

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

Red-Letter Christians, An Emerging Evangelical Center, And Public Policy Issues

September 16-17, 2008

Truett Seminary

Baylor University

Waco, Texas

TUESDAY—11:00 A.M.

1:00 P.M.

Introduction of the Conference *Joe Trull*

1:15 P.M.

Our Baptist Heritage: **Red-Letter Ethicists**

Henelee Barnette

David Garland

Thomas Buford Maston

James Dunn

Foy Valentine

Jimmy Allen

2:00 P.M.

Is There An Emerging Evangelical Center?

Panel Discussion

3:00 P.M.

Break

3:30 P.M.

Our Baptist Heritage: *Walter Raushenbusch***

3:45 P.M.

Building a Red-Letter Church *Jimmy Allen*

5:00 P.M.

Evening Meal Break

7:00 P.M.

Music

Our Baptist Heritage: *Clarence Jordan***

Red-Letter Christians in a Red and Blue World: *Tony Campolo*

Truett Lobby*

WEDNESDAY

8:00 A.M.

Continental Breakfast for Registrants Truett Great Hall

9:00 A.M.

Our Christian Heritage: *Dietrich Bonhoeffer***

9:15 A.M.

The Two Kingdoms: God and Politics *James Dunn*

10:00 A.M.

A Seamless Garment Ethic: Sanctity of Life Issues *David Gushee*

10:45 A.M.

Break

11:00 A.M.

Our Baptist Heritage: *Martin Luther King, Jr.***

Where Have All the Prophets Gone? *Tony Campolo*

***Note:** Anyone may attend any session free of charge. The registration fee of \$20 Adult or \$10 Student allows a registrant to receive Tony Campolo's latest book, *Red-Letter Christians*, and also to attend the continental breakfast Wednesday.

****Performing artist** Al Staggs will introduce most sessions with a dramatic monologue.

This conference is sponsored by Christian Ethics Today Foundation, hosted by Truett Seminary of Baylor University, and made possible by a special grant from the CIOS/Piper Foundation of Waco, Texas.

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KUDZU *by Doug Marlette*

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Pastor Julie

By Amanda K. Brown, Senior Associate Editor Atlanta Magazine

“A look at Julie Pennington-Russell’s education, experience, and related qualifications would appear to qualify her for a major pulpit . . . except for the fact that she is a woman.” And that’s just what *one* of her critics—a fellow Southern Baptist—said.

So is Pastor Julie a jezebel or just following Jesus?

Picketers, nearly thirty of them, brandished their beliefs on hand-made signs and crowded the entrance to Waco’s seventy-year-old Calvary Baptist Church. They were the same group of fundamentalists who hopped a bus from East Texas to wherever God Said Ministries called them: to Little Rock, Arkansas, to rebuke the church that accepted Bill Clinton; to Stephen F. Austin State University to condemn women’s basketball. The same group whose leader, the Reverend W.N. Otwell, believed men should reign over women and mankind should be split by color.

They were here for God. They were here for the news cameras. They were here for her. She had been nervous the night before. But now, as she, her husband, Tim, and their children, Taylor and Lucy, hurried past the sweaty, shouting men, Julie Pennington-Russell was calm. Peaceful. If anything, the picketers just added to the electricity of this day. The Lord’s Day. Her first day at Calvary as senior pastor.

The vote to bring her here had not been unanimous: 190 to 73. But those young and old who believed calling a woman went against God’s word gave this thirty-seven-year-old minister the greatest gift of all: They left before she arrived. Now those who really wanted her were waiting. Now it was time to get down to the business of being a church. Of loving God. She was so called.

But first, a few more feet.

A few more feet until she would reach the white wooden pulpit, behind which she would remain for the next nine years, and preach a message of change.

Women have no authority!

A few more feet until she would step in front of Calvary’s choir, her cream jacket and sandy blond pixie haircut crisp against their cobalt robes and scarlet sashes.

Working women equal moral corruption!

A few more feet until she would rally this all-white, 150-person flock floundering in one of the Lone Star State’s poorest, most crime-ridden ZIP codes into a flourishing, multicultural discipleship of 500.

Working mothers equal child abuse!

A few more feet until she would become the first female pastor of a Southern Baptist church in the state of Texas.

A few more feet.

Head swiveling about, Taylor, seven, squeezed her hand.

“Mom! Who is Jezebel, and why are they calling you that?”

“We’ll talk later—let’s keep walking.”

And so they did.

By the benediction, the news cameras were gone, and so were the shouting men.

Ten years and some 875 miles to the east later, dull silver clouds stretch idly in the heavens as dawn breaks above this holy ground. Below, on the lip of a broad lawn, two stone marquees anchor the cross-capped steeple of First Baptist Church of Decatur into the corner of Clairemont Avenue and Commerce Drive. The marquees are the world’s window into the church, and today twenty-two white letters proclaim the name of its recently appointed pastor.

A new house of worship. A new life. A new mission for Julie Pennington-Russell.

Organized alphabetically, the marquee’s extra letters lean in cubby-holes in the church copy room. Julie is there, as she is every Sunday morning at eight, standing before the altar of her “holy copier” in Birkenstocks and jeans. She’s forty-seven now, but her years reveal themselves lightly. Gold-rimmed glasses frame her burnt-umber eyes, and strands of gray have only begun to sprout from the bangs of her still-short sandy blond hair. After she laughs—and she does, often—the apostrophes around her mouth are inclined to remain.

At the copier, she reduces the manuscript of the day’s sermon in size, then turns to the paper cutter and positions her stack. A grinding metallic screech cleaves her humming as she raises the cutter’s handle into position.

“I’ve always sort of envied preachers . . .”

Lift, cut, turn.

“ . . . who could have three words on a piece of paper, you know.”

Lift, cut, turn.

“But whenever I do that, I have flashbacks to my seventh grade piano recital . . .”

Lift, cut, turn.

“ . . . when I forgot the piece in the middle.”

Lift, cut, turn.

“You know, you’re playing it by memory . . .”

Lift, cut, turn.

“ . . . and it all goes blank.”

Eighteen times she lifts and cuts and turns her sermon. Then sheet by sheet she carefully tapes the stack into the onionskin-thin pages of her “preaching Bible.” It’s a version she no longer uses—New American Standard—but large and floppy it feels good in her hands; she likes to hold a Bible when

she preaches. Through decades of use its burgundy leather has weathered in spots, but on the cover, stamped in gold, "Julie Kay Pennington" is still visible. It was a gift from her mother.

Barbara and Ron Pennington shared many things. They were born and bred in Birmingham, Alabama; they attended the same elementary school; and both lost fathers—hers, a mine inspector, his, a coal miner—in the same mine explosion. They shared a loving, happy home and two children, Julie and baby Ron, whom Julie just called "Brother."

But they would not share this. Shortly after Julie was born on July 4, 1960, Ron was reassigned from Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio, to Bermuda. It was there among the white sands and palm shade that Barbara was baptized in a Baptist church. She was now a believer. Ron, on the other hand, though he had professed his faith as a teenager, had since become disillusioned with the church. People weren't *real* there—they were always ducking behind stained glass and talking like they had steeples down their throats. He didn't feel welcome. No, thanks.

From then on, it was Barbara who would share her faith with Julie and Brother. It was Barbara who would haul them from Baptist church to Baptist church all over the country, wherever her husband was stationed. American Baptist churches, Independent Baptist churches, Southern Baptist churches. Big churches, little churches, and even a

church that met in a school bus in the middle of a California field. Most traditional, some conservative, all loving.

Eventually, Barbara's faith became Julie's, but as a Christian and eventually as a pastor, Julie took something just as valuable away from her father's sidelong glances at the church. She has little tolerance for "fakey, insincere God talk" and likes a little irreverence.

"You don't have to have been in Sunday School for twenty years to get that God is real and amazing and wonderful—that's how I like to preach."

By eight-thirty, the preacher is standing in her office, talking to herself. Bespectacled head bowing into her sermon, cross swinging from her neck, Pastor Julie leans over the day's message, mutters it aloud, makes changes in red pen, and sings along with praise music. It's an important day. Deacon ordination. A sea foam compact pops open, a golden tube of lipstick twists up.

Still in her Birkenstocks and jeans, she walks down the hall and around the corner to Carreker Fellowship Hall for the first service of the day, "Fresh Start." Hot coffee, its strong smell sliding across this basement room beneath the sanctuary, is offered to those who need more than Jesus for a jolt this morning. But Julie, after introducing a few new faces to a few old ones and getting miked up, heads straight for the stage and gathers the deacons-to-be—eight men, six women—tightly around for last-min-

ute instructions.

Across the room, Taylor, a sturdy seventeen-year-old with soft brown curls, and Lucy, thirteen, a blonde whose locks are perpetually pony-tailed, sit in two tall coffeehouse-style chairs and poke at one another. On stage, Tim, silver snow frosting his once-red curls, tunes up with the Fresh Start band, a caramel-colored bass across his waist. Soon the rows of cushioned seats and leather recliners fill with families and couples and teens in denim.

"Well friends, welcome to this hour and to this time of worship together."

She introduces herself, in case there are some first-timers, encouraging them to call her something other than her mouthful of a name: Julie, Pastor Julie, Julie P-R, JPR. Holding the burgundy Bible in her left hand and gesturing with the right, she begins to teach from Acts 6:1-7. Once a communicative disorders undergrad at the University of Central Florida, she orates with the careful cadence of an elementary school teacher. After the resurrection of Jesus, the early church was growing. New members were joining. Problems were arising.

"You know, we're only six chapters into the story of the whole church of Jesus Christ—just six chapters!—before complaining breaks out. Someone has said this is ironclad proof that you can trace Baptists all the way back to the New Testament!"

The crowd laughs. There is truth in humor, and Julie employs it often.

In Jerusalem, the church leaders decide to appoint deacons—"ser-



vants of the Servant”—to attend to the neglected needs of the congregation. Now it is time to ordain her own.

“Do you know what our deacons’ chief function in this church is around here? It’s to help 100 percent of our congregation—every man, every woman, every young person—to be engaged in ministry of some kind that makes their heart sing and for which they’ve been gifted by God.

“And so at First Baptist Church, we remind ourselves often that in the church of Jesus, *every* believer gets changed by God. That’s how we all come in—transformed. And then we’re gifted and called and equipped to use our gifts, and then turned loose to serve with those gifts in the church or in the world. And in the image of Jesus, *everybody* has a piece of the mission.”

One by one the deacons, black and white, share their prayers for First Decatur in the coming year. Last, a friendly brunette in a black skirt and high heels takes the mic.

“Hi, my name is Carla Stanford, and my prayer for our church is that all of us here as believers will open our ears and we will listen for God when he says, ‘Follow me.’ And we’ll say, ‘Here I am, Lord, send me.’ And we will go out and we will do the mission of Jesus Christ.”

In the beginning she did not believe God condoned anyone in lipstick or a skirt or high heels or whose name was Julie or Carla becoming a deacon, much less a minister. Women were equal to men in God’s eyes, yes, but hadn’t the genders been given *different* spiritual gifts? Surely being a church leader was not a woman’s call.

It was her first semester at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in San Francisco, 1982. She was there for the worst reason possible, and she knew it. At the very conservative Southern Baptist church she had attended in Orlando during college, it was in the water, in the culture: If you were graduating school and you loved Jesus *just this much*, then you went to seminary—it was just the spiritual

thing to do. Well, she loved Jesus even a little bit more than *this much*, so with \$11 in her pocket, off she flew.

At the Orlando church it had also been proclaimed from the pulpit: Women have this place but not that. She knew of Paul’s letters to the early church. 1 Timothy 2:11-12: *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. And 1 Corinthians 14:33-35: As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire of something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.* But now that she was at seminary, she was confused. There were women here at Golden Gate—God-connected, smart, gifted, warm, wonderful women—who claimed to be called to the ministry. Not music ministry or children’s ministry or any of the other roles toward which women typically turned, but get-in-front-of-the-church-and-lead-people ministry. And this Southern Baptist seminary was *affirming* those calls. How could this be? She needed to talk to God.

So every morning she set her alarm forty-five minutes early. *Beep! Beep!* Five-thirty. After padding down her dormitory hall to a prayer room, she got down on her knees and began to pray for these “poor, misguided women.” *Why do they believe this, Lord? Are they going against your Word? Or is there more to the story?*

With time, a door began to crack open, and light, little by little, began to creep into a very dark room. She spoke with professors. *Paul’s letters were written to specific churches dealing with specific problems—including hindrances to worship, such as talkative women.* She spoke with administrators. *His words were descriptive of a first-century culture, not necessarily prescriptive of all to come.* She spoke with peers. *And what of Phoebe, whom Paul praises as a deacon? And Paul’s friend Priscilla, who along with her husband, Aquila, taught the preacher Apollos—a man—*

more accurately the ways of the Lord? She looked in the Bible to the deity whose example all Christians were supposed to follow. *And after the resurrection, didn’t Jesus choose to reveal his risen self to a woman, Mary Magdalene, before his own disciples? Didn’t he deem her worthy to go and tell the good news? Wasn’t she the apostle to the apostles?*

Nudge by nudge, her worldview changed. She changed. She began to feel the full weight of the apostle Peter’s words at the Pentecost, when Jesus ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit entered all those who believed:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions; your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

And Paul’s own words regarding belief:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

No male.

No female.

One.

“I’ve got my pearls all ready for eleven o’clock.”

After Fresh Start, Julie rushes back to her office. To adjust her mind-set from the casual culture of the early service to that of the eleven o’clock—the more populated, conventional of the two—is the hardest part of her day. She emerges from her private bathroom wearing a black blazer over a black sleeveless blouse, a long, multicolored skirt, black loafers, and her string of pearls.

She sits. She hums. She reads back over her sermon. A sermon she spent the whole week preparing. A sermon she had to forego a Saturday with her husband and children to finish. A sermon she awoke at 4 a.m. to perfect. But in her eyes, she is not perfect. It is not perfect. There is always room for improvement.

Upstairs, the sanctuary begins to fill.

Preaching is a practice; if done well, an art. The first day of her first preaching class left her doubting her call to do either. She was one of two women out of forty students. As soon as he entered the room, the professor spotted them.

“Ah! I see we have two ladies in the class! Well, that’s marvelous! And you know what I always say: that a woman preaching is rather like a dog walking on its hind legs—neither of them does it well, but you’re surprised it can be done at all!”

These were actually the words of another man—eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson. Sweeping the professor’s bias aside, Julie otherwise received only encouragement for her craft. Eventually she was even given the chance to put what she was learning into practice.

One Sunday her second year of seminary, she and a few friends happened into a funky little white wooden house of worship in San Francisco. It was two-story and ramshackle, with marine blue trim and a neon sign that said Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church. Six multicultural congregations shared the building, and from seven in the morning until ten at night, any number of languages—Japanese, Cambodian, Estonian, whatever—could be heard singing and praying. That morning, the English-speaking congregation was in desperate need of a music minister. Julie played piano; she had a good voice. In a church of

eighty, this was qualification enough. Would she help? She agreed.

One day after hearing her give a devotional in a staff meeting, the pastor, Bill Smith, gave her some advice.

“Julie, you should really think about preaching.”

Her first chance behind the pulpit came when Pastor Smith decided to go on vacation. She was nervous, but almost eighty hours of writing and praying and rehearsing later, she put on her “girl suit” and drove to church. The early service was sparsely attended that Sunday morning—twelve people. But as she began to speak, something happened. She felt invaded by light. In nine minutes, the sermon was over; in her excitement she had spoken too quickly. But Pastor Smith would give her more chances to preach and to pastor. She visited the ill and conducted funerals and led groups. She made mistakes and she learned from them. Not everyone was thrilled. Mildred Butner, a formidable bulwark of a woman, pulled Pastor Smith aside.

“If I’m ever sick, *don’t send the kid to my bedside.*”

When Julie graduated seminary, Nineteenth Avenue called on her again, to stay in San Francisco as associate pastor. She agreed. A few years later, when Smith left for a church in Washington, D.C., they called on her once more. Will you be our pastor?

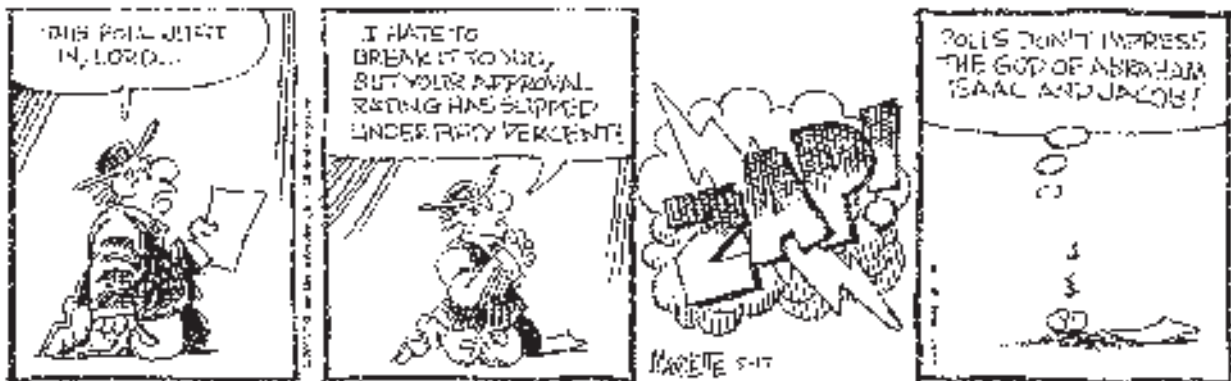
This time, she said no. She felt a call, yes—but that call was still overwhelming. She needed more time. So for the next three years she continued as associate pastor to love the congrega-

tion. To listen to God. And when that pastor left they asked her again to take the position. This time, she said yes.

The summer before she began her pastorate she married Tim, the laid-back product of a childhood in Hawaii and California. The son of a preacher, Tim encouraged her calling. They had met while they were both in seminary, and though Tim had served as a campus minister before they were married, he never aspired to be a pastor himself. Instead, he worked in web design and served in the church, as he has at all of Julie’s pastorates, by being a deacon, playing in the band, doing whatever needed doing. When the kids came—and they did, quickly—Tim helped take care of them. “Parenting our children together, there’s no way I could do what I do if he weren’t carrying even more than half the load.”

With his support, Julie led the small but energetic membership of Nineteenth Avenue for six years. Every week, seminary students and professors, University of California medical students, internationally recognized opera singers, and even the president of Golden Gate crowded the little church to hear her preach. Her gender, in general, was a non-issue. This was San Francisco, after all, where being a Baptist *anything* was a very conservative choice—and a female pastor was not the strangest or craziest or most radical thing one could hope to be.

There were members of the California State Baptist Convention, though, who did not agree. Five



years in a row, other Baptists tried to unseat Nineteenth Avenue's messengers at the meeting—and twice succeeded—because the church's pastor was a woman. They did not know her, of course. They did not *need* to know her, or that her congregants loved her, or the number of people she had led to the Lord. All they needed to know they could tell by her name: Julie Pennington-Russell.

On her last day at Nineteenth Avenue, fourteen years since first stepping through the door, she and Mildred Butner wept in one another's arms. It was time to move on. Calvary and Waco and the picketers called.

Upstairs, a more aged laity than that of Fresh Start sits and talks and reads the worship program. Thin, rectangular pillows the color of banana flesh cushion the pews the congregants perch upon, hard wooden benches painted cream. The cushions, more often suggesting comfort than supplying it, are worn now, their crevices filled with the lint from a thousand Sunday bests. Upon the backs of the pews rest Baptist Hymnals, two by two, but they are rarely used anymore. Instead, three giant screens—two above the altar, one in the back, for the choir—now project the words of the songs they will sing and the scriptures they will recite in a font size fit for Goliath. Above, six brushed metal chandeliers suspend from the ceiling, lofty as the firmament. Late morning rays filter through the pastel panes of fourteen stained glass windows, softly arched, aiding the light. Cutting through the windows is a balcony that fills up with youths in hoodies and button-downs and basketball shorts as the prelude ends. Tim takes his seat there now, by himself, as Lucy joins her friends and Taylor his.

Down front behind the forest green altar, a choir in vanilla robes and violet sashes enters, along with a few faithful musicians: a trombone, a sax, two trumpets, two French horns. Dozens of silver cylindrical organ pipes, short and thin and tall and squat, rise up from windows in the baptistery above them.

Julie says "Amen" to a prayer with her deacons in a small classroom outside the sanctuary and then joins the congregation. Not sitting in a chair overlooking them from the altar but among them, on a front pew. A shepherd to her flock.

Yes I am the pastor.

Yes I am a leader.

Yes the office of minister is an honor and it's sacred and it's mysterious and I love it. But I am not doing anything that any of you could not do, were you so called and so gifted.

I am but one of you.

As the service begins and the choir sings, she sits there, ankles crossed, hands folded, leaning forward into the moment with a look of rapturous joy. The crowd behind her and above her is thick today, most likely pushing 500. The rolls of the church hold more names, though, closer to 2,700. First Baptist Decatur is now the largest Southern Baptist church with a woman at its helm.

About fifteen rows back from Pastor Julie sits John Britt, a tall, stately man silvered in his age who has been a member here some twenty-four of the church's 146 years. Anyone who came in the front doors this morning has probably already met him. Most Sundays he stands out there on the porch beside yellowed columns and greets incoming worshippers.

He is thoughtful.

He is polite.

He is one of seven reasons she is here.

A year and a half earlier, First Baptist Decatur was without a pastor. After being voted onto the search team, John Britt and six other men and women set out to find out whom this church wanted, whom this church *needed*. So they canvassed the congregation, asking them to submit everything they were looking for in a minister. When they finished, they had a list four typed pages long. Britt showed it to Dock Hollingsworth, a professor at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, who was serving as their interim pastor.

"I'm not sure the Lord himself could qualify for what y'all are looking

for here."

But when it came down to it, what they were looking for was someone with vision. Back in the seventies, First Decatur became so populated it spawned six other churches. Their vine bore much fruit. But somewhere along the way the members grew too comfortable, too settled. The numbers dwindled and so did enthusiasm. The vine lost its vigor.

So they sent out a call. And this time, for the first time, they opened up the possibilities with three words in the job posting: he or she. Sixty-four resumes and videos later, they began to sift the wheat from the chaff. Sixty-four became sixteen, then six, then three. But like a cork, one from Waco kept bobbing to the top.

At Calvary, Julie had asked her white upper-middle-class congregation of commuters to put their money where their souls were and move into the church's God-forsaken community. *What better way could we minister to the marginalized outside our walls?* Twenty-three families did. The church was enlightened.

She had also declared general amnesty. *If you've been working in the nursery the past fifteen years and you hate it, quit! Pray so that you might find what contribution to the church might bring you joy.* And they did. The church was invigorated.

Intrigued, the seven from Decatur gave her a call.

Julie answered the phone in surprise. A woman who knew her had asked permission to send in her resume for the Decatur job. *Sure, why not?* But she wasn't interested in leaving Calvary; in fact, the last thing she wanted to do was go to a First Baptist Church *anywhere*. Surely any church that had been around long enough to earn the name "First" would have 150 years of tradition and bureaucracy and sacred cows and we've always done it this way and for heaven's sake, don't touch that carpet! It would be a jail sentence. But then the search committee asked her for a statement of vision. How does she view the church? With nothing to lose, she went for it.

. . . I believe that the church exists for people we haven't met yet. The church does not exist to maintain the institution and to keep the committees running and the budget afloat and the light bills paid, and if that's why we exist we really ought to fold up and let somebody use the building that could do some good. . .

It was a vision that shook them. This was someone who could turn First Decatur's eyes toward its community once more. So they went to Calvary to see her work firsthand, spreading out among the crowd so as to not raise pastor-poaching suspicions. What they saw there convinced them. She was warm, funny, and gracious. Her preaching was from the Gospel; she was a woman of the Word. Britt left impressed. "Everything about her ministry and everything that we saw out there wasn't about her, it was about God—and it was so refreshing to see this." They called anyone they could think of who had crossed paths with Julie over the years, and the results were the same. Everyone they spoke with praised her, including Joy Yee, the current pastor of Nineteenth Avenue.

"She has been gone from here nine years, but this congregation still pines for her."

It was time for a vote; it was down to three. The search committee talked. They prayed. And then one of the seven finally spoke up.

"I really feel led—why don't we decide to make this a unanimous decision?"

And so they did.

They then presented their nominee to the deacons. After a few looks of surprise, the deacons talked. They prayed. And then one of them finally spoke up.

"You guys, we've prayed for you for a year to do the right thing, and you tell us that the Holy Spirit led you here, and who are we to argue with that? I recommend that we unanimously adopt it."

And so they did.

After they presented their choice to the church, they brought Julie to speak before the final vote. And though she had initially been wary of this "First" Baptist, she had seen something in the faces of the search committee that she could see in the faces before her now. Something that said maybe what has been isn't what God means for it to be forever. Something that said maybe we're ready to recapture a passion for God. Yes, she thought, these are people I can love.

At the end of her sermon the congregation voted.

Five hundred people.

Five nays.

A standing ovation.

She was so called.

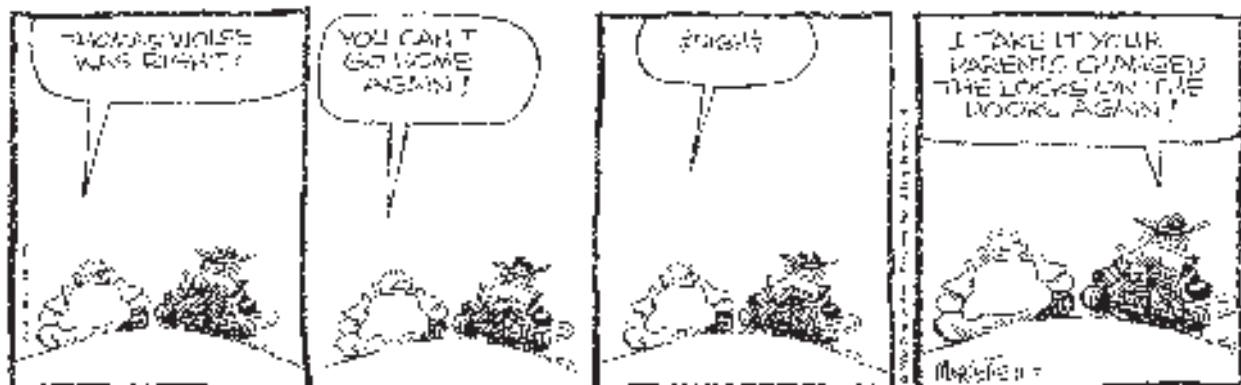
God is mysterious. his "word," the Bible, is mysterious. And when Christians can't agree with what the words inside that Word mean, it can spark hard feelings and rifts and bitterness and judgments and a hundred other perversions of what the record of God's revelation of himself to mankind is supposed to represent: love.

For Baptists, these differences of

opinion often spring from the historic denominational principle of "priesthood of the believer"—in short, that each individual is free before God to interpret scripture. But when it comes to whether or not women are equally called to posts of leadership such as pastor or deacon, the scripture can seem inconsistent: the apostle Paul writes that a deacon should be the husband of one wife, yet he mentions Phoebe as a deacon, and so on. Confusing, yes. Contradictory? Within the context of first-century culture and the specific problems being addressed by the scriptures, not necessarily.

Verily, both sides of the debate believe the Bible to be a divinely inspired verity. However, what the side that most often brands itself "complementarian" (women's spiritual gifts are complementary, not equal, to men's) most often accuses the other side, the "egalitarians," of doing—picking and choosing scripture to fit their needs—they are guilty of themselves. After all, few Baptists follow other seemingly first-century-related New Testament decrees such as the ban on women wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes in church (1 Tim 2:9).

But some Baptists have taken the issue further. In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which represents the country's largest Protestant denomination, changed its statement of beliefs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, to specifically limit the office of pastor to men. While not a creed per se—Baptist churches are autonomous—its inclusion, to some, was dis-



couraging.

Upon hearing of First Decatur's decision to hire Julie, the Reverend Al Mohler, one of the architects of the 2000 changes and the current president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, questioned the choice in a blog titled "Triumph or Tragedy? A Church Set to Make History."

"A look at Julie Pennington-Russell's education, experience, and related qualifications would appear to qualify her for a major pulpit . . . except for the fact she is a woman," he wrote.

Mohler also took exception to the search committee's claim that they "were not making a statement" but following the call of the Holy Spirit. First Decatur, however, did not so much make a statement as build upon precedent. It was one of the first Southern Baptist churches in Georgia to ordain women. And in 1984, when the SBC passed a resolution opposing the ordination of women, its pastor at the time, Dr. Peter Rhea Jones, now pastor emeritus and a professor at McAfee, preached one of the first sermons condemning it. "I want to tell you," he said, "my mother, my wife, and my daughter are not second-class citizens." Though historically affiliated with the SBC, First Decatur is also dually aligned with—and gives the largest portion of its tithes and offerings to—the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), an Atlanta-based group of moderate Baptists who defected from the SBC over a number of issues, not the least of which was the support of women in the ministry.

As in many matters, though, when it comes to Baptists practicing what they preach, reality does not always reflect attitudes. In a 2007 survey of Baptists, SBC and CBF included, 93 percent of those surveyed supported the ordination of women to the pastorate. Yet today, Julie Pennington-Russell is one of only seventy-eight or so women serving as the sole pastors in Baptist churches of any kind.

On a rare rainy night in January, Baptists by the thousands stream into the Georgia World Congress Center's

cavernous exhibit hall B. One is white, middle-aged and mustachioed, here from Virginia Beach with his wife. A green sequined pillbox hat crowns another, black and fragile, who is helped along by a young man in a sharp suit. It is the second night of the three-day New Baptist Covenant Celebration, a historic gathering of thirty-one Baptist organizations from across North America.

Back and forth, back and forth, Julie paces barefoot whispering to herself. In a few minutes the night's plenary session will begin. In a few minutes she will go out of this conference room, down the escalators, into the hall, behind a thick royal blue curtain, and up onto the stage to address this crowd of 10,000.

Speakers at these morning and nightly sessions include prolific author and pastor Tony Campolo, U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham, former presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, who helped organize this event, and tonight, following Julie, the novelist John Grisham. She is the only female pastor—and only one of two women—who have been asked to give a message.

As she approaches the lectern, the multitude sits waiting. Among them are First Decatur members wearing T-shirts with "JPR" on the front and "She's our pastor!" on the back. Tim sits at the end of an aisle next to pastor Joy Yee and music minister Mary Beth Johnson, in town from Nineteenth Avenue. Cameras flash and Julie begins her sermon. She is slated to speak about respecting diversity. But she has other plans.

"Tonight in particular, the banner we're waving and the gift we're celebrating is our Baptist tradition of respecting each other's differences . . . And friends, that is no small accomplishment . . . There's cultural diversity, political and geographical diversity, east-of-the-river Baptists, west-of-the-river Baptists . . . Northern, Southern, left-leaning, right-leaning, contemporary, traditional, high-falutin' liturgy, low-falutin' liturgy, Baptists who shout in the choir loft, Baptists who sleep in

the choir loft, Baptists who got rid of the choir loft!"

The thousands laugh, and she continues.

" . . . Is this really the gift we came so far to give each other this week? Respecting the diversity? Was this why you paid for a plane ticket? One hundred and fifty bucks a night at the Marriott? It's a fine word, make no mistake. When you and I are respectful to each other, God is in that. It's a positive thing . . . But truthfully, when you and I open the box and break the tape and peel back the tissue, is respectfulness the gift we most wanted to find? . . . Because respect, in the end, has no power to change something that's fundamentally broken in you and me. Between you and me, only love can do that.

" . . . It's love, y'all! Why is it so hard for us? You know, you'd think the church would be the first place folks out there would come looking for it. But what they often find instead are pews full of people who seemed to have figured out everything about Christianity except that it's about love!

"Let's not pretend we're any good at this; we're not. I know my own little vinegar heart can't begin to pull it off . . . But above all, let's never doubt that the love of Jesus Christ in us and through us has the power to change the world."

A cacophony of clapping and shouting.

Yes, Lord!

Amen!

When she finishes, Julie steps over and takes her place on the stage among seven men.

She is so called. ■

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Justice is what love sounds like when it speaks in public.”

Michael Eric Dyson (Meet the Press, 4/06/08).

“In the covenant community that was Israel, the idea demanded was that poverty and indebtedness be regularly rectified so that ‘There must then, be no poor among you’ (Dt 15:4). . . . setting up a social mechanism to prevent the gap between rich and poor from growing.”

Catholic Bishops of the Philippines (Sojourners, 5/08).

“President George W. Bush and seven of his administration’s top officials made at least 935 false statements in the two years following Sept. 11, 2001, about the national security threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.”

Charles Lewis, Center for Public Integrity.

“For one-sixth of the cost of an Iraq war, one could put Social Security on firm financial footing for at least the next 50 to 75 years.”

Joseph E. Stiglitz and Bilmes, authors of *The Three Trillion Dollar War*.

“Whether Carter’s approach to conflict resolution is considered by the Israeli government as appropriate or defeatist, no one can take away from the former U.S. president . . . that he brought Israel and Egypt to a signed peace that has since held. Carter’s method . . . has still not proven to be any less successful than the method that calls for boycotts and air strikes. . . . Carter beats out any of those who ostracize him.”

Editorial in the Israeli newspaper **Haaretz** (5/08).

“There may yet be verdicts at Guantanamo. But following years of

abuse, neglect and secrecy, there won’t be justice. The other place we won’t see legal accountability is at the upper levels of the Bush administration, where evidence of lawbreaking is largely dismissed or ignored.”

Dahlia Lithwick (*Newsweek*, 5/5/08).

“In the past four years at least five [military prosecutors] have quit their jobs or walked away from Gitmo cases because they believed their own integrity was being compromised.”

Dan Ephran in *Newsweek* (5/26/08).

“A half-truth is a whole lie.”

Yiddish proverb in **Context** (5/08).

“In 2003, the brash conservative banned all broadcast media from a speech in which he accepted a free-speech award. The next year he had to apologize to print reporters when his security guards made them erase tapes of his speech.”

Dahlia Lithwick reporting on Justice Antonin Scalia of the Supreme Court (*Newsweek*, 5/19/08).

“After modeling a seeker-sensitive approach to church growth for three decades, Willow Creek Community Church now plans to gear its weekend services toward mature believers seeking to grow in their faith. The change comes on the basis of four-year research that revealed fundamental weaknesses in the widely used approach.”

(**Christianity Today**, 5/15/08)

“The average American consumes or discards 3770 calories of food energy per day—roughly 50% more than the average Indian. . . . and eats 57 times more corn annually than does the average Indian and about seven times more corn than the average Chinese. Americans throw away a

staggering amount of food—27% of what’s edible.”

Dallas Morning News (5/20/08).

“These Christian Right leaders neither ‘get it’ about climate change nor have a significant record of working to end global poverty. To oppose initiatives to address global warming on the grounds of their concern about global poverty is a disingenuous smokescreen.”

Robert Parham, *EthicsDaily.com* (5/16/08) in response to a group of religious leaders and politicians unveiling a campaign to downplay concerns about human-induced global warming.

“I wish we could dedicate Memorial Day . . . to the idea of saving the lives of the young people who are going to die in the future. If we don’t find some new way, some new religion maybe, that takes war out of our lives—that would be a Memorial Day worth celebrating.”

Andy Rooney, *60 Minutes* (5/25/08)

“The decision to invade Iraq was a strategic blunder. . . . [W]ar should only be waged when necessary, and the Iraq war was not necessary.”

Former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan in his book, **What Happened?**

“Suicides in the U.S. Army have skyrocketed in 2007 to 115, the highest since records have been kept, and over 2100 have attempted suicide.”

CNN News (5/28/08).

“This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.” ■

William Penn, *Founder of the Quakers*.

Musings on Baptists, Torture, Islam, and Meganumbers

By Martin E. Marty, Chicago, IL

Baptists in the Kitchen

In 1956, during a trifaith “Religious Emphasis Week” at the University of Arkansas, I hung out at the Sigma Nu House. One morning some Baptist Sigma Nu brothers were walking with me as I went by the Lutheran campus chapel. I stopped. “You want to go in there?” they asked. Yes, I wanted to see a majestic figure of Christ on the cross sculpted by Harriet Youngman Reinhardt. Once these friendly iconoclasts got over the shock of dealing with an iconodule who favored a carved corpus, one said: “You wouldn’t want to go there. That’s Lutheran!” “So am I,” I responded, and he said: “You know, I never met one of them before!”

Back when Southern Baptists were still Baptist, I was invited to Southwestern Seminary, the “largest seminary in the world,” and was impressed by its worship, classes and faculty. Since then, I’ve been a guest on many southern college and university campuses and have stayed at Baptist-dominated sororities and in faculty homes. While the southern style of hospitality and cuisine may not be to everyone’s taste, this Midwesterner ate it up. The “sisters” and spouses in these places had manners that shamed mine; their grooming and garb reflected a culture that produces Miss Americas. A few of these women were pastors, some were destined to become pastors, and still others would marry pastors. They lacked neither grace nor graces, and the last thing they needed were “home economics” courses.

But their superiors have decided otherwise, at least at Southwestern. Pop culture, pagan pluralism or the presence of non—“cradle Baptist” converts must have led to some loss of the good old manners, mores and recipes. Maybe some of the new women are married to male seminarians who have grown slovenly. Worst of all, in

the eyes of new Southern Baptist leadership, many of the women have been called to ordained ministry, which is a no-no. The need for women’s submission to their husbands must have been what prompted Southwestern leaders to introduce a “new, *women-only*” academic program in homemaking (emphasis mine), a 23-hour concentration that counts toward a B.A. in humanities and a life as a pastor’s wife.

The *Dallas Morning News* reports that the program is aimed at helping establish what Southwestern’s president calls “biblical family and gender roles.” He adds: “We are moving against the tide in order to establish family and gender roles as described in God’s word.”

Because this is a “women-only” curricular track, one is tempted to shout “discrimination” and call in the feds. Yet the separation-of-church-and-state ethos would protect the seminary from legal enforcement. Only God’s inspired word in the Bible would count. And precisely here is where one worries about the Bible sources and these Baptists. The seminary courses are on clothing construction, textile design and meal preparation. In the Bible these tasks were as much part of the family and gender roles of men as of women.

Bible-believing Baptists have to ask: How do we square Matthew 6:25-26 with a 23-hour course on “taking thought for what you should wear” or “eat and drink”? What about the resurrected male Jesus cooking fish and baking bread for the disciples on the beach at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:9-14)? How about the apostle Paul, who made a living as a tentmaker? From what I know about (us) male ministers today, I’d say that if we cannot cook like Jesus, if we cannot sew like Paul, then it’s we who need homemaking lessons, How about men-only or mixed gender courses? They’d be

inspired, even biblical. ■

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Rod Parsley and Islam

William Franklin Graham famously called Islam a wicked and evil religion, but I don’t think he called for its extinction through violence, as in war. Colorado congressman Tom Tancredo, a wild politician, did call for the bombing of Mecca to shatter the Muslim center. Now, Parsley—as in Rod Parsley—is the flavor of the month among the controversial clergy being spotlighted in the camps of the three presidential campaigners. Parsley, pastor of Ohio’s mega-est megachurch, twelve-thousand-member World Harvest Church in Columbus, calls for “destroying” Islam.

Parsley is most explicit in his well-selling *Silent No More* and in broadcasts to large and presumably assenting audiences. While Americans know that some who claim Allah would like to destroy Christian civilization, citizens often overlook the tit-for-tat or tat-for-tit (that is, “who started it?”) calls for war from militants on both sides. As reported in *Mother Jones* (March 12), Parsley says there is a war and he wants bigger war, as America can only “fulfill its divine purpose” by seeing to it that Islam, “this false religion, is destroyed.” Though he spells out no specific strategy, he writes things like, “We find now we have no choice. The time has come” to destroy “this anti-Christ religion,” inspired by demons who spoke to Allah.

Shall some Muslims be spared—the moderates down the street or anywhere else, for example? No: “mainstream believers” in the “1,209 mosques” in America drink from the same well as do the extremists whom all citizens

condemn. Screaming that he does not want to be “another screaming voice moving people to extremes,” Parsley has plunged into presidential politics in the hope that he will find policies that will help “destroy” or lead to the “destruction” of Islam, the goal of his war.

Islam has no central authority. It is a family religion, a village religion, with millions of bases for a billion believers. Islam is not an institution or a dogma. When one calls for the destruction of Islam one has to mean the killing of all Muslims. Rather than accuse Parsley of calling for genocide, it is in place to ask him to spell out alternatives. Does “destroy” Islam mean winning a debate until every last targeted Muslim cries uncle and says, “I give up, you wind?” He may mean that. Does the “destruction of Islam” mean the de-conversion of a billion people and, preferably, conversion to Parsley’s “Christian civilization?” Try converting as many as one in your town, and then take on the millions more in Indonesia. Does “destroy” mean bombing the 1,209 mosques in America, which number includes only a few of the world-wide total? As of now, Parsley simply calls for “war.” By most definitions, doesn’t “war” mean “killing?”

The United Nations document on the Prevention of Genocide condemns attempts to exterminate others through “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, racial, ethnical, or religious group, as such.” Ben Kiernan’s *Blood and Soil*, a new “world history of genocide,” finds genocide to be identified by “philosophical outlooks and obsessions, often harmless in themselves yet invidiously related,” that supply “lethal ideological ammunition” for violence, and that these include “racial and religious hatreds.” Reviewer William H. McNeill in the *New York Review of Books* (April 17) traces such in “our” culture back to Deuteronomy 20:17, where the Lord demanded that his people “utterly destroy” the other peoples. Most Jews and Christians, we thought, have buried

that language. Brother Parsley and followers have raised it up.

Is it time to scream, “Brother, there is still time” for you to spell out how your “war” to “destroy” Islam does not mean killing all Muslims, the way a genocidist would? ■

References: Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. Yale University Press, 2007.

Torture

No sooner had torture become national policy in the United States, religious leaders were rallying to denounce it. A day or two after the proposal opposing its legitimization was vetoed and thus defeated, Protestant, Evangelical, Muslim, and Jewish leaders coalesced to present critiques. “No sooner...” may not be quite accurate. Some religious groups had foreseen that a congressional minority, drawing on the fears of a frightenable nation and on the suspicions that led to a hunger for revenge against those who threatened security, might win. United Methodist leadership spoke up last October, the reinvigorated National Association of Evangelicals made its statement already a year ago this month, and prominent evangelical leaders spoke up last summer. The Catholic press likes to point out that Catholic social policy, also voiced by bishops in the U.S., always opposes torture. Most organized of the anti-torture voices was NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, which immediately drew criticism from those who do not want to be called “pro-torture,” but who are better referred to as “pro-torture-policy” advocates. Their case? *They*, the manifestly bad nations are doing it; and, the complaint goes, the NRCAT types are focusing on *us*.

Those who join now in the congregational, denominational, ecumenical, and inter-faith denunciations of the new U.S. policy are explaining why they seem to be or are late-comers to the scene. *Washington Monthly* is presenting attacks on the pro-tor-

ture policy by thirty-five leaders of all parties and stripes. Only two explicitly draw on Christian heritages and teachings, one of them being Richard Cizik of the N.A.E.: “The most powerful argument against torture is the Christian tenet that every human life is sacred. How can we say we are for the sanctity of human life, and then deny those God-given rights. . . . As evangelical Christians, we have a non-negotiable responsibility to oppose a policy that is a violation of both our religious values and our national ideals.”

Most Christians will say they have such a non-negotiable responsibility. You will read in the new religious critiques of water-boarding, a form of near-drowning that *is* a drowning; most who believe that humans are made in the image of God have trouble picturing how one can do such a thing to someone bearing that image, however marred and scuffed and bespattered with slime it may be. The main reason churches had not spoken up more, their ethicists say, is that it never would have occurred to them that this nation would imitate its worst enemies in this matter. Torture is something “we” did during Crusades, in the Inquisition, and when Catholics and Protestants united to “do it” to Anabaptists. But as centuries passed consciences formed, and torture became the instrument only of regimes that we considered barbarous and barbarian. Religious America, Christian America, did not have to take a stand. Now it is roused to do so. One may hope and pray that this weapon of torture will be used rarely and with restraint, but to the religious conscience, even a single legislatively licensed use is a violation.

Are “both sides” on this issue using it chiefly as a measure of support or opposition against the administration’s war and defense and anti-terrorism policies? One hopes that both sides will look past the current location of the issue in national politics, and reach for the depth of the theological issue. It might well touch the hearts and stimulate the minds of many who

had not had to think about the matter before. ■

Meganumbers

WORLD magazine represents political-religious conservatism, and is rarely self-critical about its commitments, but much of its reporting is a scrutinizing of the religious right and churchly movements that go with it. So one should pay attention to Warren Cole Smith's "Numbers Racket: Survey Results on Megachurch Growth Do Not Add Up" (December 1). Smith gives instances of wildly disparate reports on membership, attendance, and financial statistics turned in by many of the congregations covered in a recent *Outreach* magazine article, "100 Fastest-Growing U.S. Churches." Typically, one church boasted 18,000 weekly attendees in 2006 but only 13,000 in 2007—a 30 percent decline? "No: A mistake," explained one analyst.

Smith reports that so many such "mistakes" were reported that *Outreach* is going to try to revisit the numbers and be more watchful and accurate in the future. Dan Gilgoff of *U.S. News & World Report* said that in his experience, megachurch pastors "notoriously inflate membership" numbers. Why?

"Media attention, political influence, and money. . . Journalists have long been guilty of taking these numbers at face value." Another expert says such lists are "seriously flawed . . . you don't get information that very closely resembles the truth. Using numbers to measure the effectiveness of a church seems a questionable measure. . ." A theology professor says if "growth alone is a sign of what God is doing, then AIDS and Islam could share a claim for God's blessing." *Outreach* begs off: "We have accurately reported the numbers as we have received them."

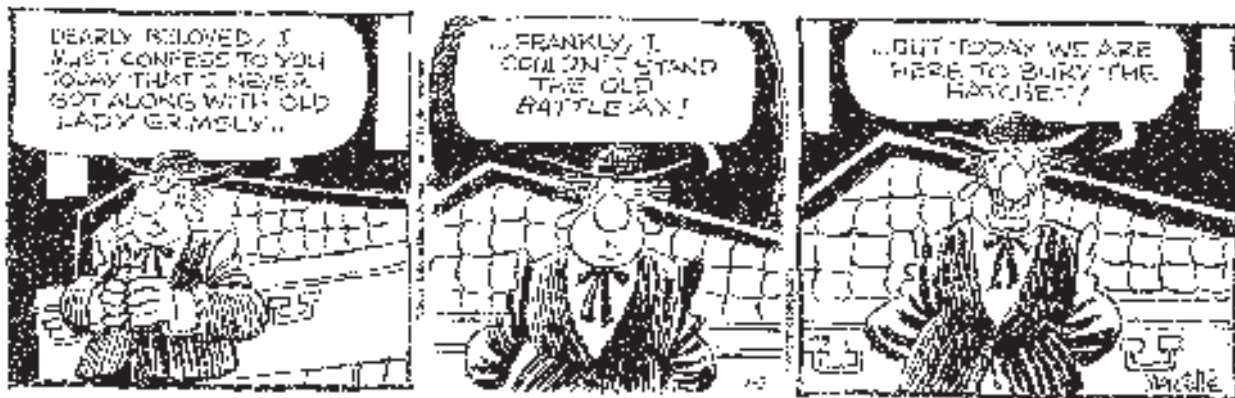
Megachurches are not alone in the policy of lying-by-statistics; mini-churches might also stretch, but for other reasons. We noted long ago that when some denominations started trying to assess congregations on a per capita basis, the capita-numbers instantly dwindled. On a personal note, when fifty years ago I was a pastor of a new mini-mission church and we had to turn in quarterly reports to impress a supervising and subsidizing board, we did not lie-by-statistics, but we were zealous counters. I have no doubt that the organist got counted in all three services, as might an on-duty custodian and every infant in the nursery. All of which is to illustrate

the contention that megachurches and media which report on them are not the only problem-makers.

The "mega-" instances draw attention in our analyses of religion in public for the reasons Gilgoff said: They are most tempted to work for "media attention, political influence, and money." If *WORLD* and the experts it quotes keep watchdogging, we may get a more fair picture of power relations in American churches.

The magazine includes a side-bar reporting on a celebrated self-examination that is big in the blog world: Pioneer megachurch founder and pastor Bill Hybels of famed Willow Creek Church in Chicago has gone public with soul-searching of his church and its kin, creatively questioning whether such fast-growing churches have done their task of disciple-building. "We made a mistake." He is likely to put energy into correcting it, if it's not too late for the movement. ■

*These last three articles originally appeared in **Sightings** (4/14/08, 3/17/08, 12/8/07), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School.*



Evangelicals: A Dwindling Flock

Jeffrey Weiss, Staff Writer, Dallas Morning News

A new book, *The Fall of the Evangelical Nation* by former *Dallas Morning News* religion reporter Christine Wicker, suggests that evangelical Christianity's influence in America was greatest a century ago and has been dropping ever since.

She defines the term evangelical as synonymous in the public mind with the term religious right. And she says that figures supplied by the evangelicals show they represent no more than 7 percent of Americans—and the number is dropping.

She recently discussed her findings and their implications with Staff Writer Jeffrey Weiss.

Aren't you unfairly limiting the numbers by using an essentially political definition for evangelical?

This is a political book in the sense that the religious right and evangelicals are a political force. But that is not my main intention. My definition quite simply is: "Who do the rest of America think evangelicals are?" What do they think when they hear the word evangelical? I know that what the word evangelical means in this country outside the evangelical ranks is the religious right.

If you are correct, what does that mean for evangelicals?

It matters to evangelicals because if I'm right, they are in big trouble. They need to be paying attention. And they are paying attention. I think what we saw with the Southern Baptists [their recent announcement that fewer people were baptized last year] is that their evangelical passion just is not there.

And for everyone else?

What it means is that we have allowed one version of Christianity to dominate the moral and ethical discourse in this country. Only one version is speaking in the public square and there's just no reason for that. Here's what it means for all the

other faiths in America: You are in the majority.

As a matter of theology, even conservative Christians can't all be pigeonholed politically, can they? The Rev. Rick Warren is a hugely successful author, a public advocate for dealing with AIDS in Africa and Third World debt, and is a Southern Baptist pastor.

My critics are saying, look, evangelicals are changing. And, yes Evangelicals are changing. I used to think it was because God, after a hundred years, had suddenly laid upon their heart the condition of the poor. Despite the fact that Jesus talked about it constantly, they had not noticed.

I know this because I grew up an evangelical [a Southern Baptist], and the only verse I ever heard about the poor is "the poor you shall have with you always." Rick Warren has changed. He is part of this new softening.

You use Lake Pointe Church in Rockwall and its pastor, the Rev. Steve Stroope, to illustrate some of your ideas. What does Mr. Stroope think about what you wrote?

He's not too happy with me. I planned to do a very different book [about mega churches]. I let him know that it had changed. And in fact I got a quote from him that I was able to use in the book in which he says that sometimes something has to die for something new to be born.

So why are evangelical churches failing by your definition?

I think the big mystery at the heart of it isn't why they're failing. The question I tried to pose in the book is why more people aren't evangelicals. Because those mega churches deliver better than churches ever did when I was a kid. Those churches are phenomenally good at giving human beings what they need to live happy,

healthy, secure, transcendent lives. And the answer to why there aren't more of them is we just can't do it.

What can't we do? Accept that version of religion?

We simply cannot go there anymore. When I was a kid there may have been people who didn't want to think we [Christians] were the only ones who were saved. But there weren't many of them. It didn't gag people. It does now. It just does. And that's why the Baptists have lost their evangelical zeal, and that's why they won't get it back. Because the zeitgeist has shifted.

But in your book you explore research that suggests people don't have nearly as much free will as we think. If that's so, how can people choose to leave evangelical churches?

We aren't making that decision. That's the whole point of the book. That's the whole point of my life. I didn't choose to get out of evangelicalism. I *had* to.

And that's how this turn has done the most damage to Christianity. It's kicked people like me out by the millions. They really aren't going out on their own volition. They are thrust out despite the fact that they lose their security, they lose their hold on God. They lose their community, they lose their friends. No angels are rejoicing. And they're still leaving. ■

Guns In Church

By Britt Towery, San Angelo, TX

“Git out the old six-shooter, Ma. We’re goin’ to church.” That might sound like it came from a Hollywood western, but it may not be fiction for long.

Some said-to-be enlightened politicians want to make it a law that allows church goers to tote their guns along with their Bibles on Sunday.

Then again, it sounds like a relic from the range wars. But, no, this gun-toting law-to-be comes from the far side of the Mississippi River, It crawled from under a rock in the state of Georgia.

Jim Beck, leader of the Georgia Christian Coalition, is urging his legislature to support a “guns-in-churches bill.”

The bill has passed the Georgia Senate and the House is now going over it with a fine-tooth comb.

The gun bill would expand places where a law-abiding citizen could carry a concealed weapon. They don’t want to offend the National Rifle Association by suggesting guns might not be a good idea from churches. Any grade-school student could tell them it is not smart, but when did politicians ever listen to the voters?

There was a time in the old West when a preacher would throw his side-arm on the pulpit next to his Bible and preach away. East of Gustine, in Comanche County, Choctaw Bill Robinson did that very thing. He was from North Carolina but by the 1860s he was preaching all over central Texas.

Dr. T.R. Havins, my favorite Howard Payne University history teacher, called Choctaw Bill “a contentious Baptist.” (My Presbyterian friends ask me if there is any other kind of Baptists.)

As far as I know my grandpa and grandma were tenant farmers along the southern banks of the Red River. They could barely afford a grubbin’

hoe, much less a rifle and shotgun. Once Dad let me use his .22 rifle (I never saw him even hold it). I wounded a poor little dove with it and have never been hunting since. Guns are not a part of my heritage.

In the 1830s when Davy Crockett came to Texas, carrying a gun was pretty natural, even to church services. A preacher friend of Crockett’s was Zacharius N. Morrell. In Morrell’s autobiography he writes that he and Davy Crockett had planned a hunting trip south of Marlin late in 1936. Davy missed that hunting party, having stayed too long at the church (the Alamo).

Morrell was known as “Wildcat,” due to his impulsive nature and fiery temperament. Once while preaching to the settlers, some Indians appeared within sight of his congregation. Two fellows, standing a short distance from the service, were killed by the Indians. (That was one day they should have been in church with everybody else.) Wildcat broke off his sermon and with some deacons took after the Indians.

Getting back to the present, would this “gun in church law” involve the expense of building gun racks here and there in the sanctuary? Building expenses in most churches is already

pretty high. But, those without a gun could feel safer knowing one is within reach of the pew. And we must not forget to protect the Nursery Department and Sunday School classes.

The whole Jim Beck gun-law has built-in problems. Could anyone wear two guns, or only the minister? Would a rifle or elephant gun be permitted? Never know when another 16th century war of the denominations might break out. Hunters might like it, they could head for the boondocks immediately after the benediction .

Somewhere back in time it was said that he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword. Even earlier in history, there was a word from God of Israel that the Hebrews should not put their trust and hope in horses and chariots down in neighboring Egypt. But I digress again.

If the wisdom of Georgia should approve taking guns to churches, I would not want to be in one of their pulpits. It is already difficult enough sitting in church with only a hymn book and a pew Bible. What will it be like when a fed-up man/woman uses his/her government-right to end the sermon as quickly as the Indians did back in the 1860s? ■

Americans on sin

Eighty-seven percent of Americans believe in the concept of sin. What counts as sinful behavior? Here’s the percentage of Americans who view certain activities as sinful:

81%	Adultry
74%	Racism
65%	Use of hard drugs
56%	Abortion
52%	Homosexual activity
52%	Underreporting income
30%	Gambling
29%	Telling a “little white lie”

Ellison Research / RNS (March 14)

Religious Liberty, Cultural Dialogue, and Creative Minorities

By Coleman Fannin, PhD Candidate, University of Dayton

Note: This essay was originally prepared for the 2007 fall conference of the Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame.

Commentary on Benedict XVI's 2006 Regensburg address initially focused on his quotation of a 14th century Byzantine emperor in contrasting the role of reason in Christianity with that in Islam. However, as the question of whether the pope mischaracterized Islam has faded, it has become clear that his lecture marked not only another step in his argument with secular Europe but the beginning of a significant interfaith conversation. While Benedict critiqued forms of Islam that advocate conversion by force, he also lamented the separation of faith and reason among Christians and argued that only by bringing them together "in a new way" will we "become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today." He closed by inviting Muslims to become "partners" in such a dialogue. Among the numerous responses was an open letter signed by 138 Muslim clerics and scholars that has, in turn, prompted a regular Catholic-Muslim Forum that will address two topics raised by Benedict: religious liberty and the separation of religious and political authority.

Baptists can enthusiastically affirm this development. Our forbears' recognition that a Christian culture maintained by coercion is, in the end, not Christian led them to stand, even suffer, for religious liberty. For example, John Leland and others pressed for the inclusion of the religion clauses in the First Amendment, and, on the whole, nonestablishment (rather than European disestablishment) was and is a welcome advancement. However, the burden of this essay is to show that Baptists and other Christians have yet to fully grasp its implications and, fur-

ther, that this hinders our capability to engage in cultural dialogue.

Baptistification and Baptist Identity

There are inherent problems in employing "culture" as a parameter for dialogue. Cultural boundaries long taken for granted are rapidly destabilizing, if not disappearing, in the face of global commerce and migration, and the center of world Christianity is shifting south, undermining identification of the West with the church. Indeed, nostalgia for Western culture can obscure the influence of contemporary culture-makers, especially nation-states and the market(s) they shelter.

Baptists face particular difficulties in negotiating our globalized world. Religious liberty arrived in the wake of Christendom and took root in the midst of a Protestant social consensus. No longer dissenters, we applied the democratic spirit of the early republic to our congregations. Yet the Civil War and industrialization ended Protestant cultural hegemony in the North and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy marked the beginning of the end in the South. Much of the conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention in the last century was a consequence of divergent reactions to this breakdown. The most prominent type of contemporary Baptists have enforced rigid doctrinal statements and aligned themselves with evangelicals (and, in some cases, Catholics) in order to resist secularization and pluralism. Few are interested in theocracy, but these Baptists do seek to retain or recover a preference for Christianity—a pursuit that has prompted a seemingly endless stream of commentary and rebuttal.

Meanwhile, other Baptists have pledged allegiance to a secular government and a pluralistic culture, seeing in them vindication of "soul liberty"

(or "soul competency"), a corollary of religious liberty. A classic formulation was given by Herschel Hobbs when he proclaimed that "religion is a personal matter between the individual and God" and that soul liberty "includes salvation by grace through faith without the need of a human mediator or any institution, ecclesiastical or political."¹ When these Baptists engage public life, they typically attempt to translate biblical and theological admonitions into universal moral principles. Additional distinctions can be made, but the point is that *both* types of Baptists tend to conflate Christianity with America. Further, although their response has been regrettable and ineffective, the first type has better recognized the implications of the loss of cultural norms and the rise of individualism.

Martin Marty was essentially correct in observing that American Christianity has been "baptistified." He identified this phenomenon not as the growth of Baptist denominations but as the prevalence of an approach to faith that grounds religious identity in personal decision.² Again, the second type of Baptists see baptistification as vindication. For example, Walter Shurden argues that Marty accurately understood the Baptist "style" as permeated by a spirit of "FREEDOM," while William Hull contends that baptistification occurred because Baptists were "uniquely suited by history and temperament to offer common people an understanding of the Christian faith that coincided with their quest for freedom in a new land of opportunity."³ Hull and Shurden may be correct, but they and other such Baptists have failed to adequately consider how this land has changed, why a distinctly Baptist identity remains necessary, and whether there is a downside to grounding it in freedom. In short, does soul liberty—that is, volun-

tarism—produce religious vitality or religious superficiality?

In their landmark study *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah and his co-authors concluded that Americans find it difficult to employ moral language in ways that point toward a shared vision of the nature and purpose of life. Instead they tend to correlate “success” with being faithful to one’s values, “freedom” with the ability to choose them without coercion, and “justice” with the establishment of procedures that provide equal opportunity to exercise one’s freedom.⁴ About the same time, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre explained that because Western culture has all but lost the narrative that gives meaning to its ethical grammar, its quest for a universal rationality independent of religious or other similar commitments is bound to collapse into the assertions, the will-to-power, of individual selves.⁵ Abandoning this quest implies neither accepting relativism nor retreating into a self-contained tradition, but it does problematize our public discourse and call into question the state’s capability of managing a society full of multiplying conceptions of the good.

These conclusions point beyond our discussion, but can be more concrete. Baptists of all stripes are finding that their congregants are no longer part of a context in which a tradition can be grasped. Few stay members of any church for long, and their involvement is often minimal. Also, while it is right to lament divisions among us, the decline of denominations has brought neither unity nor an adequate replacement for the formation they provide. In short, a lack of continuity and accountability has left an authority vacuum easily filled by secular reasoning or the personality- and media-driven groups that dominate the American religious landscape. This helps explain why Baptists and other Protestants struggle to counter problematic elements of our culture; instead we identify ourselves as conservatives or liberals and fight over who are the true heirs of the American project. Doing

otherwise will require recovering what James McClendon described as “a shared and lived story” that is not the story of the Enlightenment, democracy, or capitalism with a Christian gloss but that of the Messiah who perished on a cross rather than accede to the demands of empire.⁶ This story is irreducibly communal and sustained across time by authorities other than the self.

Americanism and Pluralism

One alternative is the Catholic Church, which defies idolatrous claims of sovereignty via a transnational unity embodied by a hierarchy of ministry. However, while the story of Catholicism in the United States is very different from that of Protestantism, the outcome has been much the same. A detailed narration would show that the children of Catholic immigrants first dreamed of converting the nation, then sought to counter nativism by proving their loyalty to it (especially by fighting in its wars), and finally joined the postwar consensus and escaped their subculture to achieve the same levels of social, economic, and political success as their neighbors. They came to view their church’s theoretical rejection of religious liberty as an embarrassment. “Americanists” such as John Ireland, John Keane, and Denis O’Connell had challenged this position, only to be rebuked by Leo XIII in *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* (1899). Not until the adoption of the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965) by the Second Vatican Council did Catholic teaching shift definitively.

Central to this story is John Courtney Murray, the Jesuit who helped compose the declaration. Murray affirmed the Protestant claim that the West had developed a new truth about human dignity: *freedom*, the responsibility of each citizen for his or her religious beliefs. He added that this truth is grounded in natural law, a fact reflected in the “self-evident” truths in the Declaration of Independence and the consensus balancing individual freedom and

civic order inaugurated by the First Amendment. Contra secularists, other Catholics, and Baptists such as J. M. Dawson, Murray contended that the establishment and free exercise clauses are not “articles of faith” but “articles of peace.” That is, they are not *theological* but *political* and therefore do not imply a free-church ecclesiology. In fact, Murray sensed that voluntarism had eroded the consensus and that civic unity was endangered by a transition from *religious* to *moral* pluralism. He solemnly explained what “widespread dissent” would entail: “The guardianship of the original American consensus . . . would have passed to the Catholic community.”⁷

Murray has been critiqued for a distinction between the temporal and spiritual orders that leads to dualism. Michael Baxter explains that although Murray was right about the political arrangement of the United States, by “excluding final ends” this arrangement “relegate[s] matters of theological truth to a separate sphere.” By separating nature from grace, Murray could only hope that consensus would be achieved via natural law. Yet if civic morality needs only perfection by the church, then the church has no recourse when the will of the majority contradicts what natural law requires. In other words, Murray’s public theology provides no substantive role for the church if (or when) the consensus fails.⁸

Further, American Catholics were unable to assume the role Murray imagined for them. Neo-scholasticism, the Catholic response to modernism after the First Vatican Council, asserted that natural reason discloses essential truths about God and humanity. It followed that the supernatural virtue of faith could be applied “to virtually every sphere of life,” Philip Gleason says. “Catholicism came to be viewed as a culture, a total way of life.” Unfortunately this way of life was so closely identified with neo-scholasticism and its institutions that when the latter were abandoned the former was also lost.⁹ The dissolution of their subculture revealed that

Catholics were already so much like their neighbors that distinct ethical positions now made little sense. Those who saw Vatican II as a call to embrace modernity soon encountered a society no longer bound by the mores of Protestant-Catholic-Jew but in turmoil over civil rights, the sexual revolution, and Vietnam. Yet few questioned their Americanist assumptions; instead both conservatives and liberals, with Murray as their totem, laid claim to the council's vision and to America itself. Today Catholics join Protestants in seeing only the state as necessary to maintain whatever moral vision emerges from pluralism.

A Different Way of Seeing Things

This story indicates something disturbing about the present and offers hope for the future. If, as William Portier claims, *Dignitatis Humanae* was not an endorsement of pluralism but “a formal rejection of Christendom, ushering in a new ‘post-Constantinian’ age in the Church’s history,” then perhaps Baptists too can hear “the Johannine incarnational imperative to make the word flesh” in a new way and join Catholicism in “[crying] out to be embodied in a culture at the center of which is the church.”¹⁰ Importantly, such a culture neither coerces religious faith nor depends on a state to defend its borders.

As William Cavanaugh explains, the modern state not only created violence “and then charged citizens for its reduction,” it also precipitated “a shift from ‘complex space’—varied communal contexts with overlapping jurisdictions and levels of authority—to a ‘simple space’ characterized by a duality of individual and state.”¹¹ The key question, then, is how to conceive of culture and dialogue in ways that take politics seriously without accepting this duality. For example, “complex space” imagines identity as not being bound to the sovereignty of the self or the state. Indeed, “identity” is but one aspect of the multitude of activities and structures that constitute a culture. It follows that Baptists

have been too concerned with definitive and explicit notions of identity and neglected the everyday practices and interactions that sustain us.

Another helpful concept is that of “creative minorities,” which Benedict XVI (as Joseph Ratzinger) borrows from historian Arnold Toynbee in *Without Roots*, a dialogue with philosopher Marcello Pera. The pope may seem an unlikely ally, given that in the Regensburg address he paints culture and reason in broad strokes. *Deus Caritas Est*, his first encyclical, also grants the state that guarantees religious liberty a degree of autonomy and the responsibility to achieve justice through politics. Still, Benedict sharply criticizes the “mere bureaucracy” of a state without love; rather, a proper state “generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces.”¹² That is, the renewal of Christian cultural “roots” falls to the entities that inhabit complex space.

In responding to Pera’s proposal for a non-denominational civil religion, Benedict asserts that the “Christian consciousness” of the United States is due to the free churches (with help from Catholics) and a separation of church and state that “is conceived positively, since it is meant to allow religion to be itself.” Here “the private sphere has an absolutely public character. This is why what does not pertain to the state is not excluded in any way, style, or form from the public dimension of social life.”¹³ The pope contrasts this state of affairs with Europe, where separation proceeded from conflict between state churches and the Catholic Church. The history of the reception of the Enlightenment is complex, but the result is that Europe’s remaining Christian majorities are only numerical. “If [civil religion] is no more than a reflection of the majority’s convictions, then it means little or nothing,” Benedict says. “If instead it is a source of spiritual strength, then we have to ask what feeds this source” (119-20). In order to play up the contrast, the pope does not fully consider wheth-

er the American state really is “little more than a free space” or American society retains a “Christian consciousness.” However, this neglect does not detract from his discussion of creative minorities.

Such minorities are formed when a convincing model of life also becomes an opening toward a knowledge that cannot emerge amid the dreariness of everyday life. Such a life choice, over time, affirms its rationale to a growing extent, opening and healing a reason that has become lazy and tired. There is nothing sectarian about such creative minorities. Through their persuasive capacity and their joy, they reach other people and offer them a different way of seeing things (121).

Benedict clarifies this remark by noting that “the decisive reason for the abandonment of Christianity,” vocalized by Nietzsche, is that “its model for life is apparently unconvincing” (125). What he is trying to spark, then, is a renewal of groups that pursue a form of life modeled not on Western culture but on the love of Christ. These groups are neither a majority nor independent; rather, “they live naturally from the fact that the Church as a whole remains and that it lives in and stands by the faith in its divine origins” (122-23). In other words, they endure only because they are intentionally and visibly connected to the Christian tradition. This location enables them to critique the culture and, when necessary, the church itself.

Benedict offers primitive Christianity and medieval monasticism as examples of creative minorities, but we can readily think of others. One is the Catholic Worker movement, which continues to embody a public Christianity defined not by national loyalty or party ideology but by nonviolence, voluntary poverty, and the sacraments. Another is the New Monasticism, a growing number of urban Protestant communities united by a rule of life and dedicated to contemplation and hospitality. A more familiar example is the variety of con-

gregations and associations that mediate and break down the simple space characteristic of modern life. Renewal of these familiar entities holds great promise if it includes a recovery of the communal roots of the Baptist tradition—the understanding that freedom *from* coercion is inseparable from freedom *for* the disciplined community—corroded by American individualism.

Authentic creative minorities are not idealized and do not avoid cultural engagement. On the contrary, they embrace the messiness of everyday life while cultivating the practical reason required for discerning when to collaborate and when to resist. They also prepare Christians for dialogue by teaching the radical hospitality shown to all persons—the poor, the enemy, the non-Christian—by Jesus Christ. For example, Benedict illustrates dialogue with Jesus' comparison of the kingdom of God to "a tree on whose branches various birds make their nests" (Mt 13:32). This tree "reaches beyond the branches of the visible Church" and "must be a hospitable place in whose branches many guests find solace." As we "move toward each other with a new openness," we learn that "there are ways of partaking of the truth by which seekers and believers give to and learn from each other" (121-23).

Creative minorities enable Christians to join with those of many cultures in working for the king-

dom of God. When agreements cannot be reached, they provide us with the strength to exercise our liberty in faithfulness. As English Baptists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries insisted, the local congregation has liberty only because it stands under the rule of Christ who is present among them. These Baptists understood that liberty cannot be created or enforced from outside, and they recognized that the congregation cannot make responsible decisions without attending to the rule of Christ manifested in other places, be it among other Christians or among non-Christians with whom we are called to fellowship and dialogue. ■

¹Herschel Hobbs, *You Are Chosen: The Priesthood of All Believers* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3.

²Martin E. Marty, "Baptistification Takes Over," *Christianity Today* (September 2, 1983): 33-36.

³Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 2; William E. Hull, "Our Freedom in Christ," *Christian Ethics Today* 3, no. 5 (December 1997).

⁴Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 22-26.

⁵Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6-8.

⁶James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Systematic*

Theology, vol. 1, *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 332.

⁷John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 55-57.

⁸Michael J. Baxter, "Writing History in a World Without Ends: An Evangelical Catholic Critique of United States Catholic History," *Pro Ecclesia* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 447.

⁹Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 169-71, 174.

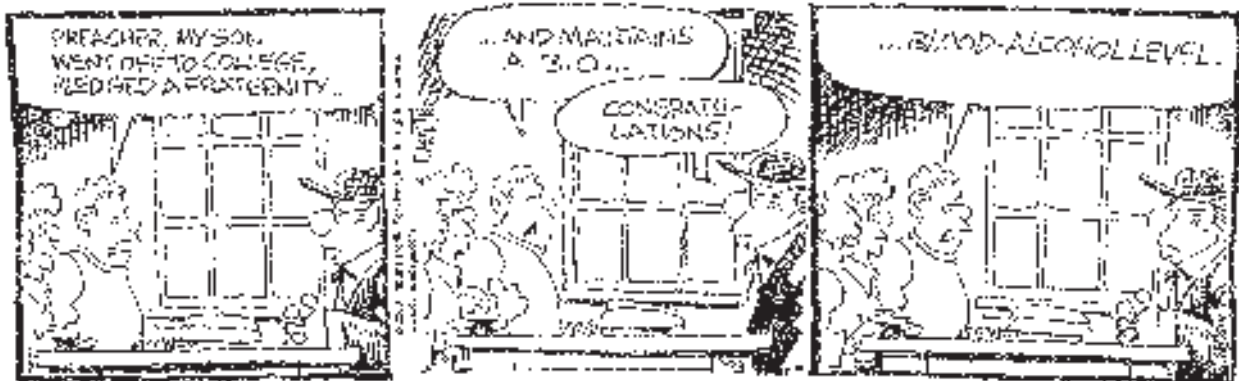
¹⁰William L. Portier, "Theology of Manners as Theology of Containment: John Courtney Murray and *Dignitatis Humanae* Forty Years After," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 103-4.

¹¹William T. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (April 2004): 249-52.

¹²Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, sec. 28-29.

¹³Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to Marcello Pera," in *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, by Ratzinger and Pera (New York: Basic, 2006), 110-11. Subsequent references to this work will be parenthetical.

¹⁴See Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), especially chap. 2.



Being a Just Soldier in an Unjust War

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

In the summer of 1992, I was leading a retreat for military personnel and their families in the mountains east of Naples, Italy. I had recently returned from war to resume my duties as a chaplain assigned to the Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation. Our primary function was to lead personal growth retreats and marriage enrichment workshops. On this particular retreat I met some brother and sister Baptists who were Italian and pacifists. When one of these Baptist brothers learned that I was both a Baptist minister and an officer in the United States Navy he was dumbfounded. He wanted to know if I had been involved in the recent war with Iraq. I admitted that I had served in a support role in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Further confused he wanted to know how I, as a believer in Jesus the Prince of Peace, could participate in war. I squirmed a bit and tried to explain that I was merely caring for those who were combatants, that I myself was not a warrior. Nevertheless he pursued the matter. He correctly pointed out that although I was a noncombatant I had contributed to the war effort, even though I didn't fire a weapon or drop a bomb. He was right of course.

His line of questioning prompted a renewed search on my part to understand what it means to be a Christian in the military. In the end I confirmed my initial assessment that the war I had participated in was indeed one that could stand the test of just war theory.¹ I felt satisfied that the nations that formed a coalition to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait had chosen the only alternative left to them. Once they had accomplished their stated aim, combat was concluded and peace restored. I am not proud that I participated in that effort, neither am I ashamed. I am confident that we did some good, yet sad that it

took war to do it.

Louis V. Iasiello, former Navy Chief of Chaplains has written extensively and authoritatively about the subject of just war. Like me, Father Iasiello has struggled with what it means for a nation and for Christian people to go to war. He states, "just war tradition is a living doctrine. It is a philosophy in process: ever challenged, ever evolving to meet the contemporary demands of each new historical epoch. Its categories and criteria remain open to continual scrutiny, study, interpretation, and reapplication."²

The ongoing quagmire in Iraq presents a growing and difficult problem for the soldier, sailor, airman, and Marine who also happen to be Christian. From the outset these soldiers of faith had to become convinced that preemptive war was justified. Like most of the general public, members of the military were convinced that the only way to prevent another 9/11, or worse, was to compel the Iraqi dictator to allow inspections. The world had to know that weapons of mass destruction were not a dagger aimed at their collective throats. When diplomacy failed, war seemed the only answer.

The search for WMDs proved futile.³ The rationale for war had vanished, yet the soldiers did not come home. Now the war has morphed into insurgency and civil war. War continues.

Preemptive war is hardly a classical construct in just war theory. Just war is conceptualized as a response to aggression. Even so, there does appear to be a loop hole. What if a first strike is so devastating that there cannot be an effective defense?

This dilemma has been the ethical legacy of the nuclear age. The terrorism of September 11, 2001 brought that reality into the laps of Americans. Americans with the corporate mem-

ory of Pearl Harbor still intact had to be convinced that a preemptive action was the only answer possible. Thus an invasion against a nation we were convinced had such weapons and the intent to use them against us was justified. Or so we thought.

If you are going to war preemptively, you had better be right in your reasons. We were wrong. There were no WMDs. The Iraqi dictator was incapable of mass terrorism. Furthermore there was animosity that existed between Hussein and Al Qaeda.⁴ When all of this became apparent the ethical justification for war disappeared for the soldier who happens to care about Christian values. A just war had become something else.

So how do they continue to do their duty? Perhaps they should resign if they are an officer or refuse to engage in combat operations if enlisted by electing to change their status to conscientious objector? No doubt some have done just that.⁵

But what about the rest of the good and ethical Christians who recognize the war as unjust and yet continue to participate? Can they be just soldiers in an unjust war?

The answer to that is yes. Here is why. When volunteers join the military they take an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, follow the orders of the president, and defend the nation against all enemies. It is not the burden of the individual soldier to figure out the justice of every combat situation. He or she must follow orders and act according to the Code of Conduct which is designed to codify ethics within their functioning as a warrior. They may even disagree with the course of war, however as long as there remains a means for corrective action they can still serve with good conscious. As long as citizen soldiers are afforded the right to express their opinions through

a free press, to legislative representatives, and certainly through the ballot box there remains the power of democracy controlled by checks and balances. Thus they can feel confident that in the end the nation will end the war. The Constitution will allow the will of the people to prevail.

Of course the same cannot be said for the Christian soldier who voluntarily serves in a totalitarian state. Where there is no form of redress, no reasonable hope of course correction it may be impossible to serve without ethical compromise. To serve as a warrior is to further a dictator's lust for blood.

I know that such an answer will

most likely not satisfy my Italian Baptist brother. We will just have to disagree within the priesthood of all believers. I am however, not only a Christian, I am an American. I still have faith that my fellow Americans know and understand right from wrong. Of course only time will tell if I am right. I pray it will be soon. ■

¹Brian Orend, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2005 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); available from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/war/>; Internet; accessed 6 June 2007.

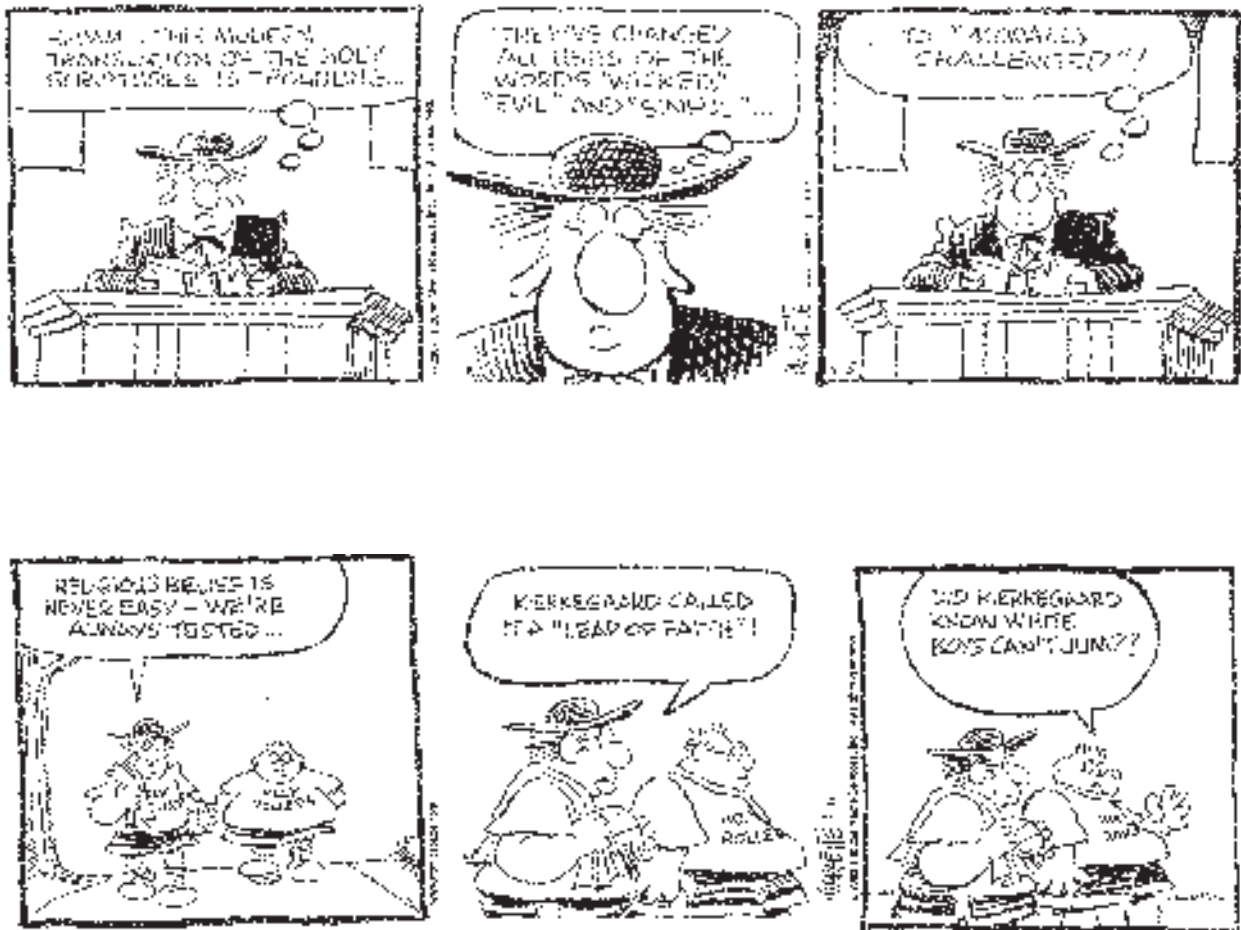
²Louis V. Iasiello, *Jus In Bello: Key Issues*

for a Contemporary Assessment of Just Behavior in War, (Newport: Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Salve Regina University, 2003), 233.

³"Search For Iraq WMDs Ends," CBS News, 12 January 2005; available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/01/17/iraq/main667376.shtml>; Internet; accessed on 13 June 2007.

⁴Walter Pincus and Dana Milbank, "Al Qaeda-Hussein Link is Dismissed," *The Washington Post*, 17 June 2004, A01.

⁵Joseph Wake-lee Lynch, "Conscientious Objection and the War in Iraq," *The Witness Magazine*, 22 December 2004; available from <http://www.thewitness.org/agw/wakeleelynch122204.html>; Internet; accessed on 14 June 2004.



A Non-Voting Manifesto?

By Tripp York, Visiting Prof. of Religious Studies, Elon University, NC

Note: In this election year many readers will disagree with the author's conclusions, but to encourage thought and dialogue the article is printed and readers may respond by writing Professor York at tyork@elon.edu.

There are few things imagined in this life more dutiful than the so called 'responsibility' of every American to vote. Despite the fact that many decide, for whatever reasons, not to vote, the very idea that voting is an indispensable requirement on each individual goes without question.

Let me state at the very beginning that any qualms I may have with voting stem from neither apathy nor indifference. It simply makes little sense to me, given that we are as Aristotle claimed, "political animals," that anyone would or should be indifferent to voting. Christians (whom I am addressing) should be concerned with the goods that constitute the temporal cities of this time between times, and voting is but one means of attempting to seek those goods. Nevertheless, I often wonder if what has been passed down to us as an unquestioned duty is the only way, or even the best way, to be political?

To be even more specific, is it possible that some form of conscientious objection to voting could be understood as an act of politics that is concerned with the good of the polis? Could it function as a witness to a different order, one not predicated on the enforcement of legislation, laws, and the lording of power over one another? If so, what would be the rationale for such an objection, or at least a hesitation, to the act of voting? What sort of witness would this attempt to make? In order to answer these questions I have jotted down eight possible reasons why voting could be problematic for Christians. If nothing

else, at least dealing with these possible objections should make us more conscientious voters, if we decide Christian civic responsibility entails voting.

I. Romans 13 demands subordination to the government.

Which government? All governments. Paul (while sitting in jail) demanded that Christians are to be submissive to all powers that be because, despite how fallen they are, they, nevertheless, are ordained by God. Rebellion against such powers is understood as rebellion against God and is, thus, not permitted. It makes little sense, therefore, to perpetuate any order that was founded on explicit disobedience to God. The United States of America only comes into being inasmuch as it rebelled against the God-ordained powers of the English monarchy (the irony of this is rich as the most patriotic of souls love to use this text to demand obedience to every whim of their beloved nation-state without recognizing the hypocrisy that made it possible for it to come into being in the first place). To vote for the maintenance of such an order seems to approve of this act of disobedience against God, or at least renders Paul's command nonsensical as it can be disobeyed if enough time has elapsed from the inception of the said rebellion/revolution.

II. Jesus requires that his disciples not be like those Gentiles who lord their power over others, even it is for some sort of 'good' (Mt 20:25).

Christians are, as Jesus says in Matthew 20:26, not to be power-hungry. Rather they are to be as slaves to one another. Perhaps it would be one thing if the elected officials of this nation were forced to take office; instead these are all individuals who desperately want to be in power and all of whom beg and plead with the

common folk for their votes, all to the tune, at least in regards to the last election, of more than \$1 billion—\$1 billion spent to convince us that we should exalt those who would be like those Gentiles who lord their power over others. If we are forbidden to be like them, why would it be permissible to place them in the kind of posture that Jesus decries?

III. Capitalism, the socio-economic order that underwrites this culture, is predicated on the seven deadly sins.

Without just one of these sins, it would fold and collapse on itself. For instance, if there was no greed this economy would be destroyed. We are taught to never be satisfied, to never have our fill, to never be satiated, to remain in a perpetual state of want, all in the name of the common good. How is this even remotely akin to the kind of desires that should be produced by ecclesial formation? Goods are only good if they are shared goods, at least according to scripture and early Christian history. Sharing goods in this culture would be a sin. An aside: Let it not be lost on us that immediately after September 11, 2001, the President of the U.S. demanded that the people of this commonwealth respond by neither prayer nor patience—rather he told the people that they should respond by . . . shopping! The saddest thing about this 'command' is that this was actually a morally legitimate response by the President (as it would have been for any president for that matter). Had people ceased spending money, the economy would have collapsed. Therefore, in such a culture one responds to terrorism via trips to the mall as well as supplying a lot of missiles and the youth of the country. This is our way of life? This is what Christians are willing to both die and kill for? How can we vote for

any potential Caesar under this sort of politic?

IV. While we are on the subject of the seven deadly sins, let's look at pride.

Outside of the word 'freedom'—which is by far the most seductive god competing for our allegiance—there simply is no greater form of idolatry than the worship of, freedom. Pride is a term that is uttered again and again by this country's leaders. For some reason I am reminded by both scripture and tradition that pride is purely representative of the fall of humanity. There is really nothing to be proud about, except as one can boast with St. Paul, our hope in Jesus. Pride has become the very means that Christians have co-opted to this culture, for it is because of pride that we seem to lack the ability or desire to practice repentance, confession, humility and servanthood—all of which are at the heart of Christian discipleship. Voting is, *de facto*, an exercise in pride. Especially if you find yourself on the winning side.

V. The kingdoms of this world seem to be ruled by Satan.

Once Satan took Jesus to the mountain-top and offered worldly power: "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'" (Lk 4:5-8).

Though the powers may be ordained by God, they are, nevertheless (as with all of creation), in rebellion against God. According to this passage it is Satan leading this rebellion. Satan offers the kingdoms to Jesus because they belong to Satan. He gives them, or at least offers them, to whom Satan pleases. All Jesus had to do in order to rule the world the way most of us imagine it is to be ruled, was to worship Satan. Thus it would appear that all of the kingdoms of the world, though rightly ordained for

the maintenance of social harmony, are currently under satanic influence. One way to lead them is to worship Beelzebub, hence, my reluctance to vote for this sort of ruler.

VI. Regardless of which leader wins, that ruler will expect my allegiance.

That is, of course, a problem in and of itself, as Christians are called to serve only one Master. One way this affects Christians is that leaders of empires simply cannot enact the radical kind of peace Christians are to offer their enemies. Rulers, history has shown, must take up arms against their enemies. They must engage in warring, or at least threats of warring, in order to secure certain goods. This is a far cry from the peacemaking and non-violence which Jesus calls from his disciples. Jesus demands that those who would follow him must turn the other cheek, pray for those who persecute us (ever heard a president pray for an enemy—except that they be destroyed?), and refuse to exercise vengeance, which belongs only to God.

Yet any nation-state, not just this one but all of them, demands the exact opposite. The literal imitation of Jesus in non-violence must be rejected in order to exist and survive in the world. I would argue that any order that demands that a Christian not imitate Jesus is a demonic one indeed, a stumbling block for Christ-like discipleship.

VII: The United States may be the greatest Babylon on the planet, but she is still a Babylon.

As William Stringfellow astutely pointed out, if we are to read all nations biblically then we must recognize that they are all Babylons.¹ No nation or culture is the Heavenly Jerusalem or the City of God. They are, therefore, parasitic on the good that is the heavenly city, and the church, as the image of this city on earth, is called to show the state that it is not the heavenly city. This is her task. It is not to buttress the powers that be, but to show them, through her witness that whatever the powers that be are, they are not the church. One way to resist being co-

opted by the powers of this world, I imagine, might be to neither vote nor take office.

VIII: Voting is an attempt to elect someone who will enact, legislate, and enforce your political values upon others.

That is the point of voting—to elect someone who will legislate and enforce your convictions. If a candidate promises this, you will support her or him. That is, you expect your candidate to do what you want them to do for the betterment of how you envision the world and how you secure the peace of the city.

This process, in a sense, alleviates the burden of Christians to be the church because now Christians can ask the state require of others our Christian convictions. The church does not need to create an alternative community, does not need to be prophetic, does not need radical discipleship, because Christians now have become the very powers and principalities that Paul claims Jesus has defeated.

By the simple refusal to vote perhaps we can at least see how we have all become seduced by such a power in such a way that we can see how our faith has been compromised and domesticated in the name of something other than the Triune God.

These simple musings are but a few reasons why I am currently hesitant to cast my vote for yet another Caesar. ■

¹William Stringfellow, *Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 13.

Servant-Leadership: Path to Organizational Health

By Charles Luke, Creative Learning Consulting, Stephenville, Texas.

In 1970 Robert K. Greenleaf¹ coined the term 'servant-leader' in an essay entitled 'The Servant as Leader.' In essence, Greenleaf stated, the servant-leader is servant first and then discovers through a desire to help others the natural choice to lead them in appropriate, healthy ways. This desire does not spring from a wish to be personally benefited. The servant-leader is different from the traditional leader in that he is not attempting to assuage some need for power or to acquire material possessions. For a biblical example of servant-leadership we need only to turn to Matthew 20:26-28 in the New Testament. In that passage Jesus describes servant-leadership by saying, 'Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be saved, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

In discussing the difference between the leader-first and the servant-leader model, Greenleaf goes on to say that: 'The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?'²

Based on the example of Christ, that certainly sounds like a principle of Christian leadership. Too often, though, those in leadership positions in charitable and non-profit institutions seem to be more interested in power acquisition and personal aggrandizement than they are in ensuring equity for the least privileged

among us. In another book, Greenleaf spells out some very basic traits to look for in a servant-leader.³ He indicates that servant-leaders are interested in ten things:

Listening—Servant-leaders are intensely committed to hearing what others have to say and to listening to them in order to meet their needs. A tolerance for the expression of other opinions and viewpoints is a mark of a servant-leader. Listening to others indicates that the servant-leader values the other person even when there is disagreement about what is said. A strong ability to hear others, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is a characteristic of a servant leader.

Empathy—Servant-leaders are connected to those with whom they work, often to the point that they can feel what those in the organization feel. The servant-leader accepts people on a different level than their behavior often indicates and because people perceive him or her to be a feeling, caring person, they engender tremendous organizational identification among followers.

Healing—A tremendous strength of servant-leaders is the ability to help others heal when hurt or broken. The true servant-leader models self-healing through his or her relationship with God. Servant-leaders seldom have to hide their blemishes but often admit them and allow healing in their own lives. The ability to help others heal leads to transformational leadership and away from transactional leadership.

Awareness—The servant-leader is very self-aware as well as generally aware of his surroundings, circumstances, and the needs of others. Self-awareness enables the servant-leader to identify with the strengths and growth needs of others in the organization.

Persuasion—The servant-leader persuades rather than commands. If

a policy exists for which there is no reason or a limited rationale, the servant-leader is not afraid to review the policy or bring it to the forefront for reconsideration. Truth and righteousness are the servant-leader's best methods of persuasion.

Conceptualization—Servant-leaders typically are visionary. They think beyond the short-term problems facing an organization and attempt to establish long-term vision, mission, and goals for the organization. Servant-leaders often discuss the future in terms of years ahead rather than how the organization will do this year. They conceptualize realities far in advance of daily issues.

Foresight—Servant-leaders are marked by an ability to understand the examples and lessons of the past, the realities and exigencies of today, and the potential and likely future consequences of decisions they and others make.

Stewardship—Holding things in trust for others is critical for servant-leaders. They understand that they are primary stewards of the health of the organization, the purpose of the institution, and indeed the corporate and individual welfare of those involved.

Commitment to the growth of people—Servant-leaders are in the people business first and foremost. They are committed to the healthful development of individuals and to helping them grow. Servant-leaders look beyond the immediate behavior of individuals and look for long-range growth patterns to assist people in their holistic development.

Building community—Servant-leaders know that in order for organizations to be healthy those involved must possess a sense of belongingness within the organization; they must identify with the purpose and goals of the organization; and they must feel that they are contributing in some way

to the organizations progress. Servant-leaders work to ensure that a sense of community, empowerment, and ownership exists among everyone in their organization.

If organizations want to be successful they must first address the motivational and development needs of their people. The best way to do this is through appropriate and effective leadership models. For organizations that are focused on benevolent outcomes for people, this means finding and empowering the right

kind of leaders to do the job.

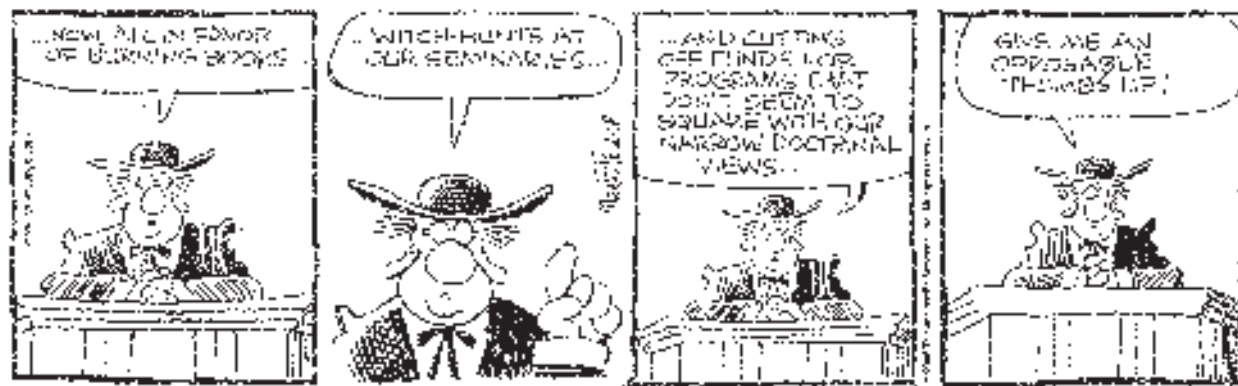
Servant-leaders who focus on the needs of others first, are critical to the organizational health of any non-profit or charitable institution. Organizations should look for those leaders who listen to others; are empathetic; are committed to healing; are self-aware and generally aware; lead through persuasion rather than force; are visionary and conceptualize future needs and realities far in advance; have strong foresight regarding probable outcomes; are good stewards of organizational

and individual trust; are committed to the growth of others; and are committed to building a sense of community among those in the institution. Only when they begin to focus on servant-leadership will institutions be truly successful. ■

¹Greenleaf, R.K. *The Servant As Leader*. (1970), Essay.

²Ibid.

³Greenleaf, R.K. *The Servant Within: A Transformative Path*. New York: Paulist, Press, 2003.



CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

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

Reconciliation:

The Kite Runner (2007)

The *Kite Runner* is a beautiful modern fable of a man who had two sons. However, this familial relationship is not revealed until the end. This secret is not too hard to guess. It is a coming of age story about an Afghan boy, Amir, who strove futilely to please his father, Baba. The title refers to the children's game of dueling with brilliantly colored kites over Kabul's rooftops. The symbolic violence of fighting kites mirrors the emotional violence between the boys, and the stark war violence within Afghanistan.

Only when Amir wins the annual kite flying tournament with a higher score than his father's old record does Amir begin to feel a little confidence. Amir is an artistic child who likes to read and make up stories, but his father is disappointed with him mainly because he is so weak.

The movie is based on a debut novel by Khaled Hosseini, himself an Afghan immigrant in California who is now a doctor. It is said to be the first Afghan novel written in English. There are some strong autobiographical elements in the novel. The general outline of events corresponds to the author's own life, including the asymmetrical relationship between the two boys. *The Kite Runner* is set in the contemporary miseries of transitional Afghanistan (part of the movie is sub-titled). The two boys, Amir and Hassan, grew up in pre-war Kabul almost like brothers, if you account for the rigid caste distinctions between them. Amir is the only son of Baba, a wealthy man. Hassan is the only son of Ali, Baba's lifelong loyal family servant. Their extreme class differences is seen in the two boys' relationship, but the story's predominant motif is their close bond as friends.

Neither boy has a mother who is present in this story. Amir's mother is said to have died in childbirth. The first important female character to appear is the young woman Amir marries in America. *The Kite Runner* is a male quest story, all the way.

The plot is divided into three main acts: (1) Amir's childhood period up to the point when the Russian invasion of the country forces Baba and Amir to seek political asylum in America, and (2) Amir's subsequent young manhood in San Jose, his marriage to an Afghan woman who was also a part of the diaspora, and his father Baba's death, and (3) Amir's return to Afghanistan on a climactic mercy mission to save the only son of his boyhood friend Hassan.

In the first act, Amir's story begins when he is twelve, and it unfolds through his close relationship with Hassan, the son of Ali, Baba's long-time family servant. Because of the strict class difference that divided the two boys, their friendship was always constrained by Amir's dominance and Hassan's subservience. Things change when Amir wins the annual kite flying tournament.

Hassan, the "kite runner" of the title, is off retrieving a fallen kite in an alleyway, but he runs into trouble. Some older bullies get little Hassan off alone and sexually assault him. Amir secretly witnesses the attack, but is too terrified to intervene. He never discloses to anyone that he was there, not even to Hassan. In the Middle Eastern moral universe, Hassan is not only tantamount to being Amir's slave, he is now impure, defiled (and defined) by his misfortune of having been raped.² So the confused Amir bears the twin burdens of dealing with Hassan's secret shame, and also his own guilt over his cowardice in not trying to protect Hassan, never telling anyone.

Thereafter, Amir becomes a cruel playmate bent on humiliating Hassan. Amir continues to act out by contriving a plot to get rid of poor Hassan. He accuses Hassan of stealing his watch. Out of his fierce, unswerving loyalty to his friend, little Hassan admits to Amir's dastardly lie, so as not to get his best friend into trouble with his father, Baba, for such treachery. Ali, the loyal family servant, feels he has no choice but to leave the beloved family and take his disgraced son Hassan with him. Baba forgives Hassan; but Ali apparently assumes Hassan's admitted guilt, and does not accept the offer of grace.

Then the Russians invade Kabul. Amir's father is forced to flee with Amir for their lives. In the second act of the movie, they wind up in California, leaving Afghanistan—and Hassan—behind forever. Amir grows into a good man, living within an Afghan diaspora enclave in America. Even in their new humbled status, working in a gas station and in the flea markets, the older elitist generation still maintains their illusions of being superior to the Pashtun servant class they condescended to back home in Afghanistan.

Amir remains haunted by the sin of his childhood betrayal of his best friend Hassan.

In the last act, set in 2000, a close family friend, (Shaun Toub, previously seen in *Crash*) calls Amir from Pakistan to inform him that Hassan has died. Hassan has left a young son, Sohrab, as an orphan back in Afghanistan, now under Taliban control. Would Amir come to get Sohrab and take him to safety? This, he says, would be a good thing. Act III shows Amir's dangerous rescue mission to find Sohrab and return him into the safety of Amir's family. The phone call revealed the dark secret that Hassan was not really the son of Ali, Amir's

family servant. Baba was also Hassan's natural father. Amir and Hassan were half-brothers by blood. Doubtless, this new knowledge reinforced Amir's obsession to rescue Sohrab as a belated action of atonement for himself.

Social and Ethical Issues. There is more than a passing connection to the archetypal stories of Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau. *The Kite Runner* is the story of the favored son and the rejected brother (or half-brother), embedded within family betrayals, enmities, inherent guilts, and perpetual demands for reconciliation and redemption. The fiction that is *The Kite Runner* allows the older brother to come to terms with his guilt by taking his nephew Sohrab into his own home to raise as his own child.

Modern day tensions and conflicts in the Middle East, alas, still await resolution.

One thing to note about *The Kite Runner* is the contrast between Afghanistan in the 1970s and 1980s, a veritable paradise (at least for the wealthy), and the hellish devastation of the present day shown by the tragic images of a generation of wars, including the succession of wars with the Russians, the ongoing internal tribal struggles involving Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and, presumably also, the Americans. Kite flying is one of the many things the Taliban banned when it came into power. The kite flying scenes represent the possibility of freedom and joy for Afghanistan again someday in the future.

On a moral note, the story is one of sin and redemption. As a child, Amir carves their names into a pomegranate tree with a legend, "Kings of Kabul." The tree dies in the next act. As an upwardly mobile young adult, Amir manages to find success as a novelist, in English, yet still seeks his dying father's blessing, who continues to deny it. In the climax, Amir is able to construct a modicum of the reconciliation he so desperately craves by adopting Sohrab, and particularly, by the way he insists that his wife's father must also accept the boy as an equal family member, and not just as "a Pashtun boy." ■

¹David A. Thomas retired in 2004 and now lives in Sarasota, Florida. He invites your comments at davidthomas1572@comcast.net

²In the real world, when the movie was released, the young Afghani actor who played the role of the violated Hassan was forced to move out of the country along with his whole family, because of threats of violence from extremists.

Family: *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2007)

Mary Boleyn: "She's the other half of me."

The *Other Boleyn Girl* explores the inexorable power of family ties, especially the supercharged sibling rivalry that leads to predictable destruction and guilt. We can put it in the same archetypal frame we see in some of the tragedies of Shakespeare.

This is not to claim that this movie reaches the heights of literary masterworks, though it is based on a popular novel. Few would claim high artistic merits for *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Still, it's worth a look, especially given that there are some accurate, historically relevant tie-ins to the role of two real sisters in the bizarre marital history of King Henry VIII, nearly a century before Shakespeare. The movie is based on a novel by Philippa Gregory, a British author who specializes in historical fictions, primarily romances, but with feminist overtones. *The Other Boleyn Girl* anachronistically highlights the Boleyn women's independence and empowerment, framed by some careful historic research.

The Other Boleyn Girl, the movie, is a "bodice ripper," a good date movie. Expect to see a costume drama, spiced with sexy scenes (brief, but R-rated), overlaid with pseudo-Shakespearean dialogue declaimed in veddy, veddy British accents. The actors are romanticized and fantasized beyond belief, in Hollywood's usual breathless form. Henry VIII is portrayed by Eric Bana (from *Munich*) as a handsome, slim, buff figure. The competing but lov-

ing Boleyn sisters, Anne and Mary, are played by two of Hollywood's hottest young romantic stars, Natalie Portman (Anne) and Scarlett Johansson (Mary). In the English Lit 101 version, Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, failed to produce a male heir, which was Henry's motivation for wanting a new wife. Mary Boleyn was the first of the two sisters to step to the challenge. After a torrid affair, Mary Boleyn bore Henry a son. But this child was a bastard, hence could not inherit the throne.

Anne Boleyn was next. She was Henry VIII's second wife. Like Mary, Anne also charmed Henry, but refused to bed him until he agreed to marry her and make her his queen. Not only did the Boleyn sisters enthusiastically pursue their ambitions to bed and wed Henry, their entire family supported them and worked towards making their dreams happen, to their final catastrophe. To them, the risks were outweighed by the hoped-for prize of becoming a part of the royal lineage.

Ultimately, Anne's only issue was a girl, who eventually became Queen Elizabeth. For his immediate needs, that wasn't good enough for Henry. Anne Boleyn followed Catherine of Aragon out the royal palace exit door as Henry continued his search for a woman, seemingly any woman, who could bear him a legitimate Tudor son. Henry had Anne beheaded, so Auntie Mary raised little Elizabeth. A loyal, supporting sister, Mary pleaded for Anne's life to be spared, to no avail. In all, Henry racked up six marriages, and failed in his reproductive goal every time.

The religious intrigues surrounding Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn was the seedbed for the English Reformation, which exploded out of Pope Clement's refusal to grant an annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine. Henry broke away from the Catholic Church in order to pursue his new marriage to Anne Boleyn. This led to establishing the Church of England with Henry as its head. The rest, as they say, is history.

Social and Ethical Implications:

Sibling Dynamics. Ponder this assumption about the importance of bloodlines and royalty in the bigger picture of human society. Why do people formulate class distinctions based on kinship, from the nuclear family all the way to warfare within and between the nations of the world? It is not just an Anglophile obsession, but seemingly, a human condition of Freudian dimensions.

Freud's theories, such as the Oedipus Complex, lend considerable insight into family interrelationships. Freud's own case studies focused on the repressed Viennese women he treated; but in his psychological writings, he dealt mainly with the developmental arc of men's lives. Towards the end of Freud's career, he professed not to understand women at all, asking, "What do women want?" The Oedipus Complex itself bears little obvious relationship to the Boleyn sisters' situation with Henry, since it describes masculinity issues, but it could shine some light on the pursuit of legacies based on bloodlines.

Modern psychology, building on Freud, has come up with several derivative ideas, such as birth order theory. Intuitively, it is easy to see that when a couple marries, they focus completely

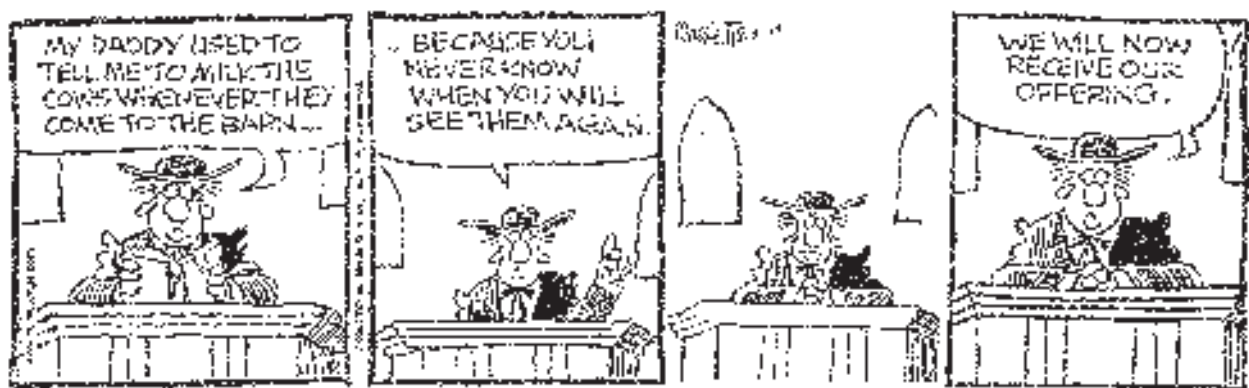
on one another. When their first baby is born, the parents have to adjust their family's orbit to bring their new child into the center of their universe. But when a second child is born, their first child loses that advantage of being the only child. In fact, as the children grow up, the parents usually assign a caretaking role to the older child, while the "baby" of the family is the one most likely to be "spoiled." One result is that the older child develops jealousy of the younger in the competition for parental affection.

Childhood expectations, embedded by patterns of nurturance and relationships like these, rule one's deepest adult attitudes about everything that matters. Oldest sons and daughters assume authority and responsibility, and become good managers. Often, Presidential candidates were oldest children. Biblical narratives, both Old Testament and New Testament world views, assume a similar common authoritative system at every social level from the nuclear family through monarchies and dictatorships.

How many Scriptural stories begin with words like, "A certain man had two sons"? Theology begins with the sovereignty of God as King and Lord of all. Faith in God begins with surren-

der of the will. In America, there is a tension between egalitarian democratic ideals and the model of an ecclesiastical hierarchy with a supreme head, whether it be a Pope or a Protestant denomination. In terms of global conflicts, it is healthy to remember that God is not an American, particularly not a partisan member of either political party. National sovereignty is a keystone of U. S. foreign policy, but not of theology. Looking beyond our own borders to the current Middle East turmoil, including Arab-Israeli conflicts and the ongoing Iraq War, these same paternalistic dynamics are manifestly evident.

Biblical family and other social models run into some resistance in our culture, particularly in terms of women's challenges to the assumption that they are expected to be subordinate to men in the home and the church. Here in this movie, the Boleyn sisters' ambitions to marry King Henry VIII and bear his son fit right in with our religious traditions. They were ambitious for the power that comes with royalty, but their avenue towards gaining power was to become royal wives and/or mistresses and mothers. ■



Book Reviews

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

A Shared Morality

Craig A. Boyd, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007. \$27.

Reviewed by Monty M. Self,

Little Rock, AR

Today many ethicist and moral theologians feel that they are land lovers trapped on a voyage around the world, with no hope of ever developing sea legs. Aboard ship they stumble around holding on to ropes and rails for dear life, but when the ship ports it is not any better. For on land, they stumble around unable to gain stability and equilibrium. The contemporary moral sea is no different. Many of her sailors feel lost in the endless waves of postmodernism longing for a return to the solid ground of the enlightenment. Unfortunately, the return to modernity only reminds us of the failed projects that drove us to the sea in the first place. Craig Boyd in his new book *A Shared Morality* attempts to transcend the failed absolutist projects of modernity without beings swept away in the squalls of moral relativism. Boyd embarks on a journey to revive the old natural law tradition by replacing its Aristotelian ontology, webbing it with virtue ethics, and responding to the contemporary critics of natural law.

The most novel approach of Boyd is to strengthen natural law by replacing the out of date ontology of Aquinas' theory with a contemporary reading of sociobiology. In sociobiology, one finds a powerful mechanism for defining human nature. Our drive to survive and propagate gives a clue as to human nature. In an ironic twist, Boyd uses the evolutionary position that washed away the old natural law tradition as the foundation of his vision for natural law's future.

In addition to revising the ontology of natural law, Boyd shores up the gaps on the hull of natural law by webbing it with virtue ethics. Like many ethicists for the last 100 years, Boyd acknowl-

edges that natural law is not a sufficient ethical system because it lacks a theory of the value of the moral agent. Therefore, natural law needs a theory of virtue in order to complete the moral system. On the other hand, virtue ethics has always been in need of a theory of human nature. A theory of value cannot stand without an explanation of how it is connected to human beings psychologically. Therefore, Boyd sees his combination of virtue ethics and natural law theory as a natural fit.

While Boyd's vision for Natural Law is cause enough to purchase the book, he goes a step further and responds to many of the classic criticisms of natural law theory. Unlike other natural law apologists, Boyd takes the criticism of postmodernism and the divine command theorist seriously. Boyd attempts to use a narrative approach similar to Alasdair MacIntyre to incorporate the ideas of natural law's critics into his mission of revising the natural law tradition. Thus, Boyd finds ideas from evolutionary theory, post-modernism, and analytical philosophy useful in his reconstruction of natural law.

The most ambitious section of the book is Boyd's rejection of the naturalistic fallacy. Boyd openly rejects both Hume's criticism of naturalistic ethics and the naturalistic fallacy of G. E. Moore. His rejection is based on a revival of the idea of teleos and Aristotle's final cause. Hume rejected naturalistic ethics because one can not derive "ought" from "is" and Moore argued that naturalistic ethics cannot come up with a definition of "the good." Boyd rejects both approaches as misguided. For natural law "the good" is defined in terms of the fulfillment of an object or person's purpose. The idea of "the good" is not an innate concept, but a teleological concept. The term "good" is about the fulfillment of purpose. Thus, one says a watch is "good" when it fulfills its purpose and tells time accurately. Hume

and Moore's criticism only works if one abandons the idea of a final cause or the fulfillment of purpose as a desirable "good."

Boyd's book is a must read for the ethicist or student of Christian ethics for three main reasons. First he provides new life to a school of moral thought that many have written of as a dead end. Second, Boyd provides a series of skilled responses to the critics of natural law theory. These responses serve as both a defense of natural law and a counter critic of her critics. Last, this book is a wealth of information about the long history of natural law. The book spends time with the pre-Christian heritage of natural law as well as the modern political and legal manifestations.

While there is a lot to get excited about in *A Shared Morality*, it leaves the reader hungry for more. Boyd makes it obvious that Natural Law is not a sunken ship off the coast of a deserted Greek island, but he has not fully demonstrated that the ship can stay afloat in the contemporary seas of change. Boyd's webbing of natural law and virtue ethics is compelling, but he needs to spend more time illustrating how this marriage looks in the realm of applied ethics. A boat always looks sea worthy in the harbor. The test is the journey out past the reef. With that said, I look forward to watching Boyd's vision for natural law battle the waves of today's moral seas. ■

Gentle Shepherding: Pastoral Ethics and Leadership

Joseph E. Bush, Jr., St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006.

Reviewed by James E. Carter,
Bermuda, LA

Joseph E. Bush, Jr. has served as a United Methodist pastor, primarily in New Jersey, as well as a professor in a number of theological seminaries. At the time the book was written he was serv-

ing as an ethics professor in a theological seminary in Minnesota. The book, therefore, is written from the perspective of both a pastor and a professor.

The author indicates that the book is written for two audiences: seminarians studying pastoral ethics or social ethics and pastors or other church leaders who are interested in their ethical responsibility in ministry.

The purpose of the book is clearly stated: "To equip seminarians and pastors with some conceptual resources that will be useful for clarifying moral responsibility in the practice of ministry. This responsibility includes three levels: (1) the minister as a moral agent in offering care, (2) the minister as a moral enabler in encouraging virtue in others, and (3) the minister as a moral leader in facilitating congregational life and witness in society" (viii).

The book is organized into eight chapters. The sub-titles of the chapters state the content of each chapter. They are: Introduction to the Moral Life; Nonmaleficence in Ministry; Informed Consent in Pastoral Ministry; Veracity as Not Lying; Veracity as Truth-telling; Confidentiality in Care; Vocation I: Creation and Community, and Vocation II: Church and Ministry.

As an indication that the book grew out of the teaching ministry of the author each chapter includes a case study for discussion and some questions for discussion. Rather than appearing at the end of the chapter these are usually included in the middle of a chapter with some discussion following.

The book is well researched and heavily documented. In fact, the abundance of documentation could be considered a hindrance in reading the book. The documentation often gets in the way of the flow of the material.

This book is not an easy read. The citation of references abound. Sources are often piled on top of sources. Lists of various kinds are often found in the book. The reasons for statements or observations are often enumerated, as "Three reasons for . . ."

Even with those thoughts in mind, the book is a rather comprehensive view of ministerial ethics. Various impor-

tant concepts in ministerial ethics are introduced. The author is absolutely on target when he stated, "For people and their pastors, ethics is not solely a matter of philosophical abstractions from life. Rather, ethics makes contact with life itself, but it does so utilizing the philosophical and theological resources that are accessible to us 'in the middle'" (3).

"In the middle" describes the stance the author takes in writing the book. Ethical decisions are made from "in the middle," at the time of decision, in the midst of an action. The decisions in ministerial ethics are not made in the quietness of reflection or from the abstractions of ethical theory. Those decisions, instead, are made right in the middle of life and ministry.

The resources for ministerial ethics are made available through the extensive documentation of the book. The index is helpful in checking specific matters of interest or concern addressed in the book.

Although this book will not be the easiest and quickest read one can have in the study of ministerial ethics, it is a helpful and useful addition to the field. ■

A Lily Among the Thorns

Miguel A. De La Torre, San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2007.

Reviewed by James Garner,
Denton, TX

To love and be loved is an essential part of our humanity. To love and be loved fairly is a quest that follows us from infancy to the grave—and, for people of faith, beyond. How are we doing as a society in expressing and receiving ethically based love? More importantly, how are we as Christians in today's world fulfilling Jesus' command to "love our neighbor as ourselves?" Are we living and loving the pure sexual ethic that God intends for humankind? If not, why not, and how do we get back to God's ideal?

Michel De La Torre, repeating the liberationist viewpoints he introduced in his earlier works, *Handbook On U.S. Theologies of Liberation and Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation* suggests that the culture

of biblical times, undeniably steeped in patriarchy, has resulted in an understanding of sexual ethics that is skewed toward male superiority, more specifically males of power and authority. However, De La Torre maintains, if we read the text from the perspective of those who are oppressed (marginalized) by sexual mores that foster sexism or patriarchy, we can better understand how to re-appropriate God's original plan. He asks us to "reinterpret passages that foster either sexism or patriarchy."

By such reading of the Bible, De La Torre says we can access voices seldom heard in our society, specifically women, people of color, singles and homosexuals—those who know what it means to live in a hierarchal society, subject to prevailing power structures. To read the Bible "from the margins," he says, "is to understand it from the experience of slaves, who would have emphasized the Gospel message of John that, 'the truth has set us free' (Jn 8:32) or the Exodus story of a God who enters history to lead God's enslaved people to freedom."

While some may take issue with the parallels he draws among women, minorities, and gays, the case he makes for liberating the female body, overcoming sexual racial prejudice, dealing compassionately with the homosexual, and promoting a more biblically based sexual ethic for Christians is a convincing one. Referencing the Bible, historical biases and current cultural understanding, he guides us through a reading of the scriptures, viewed "through the lens of patriarchy," that has been used to justify male superiority as God historically believed to have intended it. Such construct, however, is a consequence of sin, not the order of things as ordained by God in the beginning, and certainly not appropriately Christian in today's world.

For women, he says "great liberating sex" can never take place until patriarchy in the relationship with her husband is dismantled and the full humanity of women is acknowledged in both the religious and secular spheres." Such understanding is far removed from the understanding of the status of women illustrated in the commandment of Exodus 20:17, "You shall not

covet your neighbor's house, wife, slave, ox or donkey." Similarly, De La Torre says that "no conversation about oppressive sexual structures can be complete without an explanation of how race is eroticized for the purpose of controlling bodies of color." In the sexually charged atmosphere of today's world, the single is frequently either shunned for her perceived worldliness or is designated as deficient because she is "living for herself." Then she is ignored at the bargaining table when the Christian framework for sexual ethics, including those for the single, are developed.

Coining the word, "orthoeros," a term he uses to characterize a justice-based ("correct") erotic sex and using the word "familial" to refer to that time in Eden prior to the Fall in which God's perfect will for how humans are to relate to each other existed, De La Torre describes a relationship in which "Adam and Eve were naked but felt no shame" (Gen 2:25). This communal relationship with each other and with God is characterized as being the pattern for the relationship among humans, as well as between God and humans.

Further, Jesus, whose approach to women was markedly anti-patriarchal, invites us to become one with Him as He is one with the Father in John 17:21-23. The "lily" in the book's title refers to the "liberative sexual ethics" of the book and the thorns are the "oppressive patriarchal structures what have emerged over the past two centuries of Christian thought"—Song of Songs 2:2: "Like a lily among the thorns, So is my darling among the maidens."

Michel De La Torre, proving that he is an original thinker, does not shy away from advocating "a subversive reading of the scriptures" as a means to overthrow sexually abusive structures. He challenges our conventional thought. And he takes us aback when, in referring to women who have been abused, beaten, broken, tortured and humiliated, he opines that "Christ's crucifixion is not an act of substitution for our sins; rather it is an act of solidarity in our unjust suffering."

You do not have to agree with him on every point, however, to gain insight

from his resourceful access to theological thought and ethical insights. ■

Mother Teresa's Prescription: Finding Happiness and Peace in Service

Paul A. Wright, M.D., Notre Dame: Ava Marie Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Britt Towery,
San Angelo, TX

Cardiologist Paul Wright found a purpose for living after meeting Mother Teresa in 1992. His own search for fulfillment did not come through wealth and prestige, but in the beautiful things God was doing through this simple little sister of Calcutta.

Part One relays Dr. Wright's search which ends in service and Part Two details the "prescription" recommended by Mother Teresa. The ten are basic steps in a fulfilled life: Commitment to community; Reverence for all human life; Compassion and love; Contentment and gratitude; Faith; Humility; Tolerance; Patience; Forgiveness; and Honesty.

At the end of each short chapter there are lists of things to consider regarding that section. As one who had one brief visit with Mother Teresa (1977) I appreciate the writer's attempt to share her life and message as probably only a medical doctor could. Dr. Wright's journey is remarkable. The Medical Mission he began in 2001 provides free prescription drugs to northeastern Ohio residents who cannot afford it. All royalties from the book go to the Missionaries of Charity begun by Mother Teresa.

A useful appendix lists the addresses of the Missionaries of Charity in North America. There are over 200 such houses of ministry world-wide.

Fed Up With Fundamentalism: A Historical, Theological, and Personal Appraisal of Christian Fundamentalism

Leroy Seat, Liberty, MO: 4-L Publications, 2007, \$19.

Reviewed by W. Clyde Tilley,
Seymour, TN

If you are fed up with fundamental-

ism, you may, in the worst case scenario, end up losing your faith, as indeed many have done. Or you may be able to salvage your faith by moving beyond fundamentalism. In fact, Dr. Leroy Seat writes his book with the avowed purpose of helping the reader move beyond fundamentalism.

The Christian fundamentalist movement spans the twentieth century. Early in the 1900s, fundamentalism arose to challenge Darwinism, biblical criticism, and the social gospel. Seat's historical treatment carries it all the way to the "conservative resurgence" in the Southern Baptist Convention. Beginning as a seemingly sincere movement in the early century, it became increasingly militant as the century wore on.

Christian fundamentalism has several appeals: religious, psychological, and political. They include simplicity, the pride factor, and the fear factor. But it also has several problems such as arrogance, intolerance, and obscurantism.

To explain why he is fed up with fundamentalism, Seat treats several areas where abuse has resulted. These include its treatment of the Bible, its attitude toward religious freedom, war, women, homosexuality, abortion, and capital punishment.

Dr. Seat spent thirty-eight years as a missionary to Japan serving at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka City. The final eight years he spent as Chancellor of this institution with more than 10,000 students. The book is well-researched and documented, and it is very readable.

To order a book, you may send an e-mail to 4-LPublications@4-L.org or order on-line from <http://illumina.com/store/fedupwithfundamentalism.htm>. ■

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.”

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