

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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An Open Letter To Our Readers

“It’s Friday—But Sunday’s Comin’”

I’ve heard Tony Campolo preach this sermon many times—it always inspires and challenges me. The sermon idea came from Marshall L. Shepard, Jr., an elderly black Baptist pastor of West Philadelphia.

What a message for 2009! In the midst of an economic depression, business failures, high unemployment, housing foreclosures, and Ponzi schemes, IT’S FRIDAY—BUT SUNDAY’S COMIN’! We really do believe that!

If you read our Financial Report for 2009 in the last issue of the Journal, you know that in 2008 (for the first time) CET cost more to publish (\$100,824) than our income (\$82,602 from 827 donors). Our Board and staff are working together to reduce costs to about \$90,000 in 2009).*

Voluntary giving is difficult in hard times—we understand that. And, as Foy Valentine said when he launched the Journal in 1995, we will continue sending it to anyone requesting the Journal “as long as money and energy permit.”

If you are able to send a gift—\$10, \$25, \$100, or more—Thanks! If not, don’t worry—our main purpose is readers (now totaling over 5500), so keep receiving the Journal and telling others about it, for that is what makes us the happiest.

So don’t forget, even though it is Friday, Sunday’s comin’.

Grateful for your support,

Joe E. Trull, Editor Fisher Humphreys, Chair

*P.S. Remember that a gift of \$50 or more entitles you to any of our previous offers: T. B. Maston’s *Why Live the Christian Life?*, Foy Valentine’s *Whatever Things Are Lovely*, *Putting Women In Their Place by the Trulls*, the DVD “*The Minister and Politics*” (Wallis, Campolo, Boyd, Rogers), or the CD-ROM containing *Issues 1-59 (1995-2005) of the Journal (Indexed by Author/Subject)*.*

***Note:** In 2009 Christian Ethics Today will be published quarterly, four times each year, in the Winter (Feb.), Spring (May), Summer (Aug.), and Fall (Nov.), rather than five times annually as was done in the past.

Living Words

By Myra Wise Norton, Doug Wise, and Fisher Wise

For our father, Philip Wise (1949-2009)

My smile cracks in the corners of your mouth
Your words form in mine
I know they are your words when I speak them
I smile because they are what I meant

Your words will always be with me—a part of who I am
They show me who I want to be, and push me to do the things I can
Your words had the force of action—you always did what you said
You had so many words for me—words I've heard and words I've read

Your words remind me who to be tonight
“Do what's right,” you said
Your words were how you lived your life
Your words said stand up for what is right—even if you stand alone
Sometimes you stood alone; and your words weren't always right
But sometimes, after you'd thought a while,
Your words would see the light
But you lived your faith and you lived your words,
And that's the person I want to be tonight

In so many words, and in so many ways you taught me to deal with so many tests
Your words taught me to win, to brook no pessimism, and to always do my best
Your words said lead with actions, and to play when my work was through
Your words left no doubt that I should lead because you knew I needed to.
Your words said leadership requires no status; that leaders simply do
And when the time comes for you to follow—do that with humility too

People trusted your words because your wisdom was understood
You preached a thousand Sundays, making your thoughts plain to those you could
You taught me that “there is art in clarity”
And your words were crystal clear:
Treat all people with dignity and respect;
Stand up for those in fear;
Take responsibility for your actions—and try to make things right
Have enough humility to let people live how they live
And above all, love and forgive, and forgive, and forgive

You asked the hard questions and gave honest answers
You had words for everyone so you could talk with anyone
Intellectuals and the religious, atheists, farmers, sponsors of business
No one was above or beneath you,
“But remember there's always someone better,” you said
You never gave up on me, no matter what I did, or where I was led
no matter how I embarrassed you or our family, the hell I put you through
You were always there, you were always there, and that I always knew
Your love was unconditional and undeserved, always strong and true
I learned about God's love from your love, I know God because I know you

My smile cracks in the corners of your mouth
Your words form in mine
I know they are your words when I speak them
I smile because they are what I meant ■

Note: Philip Wise served as Chair of the Board of Directors of *Christian Ethics Today* from 2006 until his death March 30, 2009. We already miss his wise leadership and supportive words. JET

EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“I haven’t asked for one, and I won’t. I’ve gotten the only pardon I care about, which is from Christ.”

Chuck Colson, *Prison Fellowship founder and former Nixon aide who was imprisoned for his role in the Watergate scandal, on whether he would seek a Presidential pardon. Christianity Today.*

“I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on earth is my story even possible.”

Barack Obama, *from his speech “A More Perfect Union.”*

“Executions doubled worldwide in 2008. Countries with the most executions are: China (1718), Iran (346), Saudi Arabia (102), United States (37), and Pakistan (36).”

Amnesty International.

“A University of Chicago study found that four of the five most conservative justices to serve on the Supreme Court since 1937 (a total of 43) are on the court now—1. **Clarence Thomas** (82.2%), 2. **William H. Rehnquist** (81.5%), 3. **Antonio Scalia** (75.7%), 4. **John G. Roberts Jr.** (75.3%), 5. **Samuel A. Alito, Jr.** (74.0%). Other current justices and their rank are: **Souter** (29), **Breyer** (31), **Stevens** (32), and **Ginsburg** (35).”

“If you don’t follow Jesus to places like Africa, India, and Asia, you might want to check whether or not it is Jesus that you are following.”

Derek Webb, *Nashville-based Christian singer-songwriter (Sojourners, 2/09).*

“The science is clear and compelling: greenhouse-gas emissions, primarily from fossil fuels, are changing our climate.”

Steven Chu, *winner of the 1997 Nobel Prize, is the U. S. Secretary of Energy (Newsweek, 4/13/09).*

“Putting someone on death row costs \$3 million more than a life sentence.”
CBS News (3/19/09).

“If students have guns on campus, that can only create more danger.”
Virginia Tech graduate and UT student John Woods, who lost his girlfriend in the 2007 shootings, responding to a proposal in the 2009 Texas legislature to allow concealed handguns on college campuses

“In 1980 executive compensation was 40 times the average wage paid to U.S. workers. By 2007 it had soared to 433 times average salaries.”
Forbes Magazine.

“Taxes of \$40-70 billion a year are avoided by 83 of 100 of the largest publicly traded U. S. corporations, who have subsidiaries in offshore tax havens. Citigroup, a major receiver of bailout funds, has 427 subsidiaries and tax havens, 90 of them in the Cayman Islands.”

Sen. Bill Nelson (FL).

“Twenty-seven percent of Americans said someone in their family put off needed health care last year because of cost, including 16 percent who postponed surgery.”

Associated Press (2/09).

“If Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth truly wants to add a curriculum for women that inculcates the “characteristics of the godly woman as outlined in the Scripture,” the school’s administration will have to add courses in commercial real estate (Prov 31:16a), horticulture (31:16b), physical conditioning (31:17), business admin-

istration (31:18), the sociology of philanthropy (31:20), commercial clothing manufacturing (31:24), rhetoric and androgyny (31:26), and spiritual formation (31:30). Without courses such as these, the curriculum seems only to promote a cultural counterfeit of the ideal biblical women.”

Jim Beck, *The Christian Century* (11/13/07).

“Arrogance, incompetence, and greed.”

Rep. Paul Hodes, *D-N.H., saying in a congressional hearing what the letters AIG stand for.*

“I find it curious that we are first in line to support the coal industry that is polluting our air and destroying the Appalachian Mountains, yet when it comes to actual pro-environmental legislation, we are nowhere to be found.”

Jonathan Merritt, *national spokesman for the Southern Baptist Environment and Climate initiative, in response to SBC lobbyist for social concerns Richard Land’s support for Friends of Coal.*

“We are born to die. Not that death is the purpose of our being born, but we are born towards death, and in each of our lives the work of dying is already underway. The work of dying well is, in largest part, the work of living well.”

Richard John Neuhaus, *radical conservative evangelical Lutheran/Roman Catholic editor of First Things, who died in 2009.*

“Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.”

Thomas Moore *in the hymn Come Ye Disconsolate.* ■

We've Got Mail

Letters From Our Readers

"As I read your excellent article *When Death Becomes Birth* [Issue 73], I agreed with your interpretation of death as not an end, but a beginning. As a pastor, I have preached this theme at every funeral I have officiated.

If you really want to get the definition of a shocking event, please contact my 80-year-old parents, who, like you, have lost many friends to sudden serious illness. They were told two months ago that their youngest child had Diffuse Large Cell Type B Aggressive Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma (Stage 4). I have made all the arrangements for my funeral, just in case the chemotherapy does not succeed.

Recently while I was under anesthesia for the lymph node biopsy, the doctor said that I started singing, "There's within my heart a melody; Jesus whispers sweet and low, 'Fear not I am with thee, peace, be still,' In all of life's ebb and flow."

I am 47 years old. If it is time for me to go, I am ready for this new beginning. It doesn't take the aging process for this to happen.

I inherited this disease from my grandmother, who died from Leukemia at a relatively young age. Although I am not afraid of death, I do not think that my parents, siblings, extended family, church family and friends share my view.

Hundreds of people have called, emailed, and sent cards during the last sixty days since my diagnosis. Many of them stated that God could not possibly let me die because I have so much to do as a pastor. Gently I reminded them that God can call me home at any time. I hope that they will not be mad at God. I would rather that they rejoice that my life continues when death becomes birth.

Thank you for your wonderful journal, which I have savored for years. Keep up your good work. In His Everlasting Arms,

Rev. Joy Heaton, Waverly, VA

"Joy: I have followed your life and ministry from a distance and often thanked God for you and so many courageous and capable women pastors like you, many of whom you have influenced.

I write better than I read, so I am sitting here responding to your special email, with eyes that are moist and a hurt that hurts with your dear family. Your words give us all courage and hope, yet in my humanity I (perhaps like you) can deal better with my own death than with that of friends and colleagues. . . . Love in Christ, Joe E. Trull

P.S. An afterthought: I think to print your letter (with your permission) in CET would bless many others, as it has me.

"Yes, you have permission . . . I believe that the only way any person will truly know WHAT s/he believes about death is in the moment facing death. Now I know that I believe it is not truly the end because I was raised to know the One who took the fear of death away from me. It is my husband, parents, family, church, and friends who have a harder struggle than I do.

However, I believe my best sermon for all of them is being preached right now . . . and I'm not even in a pulpit.

Life is fragile, but, oh so beautiful! If my days are fulfilled at 47 years, I have had a wonderful life. For every person whose hand I have held as I lowered them into baptismal waters, I will be there to welcome on the other side in the maternity ward. I count it all joy! Grace and Peace to You and Your Family, Joy.

Note: *Many readers responded by phone, email, and letter with gratitude for Bill Hull's article "Finding God in the Darkness" (12/08) and the editorial "When Death Becomes Birth" (2/09).*

"Thank you for your email and sending the ethical materials [Journals, books, CDs, Audio] to our college. Could you also send them to a teacher at Myanmar Institute of Theology?"

Nang Sawm Piang, Trinity Theological College, Singapore

Note: *In 2009, the Piper Fund allowed us to send a set of Journals and all of the books and CDs we offer to Christian schools in ten different countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe.*

"Just a note of thanks to Darold Morgan for the review of my recent book, *Globalization and Grace* [Fall, 2008]. He has seen my intent as well as any of the reviewers and I am delighted that he approves of the direction of my argument. I have appreciated this journal for some time, and I pray you will keep up the good work."

Max L. Stackhouse, Princeton Theological Seminary.

"The Journal is absolutely splendid! Foy would be proud."

Ross Coggins, Sherwood Forest, MD.

"The Winter 2009 issue . . . is one of the most creative and stimulating collections of thought pieces in a while—both original and copied—otherwise I would never have read "Letter From a Birmingham Jail."

Dr. Richard D. Kahoe, Woodward, OK.

"Thanks for CET—keep it coming! This gift is given in memory/honor of those who blessed me in my two terms at NOBTS."

Dr. Reid Whittington, Collinsville, MS. ■

Making Moral Decisions: An Artful Ability¹

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

In 1804 a Kentucky Baptist congregation was divided because they could not decide the right thing to do. The moral question was raised whether a man, when captured by the Indians, was justified in lying to protect his family concealed nearby.

Some believed the man had a duty to lie in those circumstances, while others maintained he should tell the truth even if it meant the sacrifice of his family. The argument was so vehement that the church split into two congregations known as the Lying Baptists and the Truthful Baptists.²

Moral decisions are never easy. One writer lists ten obstacles to overcome before good decisions can be made.³ How does a Christian determine what is right or wrong? Is there a tried-and-tested formula for analyzing an ethical issue and making moral judgments?

Our task is to utilize the insights gained from various approaches to moral decision making in order to construct a basic outline for moral deliberation. Our goal is to construct a model that is biblically and theologically sound, ethically credible, and logically consistent.

The model suggested here claims no uniqueness, for many ethicists employ one or more of these steps in their systems.⁴ Nevertheless, each one of the five procedures suggested here is important to the total task. To omit any of these considerations is to risk a serious flaw in ethical analysis. Although the order of the steps has a logical basis, the process of decision making is always dialogical in nature. Ideally the moral agent moves back and forth between each of the suggested procedures, listening and responding, before reaching a final conclusion.

Be True to Your Character—Virtues

A beginning point in decision making is to develop a mature Christian

character. Character is basic to ethical decision making—being affects doing. In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), Jesus emphasized that character precedes conduct and morality is a matter of the heart.

Character is the inner moral orientation that fashions our lives into predictable patterns. The question posed by character is, “What values do you wish to express through your life and practice?” No person approaches a moral choice objectively; who you are determines what you do. Character ethics encourages the cultivation of virtues—moral excellencies essential to the good life. In Lewis Smedes’s words, to become a “pretty good person” requires living with common qualities like “gratitude, guts, simple integrity, self-control, discernment, and fair love.”⁵

Probably no one more than Stanley Hauerwas has emphasized the role of community in shaping character; “habits of the heart” are shaped by our family, our church, our schools, and our society. Participation in a moral community is the main way we develop ethical character.

Character ethics supports moral choices in two important ways: first, “a certain sense of calmness in doing the right thing and courage in resisting the wrong,” and second, “a measure of discretion” leaving “final judgment up to the individual.”⁶

Ethics based on Christian character also gives a certain completeness or wholeness to persons—a spiritual unity at the core of personality. Because what I am affects what I do, nothing is more basic to moral decision making than character. As Jesus put it, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (Mt 7:17).

As important as is character, the ability to analyze ethical issues and make prudent choices is also vital.

Both “being good” and “doing good” are essential in ethics. Like the bow and the violin, the two elements work together to produce the music of a life of moral integrity.

Face the Facts—Discernment

Moral discernment requires an accurate analysis of the pertinent facts. Only some facts are relevant, but all facts are interpreted facts, “felt” facts, and evaluated facts.⁷ In addition, significant facts are always filtered through our own beliefs, feelings, fears, desires, and values; only then can we identify them as “the facts of the case.”⁸

An elementary rule in responsible moral decision making is to know the facts in the case. How do we gain accurate information? Four main procedures are necessary:⁹

1. Collect data. Asking the right questions is essential—who, what, where, when, why, and how? Determine the circumstances surrounding the issue.
2. Examine the persons involved. Find out who the players in the situation are and understand each one’s point of view and apparent motives.
3. Evaluate the information. Incorrect understanding of the facts can lead you to make a wrong decision. Be aware of personal biases.
4. Explore all possible options. Identify the obvious alternatives, search for other possibilities, and deliberate about the different choices available.

For example, a current dilemma questions carrying a concealed weapon (handgun) for protection against criminals. To analyze this moral issue, a person should first gather facts—the biblical, theological, and social data about crime and the Christian response to it. What ethical norms apply? Why are crimes against persons committed? What could be done to prevent crime and to protect victims? If a Christian were confronted

by a criminal, what are the possible responses? Which one is best?

Follow the Guidelines—Obligations

Once we understand the issue, the persons involved, and the options available, we are then ready to consider the values that will guide our decision. First we must heed the moral rules that guide us toward good decisions: “Moral rules are not fetters to bind us into moral straitjackets and steal our freedom. Nor do they take all of the risks out of making choices or relieve us of the agony of making decisions when we are not sure which one is right. Rules help us to use our freedom wisely.”¹⁰

Behind every rule there is a reason, a value which can be stated as a principle. Ethical principles act like a compass to direct us toward the good. For Christians, ethical norms and principles primarily come from the revelation of God in the Bible. Chief among numerous ethical guidelines in the Scriptures are the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), the principles of love for God and humanity (Mt 22:36-40), and justice (Amos 5:24). Other resources that guide us toward the moral will of God include the Holy Spirit, Christian tradition, experience, reason, conscience, and prayer.

The mature Christian will evaluate

the obligations and duties that apply to the issue faced. Sometimes competing values will require a person to prioritize the moral goods, selecting an option that is the greater good or the lesser evil. A Christian should be able to state the norms, values, principles, and other resources that confirm that a right decision has been made.

Consider the Consequences—Goals

An important test of right choices is to consider what happens afterward—the results. Anyone interested in doing the right thing must consider consequences, for bringing good to people’s lives is a major part of what morality is about.

In one sense, consequences confirm God’s ethical ideals. “The rules of justice and love are God’s own absolutes, which are never up for grabs in anybody’s world . . . goodness and decency will eventually break down when these rules are ignored. I need a faith that assures me that respect for human life, for truth, and for property produces better results for the most people in the long run.”¹¹

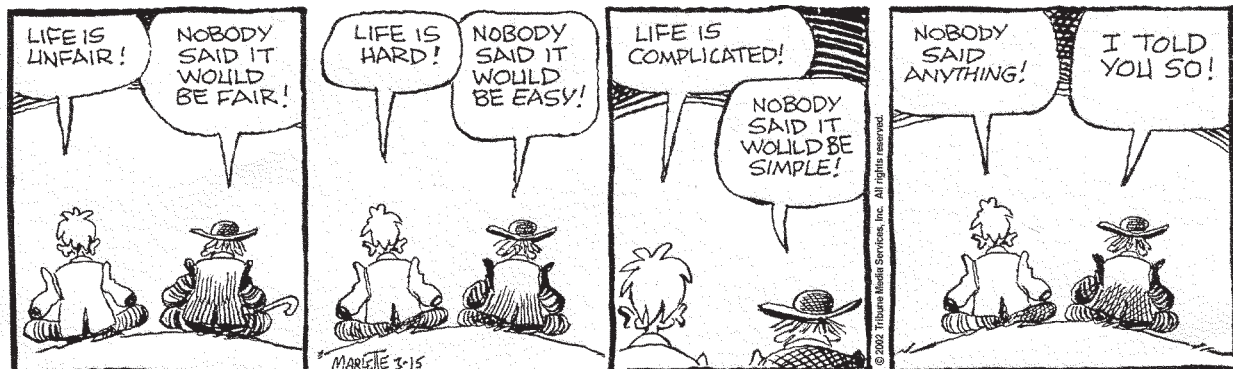
Consequentialism is present in both the Old and New Testaments.¹² Wisdom literature seldom takes the imperative form, but usually gives practical advice about how to achieve the good life (Pr 9:10). Hebrew midwives who “feared God” made their decision to deceive Pharaoh on the

basis of consequences: to save the male babies (Ex 1:15-20).

If what we choose to do brings good results, then we assume we have made a good choice. But how do we know which results are good? Before we depend on results to justify our actions, we need criteria for knowing what is good, better, or best, or maybe what is bad and what is worse.¹³ The weakness of teleological ethics is that you never know for sure what the consequences will be.

Another way to consider the consequences of a decision is to ask a series of questions: Which consequences are beneficial and which are harmful? Which are immediate and which will occur in the future? Which will only last a short time and which will last a long time? Will the consequences help me achieve an ideal or will they involve compromise?¹⁴

The question of consequences is usually raised when two values seem to conflict. As Nazis came knocking on Corrie ten Boom’s door during World War II, the heroine of *The Hiding Place* faced a dilemma. Would she reveal that Jews were hiding in the house, or would she lie to the Gestapo? Her decision involved conflicting values and potential results: to tell the truth probably meant Auschwitz and the furnaces. With much courage and some anguish, she chose a “lesser evil”



to achieve a higher good; she lied to the soldiers. Her decision was like Rahab's misleading the king of Jericho (Josh 2) and Elisha's deception of the Syrian soldiers (2 Kgs 6).

Although results matter and we cannot live by moral rules alone, we must also remember we cannot live by results alone either. The "lesser evil" is an evil, not a good. The decision maker should express repentance over the necessity of such a choice and work toward the day when such decisions are unnecessary. The focus on results can also deceive us into believing "our loving lies" are gallant when they actually are meant to save us from trouble.

Act Responsibly

Making moral decisions is a lot like driving on a crowded freeway. Certain rules of the road must be followed—speed limits, lane changes, and not driving while drinking. However, on any given trip there are hundreds of decisions not covered by the rules. Some situations require you to make your own rules or even change the rules in order to prevent a catastrophe, such as avoiding a reckless driver cutting in front of you. The catch-all rule for driving on a freeway that covers all situations is this one—drive responsibly.¹⁵

H. Richard Niebuhr taught that responsible people have three qualities: (1) they are able to initiate action; (2) they are able to respond to any situation; and (3) they are accountable.¹⁶ The chances are that you acted responsibly if you:

- Used discernment,
- Interpreted the question before you answered it,
- Considered whether the act was appropriate,
- Used your imagination,
- Acted in congruence with your commitments and your roles,
- Were willing to let your acts be seen in public, and
- Accepted accountability for your actions.¹⁷

To summarize, then, making moral decisions requires a mix of types of ethics. No single method of moral

reasoning covers the entire range of moral experience or fits every moral question.

In day-to-day situations you may operate by a set of norms and principles. In the face of unique, non-repetitive decisions you may bring calculation of consequences into operation. If really pushed to the wall by a situation in which you cannot compromise, you may act according to convictions drawn from your character. "As people mature in decision making they achieve an artful ability to make appropriate ethical responses by drawing selectively from their repertoire of ethical knowledge."¹⁸

The "artful ability" referred to above is similar to the skills of a baseball pitcher. In Little League play, a youngster with a terrific fastball can win many games, but if that is his only pitch, he will never play baseball in the major leagues. A skilled baseball pitcher not only has a "repertoire" of pitches, from slider to change-up, he also has a knowledge of the game—what pitch to deliver to which batter at what target around the plate. Likewise, the mature Christian develops the skill to deliver the right "pitch" for each situation to the right target.

The ability to make good moral decisions is not genetically inbred at birth or miraculously infused at conversion or baptism. Christian discipleship is a lifelong process. The believer identifies with Jesus Christ in a community of faith shaped by the biblical story. Character is formed, conduct is informed, and moral vision is developed—a life of ethical integrity unfolds.

The most encouraging words for decision makers are the closing words in Lewis Smedes's classic text: "Nothing you do wrong can get God to love you less than he did when you did things right. Nothing need ever separate you from the love of God. After all is said and done, being right is not the most important thing in the world. Being forgiven is."¹⁹ ■

- 1 This article is adapted from the author's text, *Walking in the Way: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 125ff.
- 2 Vernon Elmore, "The Lesson in Life," *Broadman Comments*, 1971 (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 178-79.
- 3 Ray Higgins, *Turn Right: A Christian's Guide for Making Better Decisions* (Nashville: Baptist Center for Ethics, 1994), 10-17.
- 4 Higgins, *Turn Right*, 34; Higginson, *Dilemmas*, 228; and Lewis Smedes, *Choices: Making Right Decisions in a Complex World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).
- 5 Lewis Smedes, *A Pretty Good Person* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3.
- 6 Darrell Reeck, *Ethics for the Professions: A Christian Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 47.
- 7 Smedes, *Choices*, 36-41, for a full discussion.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 9 Higgins, *Turn Right*, 36.
- 10 Smedes, *Choices*, 43-44.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 89-90.
- 12 Richard Higginson, *Dilemmas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1988), 55-69.
- 13 Smedes, *Choices*, 89.
- 14 Higgins, *Turn Right*, 41-42.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 91-92.
- 16 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 47-68.
- 17 Smedes, *Choices*, 114.
- 18 Reeck, *Ethics for the Professions*, 55.
- 19 Smedes, *Choices*, 81.

Rick 'n Jesus

By Timothy George, Founding Dean of Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham AL

Both Billy Graham and Rick Warren are ordained ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention, but their ecumenical import and stature as worldwide ambassadors for Christ have far exceeded their early success as a brash youth evangelist and a colorful church planter. From his base at Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, Warren has garnered great influence as a bestselling author, a crusader against AIDS, and one of the most winsome representatives of the evangelical community in America today. Rick Warren is the new Billy Graham.

This is why Barack Obama invited Warren to offer the prayer of invocation at his presidential inauguration in January. By any standard, it was a model prayer extolling the virtues of humility, integrity, and generosity and asking for God's blessings on our new national leader. But then he spoiled all this, some say, by offering his prayer in Jesus' name, and in four languages at that—Jesus, Jesús, Yeshua, and Isa. This was not the ceremonially correct thing to do, many said, even though Warren made clear that his invocation of Jesus was an expression of personal witness: "I humbly ask this in the name of the One who changed my life."

Why do some Christians believe it is important to pray in Jesus' name in public as well as in private? Several years ago I was invited to offer an invocation at a gathering of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, all concerned about issues in the Middle East. My prayer was "ecumenical" in that I thanked God for the many blessings that have flown into the human community from these three faith traditions, but I did end the prayer, as I always do, in the name of Jesus. The Muslims seemed to be all right with this (after all, they say "Praise be upon him" every time the name of Muhammad is mentioned), but one of the Jewish participants—

more toward the secular, humanistic end of the spectrum—objected strongly. He complimented the content of my prayer but said he felt uncomfortable and excluded because I concluded my invocation in a uniquely Christian form.

I told him that I was sorry for his discomfort, for that was certainly not my intention. But in interfaith discussions and in public gatherings where prayers are given, it seems more genuine to offer such prayers according to the distinctive rubrics of one's own faith tradition. I am not sure what the practice is at Harvard Divinity School these days, but, when I was a student there years ago, we prayed together in accordance with the deeply held convictions we each brought to that moment of worship, without any diminution of respect for one another. This reflected a genuine spirit of pluralism where nearly every tradition imaginable, from Buddhism to the Salvation Army, was represented in the student body.

Of course, there are ways for Christians to get around the awkwardness of praying in Jesus' name in such settings. We can simply say "Amen," and breathe "in Jesus' name" silently, under our breath as it were. We can lamely offer our prayer "in your name," as though God (or we) were confused about who he really is. Or we can try what Robert Jensen calls "syntactically impossible pronominal neologisms," such as "Godself," or blander still, appeal to the deconstructed deity invoked by the Episcopalian bishop Gene Robinson at the Lincoln Memorial inauguration service: "O God of our many understandings." Of course, the sovereign Lord can hear and even answer prayers offered in this way, and no doubt he does. It is another question altogether whether Christian ministers should sidestep the scandal of particularity in the interest

of making people less uncomfortable.

This has become an issue in the military chaplaincy of late and chaplains are now encouraged "to use the more inclusive language of civic faith" when praying with religiously diverse audiences. Russell Moore points out the difficulty with this approach: "Perhaps it wouldn't seem too much to ask a Catholic soldier to serve himself and his friends Mass since 'bread is bread' and the Muslim chaplain to lead the troops in the rosary because 'it's just a prayer.' But that is too much to ask from the believer's point of view. A Muslim who would speak of Mary as the Mother of God rejects the Quran, and is just not a Muslim anymore. A Catholic Mass without a priest is just not a Catholic Mass. And a prayer to a 'God' who is not clearly the Father of our Lord Jesus is not a Christian prayer."

What is called for, not only by chaplains but all believers who dare to express their faith outside the confines of their mosque, synagogue, or church, is sensitivity without compromise. A few years ago a prominent church leader made a stupid and arrogant statement when he declared, "Almighty God does not hear the prayer of a Jew!" Taken at face value, this statement raises all kinds of questions: What is wrong with the Lord's auditory capacities? Has God gone partially deaf? Could he not hear the prayers of the Jewish Messiah Jesus? The ugly tone of this statement led to religious sloganeering—a divisive pitting of "us good guys" against "them others."

But there is another danger equally perilous, though more subtle, in our pluralistic postmodern culture: We may be seduced by a false ecumenism that relativizes all differences among faith perspectives and world religions. In reaction to the violence and dis-temper we see displayed in so-called

(continued on page 30)

Theology In The Service Of The Church

By Thomas E. Corts, Late President Emeritus Samford University

Editor's Note: This article is the Foreword to a *Festschrift* edited by Beeson Divinity School President Timothy George containing essays in honor of the life and work of Fisher Humphreys, noted Baptist theologian and minister for half a century, teaching at Beeson since 1990 and at New Orleans Baptist Seminary from 1970 to 1990. He is also the Chair of the Board of CET.

Our Creator did not allow us to choose our starting point nor to determine the path we follow, when and where the journey shall end. A young Fisher Humphreys offered himself to the Lord without a plan of location, vocation, discipline, or specialty, and with the Lord's guidance, he found his way—better, *his* way—to a life of significance as professor, preacher, writer, theologian, and friend. Among the greatest blessings of one coming to the end of his most active work-life is, looking back, to realize, that even with some pauses, interruptions, and wrong turns, you found the right road, and you made it!

Few at first realize how crucial it was that the right road for Professor Humphreys included a key role in establishment of Beeson School of Divinity of Samford University. In 1988 Samford University offered, and Ralph W. Beeson responded to, the idea that degree-granting, minister-training center was needed in Alabama. Winds of controversy were blowing in all directions, churning up questions, and leaving in their wake a *chairo*s moment for a divinity school as a strategic component of a Baptist university. If all truth is God's truth, why segregate young theologies to themselves, when their ideas and worldviews might be energized by the combustion of tempestuous secular culture and academic thought with

the hot currents of scripture and theology?

As soon as Beeson Divinity School was a firm promise on the horizon—the first divinity school at a Southern Baptist university in modern times—young Dean Timothy George with distinguished Provost and Professor William E. Hull launched the quest for an established Baptist scholar—one with a warm, pastoral heart; an unyielding conscience; a capacity to accept other Christian traditions; and theological conviction. How many such individuals could be identified?

Would established scholars be venturesome to depart the security of denominational enclaves for the untested waters of a divinity school in a university setting? Could a major scholar-theologian find fulfillment as a participant in the idea-crossfire and the internal politics of a university where not every colleague is denominationally attuned? Could a recognized Baptist thinker find his audience in a setting of avowed evangelical, interdenominational commitment?

It is not melodramatic simply to point to the year 1988. Conflict was in the ozone of the Southern Baptist Convention, and it was affecting every state convention, but not always in the same manner. Storms arose first over who most believed the Bible, though no gauge has yet been invented to measure either the intensity of belief or the sincerity of the believer. Leadership was challenged and replaced. Books expressly addressing the conflict sought to explain. Claims were made of a justifiable purgation long overdue. Worry was that we were fixing what was not broken. Almost all agree: the foundations were shaken and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) would never again be the same.

Amid this contentious atmo-

sphere, Professor Fisher Humphreys and his thoughtful and devoted wife, Caroline, chose to resettle in Birmingham, Alabama, bringing to Beeson and Samford their irenic spirits; their quiet hospitality; their innate kindness; and their brand of genuine, thoughtful Christianity. It was a leap into the unknown, for sure, but not unthinkable for people who long ago “decided to follow Jesus” instead of hopping on the most advantageous oncoming bandwagon.

Now, as he looks toward retirement, this celebratory volume pays thanks and tribute touching on major themes of Professor Humphreys' life and character. He is not merely academic in his theology, so it is appropriate that “spiritual theology” be addressed. A capacious intellect and an understanding heart have made it easy for Professor Humphreys to consider other Christian and non-Christian traditions, yet his soul comprehends both the missionary call and the Savior's plea for unity. From his earliest days, Bible memory verses, sword drills, and scriptural songs have been part of Professor Humphreys' DNA, so biblical scholarship is bedrock. Alongside professorial duties; periodic preaching and lecturing; and responsibilities as husband, father, and grandfather, he has always been faithful to a local church, affirming the significance of the church of the past and prospects of the church for a glorious future. With a naturally curious mind, an inner sincerity, and an uncommon breadth of knowledge and understanding, he has been a joyously accepted colleague among Samford faculty of all disciplines and a helpful university citizen. He takes delight in theological themes of modern literature, but he also reflects on the integration of worship and theological expression through the arts. As a committed Trinitarian who has read and studied enough to know

where he stands, Professor Humphreys has a deep appreciation for doctrinal preaching as the overflow of personal conviction, and he shares concern for basic doctrines; how the next generation will know them; and the role of his church, university, and divinity school.

Perhaps the theme most appropriate for those who know Professor Humphreys best is that of friendship. Of all the attributes we could pile onto his resume, it is the one most characteristic of the man. In the fiber of his being, he has an unshakable willingness to accept differences, a disdain for bigotry and prejudice, and devotion to the worth of the individual. These virtues combine with his naturally courteous and gracious spirit; his soft, easy manner; his ability to speak hard truths in gentle ways; his eagerness to listen—all make him the person you would most like to have with you if stranded on a deserted island.

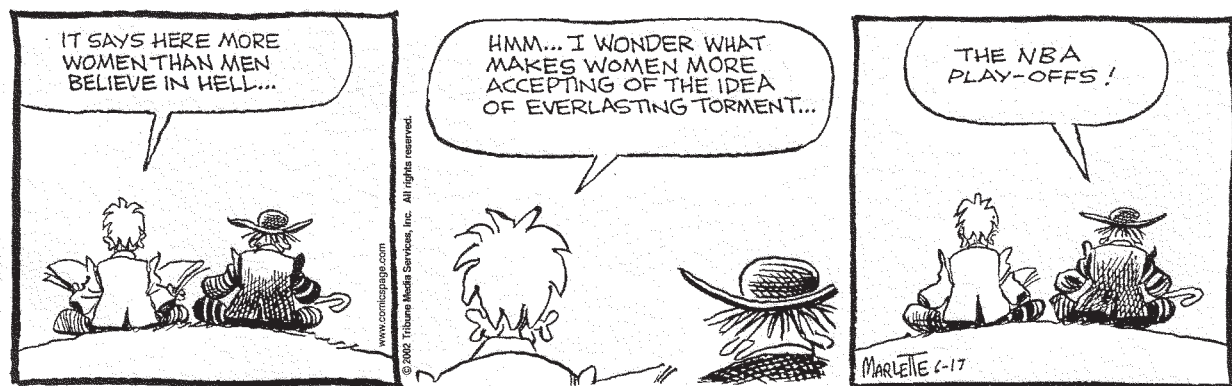
My own testimony applies here. During thirty-two years at the head of two Baptist institutions of higher learning, no faculty friendship has meant more to me than that of Professor Humphreys. Over the years we have shared many group meals and, once or twice per academic year, a person-to-person lunch. Having lived in New Orleans and as a lover of quality in all things, he makes lunch a culinary adventure, an informational cafeteria, a devotional and inspirational refreshment with a little pastoral counseling and encouragement, the latter delivered with a stealth often unperceived until a good while afterward.

So, this volume is an appropriate expression of love, respect, and appreciation for one of the Lord's great gifts to the modern church and, especially, to Beeson Divinity School and Samford University. What he has meant to us in these important years is far more than credit hours of instruction and having

filled a chair. When so many believers seek sound-byte theology, when commentators on the church are verbal pugilists, when spiritual hypochondriacs delight in merely describing their maladies, when front-running churchmen leave the race after moral injuries, when ministerial students aspire to test their "star" quality, when those who divide gain more attention than those who unite, and when marketing is more important than believing, Professor Fisher Humphreys came among us and taught, listened, cared deeply for each of us, and unfailingly reflected the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, give us more! ■

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Would Jesus Carry a Gun to Church?

By Drew Smith, Henderson State University Arkadelphia, AR

The Arkansas House passed a bill earlier this week that would lift a ban on guns being carried into houses of worship. The measure is now heading to the Arkansas Senate for a vote.

Growing up in rural Arkansas, I have come to accept the plethora of guns in the state. My dad and my brother are hunters, and I have many friends who are hunters. I don't own a gun myself, but I do respect the right others have to own guns (although I do think we ought to have strict gun laws). But despite how one feels about individuals owning guns, the bill that is now moving through the lawmaking body of Arkansas raises significant theological problems.

Several years ago, there was a trend among young Christians to ask, "What would Jesus do?" This question, shortened to WWJD, became a slogan that represented a way of asking about how we should behave in response to Jesus' behavior. This is good theology, for the question centers on Jesus as the example we are to follow. So, here is a question related to what the lawmakers in Arkansas are considering: "Would Jesus carry a gun to church?"

I think most of us would certainly answer "No" to this question. But the issue over guns in church raises a larger question about our infatuation with violence that is directly contrary to Jesus' message and life of non-violence.

There are two significant stories from the life of Jesus that speak to this

issue. Both stories derive from the arrest and trial of Jesus, a point at which, if Jesus were to approve weapons of violence, he certainly would have carried a weapon.

In Mark's telling of the arrest of Jesus, those who come to seize him carry clubs and swords. Jesus' question about their armaments is very telling and theologically rich for those of us who desire to utilize weapons for our own security and protection. Jesus asks, "Have you come out with swords and clubs" (Mk 14:48)?

The implication of Jesus' question to them is that he needs not the weapons of violence because his protection and security is found with God. In other words, though Jesus could have gathered a small army of rebels to fight, and indeed even a legion of angels, Jesus rejected not only the use violence, but also the system that promotes violence.

This idea is made even clearer when Jesus is brought before Pilate, particularly in how the Gospel of John tells the story. In response to Pilate's questioning about Jesus claiming to be a king, Jesus responds, "My kingdom is not from this world" (Jn 18:36). While we take this to mean that Jesus was informing Pilate that his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, it more likely means that his kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world—kingdoms like Rome that hold imperial power through violence. Indeed, Jesus goes on to imply that if his kingdom were like Rome, then his

followers would fight to save him.

Both of these stories reflect Jesus' radical ideas about the virtue of non-violence that epitomized his central message. At his arrest and his trial, events that would have triggered a violent reaction from most of us did not trigger such a reaction from Jesus. Jesus rejected the use of weapons and the system of violence that characterized the society in which he lived. Instead, he placed his full trust in God's loving care, despite the fact that he would be crucified in an act of state-sponsored violence.

This example should cause us to rethink how we live in a world where violence is accepted as necessary. If we claim to be Christian, then this means at least we should seek to follow Christ. And, in following Jesus, we should at least pay close attention to what was central to his life and teaching concerning non-violence. As followers of Christ, we must reject our attraction to violence, even when we think it will provide us security.

It seems likely that the Arkansas legislation to allow guns in church will pass. More than just bad policy, this decision is a hasty and tragic response to our need to feel safe everywhere we go. If the bill passes, however, I would hope that faithful Christians and faithful churches would reject the need to arm themselves, reject the attempt to create false security, and most importantly, reject violence and the system that promotes it as necessary. ■



Evangelicals and the Environment

By Martin E. Marty, Chicago, IL

This one needs an introduction: Years ago at scholarly evangelical gatherings I would be introduced as “this year’s non-evangelical speaker,” to which I’d respond with a reminder, “I’m the only person in this room who even belongs to a church body named ‘Evangelical.’” Chuckles would follow, and then we would get down to business, not reducing evangelicalism(s) to the over-noticed “Radical Christian Right.”

End of introduction. This week I stumbled upon a little book which prompts a sighting of one way some evangelicals are dealing with the environmental crisis and the future. It’s Lindy Scott’s (ed) *Christians, the Care of Creation, and Global Climate Change* (Pickwick), based on a conference at Illinois’ Wheaton College, often called the flagship evangelical liberal arts college—one of several flagships. The only “known” contributors are Wheaton President A. Duane Litfin and super-scientist and up-front evangelical, ex-Oxonian Sir John Houghton, who spoke and wrote on “Big Science, Big God.” The rest of the essays, reports, and proposals are from students and graduates of Wheaton and its kin and kind.

Wheaton-type evangelicals enjoy “born again” conversion stories, and President Litfin describes briefly how he came out of apathy to sign on

with the “Care of Creation” front. He had been an original signatory to the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), for which he was criticized by some college-board members and evangelicals at a distance from the school and the cause. Student Ben Lowe, who made the mistake of reading the Bible and responding to some of his professors, was converted to become “An Unlikely Tree Hugger.” With charming naivete he tells how he knocked on Litfin’s door and began the process of getting the administration to back a conference (which drew participants from numerous evangelical colleges) and to encourage initiatives for academic and activist moves at the college toward “The Greening of Wheaton.”

I am not a public relations agent for the school and would find any number of its positions and policies uncongenial—just as I would find many congenial—and am simply reporting on what I read. Readers who are more “non-evangelical” than I may feel ill at ease or not at home with many of the book’s concerns, but I think it is important to see how Lowe faces what the index enters as “evangelicals, shying away from environmental movements” (99ff). Many shied away and pushed off such movements, and many still do. Here are some of the old deterrents and hints at Lowe’s responses:

1. “The environment isn’t really in

crisis.” Lowe lists seven patent “degradations” of the climate, and agrees with Calvin De Witt that “the common agent . . . is human action.”

2. “Everything’s going to burn up anyway.” This is the word of the “Eschatology determines ethics” apocalypticists, whom he counters effectively.

3. “Fear of paganism, nature worship, and pantheism.” This case is a bit blurry, and demands more careful examination than he gives it, but his report is accurate.

4. “Higher priorities: save souls, not whales.” This is the oldest standard evangelical put-down; Lowe and others in the book really take that one on, and down.

I think campuses, agencies, and parishes in—ahem! again—“non-evangelical” camps can learn something of the how and why of “creation care” from works like this, be they Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Marginal, or Ecumenical, because this has come to be an ecumenical cause open to alliances in a pluralistic world. The “care of creation” tree huggers may have arrived late, but they come on strong. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (3/2/09), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Words From Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)

By Al Staggs, Performing Artist, Santa Fe, NM

Note: This article is adapted from a dramatic monologue presented on September 16, 2008, at the “Red-Letter Christians” conference at Truett Seminary, sponsored by CET and funded by the Piper Foundation.

What I would like to speak about this evening is a subject that is near and dear to my heart. This issue, this concept has been the centerpiece of my career as a theologian, pastor, and activist. That concept is “The Kingdom of God.” As I have written and spoken about this concept and its societal applications, I have often been roundly criticized and severely castigated by quite a number of pastors and religious leaders for not giving more of an emphasis on personal conversion or to personal piety and spirituality.

At this point, I would like to share a word of personal testimony about my faith and my spiritual journey. It was at my mother’s knee that I first learned to pray. I was deeply influenced by my father Augustus, who was in his own right a godly religious scholar, missionary, and pastor. Whatever I am today, spiritually, is as a direct result of the guidance and influence of my devout and loving parents.

As a young man, I began to feel the seriousness of life. I was very young when I first heard the call of God on my life. I struggled with God’s call for several years until I finally accepted his will and purpose for my career and for my future. From that time forth I have felt God’s presence through all of my endeavors and experiences.

During the time of my theological education I was confronted with the choice between the imposing authority of human customs and traditions and the self-evident power of God’s word. I chose God’s word.

I began to realize that God hates

injustice and that I would be quenching God’s spirit within me if I kept silent with all of the social sin of the world around me. Early in my life, I became convinced that it was the duty of all Christians to help bring in the kingdom of God. Do you recall the part of the Lord’s Prayer that says, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?”

Now my views on the kingdom of God or the social gospel did not come primarily from my theological training. However, my convictions on this subject came from my work as a pastor in a horribly depressed area of New York City, a place appropriately called “Hell’s Kitchen.” Alcoholics and prostitutes were in abundance. Domestic violence was far too common in the families who lived in their overcrowded tenements. The unemployment rate was unbelievably high and so was the rate of child mortality.

In fact, in one year the number of deaths of children from age five and under in that area of New York City came to sixty per cent of all deaths. That death rate was largely due to malnutrition because of the level and magnitude of the dire poverty of the people within this depressed region.

I buried hundreds of children. At each funeral I would find myself crying out to God, “Why do the children have to suffer in this manner?” I recall on one occasion one of the church members, a single father who worked at a factory for 12 hours each day. His daughter was dying at home and calling out for her daddy. The employer refused to allow the father to go home to be with his daughter in her last hours.

It was not uncommon to see grown men near our church just begging for work, just so they and their families could survive.

It was in this context that I began to understand sin in a new and radical

way. Baptists had always been known as railing and condemning the sins of alcoholism, smoking, gambling, and sexual promiscuity, such as were exemplified in the lives of the many prostitutes who lived and worked very close to our church.

Baptists have tended to equate sin with personal sins and personal behavior. But as the church historian Tolbert said, “Baptists have an abysmal record in addressing social sins and working to change the structures of society to make them more just for all.”

The German lyricist, Berthold Brecht, has this remarkable quote in his *Threepenny Opera*. Brecht has the main character Macheith saying that “even saintly folk will act like sinners when they haven’t had their customary dinners.” What that implies is that if one becomes hungry enough or deprived enough, one is capable of doing robbery or cheating or even violence in order to merely survive.

The radical conclusion that I came to was this: all of these personal sins which were so obvious to everyone were somehow connected to the sin of structural injustice. So many people saw no hope, no way to extricate themselves from their living hell, their dead-end street. So many would resort to alcoholism. Women would feel compelled to become a prostitute so they could feed themselves and their families. Charles Dickens in his writings helped us see and somewhat feel the environment that could ensnare anyone who was trapped in a world of deprivation and desperation.

The less obvious sins to most Baptists and other conservative leaders were those that were represented by the vast gulf between those who were extremely opulent, you might say “filthy rich,” and the vast majority of people who were barely able (and oftentimes not able) to get by.

We must recognize that the concept of violence is not only the form of violence that is characterized by carrying a pistol or a rifle. There is the violence which is carried out in society that is actually a legalized violence which makes it possible and legal for the wealthy to greatly increase their riches, while depriving the poor. That is violence and is tantamount to slow torture to those who are victims of the structures of business practices where the bottom line, the profit margin, becomes the only concern for business leaders.

We can see evidence of our view of business and level of income as we talk about how much a person is worth. We say that so and so is worth \$200 million and this implies that the beggar on the street who has only three pennies in his or her pocket is of far less worth. We should not view children of God in this manner.

Now I'm quite sure that many of you are saying to yourselves, "Walter, you have lost your mind. You're espousing something that sounds like socialism. What you are teaching appears to be a threat to capitalism!"

Capitalism can only work when it is compassionate, just, and considers the welfare of all citizens of this nation. If capitalism is only concerned about the bottom line or the profit margin, it turns into cruel servitude for many, and left to its own sin of avarice, it is no better than any other economic system. For capitalism must have as its foundation the principle of justice.

I take as the primary basis for my view, my beliefs and convictions, the teachings of scripture and my eleven-year pastorate in Hell's Kitchen. That din of poverty forced me to reread the entire Bible with a radical new perspective. I often felt, that despite all of my prior theological training, as though I were reading the scriptures for the first time.

We all read the Bible with a certain bias, we can't help that. We read the Bible from the perspective and biases of our own race, our national origin, our gender. We read the Bible, if you

will, with our own pair of eye glasses. And we also tend to embrace and espouse a theological view that agrees with our own lifestyle. Does that make sense?

If I'm extremely wealthy I'm prone to read and understand the Bible in a completely different way than a person who is impoverished. If I'm a black person, I am truly likely to read and understand the scriptures quite differently from a southern white Christian. For instance, a black person's understanding of the story of the exodus will likely have a very real impact on their understanding and concern for God's oppressed people than would a southern white person who has never been denied the right to vote, or to stay in any hotel, or eat in any restaurant, or to receive a quality education.

Let us consider now the teachings of scripture that are particularly relevant to the concept of the necessity of working for the kingdom of God on earth. Beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures, "Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in the court, for the Lord will take up their cause and will plunder those who plunder them." And, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute, speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs).

The prophet Amos wrote, "Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-ending stream."

Micah proclaims, "He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

As we consider the Christian Scriptures we would do well to take a long, long look at the powerful passage found in Matthew 25:31-46. If Matthew 28:19-20 can be labeled "the Great Commission, then the Matthew 25 passage should be called "the Great Omission." I recall precious few sermons in my life which have been based on this text. This section of scripture is central to the message of Jesus and it should be central in the understand-

ing of our work as Christians and of the mission of the church.

Let us not forget that when Jesus preached his first sermon in his hometown of Nazareth, he quoted a passage from Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In Luke we find the story of the rich young ruler who inquired of Jesus how he might enter the kingdom of heaven, whereupon Jesus challenged him to give up his possessions for the sake of the poor.

Our philosophical and economic individualism has affected our religious thought so deeply that we hardly comprehend these biblical views about our national life and our national sin.

The prophets demanded right moral conduct as the sole test and fruit of religion, and the morality they had in mind was not the private morality of detached pious souls but the social morality of the nation. This they preached, and they backed their preaching by active participation in public action and discussion.

These prophets were almost indifferent, if not contemptuous, of the ceremonial side of customary religion, but turned with passionate enthusiasm to moral righteousness as the true domain of religion. Where would their interest lie if they lived today? Their religious concern was not restricted to private religion and morality, but dealt pre-eminently with the social and political life of their nation. Would they limit its range today?

Like the prophets of old, present day ministers must apply the teaching functions of the pulpit to the pressing questions of public morality. They must not yield to political partisanship, but must deal with moral questions before they become political issues and with those questions of public welfare which never do become political issues.

The force of the religious spirit it should be bent toward asserting

the supremacy of life over property. Property exists to maintain and develop life. It is unchristian to regard human life as a mere instrument for the production of wealth. If anyone holds that religion is essentially ritual and sacramental, or that it is purely personal, or that God is on the side of the rich, or that social interest is likely to lead preachers astray—that person must prove their case with their eye on the Hebrew prophets, and the burden of proof is on them.

The chief goal of the Christian church in the past has been the salvation of individuals, but the most pressing task of the present is not individualistic. Our business is to transform an antiquated and immoral system and to get rid of laws, customs, maxims, and philosophies inherited from an evil and despotic past and to create just and humane relations between groups and classes of society: thus to lay a social foundation in which people can live and work in a fashion that will not outrage all the better elements in them.

Our inherited Christian faith dealt primarily with individuals; our present task is to deal with society.

The historical church in the past

taught us to do our work with our eyes fixed on another world and a life to come.

Here is the problem for all religious minds. We need a great faith to serve as a spiritual basis for the tremendous social task before us. The religion in the form in which it has come down to us is silent or stammers where we most need a ringing message. It has no adequate answers to the great moral questions and challenges of our day. Its hymns, its ritual, its prayers, its books of devotion, are so devoid of social thought.

We need a new foundation for Christian thought.

Our hymns lack social content. What we hear in our musical theology is only about a personal God that cares only about me. Have you ever given thought to the hymns we most frequently sing: *Love Lifted Me, Just As I Am*, and *I Walk Through the Garden Alone* for example. What we are missing is more hymns with a message for society.

To become fully Christian and to do their duty by society, the churches must change. Protestant Christians in America are simply perpetuating trivial dissensions in which scarcely

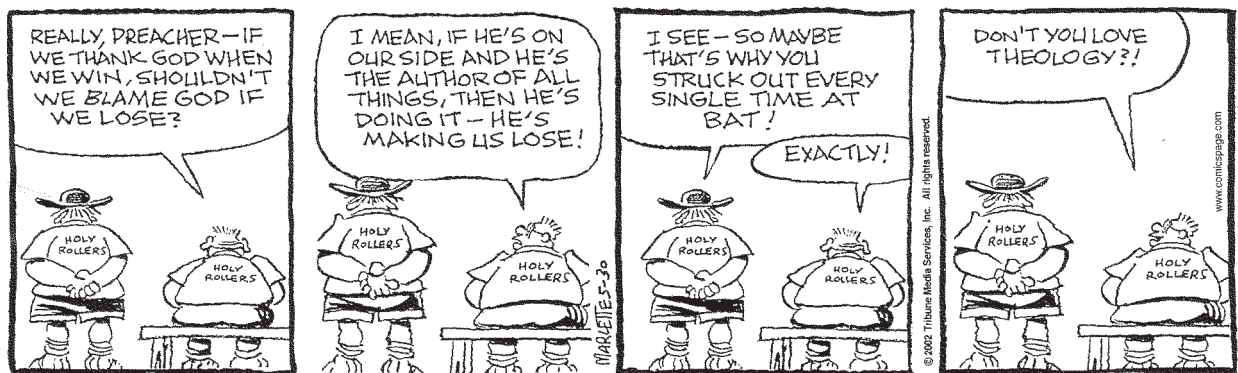
any present-day religious values are at stake.

To become fully Christian the church must come out of its spiritual isolation. In theory and practice the church has long constituted a world unto itself. It has been governed by ecclesiastical motives and interests which are often remote from the real interests of humanity, and it has almost uniformly set church questions ahead of social questions.

Churches today have often built a sound-proof habitation in which people could live for years without becoming conscious of the existence of prostitution, child labor, or tenement slums. Like all the rest of us, the church will obtain its salvation by finding the purpose of its existence outside of itself, namely, in the kingdom of God.

To become fully Christian the church must still further emancipate itself from the dominating forces of the present era. In an age of political despotism our forbearers cut the church loose from state control and state support, and therewith released the moral forces of progress.

I have always argued that the reformation did not go far enough. If



we read, interpret, and preach only a portion of the Bible, it remains a half-truth or even a lie. What can we say about the present state of affairs with the outrageous disparity between the rich and the poor of our nation?

We have wrongfully assumed that the way things are is the way God intended. Let us not be naïve. Wherever there is great wealth in the face of widespread poverty, there is injustice which creates, perpetuates, and exacerbates that disparity. In other words, we can't say "God willed this."

I have been told by certain evangelical pastors that if we could just get everyone converted then all of our social problems and evils would be rectified. It does not appear to be so, for even after all of the revivals in the South over many generations, the slaves were not freed. And when they were freed, it was not the church who freed them. And even after slavery was ended, southern churches continued racial segregation for generations. The amazing, truly amazing paradox about this phenomena is that segregation and racism continued unabated for generations in the Bible belt.

The church has every right to inquire as to who is increasing this

burden of poverty and suffering by underpaying and exhausting the people.

The "Good Samaritan" did not go after the robbers with a shotgun, but looked after the wounded and helpless man by the wayside. But if hundreds of "Good Samaritans" traveling the same road should find thousands of bruised men and women groaning to them, they would not be such very "Good Samaritans" if they did not organize a vigilance committee to stop the robbers that wounded people.

I wear this black patch of cloth on the lapel of my coat as a sign of mourning and protest over this present war. We, as a nation, have demonized the German people, my people. I did not favor our nation's involvement in this war. And I say this as a patriotic American, who are also my people.

I have warned in several of my books of the conditions that breed war. "Ever the pride of kings and the covetousness of the strong has driven peaceful nations to slaughter. Ever the songs of the past and pomp of the armies has been used to inflame the passions of the people."

To bring me comfort and to bring comfort to my children, I would often

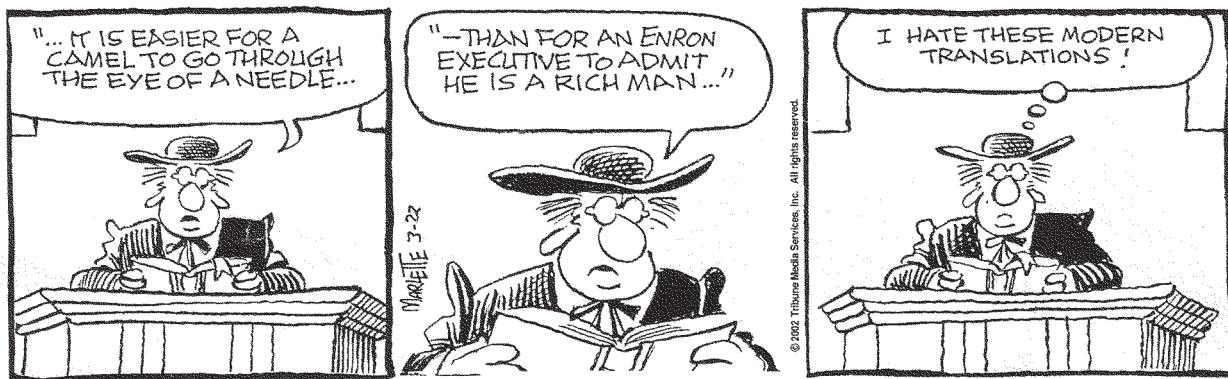
sing this wonderful song to them at bedtime: *Commit whatever grieves thee into the gracious hands of him who never leaves thee who heav'n and earth commands. Who points the clouds their courses whom winds and waves obey he will direct thy footsteps and find for thee a way.*

I conclude with a prayer:

From the sins that divide us, from all class bitterness and race hatred—good Lord, deliver us. From the corruption of business practices and of government, from greed and from the arbitrary love of power—good Lord, deliver us.

From the fear of unemployment and the evils of overwork, from the curse of child labor and the ill-paid toil of women—good Lord, deliver us. That thy followers may be strong to achieve industrial justice, and to bid the oppressed go free. That it may please thee to unite the inhabitants of every city, state, and nation in the bonds of peace and concord.

Good Lord, we beseech thee to hear us. Now in the name of the one who identified himself with the downtrodden and the one who came to preach good news to the poor and liberate the oppressed, we pray, Amen and Amen. ■



A Time to Rebuild America

By Charles Reed, Waco, TX

America has failed over the last three decades. The economy has failed, government has failed and religion has failed. It's time for us to begin to rebuild our country based on traditional American values of freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights.

By any traditional standard, America is now in an economic depression. A growing number of economists now admit this. The American depression has spread to the rest of the world.

America's classic economist Henry George identified the cause of depressions more than a century ago. His book *Progress and Poverty* became the bestselling non-fiction book in the history of the world. Both Franklin Roosevelt and Albert Einstein endorsed his ideas.

What causes depressions? The answer is quite simple: depressions are caused when too few have too much, and too many have too little. The maldistribution of wealth causes depressions.

What causes the maldistribution of wealth? Again, the answer is simple: an unfair economy causes the maldistribution of wealth. When an economy places a higher value on greed and exploitation than on work and innovation, it is heading for a crash.

The American economy pays many corporate CEOs, professional athletes, and entertainers tens of millions of dollars per year. Baseball player Alex Rodriguez signed a multi-year contract for \$252 million. Miley Cyrus [Hannah Montana], a teenager, receives over \$20 million annually.

To become a top corporate executive is to be given a license to steal and plunder what belongs to middle-class shareholders. Corporate lobbyists legally bribe politicians to plunder the federal treasury on behalf of the corporate rich.

Meanwhile, American workers are losing ground. They are paid less now than in 1973. Millions of workers receive an annual rate of less than \$14,000 to do the hardest and dirtiest work.

The knee-jerk response from the Rush Limbaugh crowd is that the marketplace decided all this. This, of course, is nonsense. In the 1970s, corporate CEOs were paid about 15 times what the average worker was paid. Today, that ratio has mushroomed to more than 400 times what the average worker is paid. You can't blame the market for that.

During the last depression, Franklin Roosevelt said: "We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now that it is bad economics." Most of organized religion doesn't understand this today.

If Henry George, John Maynard Keynes, and Franklin Roosevelt could speak to us from their graves, they would all cry out in unison, "We told you so!"

The American economy failed because American government failed. Since the Civil War, American government has struggled unsuccessfully to emerge from the shadow of the corporate corruption of the democratic process and public policy.

Undue corporate influence over public policy again reached the point of no return during the 1980s. Unnecessary wars and military spending, wasteful tax cuts for the corporate rich, and the dismantling of corporate banking and financial regulations have wrecked our economy. As the Bible says in Hosea, we have sown the wind, and we shall reap the whirlwind (8:7).

When Ronald Reagan took office, the national debt was less than a trillion dollars. Now it is more than ten times that amount and growing exponentially. George W. Bush doubled the national debt in eight years. None of that debt will benefit future generations.

Ironically, much of organized religion in America played a key role in the corruption of American government by the corporate money interests. Evangelical Christians in particular have, like Daniel Webster, made a deal with the Devil in exchange for political power. They joined forces with money interests to undermine ethics and justice in government and the economy.

Now, from the ashes of the failed corporate ideology, it's time to begin the process of reclaiming, restoring, and rebuilding America. It's time to restore peace, prosperity, liberty, and justice for all Americans. It's time to restore America's national honor. We are blessed to have President Obama to lead us on that journey. ■

Charles Reed is a retired civil servant, a Baptist deacon and former mayor of Waco, Texas. He can be reached by email at creed1020@sbcbglobal.net.

Fair and Balanced: What a Gift to Liberals!

By Harold Myerson, Editor-At-Large American Prospect and L. A. Weekly

To: Mr. Roger Allen
President, Fox News

Dear Roger,

In times past, I've had harsh words for Fox for its consistent misrepresentation of the news. In 2003, I cited a survey from the Program for International Policy Attitudes and the Knowledge Network that showed that 45 percent of Fox viewers believed the United States had uncovered incontrovertible proof that Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda had worked together; that we had found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that a majority of peoples in other lands supported our war in Iraq. The same survey documented that President Bush supporters who got their news from other networks had a decidedly firmer grasp of the facts.

I don't retract my judgment that you guys were—and still are—a constant source of rightwing fantasies. It's just that, at least in today's political environment, I'm no longer sure this is a bad thing.

The election has left the Republican Party reeling, with the smarter GOP strategists arguing that the worldviews of the social conservatives and free-market extremists who dominate it are either irrelevant or ridiculous to voters in the middle of the political spectrum.

"We can't be obsessed with issues that are not the issues that are impor-

tant to American voters," Jim Greer, chairman of the Florida GOP, told *The New York Times*.

But Fox has won its viewership precisely by promoting such obsessions.

During the campaign, you focused on Barack Obama's allegedly Muslim and alien roots and socialist ideology while, in the real world, unemployment rose, foreclosures soared and Wall Street went flooey. Over the past eight years, you beat drums for such causes as state intervention in the Terri Schiavo case. You demonized undocumented immigrants (CNN's Lou Dobbs gave you a run for your money on that one). You fed the Republican base with a steady diet of bile—and now that bilious base is the biggest impediment to the Republicans' repositioning themselves so that they can win elections again.

Reach out to Latinos? Not if Fox viewers have anything to say about it. Not after you've drummed into their heads that the Latino immigrant population is some looming terrorist threat.

Modify that opposition to stem-cell research? Tone down the ridicule of people in public life who have advanced degrees? Call off the Republican war on science that kicks in whenever science runs counter to rightwing fundamentalism in religion or economics? Not if the Hannity faithful can help it.

You're not alone in reinforcing those beliefs that marginalize the

Republican right, of course. You've got plenty of help from Rush and all the little Limbaughs who dominate talk radio.

As an aide to Richard Nixon back in the day, Roger, you were around for the birth of the Southern strategy—the policy to move all those disgruntled Southern whites into Republican ranks. But the party as Nixon would have recognized it ceased to exist after the Republicans captured Congress in 1994.

Since then, the national Republican Party has dominated by far-right Southern legislative leaders—Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay, Trent Lott—and by George W. Bush. The past two elections, Republicans have grown weaker everywhere but the white rural South—the region that remains the least educated and least diverse.

And rather than present these voters with a picture of a complex, changing world, you guys at Fox serve chiefly to reinforce their fears, to paint people who hold different viewpoints as alien and threatening.

In that sense, your work remains dangerous and disintegrative to the nation. But it is also, tactically, for now, a great gift to liberals and Democrats. You ensure the ongoing Palinization and marginalization—electorally, the terms are synonymous—of the Republican Party.

Cheers from your new fan,
Harold ■



Southern Baptists: Yes, but . . .

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute, Seattle, WA

“One sexual predator in our midst is one too many,” said Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention 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 Southern Baptist 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, person-

ally 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 4th 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. ■

The Coming Evangelical Collapse

By Michael Spencer, Oneida, KY

We are on the verge—within ten years—of a major collapse of evangelical Christianity. This breakdown will follow the deterioration of the mainline Protestant world and it will fundamentally alter the religious and cultural environment in the West.

Within two generations, evangelicalism will be a house deserted of half its occupants. (Between 25 and 35 percent of Americans today are Evangelicals.) In the “Protestant” 20th century, Evangelicals flourished. But they will soon be living in a very secular and religiously antagonistic 21st century.

This collapse will herald the arrival of an anti-Christian chapter of the post-Christian West. Intolerance of Christianity will rise to levels many of us have not believed possible in our lifetimes, and public policy will become hostile toward evangelical Christianity, seeing it as the opponent of the common good.

Millions of Evangelicals will quit. Thousands of ministries will end. Christian media will be reduced, if not eliminated. Many Christian schools will go into rapid decline. I’m convinced the grace and mission of God will reach to the ends of the earth. But the end of evangelicalism as we know it is close.

Why is this going to happen?

1. Evangelicals have identified their movement with the culture war and with political conservatism. This will prove to be a very costly mistake. Evangelicals will increasingly be seen as a threat to cultural progress. Public leaders will consider us bad for America, bad for education, bad for children, and bad for society.

The evangelical investment in moral, social, and political issues has depleted our resources and exposed our weaknesses. Being against gay marriage and being rhetorically pro-life will not make up for the fact that

massive majorities of Evangelicals can’t articulate the Gospel with any coherence. *We fell for the trap of believing in a cause more than a faith.*

2. We Evangelicals have failed to pass on to our young people an orthodox form of faith that can take root and survive the secular onslaught. Ironically, the billions of dollars we’ve spent on youth ministers, Christian music, publishing, and media has produced a culture of young Christians who know next to nothing about their own faith except how they feel about it. Our young people have deep beliefs about the culture war, but do not know why they should obey scripture, the essentials of theology, or the experience of spiritual discipline and community. Coming generations of Christians are going to be monumentally ignorant and unprepared for culture-wide pressures.

3. There are three kinds of evangelical churches today: consumer-driven mega churches, dying churches, and new churches whose future is fragile. Denominations will shrink, even vanish, while fewer and fewer evangelical churches will survive and thrive.

4. Despite some very successful developments in the past 25 years, Christian education has not produced a product that can withstand the rising tide of secularism. Evangelicalism has used its educational system primarily to staff its own needs and talk to itself.

5. The confrontation between cultural secularism and the faith at the core of evangelical efforts to “do good” is rapidly approaching. We will soon see that the good Evangelicals want to do will be viewed as bad by so many, and much of that work will not be done. Look for ministries to take on a less and less distinctively Christian face in order to survive.

6. Even in areas where Evangelicals imagine themselves strong (like the Bible Belt), we will find a great inability to pass on to our children a vital

evangelical confidence in the Bible and the importance of the faith.

7. The money will dry up. What will be left?

- Expect evangelicalism to look more like the pragmatic, therapeutic, church-growth oriented mega churches that have defined success. Emphasis will shift from doctrine to relevance, motivation, and personal success—resulting in churches further compromised and weakened in their ability to pass on the faith.

- Two of the beneficiaries will be the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions. Evangelicals have been entering these churches in recent decades and that trend will continue, with more efforts aimed at the “conversion” of Evangelicals to the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

- A small band will work hard to rescue the movement from its demise through theological renewal. This is an attractive, innovative, and tireless community with outstanding media, publishing, and leadership development. Nonetheless, I believe the coming evangelical collapse will not result in a second reformation, though it may result in benefits for many churches and the beginnings of new churches.

- The emerging church will largely vanish from the evangelical landscape, becoming part of the small segment of progressive mainline Protestants that remain true to the liberal vision.

- Aggressively evangelistic fundamentalist churches will begin to disappear.

- Charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity will become the majority report in evangelicalism. Can this community withstand heresy, relativism, and confusion? To do so, it must make a priority of biblical authority, responsible leadership, and a reemergence of orthodoxy.

- Evangelicalism needs a “rescue mission” from the world Christian community. It is time for missionaries to

come to America from Asia and Africa. Will they come? Will they be able to bring to our culture a more vital form of Christianity?

• Expect a fragmented response to the culture war. Some Evangelicals will work to create their own counter-cultures, rather than try to change the culture at large. Some will continue to see conservatism and Christianity through one lens and will engage the culture war much as before—a status quo the media will be all too happy to perpetuate. A significant number, however, may give up political engagement for a discipleship of deeper impact.

Is all of this a bad thing?

Evangelicalism doesn't need a bailout. Much of it needs a funeral. But what about what remains?

Is it a good thing that denominations are going to become largely irrelevant? Only if the networks that replace them are able to marshal resources, training, and vision to the mission field and into the planting and equipping of churches.

Is it a good thing that many marginal believers will depart? Possibly, if churches begin and continue the work of renewing serious church membership. We must change the conversation from the maintenance of traditional churches to developing new and culturally appropriate ones.

The ascendancy of Charismatic-Pentecostal-influenced worship around the world can be a major positive for the evangelical movement if

reformation can reach those churches and if it is joined with the calling, training, and mentoring of leaders. If American churches come under more of the influence of the movement of the Holy Spirit in Africa and Asia, this will be a good thing.

Will the evangelicalizing of Catholic and Orthodox communions be a good development? One can hope for greater unity and appreciation, but the history of these developments seems to be much more about a renewed vigor to “evangelize” Protestantism in the name of unity.

Will the coming collapse get Evangelicals past the pragmatism and shallowness that has brought about the loss of substance and power? Probably not. The purveyors of the evangelical circus will be in fine form, selling their wares as the promised solution to every church's problems. I expect the landscape of mega church vacuity to be around for a very long time.

Will it shake lose the prosperity Gospel from its parasitical place on the evangelical body of Christ? Evidence from similar periods is not encouraging. American Christians seldom seem to be able to separate their theology from an overall idea of personal affluence and success

The loss of their political clout may impel many Evangelicals to reconsider the wisdom of trying to create a “godly society.” That doesn't mean they'll focus solely on saving souls, but the increasing concern will be how to keep secularism out of church, not

stop it altogether. The integrity of the church as a countercultural movement with a message of “empire subversion” will increasingly replace a message of cultural and political entitlement.

Despite all of these challenges, it is impossible not to be hopeful. As one commenter has already said, “Christianity loves a crumbling empire.”

We can rejoice that in the ruins, new forms of Christian vitality and ministry will be born. I expect to see a vital and growing house church movement. This cannot help but be good for an evangelicalism that has made buildings, numbers, and paid staff its drugs for half a century.

We need new evangelicalism that learns from the past and listens more carefully to what God says about being His people in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture.

I'm not a prophet. My view of evangelicalism is not authoritative or infallible. I am certainly wrong in some of these predictions. But is there anyone who is observing evangelicalism in these times who does not sense that the future of our movement holds many dangers and much potential?

Michael Spencer is a writer and communicator living and working in a Christian community. He describes himself as a “post evangelical reformation Christian in search of a Jesus-shaped spirituality.” This article is adapted from a series on his blog InternetMonk.com. ■



A Simple Prayer to the All-Powerful, All-Knowing and Beneficent God Who Really Must Love the Orioles

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

Dear God,

Could you please stop fixing sporting events? Seriously. Your unpredictability is killing me at the betting table. I can never figure out who you're helping. One moment you're hooking up Steve Smith with the Panthers and the next it's Kurt Warner for the Cards. How am I supposed to figure out which one you love the most, or which one prayed the hardest that you would help them "guide" the ball to just the right place, if you keep flip-flopping?

Could you be a little less fickle with your handouts? You are, after all, immutable. That means you are unchanging. It says so right there in the Bible, Malachi 3:6: "For I, the Lord, do not change." Yet, when it comes to sports I am far more consistent than you. I have been an Orioles fan since 1981. Other than that time where you clearly graced us in '83, do you know what misery us O's fans have had to endure for decades?

What do you have against Baltimore? It's no more pagan than any other city (though you do seem to be a little more generous to the Ravens—perhaps I should speak to the owner of the Orioles about requiring team prayer before each game?).

Anyways, do you think you could just pick a team and stay with them? No one likes a bandwagon fan. Actually, you're not just a fan, but you, if the winners of Super Bowls, World Cups, and World Series are to be believed, actually rig the games (and I thought the Patriot's coach was bad).

I just thought I would ask. I assume, since you are so concerned about touchdowns, homeruns, and last-second shots, you wouldn't mind.

Oh, another thing (sorry to be so needy): I know you are omnipotent, but it seems that you have been giving more attention to Sunday afternoon scores than to a few other things in the world. Granted, I know extremely affluent athletes who own multiple cars and houses are very important to you, but do you think you could do something about the ongoing genocide in Darfur? Tibet? Rwanda? Perhaps you could send out a little help to ease the tensions between your followers in Ireland or in Israel and Palestine? There is also this very serious AIDS epidemic occurring in Africa. That could be important.

I don't know. Cancer is horrible! So is SIDS, diabetes, blindness, paralysis, global warming, and the near-extinction of Pandas, Blue Whales, Monk Seals, Red Wolves, and the Mantled Howler Monkey (come on, those creatures are awesome).

Perhaps (I'm feeling a bit like Abraham here), perhaps you could tone down the number of Tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes you've been sending lately? While I'm asking, any chance you might convince your world leaders to stop making nuclear missiles? I know it's a long-shot, but since all governments are ordained by you I thought it wouldn't hurt to ask.

Also, I guess you know that almost every four seconds someone dies of

starvation? Of course, you do. You're omniscient.

One last thing: Maybe you could look into why more than 2 billion people live on something like \$2 a day. More than 500 million people in South Asia live (if you can call it that) on less than \$1 a day.

I mean, I hear all the time how you are obviously blessing the people in North America with a surplus of goods, so I know that means we're doing something right. I can't even count the number of God Bless America bumper stickers on the back of your average Lincoln, Lexus, and Mercedes. In a world where less than 10% of the total population actually own a car, many of us are so blessed as to be able to own numerous vehicles! How ungrateful are those that don't praise your name?

But what did all those others do that was so bad? Don't get me wrong, I'm not questioning your justice; I'm sure their prayers for food and the basic necessities of life deserve to go unanswered. If I learned anything from the book of Job it is to tread quietly and not ask too many questions. But since you seem overtly concerned with who wears Super Bowl rings, and Jesus did (after all) say "whatever we ask for," you will provide!

Well—could you please make sure the Orioles get a better pitching staff next year? That would be my prayer. Just guide the pitcher's ball straight and true across the outside corner of the plate, oh lord. Straight and true! Sincerely, A Distraught Fan. ■

Slumdog Courage: What Is Written?

By Alison Downie, Duquesne University.

Just as the unlikely Jamal Malik won twenty million rupees, his very “foreign” (and therefore unlikely) movie recently took home an armful of Oscars. Both the events of *Slumdog Millionaire* and the event of the film itself trigger theological reflection in a time when the daily national news is full of the loss and the meaning of money, Ponzi scheme exposures, rising unemployment statistics, and mortgage foreclosures.

Some grumpy reviews have denigrated the popular success of *Slumdog*, in which a boy from the slums of Mumbai becomes a millionaire, by calling it a “kids’ yarn,” with an “impossibly shallow” plot, a “feelgood” movie. These labels pejoratively suggest slick superficiality and shallow fluff, as though intelligence and taste require one to be insulted by childlike celebrations of happiness. The same review in the *Guardian’s Observer* which calls it a feel-good movie also insightfully notes its marked “Dickensian feel,” but fails to mention that Dickens was a crassly popular writer in his day, causing fans across the ocean weeks and months of nail-biting suspense as they waited on American shores to read the next installment of his current novel’s plot in sellout magazines.

The *New York Times* review found the movie undeniably seductive but sternly warned that it “makes for a better viewing experience than it does for a reflective one,” again, because of its fairytale quality. It is curious that so many reviewers feel the need to remind us all to watch out for the dangerously sly appeal of happiness that may sneak under our skins if we aren’t properly wary. Don’t be taken in by this charming but ultimately false

fairytale, they warn.

Feminist sensibilities could also be provoked by the *ad nauseam* romantic aspect of the plot: the beautiful, powerless woman is rescued by the prince of her heart to live happily ever after—a man loves her and someone will, finally, take care of her.

But where does fairytale end and myth begin? To use *Slumdog’s* language, *what* is written? Is it written that every child born into miserable conditions will grow up to enjoy a happy life? Of course not. The appeal of *Slumdog* is mythic, symbolic, and, therefore, in the broad sense of the word, religious, telling what is deeply true and teaching how to live in harmony with truth. Reviews that regard the movie as “seductive” assume it offers a false road map that will only lead to dangerous dead ends, since it does not seriously engage the perils of navigating real life. But who could accuse *Slumdog* of glossing over unbearable suffering? In depicting such suffering but also showing a positive outcome, it is the compass rather than the road map, much like the mythic tales of many religious traditions.

Theological reflection on the powerful stirring of heart that *Slumdog* achieves suggests that the movie touches deeply and awakens something like faith, which has more than once been called foolish, naïve, and childish. The story is not fairly summarized as just another underdog triumph, and the differences between the two brothers at the center of the movie go much deeper than temperament. After all, Salim’s aggressive feistiness is a gift which saves his brother Jamal’s eyesight. Their tension is not reducible to

the fighter and the lover stereotypes, for Jamal is also a scrappy survivor.

The “realist” Salim’s wealth is a fruit of his repeated abandonment of his own heart and deepest spirit, and the parting of ways between the brothers results more from this repeated choice than from a personality clash. Salim continues to betray his own heart in the belief that this way of living constitutes strength and success. Jamal shares and risks his well-being over and over, refusing to compromise his integrity, in repeated choices which build his strength and wisdom. He is not a dreamy idealist; rather, his rooted integrity is evident in how he endures interrogation and torture, and also in his shrewd read of the talk show host’s character, which enables a correct guess at a crucial moment.

This movie has much to say about how to live. It has nothing whatever to say about the probability of winning twenty million rupees on a game show or living happily ever after with a rescued damsel in distress. In abandoning, abusing, and controlling Latika, in forcefully taking what he thinks he must have, Salim loses what he needs most: his own life’s meaning. In Jamal’s story, the girl and the rupees symbolize the meaning and fulfillment that a courageous way of living brings about, even in a context of horrific suffering. What is written is that a life of integrity is its own reward. ■

This article originally appeared in Sightings (3/5/09), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School. This issue includes a review of the movie by David Thomas

Christian Ethics and the Movies

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

Globalization and Poverty

Slumdog Millionaire (2008)

A. He is Lucky. B. He is a Genius. C. He Cheated. D. It is His Destiny.

Slumdog Millionaire is everybody's must-see favorite movie of 2008. A low budget film made on a shoestring budget of \$15 million, it had already earned back \$43 million within a month of its Christmas release. It swept nearly all the major awards (forty-two and counting) at all of the big movie festivals, including the Audience Award at Sundance, and Best Picture at the Golden Globes. As this is written, it is also in the running for ten Oscars. It is the heavy favorite to win Best Picture, Cinematography, Soundtrack, and Editing in a strong field of other artistic and dramatic masterpieces.

Succinctly describing the movie is not easy. *Slumdog Millionaire* is a story about a teenage orphan, Jamal Malik, from Mumbai's great slum who becomes a winner on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Before being allowed to compete for the top prize, the show's emcee accuses him of cheating. Else, how could the uneducated Jamal possibly know all those hard questions? He is hauled off to the local police station for interrogation (read: torture) to find out how he knew all the answers. The movie is told as a series of flashbacks into the boy's life story, depicting how in each question, his life experiences gave him the answers, or the clues he needed to figure them out.

The movie is more than a screen version of an exciting TV game show. It is a coming of age story about the children of the slums, especially two orphan brothers and their best friend, an orphan girl, as they navigate the unimaginable suffering and horrors of growing up in the streets. Mentored only by older kids, and the crime lords

who exploit the children in despicable ways, they get by on their wits as petty thieves, street beggars, and landfill scavengers. *Slumdog* is also a romance, a competition between the two brothers for the heart of the same girl with whom they grew up.

Slumdog Millionaire is a Bollywood movie hybrid. The Indian film industry produces twice as many movies as Hollywood. Bollywood movies are ethnic Hindi language films that depend on well-developed cultural traditions. The stories are derived from Hindu folklore and mythology. Upbeat music and dancing on a grand scale are expected. Until recently, kissing was not permissible on screen. *Slumdog* is more of a Westernized movie, in English, using some Bollywood conventions. Danny Doyle, the director, along with the writer and the producer, are all British. The leading actor, Dev Patel, who plays the young hero, Jamal Malik, is also British although he is an ethnic Indian himself. The rest of the cast are Indian, with veteran Bollywood stars in key supporting roles.

In the flashback scenes, Malik and his brother, Salim, and their friend, Latika, are all played by different sets of child actors selected from slum children auditions. One set represents the children at about age seven, and another set represents them at about age twelve. Danny Doyle used actual local children for those roles. He paid their movie fees into a trust fund to be distributed to them after they graduate from school (at about age sixteen), plus he arranged for their grade school education in the meantime.

The music is superlative. Pulsing to an intense percussive beat, two of its songs are Oscar nominees. *Slumdog Millionaire* depends as much on its soundtrack for its mesmerizing effect as *Jaws* relies on its signature *Da-dum! Da-dum!* The scenic backdrops for the movie range through several eye-pop-

ping locations representing the odyssey of the children, as they ride the rails as hobos to the Taj Mahal ("Is this a *hotel?*") to the sewers where they live, to the luxurious penthouse apartments of the Mafia bosses, to the Live India TV studio where the game show is taped. But mostly, the awful setting of the Dharavi slum itself is depicted in lengthy, graphic detail.

Cultural Implications. The chief significance of this movie is its consciousness-raising function. It is realistic to the point that many Indian movie critics and pundits object to the negative view it presents of India today. The Dharavi urban slum in modern Mumbai (formerly Bombay) is one of the world's largest. Its population is estimated to be anywhere from 400 thousand to one million impoverished people, who live there without electricity, sanitation, or clean water. There are indeed many thousands of orphans who grow up in gangs. There are estimated to be as many as 25,000 child prostitutes. At the same time, Mumbai itself is a poster child for Western modernization, with constantly ongoing urban re-development on a grand scale.

Do You Want to be a Millionaire! is a symbol of the globalizing influence of Western culture and media on traditional East Asian values. Jamal Malik came to the attention of the show as a result of his serving as a tea *wallah* in one of Mumbai's information technology centers that markets cell phones worldwide. On a deeper level, each and every quiz question comes with the same unstated subtext: It is plausible that even a Mumbai "slumdog" has familiarity with trivia subjects such as TV sports, movie stars, handgun manufacturers, and the presidents pictured on U. S. currency.

The two brothers typify the major options available to anyone on their life quests: Jamal is the archetype of

the lily in the swamp; his older brother chooses a life in organized crime, with a tragic ending. The beautiful Latika, the childhood friend and ultimate love interest, is the *anima*, the feminine ideal, notwithstanding all of her unspeakably severe vicimage based simply on being an exposed and vulnerable girl.

Slumdog Millionaire is a fantasy in which the hero finds success and true love through winning his fortune on a game show. In the real world, can there be any hope for ameliorating the injustices and poverty that exists on such a massive scale? Readers of this journal may want to interrogate this movie through the lens of Christian ethics, and trace out what Jesus meant by the Sermon on the Mount, his Two Great Commandments, and his answer to the Rich Young Ruler's most timely question, among many other teachings about ministering to the poor. Education, housing, and jobs,

for instance, are more needed than a quick fix.

Basic economics teaches us that America's affluent standards of living rest upon the manifest maldistribution of resources that result in deprivation on enormous scales throughout the developing world. In other words, we must give away more, and sacrifice more, than we have done heretofore—unless we believe that the destiny of the slumdogs everywhere else is God's providential will as a necessary consequence of our enjoying our material blessings here at home.

War and Anti-Semitism *Defiance* (2008)

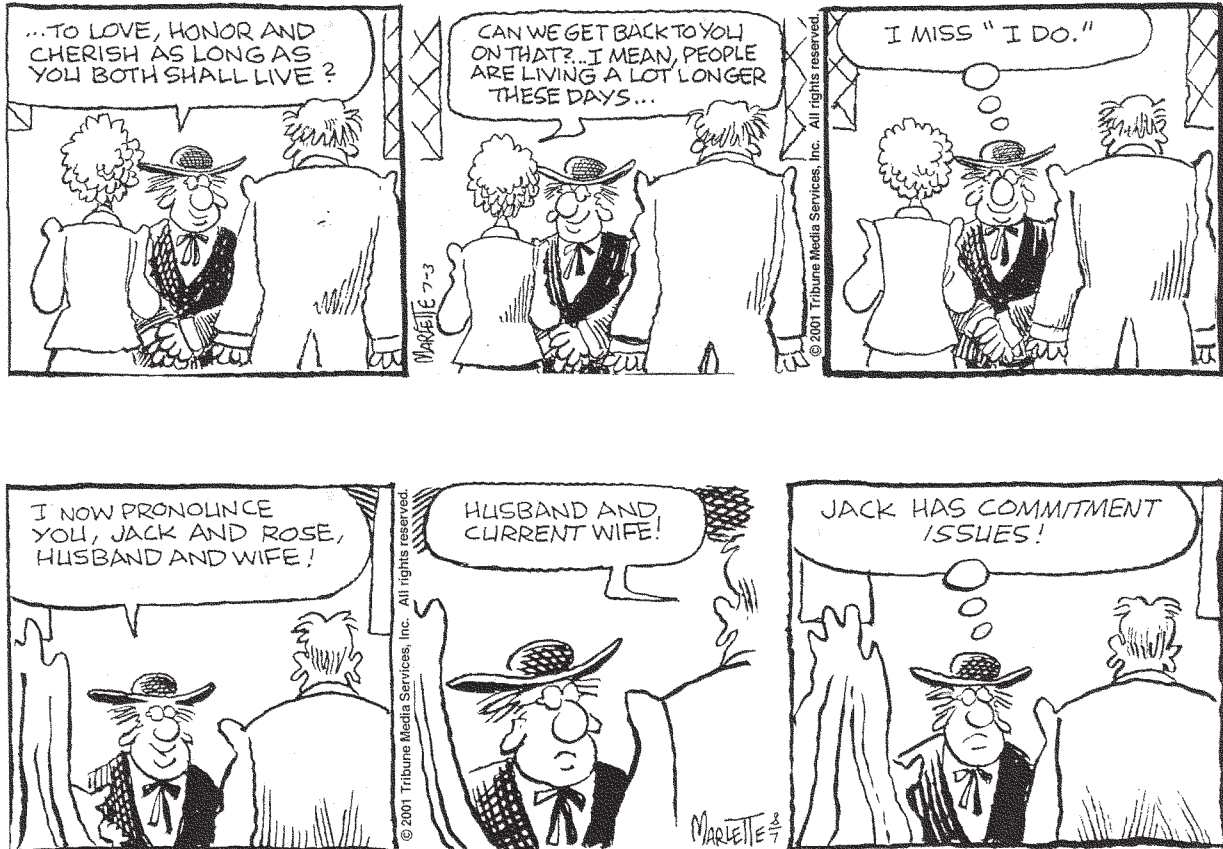
Tuvia Bielski: "Every day of freedom is like an act of faith".

Question: During the years of the Holocaust, when over six million Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, why didn't the Jews fight back? **Answer:**

sometimes they did.

Recent historical articles and books have explored Jewish resistance movements, in the ghettos, and in concentration camps. *Wikipedia* lists more than twenty entries detailing known Jewish uprisings. In the case of *Defiance*, a band of Jewish brothers in Eastern Europe became underground resistance fighters, and lived to tell about it.

Belorussia (now Belarus) is a landlocked country of forests and marshes bordered by Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. When Hitler invaded Poland, Belorussia was the hardest hit country in Eastern Europe. Over ninety percent of its Jewish population was decimated when nearly 400,000 young persons were sent to slave labor camps, and hundreds of thousands more were killed in the ovens and concentration camps. Over 5,000 Belorussian settlements and villages were destroyed. Himmler's plan was to eradicate three-



quarters of the entire Belorussian population, making slaves of the rest.

Defiance is one of the best documented of the growing collection of untold stories of Jewish resistance so far. The Bielskis, a farm family, was decimated but not totally destroyed by the invading Nazi regime. The two parents were murdered, along with several children; but four older Bielski sons escaped into the forest. From hiding, they formed the nucleus of a small but effective moving camp that managed to survive, uncaptured, to the end of the German occupation in 1944.

Defiance, The Movie. *Defiance* is a harrowing but ultimately inspiring tale of how the four very different brothers responded to their desperate situation. The story focuses on the two oldest brothers, Tuvia (Daniel Craig, most recently the star of *007* movies) and Zus (Liev Schreiber), who personify two contrasting personality types. Their interpersonal conflicts spark most of the dramatic story line. (Think, hypothetically, or a civil rights group headed by the duo of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, in the same room.) Their third brother, Asael (Jamie Bell), a young fighter and lover, adds human interest through the sub-text of his forest romance and wedding. The fourth brother, Aron, is depicted as a traumatized, nearly mute teen with only a minor role in the story.

Defiance is a thinking person's action movie. Indeed, the Bielski brothers hooked up with local partisans to help the Russian Army, but the story focuses more on the ways the two brothers respond to the impossible struggle of staying two steps ahead of Nazi (and Nazi sympathizer) pursuers. At one point, Tuvia had a huge reward on his head.

Tuvia Bielski is a wily Russian Army veteran with good leadership and management skills. He sees his mission primarily in terms of saving as many Jews as he can for as long as he can. His brother Zus is an impulsive activist whose first reaction is to fight back; he is driven by his motive to get

revenge. The Bielski brothers begin their odyssey with just a dozen other Jews, a small group that soon swelled to 47, then to a few hundred diverse Jews. Improvisation is their chief strategy. Among their growing entourage is a fair number of able-bodied young men who are actually capable of soldiering. Every day, they face the challenge of foraging for food and weapons while living undetected in the dense woods. By the end of their ordeal, they survive two brutal winters in the open.

At a certain point, Zus becomes impatient with Tuvia's methodical patience. He recruits the cream of the crop among their men, and marches off to join a Russian underground resistance group. He leaves Tuvia to continue the operational task of organizing the remaining families, children, and old folks into a functioning community in hiding, in the dead of winter. Later in the story, just in the nick of time, Zus and his ragtag cavalry rejoin Tuvia and the main body of Jews, in the most crucial battle scene in the film. (Military buffs will recognize Tuvia's tactic of waging a battle, to mount a classic flanking counterattack against an overwhelming force, worthy of Robert E. Lee.)

From tiny beginnings, the band of brothers and their followers continue to grow as more and more Jews are flushed out of their farms and ghettos. Fleeing from the SS murder squads, the Jews gravitate towards the Bielski camp, which never turned anyone away. Tuvia imposes a rigid discipline founded on the rule that every person without exception must work, and everyone must share equally in whatever they have, including the potato soup and coarse rye bread. Makeshift "forest marriages" are accepted for the duration between the men and women whose real spouses were left behind, or killed; but pregnancies are forbidden because they cannot care for infants.

Traditional Jewish cultural, social, and religious rites are maintained by the rabbi. Together with the few intellectuals and artisan/tradesmen among them, they forge a functioning com-

munity in exile, but not without plenty of loud arguments. We listen to snippets of their debates over the ethical rules that must be applied to killings (both defensive and offensive – Zus: "We should have killed the milkman!") Also, the group sets rules for how to be just in their robberies to get food supplies from neighboring farms. On one occasion, Tuvia acts decisively to execute one of their own mutinous members, which the group apparently accepts as the right thing for him to do.

In the credits, captions reveal that by the German withdrawal in 1944, the Bielski enclave finally numbered over 1200 Jews in their forest camp that included a makeshift school, nursery, bathhouse, and hospital. Only fifty died, or were killed by the Nazis. As was true of the Schindler's List survivors, today the progeny of the Bielski brigade survivors number in the tens of thousands.

When the war ended, Tuvia remained married to his forest wife for life. Both Zus and Tuvia Bielski emigrated to New York City where they drove taxicabs and ran a trucking business together for thirty more years. Neither of them ever claimed any credit for what they did during the war. Asael, the third brother, was later conscripted into the Russian Army in the final throes of WWII and died in battle. The fate of Aron was not specified.

Scriptural Implications. *Defiance* is a study in theology. Director Edward Zwick (*Blood Diamonds*, *Shakespeare in Love* Oscar winner) links Tuvia Bielski metaphorically with the story of Moses leading the slaves out of Egypt. During the brigade's darkest hours, their wise rabbi continues to perform his important ritual functions, especially on holy days like Passover, all the while giving voice to his wavering doubts. At one point he prays to God, "Please take away our righteousness and choose some other people."

Tuvia hears the Talmudic tradition, "He that saves a life is as if he has saved an entire world," as, "He that saves a life becomes responsible for that life."

Reluctant at first to take on responsibility for others, he goes into the ghettoes to invite Jews to flee with him into the forest: "I'd rather save one old Jewish woman than kill ten German soldiers."

Zwick, who claims an ancestor who died in the Polish woods, said: "You have these chapters of history that get lost. Sometimes that's down to political agendas or because mythologies are created. Ideas and events that are contradictory to those myths often disappear. That's what's happened here. The image of European Jews going passively to their deaths is inaccurate. We hope this film corrects that view, while also exploring the specifics of the Bielski story. You have to consider how they felt. Where is God when they are hiding and scratching out this existence in the forests? Where is love in the forest? What is it like to be a child in the forest? All these things were important."² ■

Marriage and Family

Fireproof (2007)

Christian movies don't get any respect from critics as a rule. *Fireproof* is no exception. Partly, some critics display an undisguised hostility to "messages" in movies, especially sectarian or evangelical messages that distract from the mindless entertainment values of normal movie going. More often, Christian movies are necessarily low budget, and so cannot match the professional production quality of commercial movies. And, to be blunt, some Christian movies are not very good at the retail level, meaning, their poor writing, acting, directing, editing, and the rest are plain for everyone to see.

Still, there is always a core market for Christian films. The single most successful overtly Christian movie ever, by far, was Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which started out with a marketing campaign exclusively focused on church groups, and then went viral to rack up an astounding worldwide box office

receipts of well over \$600 million. Even so, it received a highly polarized set of critical reviews between those who loved it and those who despised it – to a large extent based on what was regarded as its excessive screen brutality in the scourging scenes. But putting aside *The Passion* as the exception that proves the rule, costume biblical movies typically aim at more modest aims, like *The Story of the Nativity* (2006), made for \$35 million and grossing \$46 million in return, before cable and DVD sales.

Against this backdrop, we have the modern Christian phenom of Sherwood Pictures and its surprise hit of the season, *Fireproof*, starring Kirk Cameron. The company is actually Sherwood Baptist Church of Albany, Georgia. Alex Kendrick, the church's Minister of Media, is the writer/director driving force behind the movie, along with his brother, Stephen Kendrick. The duo have previously made two other Christian movies, *Flywheel* and *Facing the Giants*, using amateur casts selected from the church membership. *Fireproof*, their third feature production, cost an amazing low, low \$500,000, and so far has grossed something like \$35 million in general theatrical release, presumably for Sherwood Baptist Church, based on word of mouth. Critics typically ignored it. One wrote, *Fireproof* is a movie for Christian audiences who hate movies.

It is a simple story. Kirk Cameron stars as a local fireman named Caleb Holt, who is having trouble in his marriage. The theme of the movie is, *Don't Leave Your Partner Behind*, which is Caleb's mantra in his training sessions for his firehouse squad. Caleb's wife, Catherine (Erin Bethea, whose previous acting experience was in *Facing the Giants*), has all but given up on Caleb because of his general nastiness towards her, and his interest in internet porn. But Caleb's Dad (Harris Malcolm, ditto) urges him to fight to save his marriage by devoting forty days to "the love test," a series of proactive steps to rekindle devotion to one's spouse.

Incidentally, Dad is also a devout Christian who uses the opportunity to witness his faith to his son Caleb in direct terms, the kind of dialog that drives secular movie critics nuts. The story ends happily for the couple, and also spiritually for Caleb's salvation.

Fireproof is a good movie, production-wise. Getting Kirk Cameron to sign on is a huge plus. He contributes his professional acting chops, along with his widespread name recognition as the star of the *Left Behind* series. Cameron was a child actor who was himself converted at an early age, and now uses his faith as a guide to his acting career. He is a lay minister. He has strict rules about what he is willing to say or do on screen, contractually, such as, he refuses to kiss anyone but his real wife. In *Fireproof's* kissing scene, she stands in for the Catherine character. The bit is shot in near-silhouette to disguise the trick. And, for this movie, Cameron refused his normal appearance fee.

The editing is good. Scene continuity is smooth and logical, colors match between shots, etc. The dialog generally sounds like real people, with a few awkward spots here and there. The pyrotechnic rescue action sequences are believable.

Kendrick just keeps improving, as do the members of his acting pool in Sherwood Baptist Church. Unless you don't like the overt evangelizing scenes, nothing is objectionable about *Fireproof*. This movie has all the qualities anyone should want, in terms of a family-safe movie for church discussion groups. Sherwood Baptist Church has shown the way for other churches with an entrepreneurial bent to take their message to the Cineplex. Surely, *Fireproof's* success portends more Sherwood movies in the future. ■

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

2 Synopsis for *Defiance*, IMBD website, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1034303/synopsis>

Book Reviews

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

W. H. Whitsett— The Man and the Controversy

James H. Slaton, 2009.

In Search of the New Testament Church—The Baptist Story

C. Douglas Weaver, 2008.

Baptist Theology—A Four Century Study

James Leo Garrett, 2009.

Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

On my desk are three recent books published by Mercer University Press, who must be strongly applauded for producing these major additions to Baptist church history and theology. Serious students of the role Baptists have played in church history will find in these texts a rich and rewarding reservoir of solid information. This year marks four hundred years of Baptist life and history, which these books magnificently expound.

James Slaton, who recently concluded a long and productive pastorate at the River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, has written an intriguing book about a sad and major chapter in Baptist history. W.H. Whitsett was president of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in the closing years of the nineteenth-century. He was brutally forced to resign because of his position on Baptist beginnings in the seventeenth century, and his forthright and honest approach to the infamous Landmark controversy that divided Baptists again in the nineteenth century.

Slaton's remarks about discovering

a mother-lode of letters and diaries of Whitsett while caring for one of his church members led to the decision to write the book and also led to the Whitsett family allowing these valuable materials to be deposited in a secure place. Slaton writes with exceptional interest and insight about this period in Southern Baptist history. Major names and institutions surface in this historical tragedy, which confirms the damage done when ignorance, personality conflicts, and the quest for power combine.

One cannot help but equate this nineteenth-century conflict in Southern Baptist life with the twentieth-century conflict where open wounds are still apparent. The author does not move to such comparisons, but the reader cannot ignore them because there are too many obvious lessons engendered by the tragedies brought on by power acquisitions in the name of doctrinal purity. The Landmark Movement of the nineteenth century and Fundamentalism in the twentieth century have much in common. Slaton's book is interesting and well worth reading.

Weaver's book on Baptist history also makes a major contribution as Baptists celebrate four hundred years of church life (1609-2009). The author's presentation of "Landmarkism" and its widely influential "trail of blood" concept—i.e., the idea that the Baptist movement goes back generation after generation in unbroken sequence to the actual days of Jesus. The issue of the true New Testament Church will also dovetail with real significance to issues Slaton raises in his book about the Whitsett controversy.

Weaver touches on multiple themes in Baptist history, which are appropriately relevant to our times. Early Baptists and the Anabaptist influence, Baptists and the English Pietists, the issues of infant baptism and the immersion of believers only, General

and Particular Baptists impact following generations of Baptist churches, the initial ramifications of religious liberty, a regenerate church membership, congregational church government—all of these basic Baptist distinctives traced effectively from the beginnings of Baptist history are discussed in the book. Bringing these factors back into focus in the fast-moving streams of Baptist conflict and identity today is a genuinely helpful conclusion from Weaver's excellent volume.

The publication of the massive volume by James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology—A Four Century Study* is indeed the author's *magnum opus*. Dr. Garrett has many books and articles to his credit from his many years of teaching theology, but this volume sums up his multi-faceted career. Again the focus is on Baptists' four-hundred-year anniversary.

In this book we have a major study of exceptional importance to the serious student of theology, regardless of denominational affiliation. Dr. Garrett traces Baptist thought from its earliest years in Holland and England all the way to the twenty-first century, with particular attention given to some of the truly great Baptist teachers and authors in Southern Baptist seminary life. One of the best things about this book is how Garrett brings the reader up-to-date on the new voices in Baptist theology—one of the most encouraging and unheralded developments in Baptist life today.

The story posed by these books reveals a rollercoaster ride of ups and downs throughout many centuries of Baptist life, leaving the reader aware that God is not finished with this peculiar people called Baptists!

Certainly here are three books that richly deserve a place in the pastor's personal library as well as being made available in the church library for church members. ■

Quitting Church: Why the Faithful Are Fleeing and What to Do About It

Julia Duin

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008, \$18.

Reviewed by Glen Norris,

North Little Rock, AR

Julia Duin is crying out, “The Emperor has no clothes on.” She writes this book from her experience as Religion Editor at *The Washington Times*. She has interviewed people in the pew and people who have left the pew, backing up her conclusions with up to date surveys from George Barna, Lifeway Christian Resources, and other reputable organizations. We would do well to listen to her.

A woman, one of many, for whom the Church has become irrelevant says, “The churches I’ve been involved with were not very aware of singles and the elderly. They were constantly hitting up the middle-class, the married who were their bread and butter. I never felt connected. I tried hard: helped the food bank, volunteered for the missions committee, went to Sunday school. I didn’t want to go to a church feeling like I had wasted my time. The sermons were the same old, same old” (132).

Druin continues, “One of the top reasons people give for leaving churches is loneliness: the feeling—especially in large congregations—that no one knows or cares whether they are there. Midweek small groups are a help in creating connections, but fewer and fewer people are able to fight their way through traffic, wolf down dinner, then carve out several hours in a given evening to be a part of a small group” (50).

The Roman Catholic Church has ignored the impact of its sexual abuse scandals on the lives of its members. Protestant evangelical churches promote chastity vows when all the surveys say those vows are not working. While most Christian singles want a committed marriage relationship they feel the Church forcing them into a single role. She quotes Brian McLaren, “A lot of churches do not want to deal with the sexual chaos in a lot of singles’ lives. They are not dealing with the messiness of life” (36).

Druin writes of pastors who are burned out. Many things compete for their time alone with God to feed themselves and to prepare to feed their flocks. Many churches have become so seeker-friendly that their members feel spiritually malnourished. Some churches have blended so much with the culture they seem to have lost their identities.

Druin ends the title of her book with the phrase, “and what to do about it.” She doesn’t address it very well. Whether or not it is the answer, fully nine percent of American adults are finding nurture and true worship in house churches (58). She does say this about the local church, “I’ve not seen many churches like this, that concentrate on discipleship and leave the bottle-feeding to the mega churches, but I’m willing to bet such a church would do well in this era of dumb-downed, purpose-driven, seeker-friendly Christianity” (178). ■

LOST AUTHOR! Will the person who emailed book reviews on books by Daniel Vestal and Preston A. Taylor, please contact the editor.

Rick ‘n Jesus

(continued from page 9)

fundamentalism (of whatever religious brand), many people are touting a kind of uncritical pluralism that would amalgamate divergent faith traditions into one homogenized whole.

Praying in Jesus’ name at a presidential inauguration is an expression of the free exercise of religion guaranteed to every American in the First Amendment. It no more violates the establishment clause than the fact of the president’s taking his oath of office on the Holy Bible (Abraham Lincoln’s King James Version, in Obama’s case), or the president’s concluding his oath with the words “so help me God.” The doctrine of “nonpreferential accommodationism” requires, of course, that Jews may invoke the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Muslims the words of Muhammad. It also means that an atheist president can be sworn in on *The Humanist Manifesto*, and that a Wiccan president can use a Ouija board. But it does not mean that Christians must hide their faith in the inner reserve of their private consciousness. Indeed, they must not do so. For Christians, religious faith is more than what one does with one’s solitude. It is a public declaration to all the world that Jesus Christ is Lord. The one who said “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” was not crucified in private. ■

The Peril of Avarice

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

What desolations may ensue from greed
These tragic tales are plain for all to see,
More danger than a storied Trojan steed,
Deceiving high and low with tempting plea.

Like cancer, it may well metastasize,
The common good is scorned, greed's ways are rammed,
Accumulation is its steady prize,
Compassion's aid for weak and poor be damned.

The wise long past divined soul loss in greed;
They marked the demon deadly, one of seven,
It deals with people as pawns, with little heed,
The greedy forge new hells while mocking heaven.

With corporate boards or lone, their aims the same,
Join greed with hubris, eager then to laud
Unbridled schemes of greedy minds; they game
The field and set the stage for stunning fraud.

Obscene are pay, rewards and perks in millions,
At times in spite of massive loss, not gains;
Madoff grew rich while losing many billions;
Key rules are scrapped: the greedy want no reins.

In small concerns the Scrooge opprobrium
Wreaks pain and grief—but, see! the scourge advances;
When greed has reached a scale gargantuan,
It drives a riptide wrecking world finances.

Where greed is rampant, public trust erodes,
Accountability long overdue,
While confidence, across the board, implodes;
Affairs now dire, require the nation's rescue.

A widening gap of rich and poor bodes ill,
gregious hurt is spawned by wanton greed,
The jobless forced to take a bitter pill;
From greed, by grace alone we may be freed.

And greed can work its will in common ways,
A must-have zeal betrays and robs the soul,
Our selfish surfeit garners empty praise:
This way is sure to miss the Kingdom's goal.

If we could see where avarice will lead:
To wealth in things but hollowness in spirit,
We might more truly shun this ruinous creed;
To master greed demands our willing it.

But more: the heart so surely choked by greed,
If grace takes root, will blossom like a rose;
That heart will nurture many a generous deed,
And meeting need will bring a glow God knows. ■

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.

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