the moderate wing of Christianity, as a matter of fact, has a strong anti-institutional bent. But despite all of the anti-institutionalism of recent years, institutions are not disappearing. In fact, they are getting bigger and stronger and more dominant. Witness today's mega-corporations whose headquarters is wherever the taxes are lowest. Witness mega-banks in which your banker is hundreds of miles away. Witness mega-churches where nobody knows your name.

Such realities may well turn many of us against institutions, but Christianity will not and cannot exist for long apart from an institutional setting. Christ himself founded the church, and the scripture calls it his bride. It is the moral responsibility of the minister to care for that institution.

This means that our hands will be dirty, and our souls will be compromised. Sometimes we will be party to institutions that abuse people mercilessly and at times put their own needs ahead of their principles. Yes, institutions are corrupt. That is why they require pastoral care. This institution we call the church is also called Gomer, the faithless bride of Christ! She must be loved and wooed from her faithlessness back to her groom, for He has given everything for her.

There is a word for the pastoral care of institutions: It is "administration." The word ministry is found right in the middle of the word administration. Simply put, administration is one very important kind of ministry. This is because real administration is

not about numbers and charts and committees and rules. It is about people. It is not about self-serving ends; it is about taking the love of Christ to the world. Integrity in ministry demands that we take seriously the charge to care for the church—yes, the institutional one.

Minister selflessly

It may seem counter-intuitive, but selflessness is a rare quality in ministry. That should be no surprise of course, for ministry is a profession with unique seductions for the unhealthy ego. What other profession, after all, offers the opportunity to speak with the authority of God to hundreds, or even thousands, of weekly listeners? What other profession confers the opportunity to be the rock people lean on, the confidant they turn to, the sage they seek? What other profession makes its practitioners the constant center of human attention? What other profession offers a weekly, and sometimes daily, dose of doting affirmation from a large group of people? Rare is the person who can manage these temptations well.

So how are we as ministers to overcome the temptation to self-absorption and become effectively selfless? At least three actions are required.

First, we must take care of our *selves*, so that we have selves left to give. I learned this lesson graphically after my first sermon in my first full-time pastorate. The sermon was entitled *Promises, Promises*, and in it I made extravagant promises to that congregation. Among those promises was a flowery pledge to give adequate time and attention to my role as a husband and father. I was quite serious about it, and I also hoped it would impress my new congregation.

About three or four months later, I received a telephone call from a deacon who had taken me a bit more seriously than I intended: "I have a bone to pick with you," he said. My defenses came to full attention. "You have broken a promise you made to us." My body tensed, ready to receive the punch. "You told us you would give adequate time to your family,

and you haven't been doing it."

Oh, the sting of truth! I still remember his rebuke, tendered in love, and I still take it seriously. God does expect that we take adequate care of the human resources He has put at our disposal. That includes our families, and it includes our *selves*. Many of us stand in pulpits every Sunday, having been too busy to listen for a word from God that week. Many of us visit hospital rooms too rushed to render anything that might reasonably be called pastoral care. We sit at our desks too harried by the minutiae of the day to give any real attention to a vision for the future. As I heard my friend Hardy Clemmons point out recently, most ministers are too tired in any given week to be creative.

The second action may seem contradictory to the first: We need to learn once again to spend ourselves in ministry. After all, this is the model set by Jesus "who loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2). These two polar truths, that we need to care for our selves and that we need to spend ourselves, must be held in creative, and probably oscillating, tension.

Currently, however, ministers seem to have the oscillation fixated on "self-care." A balancing reminder is in order: At some point, ministry demands, and is worth, self-sacrifice. You and I have a calling that is urgent. It will not wait until tomorrow. It will not wait for us to marry a wife or bury a father. It is more important than any other urgency this world may put in our paths. Make no mistake. The Gospel is urgent business. It will not let us go. It cannot be ignored.

We must protect our health, of course. We must observe the Sabbath, of course. We must not neglect our children or our spouses, of course. All of us have heard the horror stories of ministers who tragically cut these corners.

But there is another side to this. We follow a Lord who gave *Himself* for us, who poured out His life on the Cross, who laid down His life for His sheep. We follow a Lord who taught, "He who loses his life for my sake

shall find it" (Mt 16:25), who said "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend" (Jn 15:13).

"Self-care" is a good idea, but it has been used in our day as an excuse for laziness and indifference, for avoiding the very call that God has given us. No one can claim to be His ministers while lounging in palaces of ease. The greatest fulfillment I ever have in ministry is when I am utterly spent, when I have given every ounce of strength I have, and I know I have offered my best in the service of God.

The third action we must take is to maintaining the tension between self-care and self-sacrifice. This is not easy, but it begins in a healthy view of one's self. I frequently try to get at it by recalling a truth I first learned a long time ago: I am not as good as they tell me I am when things are going well, and I am not as bad as they tell me I am when things are going badly. Over the years, I have been most effective and happy when I have been able to remember this.

Of course, this list of ethical lessons is not adequate to cover the entire scope of even one person's ministry. Ministry is far too complex and demanding a profession. But no matter how many lessons one might learn about ministerial ethics, none is more important than this: the cost of authentic ministry can be great. After all, the One who blazed the trail of ministry for us, found that His own

path led to a cross. The only way to find the courage to follow Him there is to take His yoke upon us and learn of Him.

Like nearly everyone, I have heard prospective ministers express doubts about embarking on a life of ministry because of the magnitude of suffering that it sometimes brings. Thirty plus years down that path, here is how I feel: God forbid that we should ever shy away from ministry because we are afraid that people might persecute us and speak all manner of evil about us falsely for the Kingdom's sake. God forbid that a cross should repel us.

The biggest crises for me has come late in my ministry rather than early. At the very beginning of my time at my present church, the congregation endured an enormous internal crisis. After what some say was decades of growing division, a large number of members left the church. In the process, some of that group attacked me personally. I could not understand it. They hardly knew me! With unjustified hubris, I thought I was too good a pastor for anything like this to happen to me.

Then one night, I was ambushed by a word from God. Attending a lecture at Mercer University by the well-known Methodist William Willimon, I heard him tell of an experience he had as a young pastor.

The board of his church had rejected a proposal he had made. As many of us have done, he returned home to

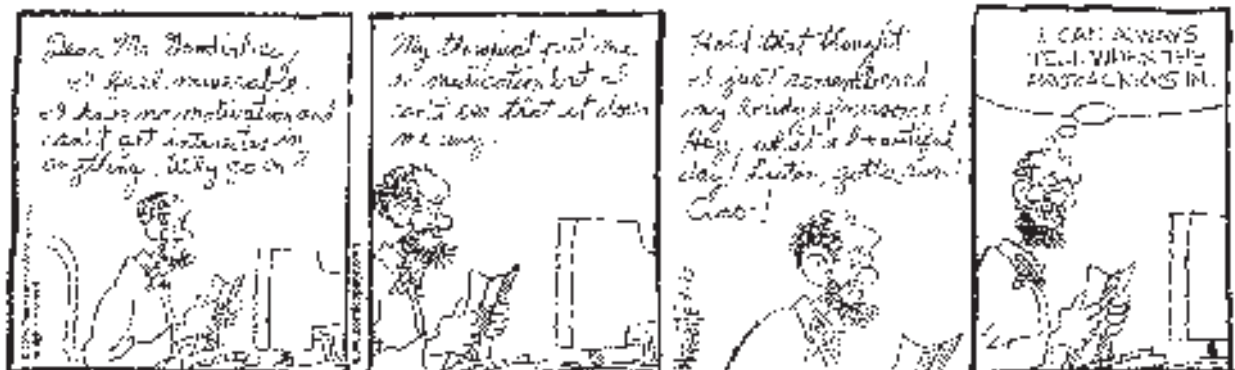
kick himself all over the house. "You are too new here to have made such a proposal," he said to himself. "You should have framed it differently. You should have discussed it with the leaders in advance of the meeting. You should have . . . You should have . . . You should have." After he finished beating himself, he sat down in his study to work on the following Sunday's sermon.

Finding his place in his chair, he turned to the open Bible on his desk and looked at his text. The sermon was about the cross. Suddenly, Willimon said, a thunderbolt struck him. "It was as though God said to me, 'What part of cross do you not understand?'"

I listened to him carefully as he recalled this experience, thinking all the while about the ecclesiastical shrapnel then flying around my own church. Then Dr. Willimon ended his talk, and friends of mine from all around the room came over to speak. One by one, these colleagues over the years, these friends in ministry, one by one every one of them said the same thing: "He was talking to you."

He did not know it, but he *was*. He was talking to me. "What part of cross do you not understand, David?" What part?

And I ask each of you, what part do you not understand? There is only one way to do ministry with integrity: "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give." ■



Christian Zionism: An Oxymoron

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

A few weeks ago televangelist John Hagee took a group to the nation's capitol where he pushed his Christian Zionism agenda for Israel. His phrase "Christian Zionism" could not be more contradictory. It is an oxymoron and more cult than Christianity.

Hagee topped off his lobbying blitz with the astounding demand that America should invade Iran. He and other TV preachers see an invasion of Israel by Russia and Iran. He gets that by reading between the lines in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. He must be reading between the lines, as these 2500-year old words do not say anything about the 21st century world. He sees Iran president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as part of a conspiracy to wipe out Israel and establish an Islamic world order.

Preacher Hagee claims God gave him all this end-time wisdom out of his King James Bible. Hagee did not invent Zionism or Christian Zionism, but brought it out of the mothballs. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 played right into Hagee's hands. A number of Jews (true Torah Jews and others) do not accept the Zionist approach. In the same way the majority of Christians do not adhere to Christian Zionism.

In the meantime any one with half-an-ounce of Bible knowledge is aware that none of the Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel are related

to the modern nation and politics of Israel. America has put more foreign and military aid into Israel than most countries. Much of that due to the Israel lobby—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (known as AIPAC). You can be called anti-Semite if you even question that lobby.

The term "Zionism" was coined in 1890 by Nathan Birnbaum. It is the dream of establishing a homeland for the Jews. The name comes from Mount Zion, where the Jerusalem Temple stood during biblical days.

Birnbaum and others found England useful for their cause. The British and Lord Balfour ruled Palestine after World War I.

The history of the Jews has been one of continual repression and terror by Roman Catholics, Protestants, and by good and bad governments. The harried Hebrews have not had a homeland since the Assyrians from Nineveh (modern Mosul, Iraq) conquered the northern part of Israel in 612 B.C. The south fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Once I heard Hagee say there was no such thing as a Palestinian or a land of Palestine. Claiming all those thousands of years that Palestine (Arab cousins) really belonged to Jews, who made up a minority of the population.

None of that is as scary as Hagee's pushing for more war, starting with

Iran. He and the prophetic voice of Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Planet Earth*) see Russia and Iran joining forces to destroy Israel. These modern prophets never give a date for the final battle; they just spread fear about the impending Armageddon. But God's army (American, I guess) will come to their aid and righteousness will prevail after a bloody exchange.

The term *prophetic* means "to tell forth" more than it means "forth tell." The Bible is not a fortune-telling book, but a guide to finding peace with God. I have read Bible translations in more than six languages and all of them stress peace over war. Call wars just, preventive, or necessary, they are still hell on earth for all sides. Peace is the hallmark of Christ's message, even if some of his disciples still do not get it. Both their Christian faith and patriotism are misplaced.

There is definitely something wrong when a man of the cloth lives in the lap of luxury and says the way to God is through a world-ending war in the Holy Land. Scary? Yes, for beside preacher Hagee, we have some politicians and industrialists who are in agreement. War makes money for some, but death and destruction for many more. War is madness, and those who promote it should be opposed with correct biblical interpretations and much prayer. ■



Winning At Any Cost?

By Don Wilkey, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Onalaska, TX

A few years back, I watched the Kansas State Wildcats play in the Big 12 football playoff game. The Wildcats were ahead and could walk away with the victory by sitting on the ball for the final few minutes. The All-American quarterback made a fatal mistake and fumbled the ball to opponents who stole the victory. Instead of playing for the national championship in Arizona with a pay off of \$12 million, the team had to settle for a lesser bowl that paid \$1 million. I surmised that one fumble cost the school in cash, \$11 million. This is a lot of stress for a teenage student to handle.

Historically the ethical issues involved in athletics have seldom even been raised in Christian circles. A few decades ago, Jim Bouton wrote about the ethical issues of inside baseball in *Ball Four*. Dave Meggesy, a pro football player, wrote *Out of Their League*, which dealt with ethical problems in professional football. Both books raised important questions about items authors said needed to be dealt with in sports. Baptists countered with, *What's Wrong With the Game*. The Baptist work virtually defended the game of football and failed to deal with the issues raised by these popular works.

To Baptists, the sports arena has often been a sacred cow to be left alone. East Texas Baptist churches openly changed their worship schedules to what was known as "Cowboy Time." This was the practice of an earlier service to allow the congregation time to get home to watch their favorite football team. Common legend had it that the stadium in Irving, Texas had a gap in the roof so that the Lord could watch His team.

Recent happenings at Baylor remind readers of how tails can often end up wagging dogs in attempts to ethically decide winning is more important than how one gets there. It was little noticed that the highest paid salary to

any Baptist employee (\$1 million per year), now goes to the university's football and basketball coaches.

I was shocked to learn that no college athletic program at any major university pays its own way—even with TV revenues, bowl pay-offs, and high ticket costs. (Have you ever checked on the price for Big 12 basketball tournament tickets?) One reason is a court ruling regarding women's athletics. There must be an equal number of programs for women as for men. This, plus the high cost of a few salaries, means that students must pay more in student fees to underwrite the programs.

Murray Sperber wrote a recent best seller called, *Beer and Circus*. In the book, Sperber charges that college sports are actually detrimental to education. The author claims student gambling, illegal contributions to athletes, and programs that spend more on stadiums than science labs are crippling modern education.¹

Poor inner city athletes are often thrown into a college culture with affluent students. These athletes make millions for their college and have a much lower standard of living than most of their classmates. Major college athletic programs are now demanding a twelve-month participation in practices. Though not legal, players know team captains are watching and their failure to participate means it will be more difficult to please the coach who watches from distance.

A recent article on masking illegal drugs to athletes raises other ethical concerns. The article says there are multiple illegal drugs available and a much smaller number of tests to detect their use. The technology of those who produce these products far exceeds the pace of those seeking to monitor their use.

Baylor's denominational counterpart in Texas is SMU. The Methodists

have the only football program shut down in the nation for unethical practices. Allegations included paying for prostitutes for football recruits. The *New York Times* reports that players on the 2002 University of South Florida football team fathered as many as 60 children.²

Ethical issues of winning at any cost face school administrators. The pressures placed on school officials by fans raise other moral choices. Believers are often reminded that even though they want to win, they should not want to win the wrong way. The mixing of money, corruption and athletes is what the NCAA was founded to regulate. Christian colleges and universities need to uphold the Christian values upon which they were founded, especially in athletic contests. Winning at any cost just costs too much! ■

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- 1 Murray Sperber, *Beer and Circus* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2003, 24, 26, 209, 217.
 - 2 Kostya Kennedy, "College Sports 101," *Sports Illustrated*, Aug. 11, 2002, 29.

Requim For A Cartoonist

Remembering Doug Marlette (1949-2007)

Editor's Note: Since our beginning in 1995, *Christian Ethics Today* readers have enjoyed the cartoons of Doug Marlette. His untimely death evoked many tributes, from which we have gleaned the following excerpts that remind us of Marlette's role as a prophet with a pen.

From the Associated Press:

Doug Marlette, the North Carolina-born cartoonist who won a Pulitzer Prize and created the popular strip *Kudzu*, was killed in a car accident in Mississippi. Marlette was working in Oxford with a high school group that was doing a musical version of *Kudzu*.

Mr. Marlette said that his biting approach could be traced in part to "a grandmother bayoneted by a guardsman during a mill strike in the Carolinas. There are some rebellious genes floating around in me."

"Cartoons are windows into the human condition," he said once. "It's about life."

From Kathleen Parker, Syndicated Columnist:

More shocking than the news of his death was the idea that Doug could die. I never really believed he was mortal.

No mere man could do all that Doug did—apparently without ever sleeping. He was otherwise transcendent, untethered to time or place, a cosmic vagabond in search of truth, omnivorous in his appetite for knowledge, insatiable in his quest for understanding.

Staying so consumed with projects "keeps me off the streets," he was fond of saying. Out of prison is what he meant.

Deeply, even painfully, empathetic, he saw (and felt) everyone's struggle and granted compassion even toward the undeserving. But he struggled, too.

He was both hurt and baffled a few years ago when other writers in his hometown of Hillsborough, NC, tried to sabotage his largely autobiographical first novel, *The Bridge*—even getting it banned from the UNC bookstore—because they deemed some of his fictional characters too similar to themselves.

The public knew Doug primarily as cartoon boy. Funny Doug could make you laugh. Gimlet-eyed Doug could make you cringe. But the private Doug was a deep diver, a thinker of exquisite dimension who was most concerned with the profound tragedy

of human existence. "How do any of us get through it?" he often wondered aloud.

The courage Doug bore witness to through his characters also found lodging in his brave heart. He was fearless against authority and hypocrisy. He stood fast when fundamentalists of all stripes issued death threats because of his cartoons. He was undaunted in defending the First Amendment, which he recognized as the foundation for all other freedoms.

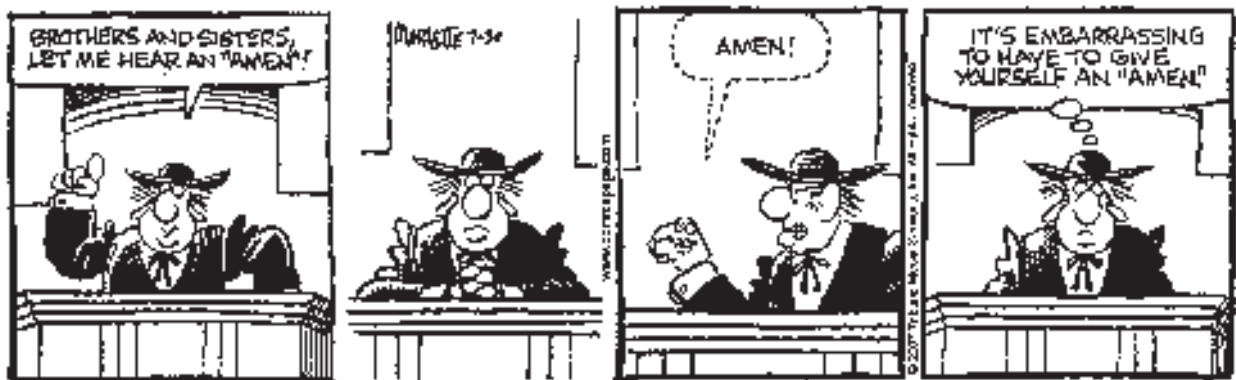
"People don't know anything anymore," he would say. "We have to stay alive so that we can keep getting the word out. Just get it out there."

"Out there" was the great big world, so in need of Doug's rare gifts, but ultimately inadequate to contain his immense spirit.

May his legacy spread like kudzu.

From Mitch Geiman, CNN, who worked with Marlette at Newsday and was a friend.

During four decades as a cartoonist appearing in Charlotte, Atlanta, New York, Florida, and Oklahoma newspapers, as well as in syndication across the country, Marlette built a career as an equal-opportunity offender. He skewered Bill Clinton as easily as George Bush, Ross Perot as



effortlessly as John Edwards; it's not too farfetched to think that Mullah Omar and Jim Bakker might have found common ground in believing Marlette was an evil, vicious, godless rodent of a man.

In his work, Marlette was indiscriminate in trying to give voice to justice and to offer unbending support for the underdog. His spirit, he often said, was forged in the South he grew up in, where he was anti-war and anti-racism in a community grappling to come to terms with both Vietnam and civil rights in the 1960s.

His funeral was held Saturday, July 14, in a small, stone church outside Marlette's hometown of Hillsborough, NC. The church is across the street from cornfields and farmland filled with hay bales, and not far from the site of the old textile mill where his grandparents worked in the 1930s.

The Red Clay Ramblers, a band Marlette collaborated with to score the musical version of his comic strip, *Kudzu*, played "I'll Fly Away" to an overflow crowd of friends, family and followers.

How many people could attract to their funeral both one of the winningest coaches in college basketball history, Dean Smith, and Pat Conroy, a writer who found glory in a book called "My Losing Season"? In Marlette's world, victory was measured not by the points you scored but by the points you made, not by banners raised or books published but by the character revealed during the inevitable struggles along the way.

No one was safe from Marlette's biting wit, Conroy said. Especially if they were prone to take themselves too seriously. "I always thought it was going to be Doug giving the eulogy at my funeral," Conroy said from the simple pulpit, his face red with the strain of nearly a week's sleepless, tearful nights. "He used to make up eulogies about me. The obituary would start: 'An unknown writer died on Frapp Island . . .'"

At New York *Newsday*, where I worked as a reporter alongside Marlette, the paper had a slogan:

"Truth, Justice, and the Comics." Marlette contributed a little of each. Eyes twinkling, mind racing, he pursued the truth, fought tirelessly against injustice and provided humor in his pictures and his text.

He lampooned the *New York Times* for lacking the guts to hire an editorial cartoonist for its op-ed pages. Any self-respecting newspaper in a democracy, he thought, had an obligation to use cartoons to convey its perspective and bring the subjects of its news coverage down to earth.

As the 20th century gave way to a new millennium, Marlette recognized the power of the Internet to create one-to-one communication and posted his cartoons online. He wrote two novels, *The Bridge* and *Magic Time*. But he was also drawn back to a family-owned newspaper, the *Tulsa World*. Some colleagues wondered why he would go to Oklahoma. Well, he explained, that's the state that gave us Will Rogers and Woody Guthrie.

One of his friends said at the funeral that Marlette may have seen himself as part of the caravan of American thought that included Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Walker Percy, John Steinbeck, and Bob Dylan.

Indeed, when the cultural and political history of the turn of this century is written, understanding Marlette's America—its truths, its ironies, and its oddly humorous conflicting motivations—will be central to any representation of the age.

From James M. Dunn in *Report From the Capitol*:

"We Baptists Gotta Stick Together—After All Nobody Else Will Have Us!"

These are the words Doug Marlette put in Will's mouth. In 1990 the embattled Baptist Joint Committee asked Doug to allow the Rev. Will B. Dunn to give the late great Southern

Baptist Convention some advice. That's what Doug came up with, quite on his own. We put it on a button, wore it and handed it out at the convention. . . .

The Rev. Will B. Dunn came boldly to the comic page, full of foibles and fumbles, fully human but with a heavenly message. The editorial cartoons parsed political reality, punctured pretense, jabbed hypocrisy, and reduced phoniness to ridicule.

Bypass Baptist Church, served by Rev. Dunn, is spookily familiar. The weddings and funerals seem like live



reports, not figments of fantasy. One suspects that with great good humor, Doug was exposing Baptists, as we are, warts and all. . . .

Doug Marlette saw the failures, the contradictions, the gaps, and the roughness of his region's religiosity. He knew the experienced beauty and power of "baptistified." He accepted the notion that a god who could be defined is God denied. Tough stuff! So Doug's faith, like kudzu, that damn vine, is ubiquitous.

Dang, Doug, we miss you already. ■

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

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

Globalism: *Babel* (2006)

Babel is the most global movie of the year. Nominated for awards by dozens of industry associations, including the Oscars and the Golden Globes, it polarized viewers into those who love it and those who hate it. It baffled those who expected a formula thriller. Limited space here hinders any attempt to clarify all of its separate but interrelated story lines in Morocco, Mexico, and Japan. If you saw the movie and it puzzled you, you are not alone. It is not the movie's fault. The connections are all there, but you have to pay close attention. It is a thinking person's film, a challenging movie. It is absorbing, even entertaining, because of the cinematography, outstanding acting, and the brilliant writing and directing by its team of top Mexican artists. It might also be the year's movie you most want to discuss in a coffeehouse afterwards.

About the plot, briefly: the catalyst for everything else in the movie is an incident that occurs during a vacation trip by an American couple (Richard and Susan, played by a matured Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett). Their marriage is under severe strain because they have just lost a baby to AIDS. As they ride a tour bus through the Moroccan desert, out of nowhere Susan is hit and seriously hurt by a gunshot through the window.

From that point, *Babel* lives up to the theme suggested by its title: what to do in a crisis situation where there are overwhelming language and cultural obstacles? At first, no one knows what has happened. Most of the riders are fellow Americans, but the driver and tour guide are Moroccans who have no idea what to do. Who shot her? Was it a deliberate attack? How can Susan be attended to? They decide that medical help is the most urgent

priority. The bus leaves the main road to drop Richard and Susan off in the nearest village, where Richard is appalled by the lack of any treatment facilities. He's panicked by his inability to communicate with anyone on the scene.

Seeing Susan on the verge of dying, he blurts out the threat: *If you leave, I'll kill you! I'll kill you!* But leave them there, they do, and for the moment, so must we. The American embassy makes a pussy-footed diplomatic non-action. American officials assume there are terrorists behind the attack, and they hesitate to send any quick response teams from the capitol city into what may turn out to be hostile territory. The hours pass.

But who did shoot her? That brings us to sub-plot number 1: the poverty-ridden rural Moroccan family up in the hills, where the father has just bought a high-powered rifle from a friend to kill the jackals that attack his little flock of goats. The family consists of the parents and three middle-school aged kids, two boys and a girl. The father hands the rifle over to the two boys, tells them to kill some jackals, and he sends them off.

They play with the gun as if it were a toy, taking wild pot shots at nearby boulders (which they miss by a mile). One boy has a better idea of how the gun ought to work. He spies the bus on the distant highway below, and squeezes off a round in its direction.

Meanwhile, sub-plot 2, back in Susan and Richard's million-dollar home in San Diego. Their two kids are left in the care of their longtime, though undocumented, Mexican nanny. Since Susan and Richard are away, the nanny yields to the temptation to make a quick trip back into Mexico for her son's wedding. Wait, what about the kids? Leave them with a friend. But the friend can't, today. So, just take them along.

The same sub-plot continues: cut to the next morning after the party ends. It's just before dawn, and the nephew is roaring drunk on the trip back. Nanny is an illegal alien, and she's got two American kids with her in the car with no documents. They try to re-enter the U. S. through the customs checkpoint. When the customs officers notice something wrong with this picture, they try to question the nephew, who acts like a loudmouth drunk behind the wheel. The nephew panics and accelerates through the checkpoint. In the ensuing chase, he dumps Nanny and the two kids in a dark hiding place out in the brushy Southern California desert. Promising to return soon to pick them up when the coast is clear, guess what? He doesn't. Another "Oops!"

Return to Morocco and the main plot. Richard and Susan are still stranded. Good detective work locates the herder and recovers the rifle. It is traced by its serial number to its original owner, a wealthy Japanese businessman.

Sub-plot 3: Cut to Tokyo for a glimpse of the businessman's teenage daughter and her group of friends. Outwardly, the girl is just a normal high schooler, a volleyball player who loves to hang out with the team in a teen club, drink Cokes, and flirt with the boys—or go to a rave club and experiment with drugs a little. Below the surface, she is deeply troubled by her mother's recent suicide. Did I mention? She's stone deaf. In a few of her scenes, the sound track is OFF, indicating her viewpoint. Soon a young, attractive Japanese detective comes calling at Dad's 10th floor condo to investigate how his rifle came to be involved in a shooting in Morocco. This sad, lonely girl thinks maybe the young man might become her friend, so she *strips* for him. It is not an erotic moment. The man is mortified. Her

action is pathetic, inducing our pity, because it is more associated with her own suicidal depression than it is with any sexual attraction. Thankfully, the detective acts like the responsible grown-up he is.

Christian Ethics and *Babel*.

Forget about trying to track the plot as a coherent three-act story. *Babel* has a structure like last year's *Crash*, but not quite its uplifting redemption. *Babel* is about the scene, and how it dominates the characters. That scene is chaos. Think globalism. *Babel* is a picture about Babel, without being an obvious allegory. In the biblical story, men tried to become as God by building a tower to heaven, but God prevented them by confounding their languages so they could not communicate. The message of this international screenwriter/director team is similar to the Bible's.

As viewers of a Hollywood film, we expect the final reel to reveal a quick *denouement* stemming from a moral decision by the protagonist that will lead to a happy ending. Too often, that is how we think of God, as Someone who views the messes we get ourselves into and Someone who magically turns us towards wise choices and bold actions so we can set things right with our world. The nearest *Babel* gets to this result is that, at long last, a Red Cross helicopter arrives to take Susan and Richard back to civilization and modern medicine.

We must leave Morocco, as the opening scene's bus tour did, taking a quick look at a quaint but beautiful bit of scenery out of our windows, and then moving on to the next attraction.

Nothing happens to resolve the problems of subsistence Moslem herders living in remote desert communities, or the illegals working as our domestic helpers, or the rich teenagers dancing to Western disco music, adrift in Tokyo. Richard and Susan are closer.

The most visible lesson is one that critics and viewers never mention: the yawning chasm between the haves and the have-nots. Though it is right there in plain sight, we don't see it because we don't speak the same languages. Since language is embedded in culture, being monolingual means that we fail to grasp just how differently other language groups view the world than we do. This blind spot applies to any of the myriad collisions between cultures (and within sub-cultures) that now butt against each other in what Tom Friedman calls our "Flat World." If anything in *Babel* is pictured clearly, it is that unbridgeable abyss between nations, between rich and poor, between parents and children, and even between husbands and wives. ■

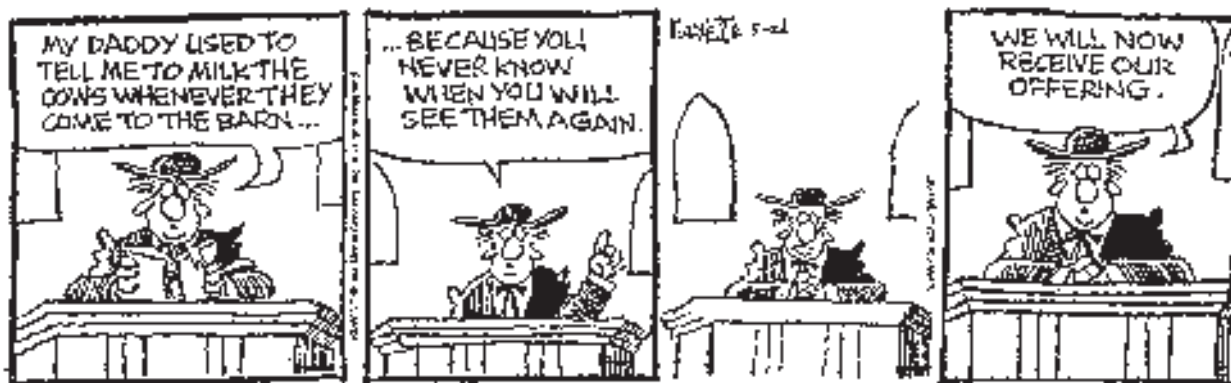
Human Corruption: *The Departed* (2006)

In 2006, Martin Scorsese finally got his Best Director Oscar, after five previous unsuccessful nominations. His movie, *The Departed* also won for the year's Best Picture, in a wide-open field that included *The Queen*, *Showgirls*, *Babel*, and *Little Miss Sunshine*. All of these nominees, including *The Departed*, had their strong advocates, yet each of them had shortcomings. Some of Scorsese's admirers were heard to say that this

year his win was based on the sympathy vote for having lost so many times previously. Compared with his previous five losses, *The Departed*, some said, is his sixth best movie. He himself has stated, perhaps seriously, that it is his first movie with a real plot.

Set in the present day, the conflict at the heart of the drama is the ongoing war between the Massachusetts State Police in Boston (the "Staties") and the city's crime empire of Irish mafia boss Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson). It's all about the drug trade. Investigation is largely a matter of using informants. *The Departed* focuses on the youthful undercover Staties out on the streets, embedded by the cops as soldiers within the drug underworld, trying to generate enough evidence to convict Costello. It works both ways: Costello has his own men implanted within the State Police, tipping him off to their plans and their next scheduled raids. To be either an informant—or a corrupt turncoat Statie—is a very dangerous occupation.

Leonardo DiCaprio's character, a brand new Police Academy graduate, accepts an assignment to go undercover and work himself into a trusted position within the Costello crime hierarchy. But he is always in danger of being discovered, either from making a mistake, or from treachery from within the State Police. He is always looking over his shoulder. He has to walk a tightrope between becoming a felon himself (in order to warrant Costello's trust), and keeping his identity secret from the State Police (except for his immediate superior officer, the only person he feels he can safely contact).



The “Departed” mentioned in the movie title represent those unlucky enough to get caught (by either side) and disposed of in the patented Scorsese way, with lots of violence. The world of Scorsese’s Boston is shown to be a full-scale war on the streets. By the story’s end, there’s a very high body count. The movie combines action and suspense. Besides Nicholson and DeCaprio, the star-studded cast includes Martin Sheen as Costello’s counterpart, Captain Queenan of the State Police. Most of the focus is on younger actors like Matt Damon and Mark Wahlberg, as the Staties who carry most of the action in the streets. You are kept guessing about who’s honest and who’s corrupt—you never know on whose side each new character will turn out to be.

Martin Scorsese was originally a Catholic seminarian who, as a young man, aspired to the priesthood. Obviously, five wives and some children later, he chose a different vocation. Critical interest in his films resides in the fact that they generally revolve around moral and ethical issues. Think of his previous productions like *Taxi Driver*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*. In *The Departed*, as in some of the other films mentioned, the Catholic Church has its own minor supporting role—a role of decidedly mixed ethical virtues.

Critics note that in a Scorsese movie, violence is always cathartic. As in real life, his characters are complex, a blend of both good and evil deeply rooted within their souls. The good guys have tragic flaws, and a few of the villains have at least some redeem-

ing qualities. Gang boss Costello slips into a father figure role to DeCaprio’s character. Ironically, the cops and the crooks have so much in common, they inevitably develop personal relationships. Sometimes, they even claim blood ties. But they don’t let that get in the way of whacking somebody if the need arises.

The Departed is inappropriate for consideration for a church movie discussion group. It is extremely violent, and the characters habitually use profanities. The dialogue is realistic and gritty. The characters all talk like Boston’s cops and robbers. (Cast members Wahlberg and Damon, in fact, are Southies themselves. Their accent is truly authentic!) The larger theme of the movie is the intrinsic corruption at the heart of humankind, no matter which side of the law they are on. In Scorsese’s vision, ultimately, crime does not pay.

You could look at this movie as a microcosm of ordinary families, especially those afflicted with drugs and alcohol. Or you could look it as an allegory of the global situation today. If you can tolerate the language and gore, you can even look at it simply as Hollywood entertainment at its best, as long as your youngest kids are already asleep. ■

Multicultural Reconciliation: *Freedom Writers (2006)*

Freedom Writers is a teacher flick based on a true story that took place in 1994. Two-time Oscar winner Hilary Swank portrays 23-year-

old Erin Gruwell, an idealistic English teacher in a Long Beach, California high school characterized by a highly diverse student population. At the time of the story, due to recent redistricting, Wilson High is populated by large segments of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other ethnic groups, with not a few gang members among them. She finds herself isolated by her faculty colleagues, made up of a rigid group of older white and elitist teachers. Unlike them, Erin sees the opportunity to work with poor and troubled children from mixed backgrounds as a stimulating and exciting challenge. In her first teaching assignment, she is given 150 freshmen enrolled in the “dummy” English classes.

Her department chair tells her that her inner-city students are so bad that they cannot be issued any of the textbooks gathering dust in the store-room because they can’t read them. Besides, they will just lose or damage them. Instead, Erin must use simplistic below grade-level workbooks and a comic book version of *Romeo and Juliet*. If the teacher wants her special students to have better books or other materials, then she has to purchase them herself out of pocket on her beginning teacher’s pay.

Because her children are bused to the school from distant housing projects and spend up to three hours in transit, they are not expected to do homework. Erin’s senior English teaching colleague, Mr. White Bread himself, assures her that her main job is baby sitting, since most of her pupils won’t stay in school long enough to reach his junior honors English classes anyway.



For example, in one scene, when one of her minority students does manage to test into his class, he promptly calls on her to give “the black perspective” on a story they were studying. The mortified girl asked to be transferred back into Erin’s “dummy” class where she felt more at home among the other Black, Cambodian, and Latino kids.

Freedom Writers is the story of how one teacher made a difference in her students’ lives despite the manifold ways the system stacked the deck against her. She threw herself into her job so wholeheartedly and passionately that her marriage suffered. Lacking the proper literary teaching resources and materials she needed, she shifted her lesson plans towards focusing on her student’s own lives. As an assignment, she distributed blank journals and pencils, and asked them to write brief essays about their experiences to share with one another. As you might imagine, she was not prepared to read about the daily violence and insults these children witnessed, and endured, both at home and in their neighborhoods. Erin’s first task, therefore, was to provide a zone of safety and nurturance for all of the members of her class. The starting point was to find ways to help them overcome their distrust of her, and even more basically, of each other.

The device of having the children write personal journal entries led to her next step, which was to introduce them to another group of children who had also been victimized by their society—children of the Holocaust. To her amazement, none of her students had ever heard of it. She took her class on a field trip (at her own expense) to the local Holocaust Museum. Then she had them read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, copies of which, again, she bought for them herself. When the students began to see the significance of the Holocaust to their own situations, her next step was to invite elderly Jewish survivors to speak to her class. By this time, she had succeeded in unifying her class to the extent that they organized and promoted an all-school fundraiser to fly to America the

Dutch woman who provided shelter for the Frank family in her home during WWII.

As part of the fundraiser, Erin had her class assignment essays bound into a book that subsequently became a bestseller, entitled *The Freedom Writers Diary*. The movie ends with the close of that school year. Outside the boundaries of the movie, since then, Erin Gruwell has moved on from Wilson High and is now a college professor.

Ethical Implications. As a teacher myself, I find “teacher flicks” and “coach flicks” to be a highly stimulating and relevant genre of movies. Think of *Hoosiers*. There have been a large number of them. Most are low budget films, and few of them achieve blockbuster status. Not everyone wants to see movies like this. Coach flicks usually do better than teacher flicks, given that ticket-purchasing teenage boys are more attracted to the gym and playing field than to the classroom! The central themes of these movies are the value of education and the powerful influence a single dedicated teacher can make in the lives of students.

Freedom Writers has special appeal

to readers of this journal because its scene is multiculturalism. Wilson High is a microcosm of the metropolis, indeed, of the larger global culture we all are learning to live in. Using the Holocaust as a primary object lesson for teaching tolerance and grace in the midst of hatred and oppression is about as moral and ethical as it gets. ■

Faith and Social Justice

(continued from page 2)

two young Christian women who will be eager to read it. ■

Note: Jim Wallis spoke at the CET sponsored conference on “The Minister and Politics,” held last summer in Washington D.C.—his address along with three others is now available in video or audio form—see announcement in this issue. This article is adapted from *Sojourners Magazine*, March, 2007, and is **Reprinted with permission from Sojourners, (800) 714-7474, www.sojo.net.**

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Book Reviews

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

The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church

Gregory A. Boyd, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006, \$15

Reviewed by Darold Morgan, Richardson, TX

Reading this book, with its provocative title, and interest-piquing sub-title leaves one quickly with several major impressions. One is the author's obvious and profound knowledge of the Bible, particularly as it relates to a full-orbed discussion of the kingdom of God. He makes this the guiding theme throughout the entire book. And this is absolutely the key to his basic thesis that this quest for political power is destroying the church. Second, practically all readers would sit up and take notice of the tragic fact that a thousand members of this pastor's church left his congregation as these messages were being delivered. Many intensely patriotic Christians sadly and firmly feel that it is disloyal for Americans to put biblical truth about Jesus and the kingdom of God above the interests of the United States. It often comes down to an "either-or" issue, rather than a "both-and."

American Christians are living in strange times where patriotism seemingly has many contradictory interpretations. The author unequivocally makes it clear that New Testament Christianity mandates the priority of a heavenly citizenship in the kingdom of God, producing a life of values supremely related to Jesus Christ because of His Incarnation, the climax of Calvary, the ultimate victory in His Resurrection and promised return! "Seek first the kingdom" is the ongoing and unchanging mandate. One of the problems in the book is perhaps a too lengthy treatment of this, resulting to some degree in a loss of interest before he comes to the distinctly American church problem of interpreting a "Constantinian" concept of national patriotism, which takes precedence over New Testament Christianity.

Repeatedly the issue comes down to this—is the current form of patriotism fusing with the concept that American Christians are trusting more in military might than the power of the Cross? Certainly the kingdom of God is a vital precept, but in these days of such world-wide terrorism and danger, trust in a Constantinian theory of church-state relationships leads to power and success. The author states this bluntly: "We have become intoxicated with the Constantinian,

nationalistic, violent mindset of imperialistic Christendom" (90). There are numerous illustrations of this dangerous trend.

The bottom line seems to be that if Christian people can dominate the political landscape, the nation will discover that the "means justifies the end." And, that end is the mesmerizing quote that "America will be Christian again!" The chapter, "Taking America Back for God" is worth the price of the book. Boyd hits bluntly the questions obviously on the lips of many American Christians—questions about Marxism, Islamic militarism, the moral issues of abortion, homosexuality, and secularism. Forget the admonitions of Jesus of turning the other cheek and ministering to the helpless and heart-broken—national patriotism comes first!

In the midst of these charges and countercharges comes this clear, rational voice of a concerned pastor who puts the focus once again on the biblical message about the mind of Christ as the essence of God's kingdom. His followers are to be the "Kingdom People." Will not our beloved homeland, the United States of America, be ultimately stronger when Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the king of the kingdom of God?

Another provocative value of this book is the question about the claim



that America has been a Christian nation from its earliest days of history. A recall of American history reminds us sadly of the treatment of the American Indians, the enslavement of millions of Africans, and the virtual apartheid of the freed slaves for a century after the Civil War through the infamous Jim Crow laws. "It is obvious America never really belonged to God." This comes as a disturbing conclusion to people who still rejoice in our Puritan forefathers hope for "the City on the Hill," the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Add memories of the great revivals in the American heartland in the pioneer days all the way to the Billy Graham Crusades of our day. Indeed there have been stalwart Christian leaders throughout American history who have fostered great Christian institutions. Yet provocative questions about militarism and a self-centered patriotism in these days of a world-wide terrorism challenge our faith..

In the light of heated debates which have greatly diminished the Christian witness at home and abroad, debates which rarely convince anyone because of such deeply held positions, this author's main contribution is an impassionate appeal to the biblical priority of the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. Simply stated, this is the essence of New Testament Christianity, and we never go wrong when this is the ultimate motivation in the church and in Christian witness—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God." ■

The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead

David Callahan, Orlando: Harcourt, 2004, \$14.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

Frankly, here is a book guaranteed to make the reader profoundly depressed because it proposes that most Americans either cheat or take

cheating very lightly. For students of Christian Ethics one must note quickly and forcefully that a major weakness of the book is the absence of any spiritual or biblical solutions, a position which ultimately is a major weakness for producing any positive solution in these sad behavioral patterns.

Spiritual renewal is urgently needed in many venues of American life. Here is a well-written and excellently researched book which reveals an engrained and disturbing practice of lying and cheating far more widespread than many believe it to be.

The author shares multiple current examples of cheating, which he defines as "the breaking of the rules to get ahead academically, professionally or financially" (14). The book is quite readable and enormously convincing, supporting the thesis that cheating is a huge problem in America (and elsewhere). You will find it in the corporate office, in public school classrooms, and all the way through graduate schools. In addition, cheating is prevalent in all levels of medicine, law offices, auto-repair shops, and Little League baseball. You will sadly find it in the multiple scandals related to professional athletics. One cannot ignore recent highly publicized stories about pharmaceutical company deceptions and lobbyists in state and national politics—sadly, these are simply the tip of the iceberg!

Illustrations abound in the "cooked books" at Enron, Xerox, World-Com, Tyco, Arthur Andersen, KPMG, and other corporations. The author also includes the prevalent problem of cheating on taxes, the prevailing epidemic of cheating in academia, the practice of down-loading music and films illegally, and the world wide problem of pirated DVDs.

Numerous reputable surveys are noted which confirm the enormity of our cheating culture. The author commends particularly the federal government for attempting to publicize, correct, and penalize violations, including insider-trading on Wall Street. A number of well-known and immensely wealthy members of the

cheating corporate elite have been sent to prison, hopefully serving as a deterrent. Yet, in spite of these highly publicized responses, the trend seems to continue.

All of this evidence confirms what the author labels as "a profound moral crisis that reflects deep economic and social problems in American society" (13). Many Americans have rejected moral absolutes and are increasingly "inventing their own morality" (169), which adds to the belief that breaking the rules is no longer the problem it once was. The new rule is simply and tragically—"Cheat, but don't get caught!"

The result from this tidal wave of cheating in all these levels of American life is a massive "fall of trust" (91). The author notes: "Sixty per cent of Americans now say that 'you can't be too careful in dealing with people.'" The old American handshake concluding an agreement went out decades ago. It is tragically sad that a person's word is not enough anymore

This thought-provoking book ends with an appeal from the author for a rebirth of integrity and honesty. Though the practice of cheating is not new, the nation's future stability depends upon a return to basic values of personal integrity and honesty. The author hopes that his writing and research will trigger a serious debate about these ominous trends. Left unchecked, increasing dishonesty plants the "seeds of destruction." The author dares to suggest that a dishonest and cheating culture will turn the United States into the chequered and controversial cultures of Brazil and Mexico.

Where does the recapturing of personal integrity and applied honesty begin? David Callahan wisely states that it must start with "teaching integrity to the young" (293). It includes honor codes in schools and businesses. Business schools must get serious about teaching ethics. Politicians from the president downward must resist the cheating mentality typified in the practices of lobbyists and the mesmerizing pressure of political contributions. All

of this points to the absolute necessity of a new social contract which ultimately outlaws cheating.

Yet, the conclusions of the author are anything but optimistic. Sadly, the author does not propose religious faith or spiritual renewal as a basis for this new social contract. However, Callahan does propose a contract which spotlights an ancient but valued commandment—"Thou shalt not bear false witness." ■

The Road

Cormac McCarthy

Reviewed by Michael Moorhead

Eastfield College, Dallas TX

Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Cormac McCarthy has never been considered a Christian writer—and with good reason. His early novels, while critically acclaimed, were violent and bloody and completely absent of any Christian message of love and grace and forgiveness. But with the

publication of National Book Award winner *All The Pretty Horses* (1992), McCarthy's message began to change. While his novels continued to be riddled with violence, McCarthy also began to include messages of hope and grace. In *All The Pretty Horses*, the two central characters, Cole and Rawlins, discuss their respective theologies around the campfire, and in *No Country For Old Men* (2005), Sheriff Bell laments the conditions he sees in his job and expresses to his wife and to Ellis, his mentor and friend, his concerns for the world as it has become a meaner, less graceful place and his belief it does not have to be that way.

So it is no surprise to a reader of the works of Cormac McCarthy to see an even more pronounced leaning toward the Christian ethic in his most recent novel, *The Road* (2006). When asked about his theology by Oprah Winfrey in a recent rare interview, McCarthy responded by saying he was religious but not regularly or

consistently so. Most regular or consistent Christians have doubts, so this assertion by McCarthy seems an honest, genuine one, one many Christians understand.

In *The Road* a reader is thrust into a post-apocalyptic world of death and destruction; he follows a father and son, two survivors of an unnamed horror visited upon mankind as they make their way through the ruins of a once-civilized world, staying alive and together one day at a time. This on first glance does not seem to be a scenario of hope and grace, but it is. Gradually and consistently, McCarthy in this grandly epic novel leads us to his Christian message, a message straight from the New Testament, a message of grace and love and courage for the battles each day brings. McCarthy tells us love will win over all obstacles, God will never abandon us, and at the end of life's journey God awaits each of us with open, welcoming arms. ■



A Train Going The Wrong Way

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

“If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Like a train going the wrong way
Is our war on Iraq.
We Americans are all passengers
On this murderous and maddening journey.
Nothing we can say can change the truth about our ghastly folly.
And there is nothing we can do to change the fact that we are invaders
Who are pillaging a land of its resources
And bringing immeasurable suffering to the citizens of that nation
Who do not want us there.

We are passengers on this train bound for Hell
Yet we delude ourselves that we are combating terrorism,
That we are removing WMDs,
That we are spreading democracy and freedom,
That we are, as Americans, invincible to defeat,
That we will not be judged by history,
That God is on our side,
That if we can just pour enough money and munitions
And send enough of our bravest and finest
We are certain to win, to prevail.

It is the delusion of a passenger who rises from his seat
And walks in a direction opposite from that of the train-
That this gesture will make everything right.

The train began its awful journey in March of 2003
And there is nothing we can do or say
To change or make right what we have done
And what we are continuing to do to Iraq
While squandering our precious resources
That could have been used to bring justice and equality
To citizens of our own land.

And we all bear responsibility for dealing Death
To those who continue to give their lives
For this spurious cause
As well as to those who continue to experience
The horrific effects of our military might.

We are all passengers on the Train to Hell. ■

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

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OUR ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS

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

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