

Christian Ethics Today

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

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COMING IN NOVEMBER

T. B. MASTON'S CLASSIC—"Why Live The Christian Life?"
Reprinted for CET and our Subscribers—**Watch for Details**

Lemuel, I Found One!

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

On September 6 fifty-three years ago I persuaded a young girl barely out of high school to leave the security of her own life for the chartless seas of being the wife of a Baptist preacher.

During that first decade of married life we passed through some chaotic times—I completed my final two years of college and seven years of seminary education. She somehow found time to bear and raise our three children, hold down two full-time jobs, acquire two years of college and seminary education (she later graduated from U.T.), and filled the role of pastor's wife at three student churches.

With a woman's "know how" and "make do," Audra washed dirty faces and dirty clothes, ironed shirts and dresses every Saturday night, and stretched the budget beyond our meager means.

She did not have a home of her own until we moved to our first full-time church in Austin in 1965. Yet in all of those moves into the "parsonage," where the furniture never matched the chartreuse and pink drapes, the wallpaper bulged from the wall when the winter wind blew, and the tornado shelter was better than the manse—she always managed to change every house into a home.

Through it all she has listened to statements like, "Our former pastor's wife did it this way!" Usually she smiled—sometimes she cried. She

has been scrutinized by pulpit committees, interrogated by busybodies, and mistreated by those who were upset with her husband—yet she has remained sweet and calm through it all!

Her job description includes answering the phone at least a thousand times to explain she did not know how to reach her husband (pre-cell-phone world), smoothing the ruffled feelings of many distraught members, and listening patiently to tearful tales of woe with empathy and concern.

She has also listened over and over to the same old humorous stories told by her pastor and always laughed at the right time. She has endured the same sermons time after time, and not gone to sleep. Over the years I have learned to listen to her gentle criticisms and take heed, because she is almost always right.

Without grumbling or questioning, she has journeyed with her husband from the plains of Oklahoma to the mountains of East Tennessee, and from the hill country of Austin to the West Texas town of El Paso. She even joined me in a brief stay at Richmond, Virginia, before going to the "foreign" world of New Orleans, where we lived on a seminary campus for fifteen years.

While in New Orleans, we fled hurricanes, endured the demands of weekend interim pastorates and week-day teaching jobs, taught hundreds of

ministers and missionaries, and once again lived in a home not our own.

During all of these stays, we were far away from our families. Yet, she never rebelled or complained, even when her husband was grumpy.

She has continued to listen, encourage, understand, sometimes caution, but always support and believe in her husband, even when he lacked faith in himself.

For these last ten years, we have enjoyed "early retirement," working side-by-side in our home producing this Journal—she serving as secretary, proof-reader, bookkeeper, and associate to the Editor, who could not produce this bi-monthly publication without her help.

Fifty-three years together. What a wonderful life!

In the Old Testament, King Lemuel asks a rhetorical question, "Who can find a capable wife, for her price is far above rubies?" (Prov 31:10). This was a cynical observation on the scarcity of good wives.

Well King Lemuel, I have news for you. I found one! ■

--JET

Editor's Note: This article was adapted and expanded from an article first written in 1971 and is used by permission of the author who insists the article is even more true in 2008 than it was then.

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Five months from now, I wanted them to remember that this occasion brought them together.”

Luke Russert, 22-year old son of Tim Russert who requested presidential nominees John McCain and Barack Obama sit together at his dad’s funeral. They did.

“The idea that you have to offer someone a \$10 million pension just to keep him around—there’s something wrong with that. . . . People taking compensation have a moral duty not to take it, a moral duty to be underpaid. If generals and archbishops can do it, why can’t leaders of large enterprises take less than the last dollar?”

Warren Buffett and Charlie Munger to 30,000 Berkshire Hathaway shareholders (May, 2008).

“There’s nothing wrong with micro-waves or mobile phones—they save time. But God will ask you what you have done with the time you have saved.”

Egyptian Coptic monk Ruwais el-Anthony.

“I learned that God reveals himself through Scripture and in general through creation. When we destroy God’s creation, it’s similar to ripping pages from the Bible.”

John Merritt, speaking for 44 Southern Baptist leaders rescinding a 2007 SBC Resolution.

“Only seven percent of pastors in this country are under age 35, and about 40 percent of today’s pastors will retire between 2015 and 2020. . . . a future crisis for mainline Protestantism.”

Trace Haythorn, The Fund for Theologian Education.

“We will bring with us a Navy/Pentagon certified copy of Senator Kerry’s full military record and his

writings and the movie footage you have requested. . . . We know the truth because we were there on the boat.”

Letter from 10 men who served in Vietnam with Sen. John Kerry who want Dallas billionaire T. Boone Pickens to fork over the \$1 million (for charity) he offered anyone who could disprove the Swift Boat ads in the 2004 campaign.

“Afghanistan produces 93% of the world’s opium. The opium [heroin] trade provides \$100 million to the Taliban each year.”

U.N. Annual Report on Global Drug Trade (6/26/08).

“Ninety Religious Right evangelicals met in Denver July 1 and decided to support Sen. John McCain as the president who most shares their values. . . . They are concerned about other issues . . . , but determined that opposing abortion and gay marriage are so central that they have no choice but to support McCain.”

Christianity Today (July 2008).

“There’s now a pitched battle for the soul of the religious right. . . . That movement is withering at the top and in revolt at the grass roots. . . . What’s new is how widespread social justice issues are in the evangelical world.”

Former Bush staffer David Kuo.

“30,000 Americans die of gun violence each year, 80 per day.”

U.S. Center for Disease Control.

“Those who follow [Baptist Calvinism] out to its logical conclusion may eventually decide that there is no point in evangelism or missions.”

Roger Olson, theology professor at Truett Seminary on what he calls “Piperism.” (Baptists Today, 6/08)

“Capitalism without failure is like Christianity without hell.”

Investment billionaire Warren Buffett, arguing that not every failing business or investment bank should be rescued, but that homeowners who were deceived should be helped.

“Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss always looks into you.”

Nietzsche.

“Let none say: God has blessed us with money and possessions, and then live as if they and their God were alone in the world. Possessions are not God’s blessing and goodness, but the opportunities of service which God entrusts to us.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Unless and until there is a safe place to which the victims themselves can report abuse with some reasonable expectation of being objectively heard . . . everything else will be window dressing.”

Christa Brown (SNAP), in response to the SBC rejection of a database of Baptist ministers convicted of sexual abuse.

“5 million opposite-sex couples in the U.S. live together unmarried, up from half-a-million in 1970.”

Leadership (Summer, 2008).

“Beware the terrible simplifiers.”

Historian Jacob Burckhardt (PBS.org, May 4). ■

We've Got Mail

Letters From Our Readers

"In 2004 my family sold most of what we owned, packed the rest and moved to Kosice, Slovakia to serve as CBF missionaries among Romany Gypsies . . . My growing stack of CET Journals was one of the things I did keep. . . Tragically my box of journals was lost, but how thrilled I was to learn of the CD [Issues 1-59]. Please keep sending CET to my Benton, AR address."

R. Shane McNary.

"The Palmer Seminary I taught was challenged by *Ministerial Ethics*, as well as pleased to be introduced to CET. You are making a difference in the ethical context of many."

Allen Reasons, Huntington, WV

"As a 65-year old biker who has 'tats' on both arms and who is descended biologically and theologically from German stock, I found the article on 'The Temple and Tatoes' [Fall, 2007] offensive and deeply prejudiced. Shame on you! Cancel my subscription."

N.B., Lubbock, TX

Ed: *What can I say? I thought my granddaughter's article quite good!*

"I am thoroughly enjoying your Journal. I read it from cover to cover the day it comes—the articles are firey and the cartoons alone are priceless. I don't know how you do it! I struggle to get a fraction of the size out four times a year. I think you are in another league."

Bill Spencer, Editor of Pricilla Papers of Christians for Biblical Equality

"Enclosed is a gift in memory of my brother Jerry Reeves, who passed away 9/7/07, and had written for CET. I can think of no more fitting memorial."

Joel Reeves, Buckner, AR

"I haven't studied Tripp York's *A Non-Voting Manifesto*? [Summer, 2008] carefully, but from my years of ministering to Mennonites and some casual study of their history, I had an immediate reaction. York's *Manifesto* seems to be an elaboration of an experiment by Menno Simon's followers 500 years ago. After a generation or two the Mennonites concluded that if believers withdrew totally from the public/political arena, that left it alone to unbelievers. So they concluded (to oversimplify) that it was the better part of discipleship to vote and (cautiously) even stand for public office."

"I also still think Baptists erred in distancing ourselves too much from the Anabaptists and their suspicion of the 'polis'."

Richard D. Kahoe, Woodward, OK

"Jane and I often quote or paraphrase some bit of knowledge from CET."

Jim Crouch, Hamilton, TX

"As one of your former students, I enjoy reading each issue of CET. Over the last couple of years, I have noticed an over drift in your articles from Christian ethics to liberal politics. . . ."

Brian Gasiorowski, Corpus Christi, TX

Editor's Reply: *Thanks for your question—I am always interested in reader's thoughts, especially former students like you, who are among my best. Labels like "liberal" and "conservative" have various meanings. Most who use the term "liberal" usually mean "to the left of where I am." The dictionary definition of liberal includes: "tolerant of views different from your own, democratic as opposed to monarchistic [the first Americans were called 'liberal thinkers' because they opposed autocratic kings and rulers], favoring reform, prog-*

ress, personal freedom, not restricted to a literal meaning of the Bible."

I also believe a strong case could be made for Jesus being considered a "liberal" by the religious and political leaders of his day—he questioned religious traditions, opposed the narrow dogmatism of religious authorities, opposed injustice and oppression, and challenged those who sought to "conserve" the orthodox views of Judaism. You could say Jesus was crucified because he did not "conserve" the orthodox views of his day.

To be "Red-Letter Christians" and follow Jesus teachings (esp. the Sermon on the Mount) probably means accusations of being political and religious liberals. I guess CET and the editor are guilty of that.

"Thank you for your offer to send a package of CDs, books, and CET journals to us. . . . We continue to mentor our International Students via the internet. We paid one graduate of the Moscow seminary to translate a textbook on Christian ethics in the Russian language. . . and two others to write a new textbook of Christian ethics. *Christian Ethics Today* offers good perspectives for our students."

Dr. Ruth Heizer and Dr. James Heizer, Baylor and Southern Seminary graduates who teach short term courses at seminaries and Bible colleges in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and China. ■

Note: A number of letters/emails have come from pastors, teachers, seminaries, and Christian schools in foreign countries, where we cannot send CET bi-monthly; however, we do send the CD of Issues 1-59 and a packet of recent journals and other books and videos/CDs for their libraries, thanks to the Piper Fund.

The Saddleback Forum: Two Viewpoints An Analysis

By Richard Pierard, Professor of History Emeritus Indiana State University

As a long-time student of civil religion (I co-authored a book in 1988 entitled *Civil Religion and the Presidency* that the publisher quickly took out of print because the evangelical audience to which it was directed was [and still is] unwilling to face up to the matter). I stayed up last Saturday night to watch the show in California. I found it profoundly disappointing, even though Rick Warren tried to be “an honest broker,” a term German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck used about himself at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

The evangelical (and overwhelmingly pro-McCain) audience was brought face to face with a man, Barack Obama, who clearly and effectively articulated his Christian faith, as opposed to McCain, who only used evangelical buzzwords and the old melodramatic anecdote of his prison-camp experience, now given a more personal Christian twist obviously as a result of critiques of its blandness. The audience was clearly not interested in nuanced and thoughtful arguments on the vital issues of the day. McCain’s repetition of slogans and easy answers (passed off as “straight-talk”) and which were roundly applauded greatly disturbed me.

The question about moral failures in their lives was particularly revealing. McCain just tossed off the example of his failed first marriage as an un-commented-upon one liner. He didn’t deal with his conduct that led to its failure, how his first wife suffered, or any discussion about how he established the relationship with his second wife—obviously (that is, it ought to be in the eyes of the “pro-family” evangelicals) a moral failure that is as great in magnitude. On the other hand, Obama explained some of the struggles of his youth, where he went wrong, and how he has struggled to rectify these. He did not slough these off in the cavalier manner that McCain did his failure

The abortion controversy was yet another disturbing aspect. McCain dismissed the deep moral conflicts that women face in this crisis with the flip comment that he is pro-life from the point of conception, which the crowd greeted with loud cheers and acclamation. Obama honestly affirmed his pro-choice stance, but he tried to fathom the issues surrounding such a crisis and the need for a social system that does not leave a pregnant woman with the sense that she has no other way out. These people, who for the most part believe the right to life ends at birth—after that you are on your own—simply did not want to face the complexity of the whole situation.

Moreover, one of the great “pro-life” issues of our time, the war in Iraq, was given short shrift by McCain. He heaped praise on General Petraeus, repeated his promise of staying the course until “victory” is achieved, and promised he would hunt down Osama bin Laden, something President Bush seems to have lost interest in. Obama again tried to deal with the complexities of the war and its impact on our country and its place in the world, but the audience was hardly moved by this.

There are other things about the presentations I could mention, but I think my point is clear. The American people have a choice. One candidate gives easy answers and slogans that tickle the ears of the populace. It’s a case of “everything is all right—just pretend;” we just need to stay the course. The other candidate recognizes the enormous problems we face, the effort it will take to deal with them, and his willingness to confront them. For him there are no easy answers.

As our economy and international reputation crumble around us, we are facing the greatest crisis since 1860. Do we as a people follow the do-nothing path of slogans and buzzwords, or do we make the hard decisions that will redi-

rect us from the path of destruction we are now following? The choice lies in the hands of every voter.

Why Rick Warren Changed

By Robert Parham, Editor
EthicsDaily.com
Nashville, TN

Mega-church pastor Rick Warren has changed from being a cheerleader for President Bush in the fall of 2004 to claiming neutrality in the 2008 presidential election. His twist is accompanied by a widespread claim that he now has a broader moral agenda. But discerning Christians ought to ask what purpose drove his shift and did he really pivot toward a more comprehensive set of moral issues?

An *EthicsDaily.com* editorial asked in March 2005: “Does Rick Warren Read a Small Bible?” That question arose from Warren’s endorsement of Bush six days before the 2004 presidential election, when Warren wrote pastors across the country that the Bible was on Bush’s side and that Sen. John Kerry’s views were opposite of Bush’s views.

“For those of who accept the Bible as God’s Word . . . there are five issues that are non-negotiable,” wrote Warren. “To me, they’re not even debatable, because God’s Word is clear on these issues.”

Those issues were abortion, stem-cell harvesting, homosexual marriage, human cloning, and euthanasia, issues about which he claimed the Bible was clear.

“There can be multiple opinions among Bible-believing Christians when it comes to debatable issues such as the economy, social programs, Social Security and the war in Iraq,” he asserted.

The “non-negotiable” language and

the five issues were identical to those of a right-wing Catholic statement intended to help elect Bush.

Warren neither credited his original source nor cited any biblical evidence to back up his claim. He simply spoke *ex cathedra* about the Bible being on his side, on Bush's side.

When the re-elected Bush nominated White House Counsel Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court to replace Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in the fall of 2005, Warren *said*, "I think it was for this very moment that we had the last election."

"It's the reason I jumped in and mobilized, you know, our network, because it's all about the court," Warren said. "And I think for all of the reasons already mentioned Harriet's a great choice. I mean she's a great person, she's a great woman, she's a great Christian, she's a great thinker, and I just throw my support behind her."

Miers later withdrew when conservatives failed to support her confirmation.

Fast-forward through Bush's sluggish response to Hurricane Katrina, disastrous execution of the war in Iraq, and failed leadership on the economy.

Observe the moral collapse of the Republican Party with scandal after scandal—Rep. Mark Foley (R-Fl.), preacher Ted Haggard, Republican activist Ralph Reed, Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) and Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho).

See Bush's plummeting popularity. Look at the Democratic Party's recapturing of the House of Representatives and Senate in 2006.

Now listen to Warren in early 2008. He *told* journalists that he regretted his e-mail to help re-elect the president.

He cited as reasons for his about face his wife, who was treated for breast cancer in 2003, and the success of *Purpose Driven Life*, which was published in 2002, both experiences before his Bush endorsement.

"I never endorse," he *told* CNN's Wolf Blitzer on July 22, 2008.

Three days later, he *told* CNN's Campbell Brown, "I don't think it's right for pastors to endorse" and "I would never endorse a candidate. I would never campaign for a candidate."

Faithful Democrats and Democratic operatives disclose little interest in why Warren has backed away from the beleaguered Republican Party. They are simply grateful that one less evangelical preacher is ordaining the GOP as God's Only Party. They believe that if evangelical preachers are inactive then it helps their candidates win elections.

Perhaps others of us are more curious about why exactly Warren switched his positions.

Is his flip driven by a changing cultural ethos? After all, fundamentalist leaders are aging and losing power, the Southern Baptist Convention is declining. Republicans have proven their hypocrisy once too often, Americans now know that the Iraq war was the wrong war and economic anxiety is spiking. Is Warren moved by the winds of cultural change?

Or is the purpose behind his change driven by his reading the big Bible? Does the Bible have anything to do with reshaping his agenda?

In 2004, he read selectively from only a few biblical texts. Since the Bible hasn't changed, did Warren discover the biblical witness' call to care for the poor, the ill, and the earth?

For those of us who believe in the centrality of the Bible for determining our moral vision, we hope the answer is a resounding "yes."

The CNN *covered* Saturday forum at Warren's California church with Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Barack Obama (D-IL) didn't answer the question about why Warren has shifted from endorser to interviewer.

Neither did one get a convictional sense that Warren's moral agenda is as broad and deep as some claim. His questions to the presidential candidates began with personal morality and faith in Jesus Christ. He spent time on abortion, stem cell research and gay marriage, three of his 2004 non-negotiable issues. He focused on the courts. He did ask about AIDS, Darfur, human trafficking, and religious persecution.

Warren could have helped viewers to understand the long moral arc of the Christian vision with a sharp focus on environmental responsibility to address climate change; the call of Jesus to be peacemakers, instead of peacekeepers; the imperative to seek a justice society that protects the poor from predatory capitalism; the obligation to guard the stranger in the land—the immigrant; and the ethical duty to provide health care to all.

Those issues and others are as critical to the Christian moral agenda as abortion and personal morality.

One senses that Warren has found some new biblical texts but still needs a more thorough reading of the big Bible. ■

Note: The article above was published first in *EthicsDaily.com* (8/18/08) and is reprinted with permission.

Survivor: The Story of a Pastor and a Church

By Glen Schmucker, Dallas, TX

Occasionally, life offers us the rare opportunity of standing at a crossroads and actually knowing it at the same time. On Sunday, April 6, 2008, I found myself standing at one of those moments of departure. I was preaching my final sermon as pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church, the church I had served for just shy of ten years. Just a few weeks before, I had survived a vote of confidence by a two-thirds majority. Survived, but barely.

Though I could have kept my job and though I had no place else to work, I genuinely feared that staying in that place would have involved sacrificing my calling, my health, and my family. Sometimes, it's best to just let go. Letting go meant accepting the fact that being faithful to the call of God to ministry does not involve keeping any one particular job, no matter what the cost.

While I had not been forced to resign or been terminated, by that Sunday two weeks after Easter, I had arrived at a place where I knew that local church and I could no longer walk the same path together. Without doubt, it was one the most significant, gut-wrenching and soul-stirring decisions I have ever made. What brought us to that moment? The complete answer to that question will only come with many more moments of time.

My story is not unique. Several of my colleagues had either faced forced termination or votes of confidence at virtually the same time. The common denominators in our stories were frighteningly similar. There was a direct correlation between the mission to which the church had committed itself and the conflict following that mission had created within our fellowship.

Like many churches, our inner-city congregation had struggled with its commitment to fulfill the Great

Commission in a radically changing neighborhood. Since the 1950s, our predominately Anglo congregation found itself in a neighborhood transitioning from one made up of people "like us" to one populated by eighty-five percent, first-generation, poverty-level Hispanic families.

The church made the strategic decision in the 1980s not to follow the white flight by relocating to the suburbs. It had chosen to break the mold by not abandoning the very community in which it believed itself called to be the presence of Christ. On the surface, it appeared to be a decision based on more than just self-preservation.

The church had engaged in many effective ministries to the community over the years. Yet, with each passing year, it also found itself increasingly disconnected from those it sought to serve by overwhelming socio-economic, racial, linguistic, and even religious barriers. Regardless, a church that is not vitally connected to its community has no future in that community. Christ-like ministry takes place in the daily rub of one life up against another.

To choose to stay located in a community is one thing. Making that decision work is something else altogether. The needs of the community had long ago outstripped the resources any one congregation could supply. Knowing that, our church made what I believed to be a reasoned, Spirit-led commitment to devote some of its resources to partnerships that would empower us to stay connected to our community.

No one does a better job of empowering local churches to stay community-connected than does Buckner International. In the spring of 2005, Cliff Temple entered into a collaboration with Buckner. The future looked brighter than ever for what otherwise seemed to be an impossible situation.

Little did I know that, in the making of that decision, conflict was brooding in our fellowship.

Like the dry underbrush on the forest floor, all the fuel needed for a firestorm was growing by the day. All that was needed was a spark. The spark that created the firestorm for our church was just that, the electric spark of one simple email. Once I hit the send button, all that was left were the ashes of what might have been.

The Perfect Storm

On December 26, 2004, a 100-foot tsunami swept hundreds of thousands Southeast Asians to their deaths. Many died because they'd been caught off guard by waves generated by forces at work hundreds of miles away. Two plates of the earth's crust had been competing against each other to occupy the same space, perhaps for hundreds of years. The pressure finally caused them to snap. The very face of the earth's surface was permanently altered. No one will ever know the total cost in human life and property.

In our world, cultures are clashing along socio-economic, racial, geographical, and even religious lines, perhaps as never before in recorded history. Because the church is located in the world, it will not escape the tsunami-sized waves of change that are coming.

Cliff Temple's world had been caught at one of the most visible flash points of that cultural change. It had chosen to stay put at the point of conflict, to be the presence of Christ there. The church's leadership acknowledged that staying put in and connected to the inner city would demand that the church adapt (read: change) itself to the changing culture in order to reach it with the gospel. None of us could possibly appreciate how demanding that change would be.

Though Cliff Temple had historically ministered to its most immedi-

ate community for generations, the church's survival would now require integrating the church into the community before there was any hope of the community integrating itself into the church. Cliff Temple asked Buckner to come alongside, train, empower, and equip the church for that integration.

Change, however, even if it is acknowledged and chosen, is always painful. Some welcome the pain of change as the sign of new life. Others can only see that pain as personal loss. For a leader, the challenge is to keep the conversation open between those who view change so differently. Too often, especially in churches, that conversation degrades into competition. Good people start talking about each other instead of to each other.

Competition grows for budget dollars, for worship styles, and even for physical space. When the conversation degrades into competition, the competition-conversation is only versed in the language of us-vs.-them. The stage is set for everyone to lose, no matter who wins.

One day, in processing my feelings about the conversation-turned-competition, I sent an email to Ken Hall [Buckner's CEO]. In that email, I candidly expressed my growing frustration. My frustration was not at

any one person or group of people. I was simply jammed up, as on an overcrowded freeway at rush hour. I felt trapped between the call of the church, as I understood it, to help it find a new way in a radically changing world and the need to be responsive to some who apparently felt it was their call to protect the church from the change that leadership would eventually create.

Nonetheless, if it is not dealt with in healthy ways, pressure builds like steam in a pressure cooker. I was letting off some steam when I hit the send button, not realizing until it was too late that I had inadvertently sent the email to the church's leadership team. In the minds of some, I had chosen sides and the race was on. Having later been made aware of my error, I spent that evening retching into our master-bath toilet. My mistake made me physically ill. I had no idea how sick I was yet to feel. Sometimes, change really does hurt. Wait and see.

Fear

Anyone who has been to seminary knows that Arthur Flake was the father of the modern Sunday School. One of Flake's principles for growing a church's Sunday School could be summarized in the words "build it and they will come." Flake assumed

that Sunday School would always be the primary means of outreach for churches. For decades, he was right, especially in the post-World War II baby boom years. In growing suburbs across America, virtually all you had to do was build a church, throw open the doors, and find yourself in need of even more space very shortly. Whole generations of pastors and educators were trained in that paradigm of church growth.

Flake's formula failed to take two major factors into consideration. For one, a day was coming in the post-modern world where, in many places, Sunday School would cease to be the most effective way of reaching people. The major flaw in Flake's paradigm was that church growth was too narrowly defined by how many people you could get into the church building on Sunday morning, a standard most Baptist churches still use to define the success of their professional leadership.

Another factor overlooked by Flake's formula was the natural tendency of church people to become territorial. After a few weeks in the same room, that room becomes the exclusive domain of the people who meet there for one hour a week.

The result was that billions of square feet at a cost of uncountable



billions of dollars have been built since WWII that sit empty for seven days a week, except for one hour on Sunday. The back-hook of territorial thinking is that, before long, the building owns the church, literally defining and driving the church's mission.

One of the constant struggles the good people of Cliff Temple faced was mission-definition and territorialism both defined and driven by the building. We were successful in helping our folks open the doors of the church to multiple community-based ministries. By the time I left, we had an expanded Day Care Center, an independent African-American congregation, an Hispanic congregation, and a church for the mentally disabled—all worshipping and serving alongside our predominately white congregation and all under the same roof. The children in two Charter Schools that leased space from us during the week began to integrate into our church's many programs and ministries. Additionally, Buckner had begun funding and overseeing an After-School ministry for latch-key kids and a Day Center that provided food, clothing, and other essentials to some 30,000 souls per year.

Yet, in all of that, the competition for the square footage continued. Though the majority of Cliff Temple was thrilled to see the new rainbow of humanity touching down in our facility, there were some who complained that Buckner was taking over our church or that we were "outsourcing" our ministry through Buckner. There were those who complained that we weren't doing enough for "our people," even though the structure of both our budget and staff gave solid proof otherwise.

In time, I found ways not to take the complaints personally. I came to see them as expressions of fear. Fear that their church was changing. Fear that the world was changing. Fear that things would never be the same again. The fear was real, if fear is one's choices of responses to change.

Being a pastor who leads people to change means stopping now and then

to talk about fear. Or, better yet, stopping to at least listen to the fears of others. Most church fear is not based on logic; it's based on emotion. You can't respond to fear with logic; it only makes people angrier. You better listen, nonetheless, or you will soon find yourself a very lonely leader with no one following.

Letting Go

When I first slapped on a pair of water skis years ago, the first lesson I was given was how to fall down. The instructions were simple and terse. When you are water skiing and you start to fall, let go of the rope. Letting go of the rope is hard at first because it's counterintuitive. Letting go feels like surrendering security when the opposite is actually true. The only people who ever get hurt are those who hold on when they should have let go. It doesn't take much creativity to imagine the rest.

Letting go of Cliff Temple was one of the single most painful and difficult things I've ever done in my life. Some of the finest people and servants of God I've ever known, I met because of Cliff Temple. I let go only because it became apparent to me that holding on would drag both the church and myself places neither wanted to go. It was so hard to let go because it also meant letting go of a dream that I would never see fulfilled. Nonetheless, it takes a pretty enormous ego to assume that Providence is limited to any one person's presence to fulfill God's redemptive purposes in any church or community.

Could I have done things differently? Absolutely. I have a whole list of things I've learned. However, nothing rates higher as something learned than this: if we want to see the face of Jesus, all we need do is look into the faces of "the least of these." It takes more than a glance. It takes a compassionate and fixed stare that only months and years of caring make possible.

It is in the eyes of those who are hungry, broken by life, homeless, out of a job, dispirited by personal defeat, mentally disabled, unkempt, orphaned and widowed that the face of Jesus is

very, very visible, if we will only take time to look. Sometimes, it takes siding up close to someone, like the folks at Buckner, who are skilled at helping people refocus their vision to see the eyes of Jesus in the faces of human beings close by. In too many churches, the language of the redeemed still contains too many references to "those people" and "our people." Jesus never spoke such condescending profanity.

All children are God's children, and should be treated like the royalty they are in the house of God. My biggest dream at Cliff Temple was to lead a church to change the conversation from "What has the church done for me lately?" to "What can I do for the kingdom of God today in this place where I live every day?" We actually succeeded with many. With others, the work may never be done.

I was able to finally let go because I believe, with all my heart, that if I helped one person change the conversation by letting go of old stereotypes and embracing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, then ten years of ministry was not wasted.

Things Learned

People have asked me multiple times what I have learned from all of this. I've decided, for my last blog, to list what I think I am learning. Maybe ten years from now, I'll know for sure what I've learned. Until then, here is what I'm learning, in no particular order.

1. Church leaders must take care of themselves, physically, spiritually and emotionally. When we extend ministry to others, we do so out of our whole being. We cannot minister to others beyond what we are physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

2. Church leaders must make certain that decisions are as lay-generated as possible. The church must own the mission or, in time, it will abandon that mission one way or another.

3. One of a church leader's primary responsibilities is getting people within the church to keep the conversation open and progressive among diverse groups with diverse values.

4. God can and does use all people,

even those who do not behave in loving ways, to accomplish his greater good for us and for others. We learn more about what it means to give thanks in all circumstances when we acknowledge the gracious providence of God no matter how others behave toward us.

5. Helping local congregations redefine success as having something more to do with substance than size may well be one of the greatest challenges facing church leadership on all levels, from the local congregation to the largest of institutions, in this generation.

6. Church leaders must have friends within the congregation, even though that will be threatening to others who feel left out. It is impossible to be all that it means to be Christian apart from good friends who can and will share life's experiences with us, people who won't hold our divine calling against us by forbidding us to be fully human in their presence.

7. Segregation has far more to do with socio-economics than it does with race. Acknowledging that reality is the first step toward experienc-

ing true community. If churches want the community to integrate with the church, the church must first integrate itself into the community. There are no shortcuts to incarnational ministry.

8. Gratitude is the only anecdote for the soul-poisoning viruses of greed, fear, anger, resentment, pride, and power-lust, not to mention the other lust, too.

9. Churches have a difficult time distinguishing between their own survival and the fulfillment of their mission. A graciously prophetic voice from the pastor is essential to helping any church make that distinction.

10. In order to do ministry effectively, we must be willing to be bloodied by the same conflicts that are destroying those to whom we seek to minister. We must climb down into the pews and struggle with those who are struggling.

11. If you love your life, you will lose it—only what we are willing to release to Eternal God has the possibility of life beyond us, beyond our imaginations, and beyond our ability to make things happen. That goes for the church, too, not just the individu-

al believer.

12. We ministers tend to give our sense of call too much credit. It's one thing to be passionate about a mission. It's another challenge altogether to remember that people are the mission, they are more than just a means to an end, they are the reason Jesus came in the first place. The needs of humanity, in and outside the congregation, are the heart and soul of the Great Commission.

13. No one job represents the fulfillment of our calling in Christ. Our call is not dependent on the opinion, attitudes, or values of others. Sometimes, a door must close so we will be forced to look for others that we were meant to see as open all along.

Thanks again to Ken Hall for this wonderful opportunity. ■

Note: This article was originally a series of email blogs written by the author, who may be contacted at <http://www.pastorsmucker.blogspot.com/>. He has recently accepted the call to be pastor of Grace Fellowship Baptist Church (CBF) in Fair Oaks, TX.



Southern Baptists: Struggling With Sexual Predators and Wife Abuse¹

By Marie Fortune, Founder and Senior Analyst FaithTrust Institute, Seattle, WA

The SBC and Sexual Predators

“One sexual predator in our midst is one too many,” said Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) executive committee. “Sexual predators must be stopped. They must be on notice that Southern Baptists are not a harvest field for their devious deeds.” Good so far.

But the SBC Executive Committee has determined that the denomination will not create a database to identify sexual predators nor establish a national office to respond to complaints. Not so good.

Their reasoning: polity problems. They say local autonomy of their congregations precludes a centralized list or investigative body. The Convention does not have the authority to prohibit known perpetrators from doing ministry. The local church can hire anyone it wants as a pastor. Now I appreciate the value of a congregational polity. My denomination, the United Church of Christ, also uses this way of organizing itself.

But I also have spoken with victims and survivors of Southern Baptist pastors who are very frustrated with the unwillingness of their church to take some institutional action to stop clergy offenders. The words are important. The SBC statement is strong. Their website provides some excellent articles on the sexual abuse of children. But words are not enough.

When the study began in 2006, Oklahoma pastor Wade Burleson suggested the database to track ministers who are “credibly accused of, personally confessed to, or legally been convicted of sexual harassment or abuse.” The Executive Committee nixed that idea and now urges local churches to use the U.S. Dept. of Justice database

of sexual offenders to do their background checks.

So here’s the problem: the Department of Justice database or any state police database will only include convicted sex offenders. A minister will only show up in that database if he has been reported, prosecuted and convicted of a sex offense. The database will not include ministers who offend against adults and may have been fired by their local churches. So how is another Baptist church to know that their pastoral candidate is in good standing if there is no Baptist database?

Local churches need all the help they can get to deal with a complaint about clergy misconduct, even if it is finally their decision what to do about it. The national denominational structure can and should make resources available for training, preparation of local church policies, etc. It is interesting that when the Southern Baptist Convention decides to do a mission project, it doesn’t worry about local church autonomy. It provides a mechanism for its local churches to participate in mission efforts.

Yet here when the health and well-being of its members is on the line, it has chosen to speak but not to act. It was fourth century Bishop John Chrysostom who said, “At all times it is works and actions that we need, not a mere show of words. It is easy for anyone to say or promise something, but it is not so easy to act out that word or promise.”

This is an issue that independent, non-denominational churches struggle with all the time. They literally have no denominational structure to turn to for support. Their independence means they are isolated and often lack policies when a complaint comes to them. Even if they want to, they often

lack the capacity to act to remove an offending pastor. A lawsuit is in their future. Victims have no other recourse. The Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. has put in place a mechanism with standards and policies to address the abuse of children by clergy. Because of its hierarchical polity, it can mandate action by the dioceses and provide resources to assist them. In responding to clergy misconduct, this is an advantage. Of course one still wonders why it has taken the Catholic Church so long to begin this process.

All of which serves to remind us that polity is not the problem. Regardless of the structure of a religious institution, it has the capacity to act to address clergy misconduct. It is a matter of using the structure and values it has to guide its action. It is a matter of the will to use every institutional resource available to try to insure that congregations will be safe places for congregants rather than looking for structural excuses why church leaders don’t have to act.

Seminary Prof and Wife Abuse

Bruce Ware, professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, actually does know why husbands abuse their wives.

But he is confused and just doesn’t realize that he knows: “And husbands on their parts, because they’re sinners, now respond to that threat to their authority either by being abusive, which is of course one of the ways men can respond when their authority is challenged—or, more commonly, to become passive, acquiescent, and simply not asserting the leadership they ought to as men in their homes and in churches,” Ware said recently from the pulpit of Denton Bible Church in

Denton, Texas.

So, according to Ware, there are two options for men in response to women who assert their rights to be free and equal partners in marriage: beat them up or become passive, i.e. a wimp. Society condones the first and abhors the second. I think this is why we have abuse in marriages, Ware concludes.

In his confusion, Dr. Ware pref-aces this insight with the opinion that the problem begins with women who ‘rebel’ against their husbands who have been given authority over them by God. So once again in blaming the vic-tim, Dr. Ware misses his own insight.

Ware’s conclusion is quite limited: “He will have to rule, and because he’s a sinner, this can happen in one of two ways. It can happen either through ruling that is abusive and oppressive—and of course we all know the horrors of that and the ugliness of that—but here’s the other way in which he can respond when his authority is threat-

ened. He can acquiesce. He can become passive. He can give up any responsibility that he thought he had to be the leader in the relationship and just say, ‘OK dear,’ ‘Whatever you say dear,’ ‘Fine dear’ and become a passive husband, because of sin.”

Talk about dichotomous thinking. Actually, there *is* a third option for men and women in heterosexual mar-riage. What about those thousands of marriages that I know, like my parents’ for fifty years, where two adults stand side by side as equal partners, faithful to each other and their children, living out Gospel values everyday?

What we have here is a professor of theology who clearly knows nothing about wife abuse and domestic violence and someone who is willing to expend enormous energy blaming battered women and excusing batterers with a high gloss, labored theological rationalization.

The “sin” is “that he [male humans]

will have to rule,” i.e. the man’s desire to rule over and dominate another human being and his willingness to use force and violence to accomplish this. (I suggest that Dr. Ware reread Genesis 1 and Galatians 3:28 and any-thing written by Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger.²

Finally, Ware worries that the “egal-itarian” view—the notion that males and females were created equal not only in essence but also in function—crops up in churches that allow women to be ordained and become pastors. Praise God! Don’t even get me started on this one. ■

1 This article is a compilation of blogs from the FaithTrust Institute web-site: www.faithtrustinstitute.org.

2 See for example, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) and PASCH, a Christian network addressing domestic abuse: www.peaceandsafety.com.



Islamic Terrorism: Fact vs. Fiction

By Glenn L. Carle, Deputy National Intelligence Officer (ret.)

The “Global War on Terror” has conjured the image of terrorists behind every bush, the bushes themselves burning and an angry god inciting its faithful to religious war. The inclination to trust our leaders when they warn of danger is compelling, particularly when the specters of mushroom clouds and jihadists haunt every debate.

In my 23 years in the CIA, I drafted or was involved in many of the government’s most senior assessments of the threats facing our country. I have devoted years to understanding and combating the jihadist threat.

• From that experience base, I suggest that the next commander in chief base his counterterrorism policies on the following realities: We do not face a global jihadist “movement,” but a series of disparate ethnic and religious conflicts involving Muslim populations, each of which remains fundamentally regional in nature and almost all of which long predate the existence of al-Qaeda.

Osama bin Laden and his disciples are small men and secondary threats whose shadows are made large by our fears. Al-Qaeda is the only global jihadist organization and is the only Islamic terrorist organization that targets the U.S. homeland.

Al-Qaeda remains capable of striking here and is plotting from its redoubt in Waziristan, Pakistan. The

organization, however, has only a handful of individuals capable of planning, organizing and leading a terrorist operation. Al-Qaeda threatens to use chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons, but its capabilities are far inferior to its desires.

Even the “loose nuke” threat, whose consequences would be horrific, has a very low probability. For the medium term, any attack is overwhelmingly likely to consist of creative uses of conventional explosives.

• No other Islamic-based terrorist organization targets the U.S. homeland, is part of a “global jihadist movement,” or has more than passing contact with al-Qaeda. These groups do and will, however, identify themselves with global jihadist rhetoric and may bandy the bogey-phrase of “al-Qaeda.” They are motivated by hostility toward the West and fear of the irresistible changes that education, trade and economic and social development are causing in their cultures.

These regional terrorist organizations may target U.S. interests or persons in the groups’ historic areas of interest and operations. None of these groups is likely to succeed in seizing power or in destabilizing the societies they attack, though they may succeed in killing numerous people through sporadic attacks such as the Madrid train bombings.

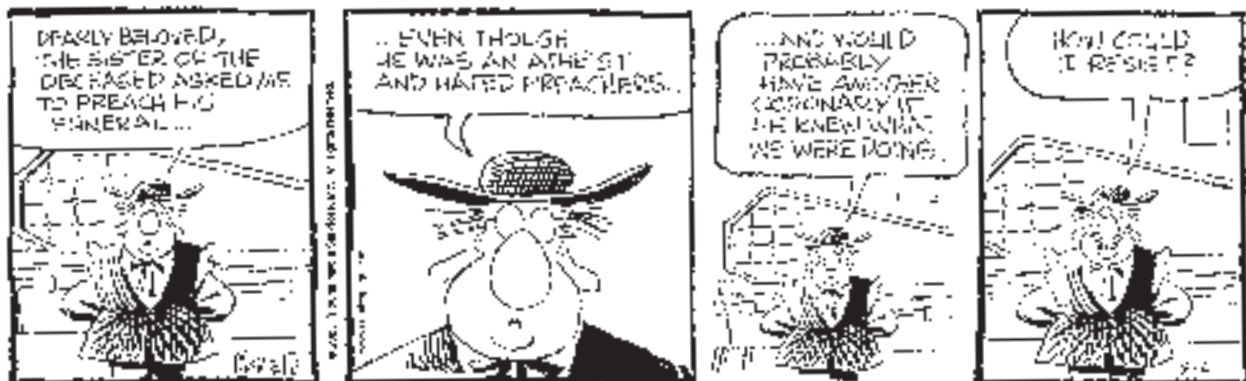
• There are and will continue to be

small numbers of Muslims in certain Western countries—in the dozens, perhaps—who seek to commit terrorist acts, along the lines of the British citizens behind the 2005 London subway and bus bombings. Some may have irregular contact with al-Qaeda central in Waziristan; more will act as free agents for their imagined cause. We need to catch and neutralize these people. But they do not represent a global movement or a global threat.

The threat from Islamic terrorism is no larger now than it was before Sept. 11, 2001. Islamic societies the world over are in turmoil and will continue for years to produce small numbers of dedicated killers, whom we must stop. U.S. and allied intelligence do a good job at that; these efforts, however, will never succeed in neutralizing every terrorist everywhere.

We must not delude ourselves about the nature of the terrorist threat to our country. We must not take fright at the specter our leaders have exaggerated. In fact, we must see jihadists for the small, lethal, disjointed and miserable opponents that they are. ■

Note: This article was adapted from a larger article by Glenn L. Carle, who was also a member of the CIA’s Clandestine Service for 23 years until his retirement in March, 2007.



Left Behind or Left in Cyberspace?

By Noreen Herzfeld, Prof. of Theology and Computer Science St. John's University, Collegeville, MN.

As a teenager, when a friend first told me about the rapture, in which Christians will be miraculously transported to heaven while sinners remain on earth to suffer a variety of tribulations, I was quite sure that, sinner that I was, I was destined to be the one member of my family and friends who would surely be “left behind.” My psychology teacher later assured me that considering oneself the “chief of sinners,” as the apostle Paul did, was a normal response, since we each know our own peccadilloes far more intimately than we know those of others. Apparently, however, not everyone shares this proclivity. For forty dollars a year, those who are relatively assured of their own salvation can now leave a final e-mail to less fortunate loved ones who might be left behind during the rapture.

A new website, *Youvebeenleftbehind.com* allows users to compose a final message that will be sent to up to sixty-two recipients, six days after the rapture occurs. These messages might be used to pass on information, such as bank account numbers and passwords, but the site stresses the opportunity to leave a letter begging those who remain to accept Christ, a last chance with one's loved ones to “snatch them from the flames.”

This raises a host of questions, both practical and religious. Is it safe to store sensitive financial informa-

tion on such a website (answer: no)? Would the web still function after the rapture? Why not play it safe, save the forty dollars, and simply leave a stack of letters on your desk. *Youvebeenleftbehind.com* is one of the latest attempts to market religion in cyberspace.

Sites abound hawking a variety of religious books and wares. Beyond the crassly commercial, there are web sites for a wide variety of religious faiths and denominations where one can access religious texts, share experiences and prayer requests, initiate new spiritual friendships, or engage in ecumenical dialogue. As a resource for finding a quick answer to a religious question, the Internet is unbeatable.

Web cams let one make a virtual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Wailing Wall, or Chartres Cathedral. Avatars in Second Life build virtual churches and synagogues and participate in religious rituals with one another. Each of these draws on the strength of the Internet as a medium that overcomes distance or physical limitations. The computer enlarges the neighborhood, giving opportunities to connect with or learn from a wide variety of people and traditions.

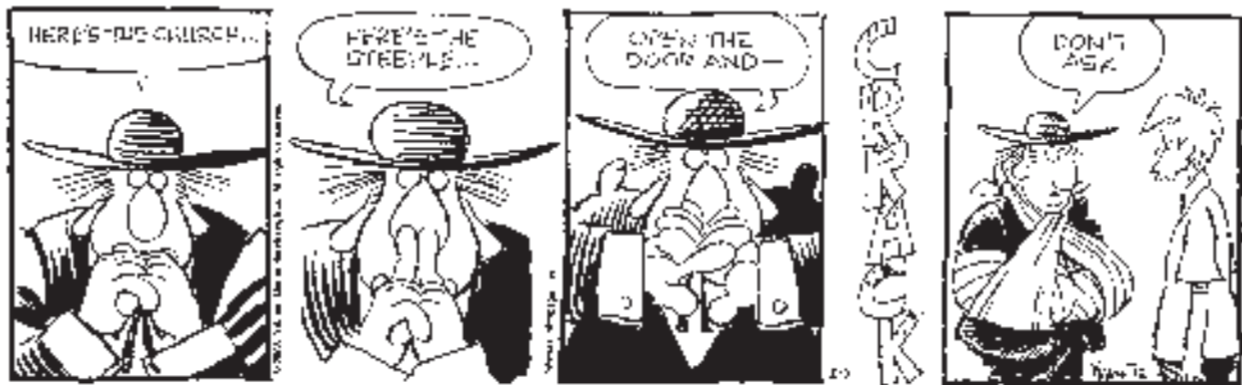
However, what computer technology gives to religion in terms of speed and broader access, it takes away through lack of physical presence. The sacramentality of the Christian faith,

for one, calls us to move away from our keyboards and into the real world. In this world we cannot dismiss those with whom we disagree with the click of a mouse. We are asked to taste and feel and smell the world around us in its elemental richness. We learn what is, not what we wish were.

Cyberspace is, in the end, an ambiguous place. We do not know if people in chat rooms are who they say they are. We do not know if an e-mail will really get forwarded on. As philosopher Albert Borgmann points out, “ambiguity is resolved through engagement with an existing reality, with the wilderness we are disagreed about, the urban life we are unsure of, or the people we do not understand.” Computer applications may seem like a simpler alternative, but they are rarely as satisfying as the real thing.

So I think I'll save the forty dollars. A sealed envelope in my desk and power of attorney documents will cover my much more likely demise from natural causes. And as for worrying about myself or others being “left behind,” Jesus' promise that “I will never leave you nor forsake you” is far more reassuring than any web site. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (7/17/08), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Living Apart Together: Why I Am Trying To Stay

By Jon Mark Hogg, Attorney San Angelo, TX

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

I am part of a congregation that is dying. Yet, it does not know it. It believes it is living and vibrant because it has members, a budget, and buildings. It is a downtown, urban church that remembers when it was the biggest, baddest kid in town. Now it is not, but refuses to admit it. For a few brief years we had leadership that envisioned a transformed future for this congregation reaching the downtown community. Most of the church played along for awhile. Then they began to realize that there was no greatness in that direction. The people downtown were the wrong color, or had too many problems, or didn't have enough money, or weren't the “right kind of people.” Ultimately, the church did not embrace this vision, so that pastor left. His staff started trickling away. Some of the laity, including myself, tried to hold back the tide of traditionalism that began moving in. It was to no avail. The waters slowly crept in amid cries of “hiring that last pastor was a mistake”. . . “we need to grow the church”. . . “we need more evangelism”. . . and “we need more missions” (meaning missions in other places and with other people, not those right outside our door).

The tide drowned many of our hopes and dreams for the future by returning to the old ways of doing things. Numbers and money were all that really mattered. I felt like an exile in the church where my wife grew up, where I was married and where my children were baptized. So, I prepared to leave.

Across town, was a congregation that seemed to have values and views on ministry, discipleship, and theology

similar to mine. I attended a service there during Holy Week. It was meaningful and thoughtful. This church probably isn't perfect either. But, at least if I attended there I would not be ticked off after listening to the sermon every Sunday. I am ready to go. So, why don't I? I am still not sure.

I have always been intrigued by our culture of church-hopping. What makes someone decide to leave one congregation for another? We join a church and become close to the people in that place. We engage in worship together, raise our children together, and suffer together. But, for some strange reason those connections are no longer good enough. We reject the people we loved in favor of another congregation of people we hardly know at all. We do so because our old worship no longer “feeds” us, because somebody did something that hurts us or made us angry, or because the church goes in a direction we do not agree with. That is where I was, where I am. So, why don't I go? Do I belong here? Is there some place else I am supposed to be? What do I feel the Holy Spirit leading me to do and why? If only I could understand. Something far beyond myself holds me here.

Right now when I think of my church my thoughts are consumed with sadness, disappointment and disillusionment. I had an ideal of what a community of faith should be—how we should treat each other and minister to the world. When I compare that to what we are, how we do treat each other and fail to minister, I only compound my misery. Church life is all disappointment and disillusionment. Is that what it is supposed to be?

Simon Tugwell writes that Christianity has to be disappointing precisely because its purpose is not to accomplish our human ambitions but to subject everything to the will of God, not our will. Tugwell claims that while

Christianity directs us towards the fulfillment of all our desires and hopes, it also reveals that a great many of those hopes and desires will eventually be shown to be foolish and misconceived, like the disciples disillusionment with Jesus and his disregard for their own hopes and dreams. Even after his resurrection they were still waiting for Jesus to initiate his Kingdom and restore Israel to greatness. It was as if they were saying, “Okay Jesus, that whole resurrection thing was great. But, you are going to make Israel a superpower again now aren't you?” Maybe, like the apostles, we just don't get it. If the church is inevitably disappointing to our ideal of what it should be, perhaps it is because we have not understood what community is in the first place.

A few years ago I was struck by Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *Life Together*. After reading Tugwell's comments, searching for comfort I turned again to *Life Together*. In that small book, Bonhoeffer describes the contrast between our ideal and the divine reality of Christian community. He writes that when we come together we each bring our own ideas of what a Christian community is. But God must shatter that dream in order for us to be able to live in true community, not in the community of our illusion. If that does not happen, if we resist God to hold on to our illusion, eventually we lose Christian community altogether.

When I first read these passages I thought of my church and everybody in it and how they all need to lose their illusions and dreams of glory and greatness, their dream of what they want that church to be. If they would just do that, everything would be fine. They have not, but that really is not the point. When I recently reread these passages in light of my own struggles, I realized that Bonhoeffer is not referring to someone else's illusions, as false as those may be, he is

referring to mine.

I am to enter into community not as a leader or visionary, demanding that things be a certain way. I am to enter as a servant, a sinner saved by grace the recipient of unfathomable forgiveness. In true community we are called to be “thankful recipients” says Bonhoeffer, -thankful recipients of God’s grace. We are not to complain about what God has not given us, but to be thankful for and live in the blessings of the community God has given us. The sin and failings of my brothers and sisters, of each of us, are to constantly remind us to give thanks that we are all saved by the merciful blood of Christ. But, to participate in this kind of community, we must first get rid of our dreams and plans.

Whenever we feel like we are an exile, like we are not fulfilled in a given place of worship, like we are not welcome and do not fit, our reaction is pretty standard. We use “church-speak” and claim that God is “call-

ing” us to go to a new place. But, often that is simply our own ego and arrogance using disappointment as an excuse to drive us to achieve our own selfish hopes and desires through our own effort. In other words it is as if the disciples when told to go back and wait for the Holy Spirit had told Jesus “no thanks” and had picked up their swords. It is very tempting to short circuit Jesus’ way by taking up arms and marching on Jerusalem. How much like the apostles I am. The devil does not need to do anything to destroy Christian community. We are very effective at doing that all by ourselves.

I wonder whether the primary purpose of a congregation is not to comfort us, not to be a place of peace, agreement, and consensus—not even to be a place where we minister together. Perhaps its most important purpose is to be so exasperating that it strips away every illusion, dream, and plan for community that we bring

to it. Only then can we surrender to God’s will.

In this sense God’s will is that we have the true Spirit of grace and forgiveness toward each other. Only then can we really partake in community. Going to another place does not change us, does not change God, and does not change what the Spirit seeks to do with us, for us, or through us. It merely helps us avoid and ignore that disillusionment that God uses to show us that the fault for our failure as a community lies not in a pastor, staff, or our competing visions for the future.

The fault lies in us! Perhaps the church does God’s work best when providing us a place to show how sinful and arrogant we all really are. By so doing it exposes our own foolishness, leaving us naked and in divine misery. This misery is a gift of the Spirit. I need to let the discomfort do its work. That is why I am trying to stay. ■



On Patriotism, Public Preaching, and the IRS

By Martin E. Marty, Chicago, IL

Patriotism

Ninety years ago this Fourth of July weekend, the City Council of West Point, Nebraska passed a resolution that citizens were not to hold “assemblages not in sympathy with the war” or to distribute literature “out of harmony with the war,” that is, World War I. On April 19, 1918 the local paper reported that three Catholic priests and one Lutheran minister “were not permitted to preach last Sunday,” because they violated Nebraska’s Sedition Law. “No alien enemy may act in the capacity of preacher...without having first filed an application in district court...The applicant must show when he came to this country, what places he has been, what steps taken toward completing naturalization and what contributions he has made toward winning the war.”

Fathers Grobbel, Roth, and Brasch and Pastor Mangelsdorf, not yet citizens, “appeared in court the next week. Each stated his sympathy to the American cause and stated they were in the process of becoming citizens. They were granted licenses to preach. Area residents who had not completed all necessary paperwork to become U.S. citizens fell into the category of possible enemy aliens.” A woman accused of being unpatriotic “denied the charges and mentioned her husband had purchased Liberty Bonds and that she had donated to the Red Cross.” A new and prize-winning history of West Point adds: “The case came to an end when the armistice was signed in November.”

I came across this while doing research before speaking at my natal town, West Point, for its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary last weekend. The Sedition Law was passed in a fit of anti-German sentiment and violence during the War. The story of anti-German-language legislation in

Oregon, Nebraska, and elsewhere is familiar, and there were thousands of West Points where scenes like those just described were common. Things have quieted. Today, the town (of three thousand plus people) is 87.2 percent White Non-Hispanic (and 12 percent Hispanic), and still numbers 54.2 percent citizens of German ancestry, along with 5.5 percent of Czech and 4.6 percent of Swedish descent. Germans there are obviously safe and prospering. So why bring up this history here and now?

Independence Day Weekend provides occasion, among those who care, not only to barbecue, watch fireworks, wave flags, and watch parades—I did three of the four, so I should qualify as 75 percent patriotic—but also to review our history and reflect on it. This item about wartime hysteria, the impulse to be suspicious and fearful and hence macho about “true Americanism,” is matched in numberless American stories. It is almost embarrassing to place anti-German madness during World War I in a context of ferocious hostility against Native Americans, African-Americans, and Asians (recalling the concentration camps our government set up for every Japanese-American we could catch) but sometimes milder cases illumine the more extreme ones.

Why pick at the old scabs? Answer: Because in this long, long war suspicion is raised again, this time against Arab-Americans, profiled potential terrorists, anyone and anything Muslim. If we would learn from, history, we might have fewer instances of harassment and embarrassment shown to those who do not appear to be quite like “us,” the patriots, who are inconveniencing ourselves so much—tell us how!—to “win” the war against terror. But I don’t want to conclude that way. Noticing how relatively at peace our West Points and many big communities are, how ready the majority

of Americans are to tell poll-takers that they are not religiously and racially prejudiced, we do have cause to celebrate, without, I think, needing licenses to preach. Yet God bless America.

Public Preaching

Public Pulpits by friend Stephan M. Tipton of Emory is a timely, historically-informed analysis of “Methodists and Mainline Churches in the Moral Argument of Public Life.” The “pulpit” is largely metaphoric here, because Tipton’s accent is on policy-making and headquarters’ involvements in politics, but these inform preachers. The book will provide background for discussions of the role of preachers and, yes, pulpits, in the political side of public life. (I prefer to hear political discourse in the lecture hall or classroom, where there can be give-and-take, while the sermon is in most ways monological.)

Preachers seldom have had it so good, or so bad, as they have it during the current campaign, as treated not so much by campaigners as by media commentators. So good? The commentators propagate the idea that preachers have enormous and spellbinding power. This implies that if a preacher says something, everyone will hear and, unless restrained, act upon what they heard, for good or evil. During a campaign, that means “for evil.” They also never had it so bad because they have not gotten the point across, culture-wide, that congregants are smart enough to filter, discreet enough not to tear the sermons apart, and hungry enough that they want to hear “the gospel,” messages of faith and hope and love as they try to put their week or part of their lives together.

If they would consult their friendly neighborhood historians of American Christianity—Protestantism in particular—they would get ample evidence. My students have heard that, were I to carve a Mt. Rushmore or

twentieth-century preachers, it would include five: Walter Rauschenbush, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and William Sloane Coffin. They all preached to many classes of people, including those powerful enough to get their names in print. Some hearers were alienated and walked away to receive sweeter messages (as some blacks now do, too, with the non-biblical "Prosperity Gospel"). Some did not. Start with John D. Rockefeller, who traipsed and slogged through the mud of the slummy West Side in New York, in support of the "Social Gospel" preacher Rauschenbush and his church and charities. His "Gospel" was near-socialist and we may presume that Rockefeller was capitalist. Yet they never broke. The magnate admired the preacher/theologian and stayed with him.

Next generation: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., admired modernist Harry Emerson Fosdick enough to basically fund cathedral-like Riverside Church in New York. We have records of the give-and-take contentions between preacher and hearer, often about the place of the businessperson, one of which Rockefeller was. When Reinhold Niebuhr was a Detroit pastor he had no notable members, but he challenged all on issues of labor; not all of them agreed with him, but they stayed and cried when he left. King was in his own pulpit briefly, but later he was in many pulpits, sometimes all but cursing racist America before he preached the gospel of reconciliation. His test: Who stuck with him when he radically criticized the Vietnam War? Many were conflicted, but stayed.

William Sloane Coffin, a man of legends, told various versions of how a "right-wing" friend raved about his pastor and beckoned Bill to church to hear him. They heard a sermon that had to be classified "left." How did this work? "Listen, he held my wife's hand during her last twenty-four hours and mine the next twenty-four. I'd show up even if he only read the Yellow Pages." We have a lot to learn

about pulpit-pew transactions, so little understood within the sanctuaries and, for sure, beyond them "in public."

The IRS

Billy James Hargis, a now forgotten but once towering figure on the not yet couth religious right, built a radio ministry and developed an anti-Communist front that has to be remembered as rabid. The preacher of righteousness was so overtly political that the Internal Revenue Service tabbed him for violating revenue regulations. Having to pay taxes for a year is not what did him in. What weakened his empire and led to his demise was the standard brand "over the top moralist" syndrome. As the press delighted in telling, a female alum of his American Christian College, on her wedding night, confessed to her groom that she had had sexual relations with their college president. On fairness grounds he responded, "So did I!"

Hargis wanted to take others down with him and fingered *The Christian Century* as a violator. The year was 1964, and in the Goldwater-Johnson campaign the magazine's cover bannered "Goldwater No!" So far so good. Then it followed, in a momentary fit of affirmation, with a cover, "Johnson Yes!" No, no, and no! Hargis inspired the I.R.S. to pursue the magazine, which, knowing it was guilty, lost its tax-exemption that year.

The IRS regulation does not permit a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization to deploy major energies or resources in support of specific candidates or legislation up for debate. The topic has become urgent in 2008, because religion has become ever more prominent in partisan politics, clerics have backed or fronted for candidates, candidates have sought church leadership support, some borderline-violators are being sought out and some of them are fighting back—strenuously.

Some years ago the IRS pursued a Texas Catholic diocese, whose bishop had the diocesan paper respond in a headline which, if I recall cor-

rectly, reduced everything to one word: "Nuts!" What IRS person is going to pursue the question further? Presidential candidates have regularly trouped to churches to give inspirational messages which could not *not* be partisan and vote-seeking. The IRS is closely watched by those who discern selective enforcement. Watch for more.

Some of the intentional violators are fighting back through legal fronts. Thus Suzanne Sateline told in the *Wall Street Journal* (May 9) how "Pastors May Defy IRS Gag Rule," and that a "Legal Group Urges Ministers to Preach About Candidates." The group is the Alliance Defense Fund, which aggressively promotes preachers of politics in pulpits so overtly that the IRS will some day have to swoop and the ADF can showcase government suppression of religious freedom. We are going to have a very busy set of enforcers. The black churches advertise nothing new in their actions: Greet numbers of them have turned their pulpits over to politicians. "Justice Sunday" promoters work at the borders of legality as they instruct churches how to use their power to get votes for favored candidates and policies.

How to stay clean and legal? You will hear preachers on the lift, muzzled by tax law, telling you that no prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures could have survived the new scrutiny. (All Democrats!?) But, then, they were acting within overt theocratic bounds. Few are sure as to where the bounds are now. Be thankful you are not a judge in these matters and enjoy the campaigns (more outside the sanctuary than in it, one hopes). And that churchly voices then find ways to be heard and be in the thick of things. Meanwhile, "501 (c) (3)" comes to view more frequently than "John 3:16." ■

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Torture and We're Number 1?

By Britt Towery, San Angelo, TX

Torture

Dr. James Dobson, founder of *Focus on the Family*, has criticized Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain's opposition to the U.S. government's use of torture.

That's right. Supporting torture appears to be an important issue for Dobson and many of the Christian Right. Dobson's radio broadcasts, heard locally, have for years faithfully relayed information useful to families and the challenge of Christian living. Where does torture fit into such programs?

In an exclusive with the *Wall Street Journal* of April 2, Dobson did not explain his approval of torture or how it relates to the Christian life. "How he contorts Christian theology to justify [this] is a puzzle," writes Robert Parham of EthicsDaily.com.

If this pro-torture stand was Dobson's alone there would be little attention paid to it. But last month an ethics professor, Daniel R. Heimback, at Southeastern Baptist Seminary, favors torture much as Dobson does. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders also favor torture. A Baptist Press (BP) release reported that to oppose torture "threatens to undermine Christian moral witness in contemporary culture." They went on to say that situation ethics necessitates that sometimes torture is the right thing to do.

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) recently released a statement that the United States has crossed the "boundaries of what is legally and morally permissible" in the "war on terror." (The paper's title is "An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture: Protecting Human Rights in an Age of Terror.")

Heimback says such talk from the NAE undermines the Christian moral witness. Nothing could be more confusing to people in the pew than to

have a professor of ethics speak out in favor of torture. Heimback is not for using "inherently evil methods, only using force on those involved in violence against us." He is advocating lowering ourselves to the indecent level of those who torture. Torture them because they torture us. How does a Christian teacher ignore the overriding attitude of the New Testament and the value of "turning the other cheek"? Or, "love your enemies"?

Supporting just wars are acceptable to many people, but torture of a suspected enemy goes beyond the pale. As a former Southern Baptist, I wonder what such remarks tell the world about Christian beliefs? Torture, as a method, has always been condemned by our government and churches until the "war on terror" began.

Albert Mohler, president of another SBC seminary argues that torture cannot be condoned except in circumstances when it might be necessary. It is too seldom noted how the torturer is affected. The emotional trauma of those ordered to use torture is too often ignored. Horrors that are not easily erased. From the testimonies of men who have been ordered to torture many end up embarrassed and wracked by guilt. The more they contemplate what they did to other human beings, brings depression and often worse experiences.

Governments for centuries have made claims that they do not torture. The "ticking time bomb" scenario of the TV series "24" exploits this excuse for torture. Under torture most people say what the torturer wants to hear.

Another claim (read: excuse) is "it's an emergency." Egypt declared such an emergency in 1981. It is still in force, and torture is common.

Another claim: "They don't deserve better." Many of our citizens use this excuse. The present administration says they are not prisoners of war and made

up the term: "unlawful combatants." The Geneva Conventions do not apply to the invented term. Recent memos reveal torture was approved higher up than sergeants and captains.

"It is not really torture" is another attempt to deny our government tortures the enemy. It is simply "enhanced interrogation." The Universal Declaration of Human Rights forbids both torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Pain by any other name is still pain.

Supreme Court Justice Brandeis shares this insight: "Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole of the people by its example. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for the law and invites every man to become a law unto itself. It breeds anarchy. To declare that the end justifies the means would bring terrible retribution."

We're Number 1?

With the football season approaching, we can get ready to see all kinds of weird fans on the TV screens with their index fingers pointed toward us, yelling, "We're No. 1."

Being No. 1 in the world also comes on strong every four years when American athletes compete in the Olympics. We go into the games knowing we are the best. No one is even close to us in any sport. (We conveniently forget about soccer.)

As Michael Ventura of the *Austin Chronicle* wrote last February: "No concept lies more firmly embedded in our national character than the notion that the U.S.A. is 'No. 1,' 'the greatest'... Yet the delusion is ineradicable." Mr. Ventura went on to list some 30 items he dug up that put the United States' standings in the world to be well short of No. 1.

You don't have to watch "20/20" or "60 Minutes" to know that most

of America's manufacturing base is all but gone. We are not much of an empire if we must borrow \$2 billion a day in order to operate. Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea hold 40 percent of our government debt.

For starters: The U.S.A. is 49th in the world in literacy. When it comes to mathematical literacy, the U.S. ranks 28th out of 40 countries. Ever notice how so many of our research scientists are from Asia. Jeremy Rifkin's well-documented book *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*, found that Americans with less than nine years of education fare worse than all other countries. Our future science and space textbooks may be written in Hindi or Chinese, because 20 percent of Americans think the sun orbits around the earth. But before the Asians write our science books, it should be noted that Europe surpassed the U.S. as the largest producer of scientific literature. Future science students may have to use Bulgarian or Albanian encyclopedias.

As usual, our esteemed Congress (which raises its salary at every opportunity) cut funds for our National

Science Foundation. Instead of the needed research grants, we don't even tread water, but get far fewer grants.

Lots of Americans did not appreciate Michael Moore's documentary on our health care, but the World Health Organization has ranked the world's countries, and the U.S.A. ended up 37th. We spend more per person and get less. Evidence: Congress is messing with Medicare again.

There was run on a bank or two in mid-July. Folks are getting jittery about the place that holds their money. The old mattress never looked so safe. To buy one Euro you need \$1.59 American money. Even Canada Maple Leafs are catching up. Only six of the 20 largest commercial banks in the world are American. This is getting somewhat repetitious and gloomy. There's more: in a recent survey of the world's 50 best companies, all but one were European.

Afraid to eat store-bought tomatoes? Last year it was lettuce, and the South Koreans still do not want our meat. Huge riots in Seoul tell the government to keep our beef out. Brazil now produces more beef than here. Last year Toyota began mak-

ing Tundra pick-ups in San Antonio only to stop this summer because gas guzzlers don't sell now days. GM and Ford are both laying off workers. I see where Brazil is making a car that runs on sugar cane. They have been doing it for 30 years. The U.S. is importing more food than it is exporting. Brazil has a \$30 billion trade surplus, while the U.S.A. has record trade deficits. R.G. Lee's great sermon title fits here: "Payday Someday."

The Lottery is booming. In the U.S. more is spent on gambling than any other kind of entertainment. It is also the most costly entertainment as it makes the poor poorer and drains off money for food and shelter from those who need it most.

Torture is sometimes justified, say 43 percent of Americans. President Bush and too many senators and congressmen are apparently part of the 43 percent.

Over 79 million eligible voters did not vote in 2004. Torture and the war on terror might have been avoided, if some of the nearly 80 million who do not vote had voted. If that is all we can get to go vote then chanting "We're No. 1" is a joke. ■



AN-CHOO!



Early Challenges to Capital Punishment

By David W. T. Brattston, Court Adjudicator, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

In the Winter 2008 issue of *Christian Ethics Today*, seminary student Cody J. Sanders exhaustively presented the biblical and social science evidence in the present debate over capital punishment.¹ Another important aspect of this moral issue is the witness of the earliest Christians. The pronouncements of Christian writers before the Decian Persecution of A.D. 249-251 add an interesting argument against capital punishment.

Sanders noted that some present-day proponents of the death penalty interpret Romans 13 in a way supportive of their position, and then he asked, "Would this reading of the text be the same during the first few centuries of the Church when Christians were primary recipients of the death penalty?" The answer is that the earliest Christians were opposed to the death penalty, at least as regards Christians inflicting it.

In addressing a rebellious faction in the church at Corinth, *1 Clement* 45 recalled that in the Old Testament when the righteous were persecuted or put to death, it was only by the wicked, the unholy, and the hate-consumed. Various dated between A.D. 70 and 97, *1 Clement* is one of the oldest extant Christian documents outside the New Testament. This letter was written during the time when in the church at Rome "there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles."² It was so authoritative and influential that it was included in some early editions of the New Testament. It refers in passing to a recent government persecution of Christians, which means that the death penalty was not far from the author's mind as a punishment for some acts and beliefs regarded as criminal.

Around A.D. 177 the philosopher Athenagoras of Athens wrote a defense of Christianity to the Roman Emperors, describing the beliefs and

practices of Christians. In the document, he dealt with and refuted pagan allegations that the Christian faith commands its adherents to murder and practice cannibalism.

Athenagoras stated that Christians not only are forbidden to kill anyone for any reason, but also that "we cannot endure even to see a man put to death, though justly. . . . We, deeming that to see a man put to death is much the same as killing him, have abjured such spectacles. How, then, when we do not even look on, lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put a man to death?"³

For this reason, he added, Christians adjure even such killing sanctified by the law as gladiatorial combats, at that time perfectly legal and favored by the secular authorities.

Tertullian was a prominent Roman lawyer prior to his conversion and ordination in middle-age, which means he was probably familiar with death-penalty cases. His writings are today of great importance in theological discussions, particularly on the relationship between Christianity and culture.⁴

Dated sometime between A.D. 198 and 220, Tertullian's *On Idolatry* indicates that Christians could not conscientiously inflict the death penalty. This treatise considers the dangers of contributing to sin inherent in certain professions and trades. One of these occupations was the Roman military, partly because the higher ranks participated in capital punishments. For Tertullian, killing of any sort—including the state-ordered death penalty—excluded military service as a livelihood for Christians.⁵ In *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 16 he classified hangmen in the same category of reprobates as lascivious women, gladiators, and priests of a pagan cult.

Attributed to the central Italian Pastor-Bishop Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 16.17 (A.D. 217) is

similar. Even if possessing the necessary government authorization and ordered to do so, a soldier "must not execute men."⁶ As a corollary, the church must cast out any Christian who volunteers for military service. *The Apostolic Tradition* considers such soldiers and volunteers to be in the same category as pimps, priests of idols, makers of idols, gladiators, and prostitutes.⁷

The Book of the Laws of Regions, also called *On Fate*, is ascribed to Bardesanes, who prior to his death in A.D. 220 was a friend and guest of a king of Edessa. It contains expositions of how the laws of various nations and regions differ from one another, while Christians follow their own law (what we would call "ethics"), no matter where they are. Among the contrasts he observed was the practice in one particular country to stone thieves to death—the implication was that Christians did not do so anywhere, even where secular law permitted them to. Nor did Christians commit "honor killings" of wives and daughters, as non-Christians practiced in another country.⁸ In short, the Christian religion forbade its adherents to inflict the death penalty for any offence.

In *Against Celsus* 7.26 the church father Origen in the late A.D. 240s contended that if Jews were free of Roman control and constituted their own sovereign nation again, they would probably practice stoning and burning of malefactors as Moses had commanded, e.g. put murderers to death. However, Origen wrote, if Christians were in government they would be restrained by the laws of their religion from doing so. In fact, Origen wrote that God's purpose in destroying the Jewish state was in part to end capital punishment and other forms of bloodshed by the people of God.

Origen was dean of the world's foremost educational institution of that era (in Alexandria, Egypt) and

later established one of his own in Palestine. He was the most influential and most prolific Christian preacher, Bible scholar, and writer of his own day and for centuries afterwards. He was probably the most knowledgeable Christian of the first half of the third century, or at least the most able representative of ancient Christian teaching, evidenced by the fact that he was often called upon as a consultant by pastor-bishops throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Did these early Christian writers represent the earliest Christian beliefs? By default, yes. Of the extant Christian documents from this period, these are the only authors to have considered the death penalty from the viewpoint of Christian ethics, and all considered it forbidden for Christians, even where permitted by secular law. From these surviving records, it is clear that Christian writers strongly opposed capital punishment for the first three centuries.

One possible exception is Clement of Alexandria. He was the leading Christian intellectual of the late second century, Origen's predecessor as Dean of the Christian school in Egypt, and a pioneer in making Christianity acceptable to educated pagans. Clement's *Stromata* 1.27 has been cited as a pre-Constantinian source *in favor of* state-inflicted capital punishment, because Clement applied the analogy of surgery to the death penalty: just as a surgeon excises a diseased member or organ lest it harm the whole body, so it would be good to put to death any member of society that "falls into any incurable evil"⁹.

However, there are five reasons why many believe Clement cannot be construed as totally justifying the death penalty. First, he considered

the execution to be beneficial to the wrongdoer: "it will be for his good if he is put to death."

Second, the relevant passage also declares that "it is the highest and most perfect good, when one is able to lead back anyone from the practice of evil to virtue and well-doing, which is the very function of the law."

Third, the only specific example Clement gave of "incurable evil" was covetousness—which was not a capital offence nor a criminal offence at all.

Fourth, Clement wrote the *Stromata* for pagan readers and used examples, quotations from pagan philosophers, current Greco-Roman views on morality, and other sources for the purpose of persuading these pagans to embrace or think more highly of Christianity. Fifth, an ancient analogy that a non-Christian government might justifiably inflict the death penalty does not mean that an American Christian may in good conscience be an executioner or otherwise contribute to it.

What the earliest Christian authors were expounding was *Christian* morality, i.e. the ethics that were taught and practiced by early Christians. Because they were describing specifically *Christian* ethics, unlimited in geography and binding even if they attained political office, the ancients would no more have extended official Roman conduct to present-day believers than they would other undesirable practices of the Roman Empire.

After the Decian Persecution of A.D. 249-251, there was a radical discontinuity within the church, especially affecting what is regarded as sources of authority in Christian ethics. Such changes were as far-reaching and unprecedented for Christianity

internally as was the Constantinian revolution for its relations with secular government and its subjects. ■

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- 1 Cody J. Sanders, "Prophetic Challenge to Capital Punishment" (CET Winter 2008), 19-22.
 - 2 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.3.3 (A.D. 180s) trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut at vol. 1 p. 416 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. American Reprint of the Edinburgh ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885-96; continuously reprinted Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson) (hereinafter cited as ANF).
 - 3 Athenagoras *Presbeia* 35 trans. B.P. Pratten under title *A Plea for the Christians* ANF 2.147.
 - 4 Rober D. Sider, "Tertullian" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: London: Garland Press, 1990), 884.
 - 5 Tertullian *On Idolatry* 19.
 - 6 *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of Saint Hippolytus of Rome* trans. and ed. Gregory Dix, revised Henry Chadwick (London: Alban Press; Ridgefield, Conn.: Morehouse, 1992), 26.
 - 7 *Apostolic Tradition* 16.10-11, 16.15-17 and 16.19-20 at pp. 25-27.
 - 8 Bardesan trans. W. Wilson ANF 8.733.
 - 9 All quotations from Clement of Alexandria are at ANF 2.339.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

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

Evolution vs. ID: *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008)

This ninety-minute documentary by Ben Stein about Intelligent Design (ID) has grossed over \$7 million within its first month of release, as this critique is written. It is highly controversial. With zero publicity, the movie has depended on church groups and word of mouth. With about a million tickets sold so far, it is already a profitable movie, with bright prospects yet ahead.

Mainstream critics have panned it mercilessly. It has also generated a tremendous amount of online discussion, represented by flaming bloggers as well as more by more sober reflections, from both sides of the debate. Like many viewers, I had a visceral reaction to Stein's know-it-all manner, and his gratuitous Holocaust footage, but I have also re-thought my position on the intellectual issues underlying the ID movement.

In this critique, I will discuss both the movie's weaknesses that invited such a Niagara of negative reviews, and also a positive value that *Expelled* potentially has to offer.

The Movie and the Writer, Producer, and Star. This is a low budget film by a first time film maker. This could account for its more obvious cinematic shortcomings. Let's dispose of one major negative distraction now.

Stein has a tendency to splice in cheesy film clips. These do little to illustrate the narration, but often disrupt the continuity. My take on it is, Stein realized that the heavy, talky subject matter needed some light, visual elements to make his movie more tolerable. He also needed to control costs by choosing cheap licensing sources (hence, a lot of old, old sources). One good piece of visual material imported into the movie consists of an animated

sequence about "The Casino of Life." The company that made this illuminating little feature has sued over copyright infringement.

The basic structure of *Expelled* apes (no pun) Michael Moore's formula: interviews with partisans on both sides, some obtained by ambush. Mostly, Stein lets his sources, including the atheists, speak for themselves. Some protested that his editing was unfair and taken out of context. I tend to agree, but it's his movie, and they all signed releases.

Stein opens the movie with a lecture tour moment. He marches onto a stage and launches into a speech about the trend he sees in science education, whereby those who espouse ID have been persecuted by the scientific establishment. The movie ends up full circle back at that same lectern, with Ben Stein's rousing peroration in defense of truth, and of his lonely crusade to lead the charge against tyranny. He invites his audience to join him: "Anyone? Anyone?" echoing his most famous line in *Ferris Bueller's Holiday*. Turns out that this scene was one of the only set-ups in the movie, to resemble the Al Gore lectures in *An Inconvenient Truth*. The audience members were all movie extras.

The movie proper consists of two main parts, developing Stein's main arguments. The first part asserts that evolutionists have built an intellectual Berlin Wall against teaching ID in science classes. Those who deviate from the party line by bringing up ID have been banished through unfair firings or denial of tenure. I do care if colleges have done anything unethical in terms of persecuting their own faculty members, or of jimmying tenure processes. Likewise, if Ben Stein's argumentation about this serious issue has itself been deceptive, that would also be unethical, and our readers should know about that as well.

The second part of *Expelled* is of much greater interest to the general audience. In it, Ben Stein takes on the theory of evolution. He argues that it is inherently atheistic, hence, biased against God in the study of biology or of the origins of the universe. Stein goes further. He argues that evolution is a necessary (but not sufficient) cause of extreme Social Darwinism, including the misguided "science" of eugenics, and of Hitler's campaign to eradicate the Jews. Stein's main method is to show an extended sequence of scenes from the Berlin Wall, and of some gruesome shots of Nazi genocide in Dachau.

Frankly, this argument is a fallacy. It begs the question of any substantive linkage between Darwin and Nazism. The Dachau footage is the most inflammatory image in the movie. What if Ben Stein imagined that Darwin's theory contributed to the spread of child porn? What images would that justify him to include? Returning to the statement of his main case, I will defer to others who have the credentials to judge Ben Stein's take on evolution vs. ID, and his philosophical and theological analysis.

So, who is Ben Stein? The son of Herb Stein, President Nixon's Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors. Ben Stein graduated from Yale Law School and practiced law at the outset of his career. He is also an actor with an active and successful career, with over seventy appearances on TV and in the movies. His most memorable role was in *Ferris Bueller*. He emceed a TV show, *Giving Away Ben Stein's Money*.

As if that were not enough, Ben Stein is a prolific author, writing primarily personal finance and economics books, but also conservative political opinion pieces. He has published in the *Wall Street Journal*, and he has a regular column in *The American Spectator*

in which he positions himself on the right wing of the Republican Party. Ben Stein is intelligent and articulate, but he is neither a trained scientist nor a philosopher. No doubt, he sincerely believes in the ID cause. He describes himself as Jewish, but not devout. He states that his concern is less about religion than about the political ramifications of ID as opposed to the dominant Darwinian paradigm now universally accepted among the scientific elite.

In the movie, it is difficult to take him seriously, given his public persona as a comedian and gadfly. He comes across as tongue-in-cheek at times. Ben Stein seemed most genuinely affected and honest in the sequence where he visited a WWII museum devoted to the memory of the Nazis' extermination of disabled and mentally retarded Jews. He also acquitted himself well in his final confrontation with Richard Dawkins, where his probing cross exam actually bested the famous atheist in their mini-debate.

My Ethical Concerns. At the level of his first argument about the employment status of pro-ID science professors, I did some fact checking. Much of the following is found in Wikipedia. It is also available by googling their names. Ben Stein has not been completely up front with the evidence he cites for his case.

In the movie, he names four individuals who, he claims, were fired, or were denied tenure, solely because of the bias against them. Here's a review of the cases he cites.

1. Richard Steinberg, a journal editor at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, lost his job over an ID-friendly article he published. A Congressional hearing ensued but went nowhere. Steinberg was not an employee, but a volunteer worker.

2. Dr. Caroline Crocker, "beloved professor" at George Mason University, was fired because she taught ID in her science class. GMU officials verify only that her contract was not renewed. In fact, Dr. Crocker was not tenured, nor in a tenure track position. She was part-time with no

job security rights. She has since been appointed as Executive Director of an outfit called the IDEA Center, a non-profit dedicated to promoting ID.

3. Dr. Robert J. Marks II of Baylor University claims that the university shut down his research web site. The University says only that it removed the website from under the auspices of its sponsorship and its logo. Dr. Marks is still employed as a Distinguished Professor of electrical engineering at Baylor. His tenure was never in jeopardy. Dr. Marks was involved with Dr. William Dembski at the ID lab while it existed. It was never a part of any of Baylor's science departments.

Readers are more familiar with the whole Baylor ID lab episode than I am. My focus is on Ben Stein's claim that the science establishment persecuted professors and denied their academic freedom. For that limited claim, Dr. Marks is not a good example.

4. Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez, the movie's prime example, was an associate professor of astro-physics who was denied tenure at Iowa State University. That is a fact. ISU has undergone a firestorm of protest from ID sources over this case because Dr. Gonzalez is an eminently qualified scientist. However, he was denied tenure because his scientific research, which was excellent, was all produced prior to his appointment at ISU.

Some of the facts in Dr. Gonzalez' case were as follows: While at ISU, none of his publications met scientific standards, since they were nearly entirely devoted to his ID essays and talks. In a physics department whose faculty members averaged over \$1 million in grants per year per professor, Dr. Gonzalez attracted only a few thousand dollars to publish and promote his previous research. None of his advisees graduated.

Dr. Gonzalez followed the university's procedures to appeal his adverse tenure decision. He was denied at every stage up to and including the president of the university, who, atypically for a higher education administrator, is uniquely qualified to read and judge scientific publications. He

had done so in hundreds of previous tenure reviews at several other top tier graduate science institutions. Finally, tenure was denied to four of the twelve applicants within the department over a ten year period, indicating that the requirements were tough and had been applied rigorously as a matter of accepted policy.

Dr. Gonzales subsequently accepted a position as director of a new astronomy program at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, a small Christian liberal arts school that subscribes to the inerrancy of the Bible in its mission statement.

5. As to the general point that the science establishment has frozen out ID research, the Discovery Institute website includes these facts:

The Discovery Institute has spent over nine million dollars over the last decade to fund grants for colleges and universities to underwrite faculty salaries and research into ID. It has provided grants up to \$60,000 to graduate students in paleontology, linguistics, history and philosophy in its campaign to promote ID. In terms of the Institute's overall budget, this is a significant outlay. It undermines Stein's claim that higher education persecutes ID adherents. Some colleges and universities, at least, foster the study of ID.

A Potential Positive Contribution.

Spokespersons for ID on camera make sense, metaphysically. Dr. William Dembski, for one, is a remarkable scholar who possesses six advanced degrees in math, philosophy, and theology. His publications on information technology have won high recognition.

Dembski has been something of an academic gypsy, including his ill-fated sojourn at Baylor. Since then, he spent a year on the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Currently he is research professor at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth. Dembski's comments on camera regarding the competing world views between science and theology deserve attention. Other pro-ID figures are also represented, including some who

have good scientific credentials.

All, including Dembski, take pains to distance themselves from the Institute for Creation Research, which has a spotty academic reputation. Observing the contortions ID has gone through since its own origins in Creationism, you could say that it has evolved. By the same token, evolutionary theory has also undergone radical changes since Darwin.

The main argument for ID is not scientific, but [theo]logical: it is statistically improbable that the complex designs observed in nature could have resulted from random chance alone. Design, according to ID theory, implies a Designer. The Discovery Institute concedes that the cosmic Designer need not be supernatural. Scientific method has no way to prove or to disprove it, but it is a legitimate philosophical question.

The Bottom Line. Ben Stein's *Expelled* fails to prove unfair employment discrimination. He does not delve into underlying legal issues surrounding state boards of education and high school science classes, which have all gone against ID in the courts. Philosophically, and theologically, the movie has the potential to raise public awareness of questions about atheism vs. belief in God, and especially, God's place in the origin or life and of the cosmos. Darwin's theory of evolution does not even address those questions, only the origin of the species. The study of evolutionary changes in nature does not exclude God's existence, even if publicly funded education prohibits any discussion of religious doctrines in science classes, as a matter of accreditation. What about other kinds of classes?

War: *Stop-Loss* (2008)

The Issue. *Stop-Loss* is the first major movie, and the first Iraq War movie, of 2008. It follows several 2007 war movies like *Lions for Lambs* and *In the Valley of Elah*. What makes *Stop-Loss* subtly different from the others is that it starts from the military's policy of involuntarily extending mili-

tary enlistments to send troops back to Iraq for second, third, and even more combat tours. This policy has been called "the back-door draft." "Stop-loss" is defined as a plan to prevent continued loss, such as a customer's order to a broker to sell a stock automatically when it reaches a specific price in a falling market.

In the recruiting context, the main concern is how to fill required troop levels with an all-volunteer force during the current unpopular U. S. war and ongoing occupation of Iraq, now in its sixth year. Several other measures have been implemented already. National Guard units have been activated for Iraq combat. Incentives like huge re-enlistment bonuses have been offered. A massive civilian "consulting" cadre, including armed personnel, now outnumber our troops on the ground. Another measure has been for the U. S. to pay for Iraqi militias, some of them manned by some of the same men who previously planted IEDs² in the streets against us, to join in the fighting on our side.

The stop-loss policy, as depicted in this movie, has helped the military to help fill in TO&E³ shortfalls. Of the 650,000 American troops who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning, over 80,000 have been "stop-lossed," concentrated in more recent years. *Stop-Loss* does not argue that those troops are not *ipso facto* volunteers. Keep in mind that they were all volunteers originally. They may be happy to serve beyond their original contracts. No studies exist about the stop-loss effects on those most affected by it. No one can say that stop-loss is just a technicality designed to avoid re-instituting the draft. But as shown, it does not make the troops happy, to say the least.

The movie has no discussion of the merits of the Iraq War, and very little discussion of the stop-loss policy specifically. Viewers are left to make their own judgments.

The Basic Story. Considered as a social text, *Stop-Loss* is more current than last year's war movies. *Stop-Loss* updates what "winning the war"

realistically looks like today. Several flashback scenes simulate the "home movies" made by soldiers with their own digital cameras, accompanied by their favorite iPod downloads. Their tours of duty consist of long stretches of routine, punctuated by brief periods of frantic action, as assault squads in Humvees pursue small bands of insurgents through the already devastated killing streets of Tikrit.

Stop-Loss is a well-written, well produced movie. The movie company, up and down the credits, is drawn from Hollywood's A-List. Technical and artistic departments behind the film are directed by the leading people in the industry. The cast is topnotch, led by Ryan Phillippe (*Flags of Our Fathers, Breach*) as Staff Sgt (SSgt) Brandon King, a highly decorated soldier returning home to Texas following his second combat tour. SSgt King is an admirable guy who has serious adjustment problems when he is stop-lossed.

Just as SSgt King is being separated from the Army, he is stunned and angered when he receives his "stop-loss" assignment to return promptly to Iraq for a third combat tour. Protesting the injustice he feels over this sudden unwanted development in his life, he goes AWOL for a time with the intention of taking his case to his Senator in Washington. Given his heroic qualities, such an impulsive act is not typical of what SSgt King might be expected to do. By acting out on his anger, he learns that as a result, he will be regarded as a deserter and must actually leave the U. S. permanently for Canada or Mexico as his only alternative to prison—or else comply with the Army's stop-loss order to report for duty again. In the end, he accepts his responsibility and his extended tour.

Most of the movie takes place when he goes AWOL. Therefore, rather than being a "war movie," it is a "road movie," in which the hero and a sidekick take a trip together. On the way, they encounter allies and adversaries on their quest to reach the hero's goal. SSgt King's companion is a friend, a young woman named Michelle, who

is the fiancée of his best Army buddy, Sgt Steve Shriver. Michelle is not SSgt King's romantic interest. Michelle's role provides us as viewers with an independent perspective on Brandon King's character and his impulsive actions while they are on the run.

Thus, Michelle is a sort of Greek chorus in this drama, reflecting on Brandon's choices, yet giving him support, and even protection, as a caring friend. She becomes the conduit for relaying information between Brandon and Steve, and with Brandon's parents back home in Texas. Michelle has the most important female role in an otherwise hyper-macho movie. By writing her role as Brandon's road partner, rather than a fellow male trooper, the movie is able to enlarge its social critique from a relatively narrow focus on the controversial stop-loss policy. Michelle agonizes over her possible future life with Steve. Michelle's eyes give us a different observation point from which to see both Brandon's dissent and Steve's obedience, and on the Iraq War itself, from the home front. Michelle is a powerful and independent voice, so she might be considered a feminist voice in the context of the movie's larger discussion. In my view, she is an ordinary civilian member of the Iraq War generation.

Movie scripts about returning

veterans often follow the fortunes of three buddies. SSgt King's other GI buddies round out some of the possible responses that veterans make when they are confronted with stop-loss. In this movie, there's acute PTSD,⁴ alcohol abuse, depression, violence, nightmares, and suicide among them. During the "road" sequence, there's a visit to a severely wounded buddy in a military hospital, a blinded amputee—but there's nothing much wrong with his attitude. SSgt King also visits the parents of a fallen squad member, with gratitude expressed by the parents but some bitter words of resentment from a younger brother. This family, too, voices mixed reactions.

None of SSgt's cohorts, except his commanding officer, is a one-dimensional super-patriot. Despite their ordinary human flaws, these servicemen are all treated with respect as patriots and heroes. There is a scene containing some rather jarring curse words aimed at President Bush, but *Stop-Loss* makes every effort to support the troops, if not the war.

SSgt King's own Texas rancher-parents are portrayed as salt-of-the-earth, silent-majority types, who beam with pride over his patriotism, and who earnestly try to understand his frustration and rage. His mother is most concerned with his safety; she wants

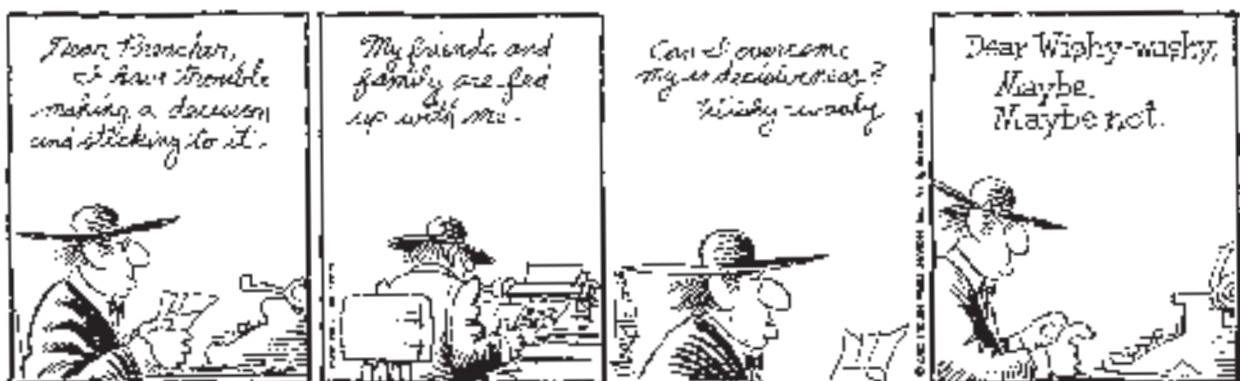
him not to go back, even if she has to drive him across the Mexican border herself. His Dad (Ciaran Hinds) seems more confused over his son's dilemma. Hinds' terse dialogue is confined to one-liners like, "It's just not right," as he tries to make sense of what his son is going through. The viewer is pretty sure he means his son's determination to go AWOL to fight against being stop-lossed, but then, it just could be that he is condemning the stop-loss policy itself. ■

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

2 IED's are Improvised Explosive Devices, \$100 bombs used by insurgents to disable Humvees and inflict casualties.

3 Table of Organization and Equipment, the basic structural guideline for all military components.

4 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is now recognized by the Veterans Administration as an effect of combat trauma upon returning veterans. Treatment is made available on the same basis as any other combat injury.



Book Reviews

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

Jesus for President

Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw,
Zondervan, \$17.

Reviewed by Ed Housewright,
Dallas Morning News, Plano Bureau

Some Christian conservatives don't like their presidential choices this year. They believe that neither Barack Obama nor John McCain adequately embraces their public policy views. The authors of *Jesus for President* might tell them, "Get over it!"

Mr. Claiborne and Mr. Haw pull no punches in arguing that Christians shouldn't look to government to carry out God's work. "We are seeing more and more that the church has fallen in love with the state and that this love affair is killing the church's imagination," the authors write.

They contend that Christian discipleship is "politically and socially engaged, but in a way that confounds and transcends [political] parties."

Shane Claiborne is one of the founders of The Simple Way, an inner-city Christian community in Philadelphia that helps spawn other communities. Chris Haw is a member of a Christian community in Camden, N.J. Their views are well-stated and provocative, particularly in this election season. Some Christians may take offense at some of the statements.

For instance, the authors question whether America is, indeed, a Christian nation that God looks upon in a special way. *Jesus for President* challenges Christians to re-examine their patriotism in light of the Bible's teaching. Their book comprises more than two dozen essays, with titles such as "Power in Weakness," "Set Apart for Something Better" and "A Security Plan That Will Never Win an Election."

Note: This review appeared in the DMN, June 21, 2008, and is reprinted with permission.

The Fall of the Evangelical Nation

Christine Wicker, HarperOne, \$25.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Weiss,
Dallas Morning News Religion Columnist.

The author, a former reporter who covered religion and other beats for *The Dallas Morning News*, throws her best punch with her first sentence: "Evangelical Christianity in America is dying." The rest is nuance and numbers, woven around compelling anecdotes.

The nuance: She defines evangelicalism as what most people would call the religious right.

The numbers: Largely using statistics supplied by the groups themselves, she makes a strong case that they represent no more than 7 percent of adult Americans and that the percentage is shrinking.

Her premise matters, she says, because evangelicals should not command the degree of power or influence their image has seemed to justify.

The book is strongest when she's laying out her numbers and introducing us to people. Her speculative attempts to enlist sociology, neuropsychology and evolutionary biology to explain the drop in evangelical numbers are less convincing.

You need not know much about religion or numbers to appreciate this book. She breaks down her arguments into simple bites that are not dumbed down. Her portraits of evangelicals and those who have left the fold are colorful and engaging. Her case is not beyond critique—is her definition too narrow?—but a reader will have no trouble understanding her points.

Note: This review appeared in the DMN, June 2008, and is reprinted with permission.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

An initial impression one gets from this well-written and effectively

researched book is that it relates to the 2008 political campaign in the United States. The author's main point is that the strident and often vocal voices of the Evangelical Christian Movement in America usually relate to the right-wing of the Republican party and are simply more noise than substance. The reason: there are not as many of those voices as they claim. By the time the author wanders through this religious mine-field, she has seemingly cut down this major and influential outcry of moral indignation to a minor whimper that frankly should not be taken seriously!

The approach she makes in her book is multi-directional. There are many human interest stories which make for fascinating reading. Some of these are bluntly offensive to intelligent Christians. Helpful research reports from reputable sources undergird her contention that the actual numbers of evangelical Christians should be drastically reduced from the much-publicized figure of 25% of the U.S. population to somewhere between 5-10%. Church membership rolls are also inflated. Hence, this group in American religious and political life is not that significant!

If the author's premise is correct, then all one has to do is to await the arrival of the casket and witness the official burial service of the evangelical movement in America.

Interestingly enough, one of her other points is a critique of the mega-church movement, a seemingly major development in American church life which belies the premise of death. As a lapsed Southern Baptist, she gives the reader an in-depth study of a large mega-church, the Lake Point Church in Rockwall, Texas, a booming suburb east of Dallas. Save for relegating the pastor to the rigid halls of biblical literalism, she scores positively the excellent ministry and outreach of the

congregation.

This church, though indistinctly Baptist, constitutes a good example of what mega-churches are doing through out the land, an amazing picture of Christian growth primarily in metropolitan areas.

These trends are also symbols of a post-denominational development as well as a commentary on the inexorable decline of the main-line denominations. This additional fact supports her main contention that there is a real decline of evangelical strength. The author has some interesting predictions about mega-churches: they are pastor-centered, and as such they may not live beyond the current leadership.

The book ends on a very personal note, which leads the reader to question the author's objectivity in the very serious question about the true strength of American Christianity. Absent in the book is both the recognition of the historical strength of traditional Christianity as well as the surprising flexibility of this two-thousand-year-old religion which continues to address humanity's deepest needs.

Church State Matters: Fighting for Religious Liberty in Our Nation's Capital

J. Brent Walker, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008, \$28.

Reviewed by Aubrey H. Ducker, Jr., Orlando, FL.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. So reads the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. There are four other clauses covering freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and the right to petition, but the first sixteen words establish forever our right to be Baptists, Catholics, Lutherans, Quakers, Mormons, Hindus, Buddhists, Wiccans, atheists, or more importantly, not.

Why would you care about the

Separation of Church and State? Because you are a Baptist! When Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Connecticut Baptist Association affirming the First Amendment as "building a wall of separation between church and state," he was simply citing the first Baptist in America, Roger Williams, who coined the phrase "wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world." Jefferson, certainly no Baptist but a deist who believed Jesus was a great philosopher, insisted his tombstone bear witness to his drafting the State of Virginia's Freedom of Religion Statute. He knew, as any who would observe history knows, a failure to separate God from country produces the King as God's Representative on Earth, the Spanish Inquisition, the Salem Witch Trials, and more recently, the Taliban in Afghanistan.

While the United States of America espouses a shining example of religious freedom in the world, such freedom is only possible when guaranteed against government intrusion into religion. Such guarantee is largely due to the effort of Baptists like Roger Williams; Thomas Leland; George W. Truett; James Dunn, and now Brent Walker.

Who is Brent Walker? Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, D.C., lawyer, minister, and amiable host and guide of any truly complete trip to Washington D.C. He goes by many titles, but most importantly, friend: friend of Baptists; friend of the First Amendment, and friend of the Court when he files briefs in the United States Supreme Court on issues of Church and State.

Brent Walker's latest book details American History through its intermingling with Baptist History and the uniquely Baptist ideal of a Free Church in a Free Society. You can receive the same history lessons by reading scores of books, letters, treatises and sermons, but Walker boils it all down to 253 pages of previously published articles and in some cases unpublished sermons leaving the read-

er educated, entertained, and proud. The book educates the reader on our "First Freedom," as it remembers past controversies and personalities. Walker also shares sermons delivered on this important topic.

Read this book if you care about the Baptist heritage of religious freedom, the founding of the United States, or the meaning of the First Amendment. The book is available through booksellers, but it also may be acquired by donating \$50 to the important work of the Baptist Joint Committee.

Globalization and Grace

Max J. Stackhouse, New York: Continuum, 2007, \$35.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan, Richardson, TX.

This book is Volume 4 of the "God and Globalization" series which is subtitled, "Theological Ethics and the spheres of Life." Dr. Stackhouse is the editor of the first three volumes and the author of the fourth. All four in this series merit serious attention.

Events of unparalleled importance cluster around this emerging reality globalization, a development which is taking place right now in our world. Many students of history equate the impact of globalization as important as the Industrial Revolution and even the Protestant Reformation.

Globalization, an economic, political, cultural process of change, has emerged in this generation because of the information revolution that knows no national boundaries. The changes inaugurated by the computer, the cell phone and the world-wide web has drastically changed the way the world does business. It is tied to a communication revolution which literally knows no boundaries.

Stackhouse's book, as well as the entire series, tackles head-on the implications of this phenomenon, specifically as it impacts religion and ethics. Many of the current writers in this field either ignore these major areas of influence or underrate them in the course of their writings.

Stackhouse is a well-known and

highly respected professor-emeritus of Theology and Public Life at Princeton Theological Seminary, and is regarded far and wide as a major voice in the field of Christian Ethics. In this volume he writes wisely, seriously, and profoundly about these new themes, which are absolutely necessary for Christian understanding and guidance in Christian Ethics. He is also plowing new fields in the relationships brought on by the international developments impacted by globalization.

One of the key values of this book is the author's demand that religion be given its rightful place in the potent influences of both the cause and effects of globalization. The Darwinists, sometimes parading under the banner of "evolutionary psychology" (118) have strangely joined forces with economists, political scientists, and even journalists to equate religion and ethics as unimportant or irrelevant in the quest to grasp the significance of the cultural impact of globalization. To ignore these essential factors in life everywhere is to make a major mistake in human values and behavior. The author builds throughout this seriously written book a strong and defensible case for the place of religion and ethics at the very heart of humanity.

This is a deeply probing book mandating a methodical reading

and response. The author is attempting to answer the question "What do Christian theology and ethics have to offer public life in our globalization epoch?" (35) We live in different times from even a generation once removed. Exploration, colonization, industrialization, and even the information age—all have given way to the nebulous era of globalization, a time whose end and impact we are unable at this juncture to determine. Every segment of life is being influenced. If ever there was a time for a vibrant and creative expression of the Christian faith, these are those days.

At the very center of this vortex, the author inserts the great themes of God's grace as expressed in Creation, Providence, and Salvation. The strength of the book is the genuine welcome these themes have in an authentically biblical setting. The book moves to a positive conclusion that clearly posits the grace of God as an intelligent, basic, and trustworthy choice in these clashing streams issuing from the economic, political, and divergent religious concerns stemming from the challenge of globalization. The bottom line from the author—the Christian Gospel is prepared for this new challenge!

One final note: One is grateful for the fruitful footnotes and subsequent

comments the author gives throughout the book. These documents carefully an amazing reservoir of resource material available to the serious student of Religion and Ethics.

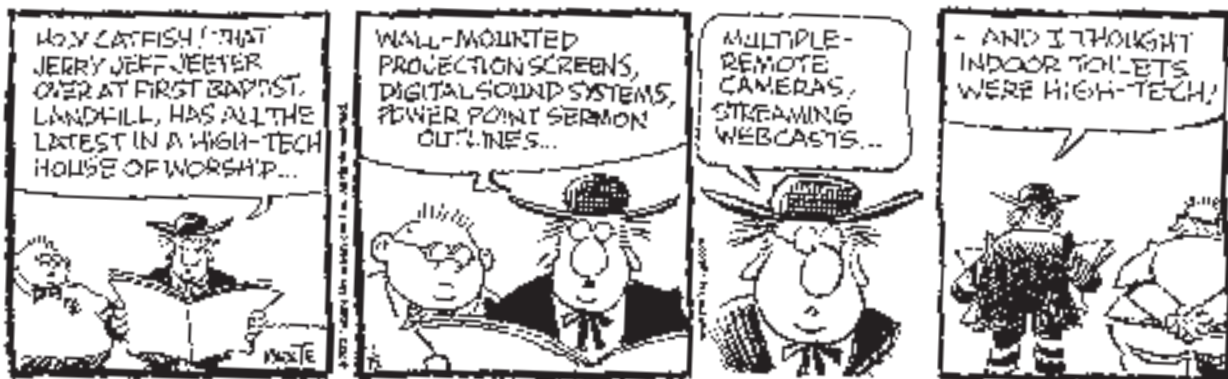
The Great Awakening

Jim Wallis, New York, Harper, 2008, \$26.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

Borrowing a major theme of American church history, Jim Wallis uses powerfully the concepts of "The Great Awakenings" in the 1700s and 1800s, comparing them intriguingly to some vitally important current religious and political developments. Whether this comparison is overstated or not is a conclusion that the reader will have to make. Wallis has written another major and searching book about these relationships of faith and politics in a time when the Religious Right has seemingly lost its way in the political world. For a quarter of a century American religious and political life has been impacted by a collage of extremes designated as "The Religious Right."

Wallis believes, and he is not alone, that there is a genuine grass roots movement nation-wide which almost desperately wants a new approach of



religion and politics to these formative unanswered issues of the day. It is indeed a post-Religious-Right time!

The book is a timely, powerful, persuasive book which richly deserves a wide hearing because Wallis is dealing in urgently important challenges which face not only this nation but the entire world. The earlier "Great Awakenings" resulted in theological and ethical revivals of great importance in America's religious evolution . . . i.e. hyper-Calvinism vs. Arminianism vs. Unitarianism, as well as the emergence of the abolition/slavery conflicts leading to the Civil War.

The Religious Right has centered its attention primarily on two major ethical issues—abortion and homosexuality! It has left untouched the surging concerns around poverty, racial justice, war, and environmental problems, as well as balanced approaches to abortion and homosexuality. Wallis' book details both these last two issues

and gives new directions for solutions. Wallis himself is an interesting blend of old fashioned conservatism and a nuanced liberalism, which is rarely found in American religious circles today. He writes of a new paradigm regarding faith and politics, one that is distinctly needed in the 2008 political campaign which is shaping up as a contest unlike any other in American political history. His approach includes the traditional moral values for the family, the sanctity of life, and personal behavior. Wallis writes problemingly from an anti-war stance, and his words about environmental stewardship are exceptionally timely and direct.

Wallis' new book focuses on his deeply held conviction that there is a meaningful revival of religious faith in America, partly growing out of a profound reaction to the misuse of religion by the extreme right. The peculiar non-interest of this influen-

tial group regarding important ethical issues is a contributing factor in the new "Great Awakening." He cites numerous references which verify this current development and give a genuine optimistic tone to the entire book.

Throughout his book are delightful excerpts from his family, his early life, and his ministry of preaching and writing. These insights help us understand better this major player in the field of religion and ethics.

He honestly believes we are on the threshold of new times in an ethical sensitivity to the massive challenges facing not only our nation but the entire world. A balanced religious approach to these constitutes some radiant light at the end of what has been an exceptionally long tunnel! Whether or not one agrees with Wallis' perceptions, his book is one that is well worth reading and debating. ■



God Speaks in Many Ways

By James A. Langley, Washington, D.C.

God of heav'n and earth speaks in many ways,
Revealing himself and his sov'reign will,
In grace, commands and guides us all our days,
Earnest seekers, thus led, may truth distil.

God may speak in lightning rending the skies,
Crashing thunder---or, silence of the spheres;
Acts of love and kindness, a child's troubled cries,
Grace abounding amid recurring fears.

By great cataracts of the Zambesi,
Or awesome Niagara's plunging roar,
Some wild flower, a mountain majesty,
When hummingbirds hover, and eagles soar.

With a child's deep trust, and clasp of the hand,
The convolutions of the human ear,
A questing mind's search to know and understand,
The faithful, through travail, conquering fear.

Dostoyevsky probing the psyche's depths,
An exquisite aria by Gounod,
Remembrance, near or far, of some saint's steps,
Millet's *Angelus*, a tyrant's overthrow.

A profligate fling of diamonds across
The velvet night, sunset flaming the sky,
Healing, or an irreplaceable loss;
At times we sense a wordless Presence nigh.

Where disease ravages and hunger stalks,
And many are broken, or bowed in shame,
There assuredly the Lord walks and talks,
Summoning us to minister in his name.

A mushroom cloud holds humankind hostage;
Can we not also discern the same Voice
Calling us to turn from killing and carnage,
All wars' stygian ways, by wiser choice?

By the mind he gave, with God communing,
The stars which "he made also" are telling
His glory, infinite, all surpassing,
In whose heart are all the virtues dwelling.

If the Almighty in a still, small voice
Marks the human path, why should it surprise?
No sound heard among the stars by God's choice,
And heaven oft'n shows its ways in disguise.

Prophets walked with God in lonely exile,
At other times among princes and kings,
Spoke truth to power, blocked the devil's wile,
Soared with insights as if on angels' wings.

God still speaks by these movers and shakers,
Calling for justice for the poor and weak,
Love for mercy, severe on evil-makers,
Exalting the God-like strength of the meek.

Divine light shines through the sacred pages,
Spirit inspired oracles blest in seeing,
Tested guide and compass across the ages,
That ever know and find our inmost being.

In this final age God speaks by a Son,
Paradox of paradoxes, God-Man,
Lately come, redemptive work to be done
Revealing God's magisterial plan.

He speaks as no other has ever spoken,
By his cross and resurrection power,
Healing lives, and a world that is broken,
The way, the truth, life and love, his dower.

O hear! hear the Word, written and living!
Listen for the vital truth God will give,
To the willing God is ever giving,
O discern God's gracious will! hear and live! ■

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

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