

# 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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# EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Given a choice between a society with no newspapers and a society with no government, I would choose the latter.”

**Thomas Jefferson.**

“The country’s shift away from right vs. left thinking toward a right vs. wrong frame continues to gain momentum.”

*Syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington.*

“I’m not real sure you’re a bunch of right-wing extremists. But if you are, we’re with you.”

*Gov. Rick Perry, who raised the prospect of Texas secession addressing a tax-protest tea party in Austin (4/15/09).*

“You give me a waterboard, Dick Cheney, and one hour, and I’ll have him confess to the Sharon Tate murders.”

*Jesse Ventura, former Minnesota governor who endured waterboarding as part of his Navy SEAL training, on the unreliability of the tactic (Larry King Live, 5/11/09).*

“It’s not about who they are; it’s about who we are.”

*Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) in response to those who support the use of torture in interrogation.*

“51% of Americans now call themselves pro-life and 42% pro-choice on the abortion issue—23% said it should be illegal in all circumstances, 22% said it should be legal under any circumstances, and 53% said it should be legal only under certain circumstances.”

*Gallup Poll Survey on Values and Beliefs (5/7-10/09).*

“Look, I am a Catholic. And before pro-life advocates protest President

Obama speaking at the Notre Dame commencement, they should first look at the faculty there, especially in the science departments and the law school, where I am sure they will find many with the same views.”

*James Carville on Meet the Press (5/17/09).*

“The Vatican’s top bioethics official said the two Brazilian doctors who performed an abortion on a nine-year-old rape victim do not deserve excommunication, since they acted to save her life.”

*Statement by Archbishop Rino Fisichella in the Vatican newspaper L’Osservatore Romano (3/15/09).*

“Exxon Mobil Corp., the world’s largest oil company, raised CEO Rex Tillerson’s compensation 34 percent last year to \$22.4 million. His salary rose to \$1.87 million, his bonus increased to \$4 million, stock awards were \$7.81 million, and the value of pension and other compensations rose \$8.29 million.”

*(U.S. Sec. & Exch. Comm. Filing).*

“The government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

*Second President John Adams, 1797 Treaty of Tripoli.*

“It is not the job of government to tell the American people what, where, or when to pray:”

*Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.*

“The U.S. church suffers a ‘dumbing down,’ from over simplified Sunday school materials to un-challenging feel-good sermons.”

*(Marilyn McIntyre, Sojourners, 6/09).*

“When you get my age, you cry at weather reports.”

*Dustin Hoffman, fighting back tears while receiving France’s National Order of Arts and Letters.*

## TEN WORST COMPANIES

The *Better World Shopper* organization has determined that the following companies are the world’s worst when judged on Human Rights, the Environment, Animal Protection, Community Involvement, and Social Justice: 1. Exxon-Mobil 2. Kraft 3. Wal-Mart 4. Chevron-Texaco 5. Pfizer 6. Nestle 7. General Electric 8. Archer Daniels Midland 9. General Motors 10. Tyson Foods. *(Christian Century, 5/5/09).* ■

## Hear Tony Campolo!

“Red Letter Christians”  
And The Dallas Baptist University Choir

Wednesday, October 14

7:00 PM

Gambrell Street Baptist Church (Adjacent to Southwestern Seminary)

Meal Served at 5:30 PM—Book Signing at 6:00 PM—Call For Details

# 1 A Visit to the Monastery of St. Thaddeus

By Calvin Miller, Birmingham, AL

**Note:** *This first chapter from The Second Letter of Eusebius of Philippi to his Beloved Friend Clement, is a long-lost second-century manuscript discovered by archeologist Dr. Helmut Niedegger and translated from ancient Greek scrolls by the author.*

1. A year has now passed since I wrote my last epistle to you. It has been a year of quiet for the church. We have not lost a single member to martyrdom, and we heard that the authorities were thinking of shipping the big cats to Rome where the persecution seems to really be getting underway. 2. I cannot believe that in the economy of the kingdom of God would rather have the cats eating Romans rather than Philippians. I can say the atmosphere here is not so tense, and we are breathing deeply.

3. I only wish I could say that I was feeling the same freedom in the assembly. For the last year Coriolanus has repeatedly explained to me God's will for my life. He believes I should leave this pulpit. 4. He offered me a stipend of many shekels if I would take an empty pulpit just outside of Rome. I told him that I had heard that the Romans were receiving the Philippian lions to be ready for a new wave of persecution. 5. He informed me that a true man of faith would never turn from lions to sidestep the will of God in cowardly self-interest.

6. I am afraid, Most Excellent Clement, that Coriolanus will not be content until I am no longer shepherd of this flock. 7. Last week he invited every elder of the church to his home for squab and honey, but neglected to add me to his invitation list. He is applying a kind of ostracism. 8. It is possible to face it, but it does keep me busy praying that I may not reciprocate his hostility with hostility of my own.

9. I have learned a little more about

the sad care of one of my predecessors whom we have called Tertius. It seems that on the day he entered the marketplace singing hymns he had a long discussion with Coriolanus who explained to him the will of God. 10. According to Coriolanus it was the will of the Father that Tertius join the order of St. Thaddeus. You will recall that these monks live high on a rocky pinnacle north of Atticus. 11. They all submit to having their tongues torn out so that they never again will be tempted to utter a single syllable that might break the silence of their lifelong vigil of prayer. 12. While Tertius had always been known as a man of prayer, the idea that his tongue would be tenderly removed as a part of the sweet will of God had not been revealed to him so clearly as it had been revealed to Coriolanus.

13. Last week I visited the monastery at St. Thaddeus. It is all true. It is a silent settlement manned by thirty tongueless monks. But, my dear Clement, here was the startling impact of my discovery—twenty-two of them had once been the shepherds of local congregations before entering their tongueless lifestyles. 14. Can you imagine that? I could but ponder what had taken those tongues once given to sermonizing and subjected them to amputation and the life of prayer and silence that it produced.

15. I must admit that mine was a silent sojourn among these brothers! They wheezed and breathed, occasionally sneezed, and I found out that many even snored, but year after year they passed without ever saying so much as "Good day!" 16. Cicero Chrysostom and I became as good friends as we might with my talking and his nodding or writing monosyllable phrases on the scratch parchment.

17. Cicero had once preached in the suburbs of Philadelphia. By his own immodest testimony he was a

popular preacher and large crowds attended him whenever and wherever he spoke the gospel. 18. You are probably moving ahead of me in this tale, but he had his own Coriolanus who knew God's will for his life and, thus, the inner persecution began.

19. "Do you like the silent life?" I asked him.

20. He dipped his quill in the berry juice and scratched on the parchment. "I like preach!" he wrote, living up to his monkish vows to write no more words than absolutely necessary to communicate what had to be said.

21. "How are the accommodations here?" I asked.

22. "Bed hard!" he wrote.

23. "And the food? Is it well prepared?" I asked.

24. "Bad cook! Food awful!" he complained with his quill and parchment.

25. "Do you miss preaching?" I asked.

26. Tears came to his eyes, and he dipped his quill and wrote for fully five minutes, "I like preach. I like feel God power. I like see people's faces when they hear sermon. I like power of spoken gospel. 27. I used to feel like God moved inside my life to form every word of sermon and people were powerless to resist. Once wrote sermon on repentance. Thirty-four Phillipians heard sermon and came out of sin to Christ . . ."

28. He stopped writing. He buried his head in the sleeve of his robe and convulsed.

29. When he stopped convulsing, I spoke softly. "I am a preacher in Philippi, but I have been having second thoughts. I may come here and become your silent brother. You see, things aren't going well for me in the congregation, and I felt it may be God trying to tell me to . . ."

30. Cicero Chrysostom jumped up  
(continued on page 23)

# When Does Human Life Begin? Conception And Ensoulment

By Lindsey Disney, New York University Medical Center and Larry Poston, Nyack College, NY.

In *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph #2322 states that “from its conception, the child has the right to life. Direct abortion . . . is a criminal practice, gravely contrary to the moral law. The Church imposes the canonical penalty of excommunication for this crime against human life.”<sup>1</sup>

In an *amicus curiae* submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court in October 1988, the Eastern Orthodox Church stated its conviction that “modern science has borne out the prescient wisdom of the Holy Fathers of the Church, that life begins at conception, and at no other arbitrary or scholastically derived juncture.”<sup>2</sup>

In May of 1982, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a “Resolution on Abortion and Infanticide” which contained the following phraseology: “Whereas, Both medical science and biblical references indicate that human life begins at conception. . . . Be it finally RESOLVED, That we support and will work for appropriate legislation and/or constitutional amendment which will prohibit abortions except to save the physical life of the mother. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

And on January 22, 2007, Bill H.R. 618 was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA)—a Southern Baptist—proposing that the terms “human person” and “human being” be defined as “each and every member of the species *homo sapiens* at all stages of life, including, but not limited to, the moment of fertilization, cloning, or other moment at which an individual member of the human species comes into being.”<sup>4</sup>

The examples above give clear evidence that a majority of Christians in the modern world believe (or are supposed to believe) that human life begins at the moment that sperm and egg unite. But in the history of Christianity there has never been a

united voice on this issue. In actuality, neither the Christian scriptures nor modern science provide sufficient data to enable us to draw indisputable conclusions regarding this topic. But much of our confusion may be attributed to our failure to distinguish between the concepts of “life” and “ensoulment.”

Until quite recently, non-human creatures have been considered as lacking “something” that distinguishes human beings from all other living forms on the planet. Philosophically and religiously speaking, this distinctive aspect is called “the soul;” an immaterial “something” that endows a human being with an intellect, emotions, a will, and an autonomous “sense of self.” It is one thing to speak of “when life begins,” but quite another to speak of “when the soul enters” or “is present” in a human body. These are entirely distinguishable items, and though they *may* be simultaneous in their origins, they are not *necessarily* so.

## Ensoulment in Scripture and Christian History

The canonical Scriptures of the Christian faith do not directly answer the question of when “life” begins or when “ensoulment” occurs. To illustrate: Psalm 139:13, which contains David’s conviction that “you [God] created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb,” is often used as a model verse for Christian Pro-Life activists. The literary genre of the Psalms in general, as well as the context of this particular psalm, are not scientific in orientation. David is using the forms that are appropriate in a psalm—poetry and metaphor—to teach his listeners that God is to be praised because the Creator cares enough to know David intimately. Even if for the sake of argument we were to consider this passage literally rather than metaphorically, it may still

be construed as saying no more than that God sovereignly brought about the life of David, one of his closest followers and “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14). The passage does not necessarily imply that God “creates the inmost being” of every fetus in every womb; nor does the passage address the issue of *when* such an inner-being creation occurs.

Looking to the “roots” of Christianity, we find that in Jewish law a fetus is not considered to be a full-fledged human being until its head emerges from the womb. Before that moment, “the fetus is the thigh of its mother” (*ubar yerekh imo*), meaning that it may not be considered an independent entity but instead a “partial life.”<sup>5</sup> This view is based on Exodus 21:22, which says that if a woman miscarries due to being struck by men fighting and she herself is not seriously injured, the offender is to pay the husband of the woman a monetary fine for the loss. Since the Mosaic Law requires a “life for a life” (Exodus 21:23), the above scenario implies that the fetus is of worth (since payment is required for its destruction) but not of equal worth to the life of a born human being (otherwise the punishment of the offender would be death). In addressing the issue of ensoulment, Philo (20 BCE—50 CE) used the scenario of Exodus 21:22 as his starting point. “If one have a contest with a woman who is pregnant, and strike her a blow on her belly, and she miscarry; if the child which was conceived within her is still unfashioned and unformed, he shall be punished by a fine, both for the assault which he committed and also because he has prevented nature—which was fashioning and preparing that most excellent of all creatures, a human being—from bringing him into existence. But if the child who was conceived has assumed a distinct shape in all its parts, having received all its proper connective and



distinctive qualities, he shall die; for such a creature as that is a man, whom he has slain while still in the workshop of nature. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

Philo held that the time of having assumed “a distinct shape in all its parts” was the fortieth day after conception. But not all Jewish thinkers have concurred. During the Middle Ages, for instance, the issue of “doubtful viability” was introduced which held that an embryo remains an embryo until thirty days after its *birth*, becoming only then a *bar kayyama*, a viable, living being.<sup>7</sup> Because of the ambiguity of the scriptural passages cited above and the precedents established by Jewish law, the history of Christianity has seen the development of three distinct views of ensoulment: Pre-existentism, Traducianism, and Creationism.

#### **Pre-existentism**

Pre-existentism is the belief that “souls” are pre-existent entities that await the creation of bodies for them to enter. Historically, very few within Christian circles have held this view, though the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints adopted it in the nineteenth century and certain “New Age” movements have more recently attempted syncretisms between Christianity and Eastern reincarnationism that include forms of pre-existentism.

#### **Traducianism**

The doctrine of Traducianism teaches that the “soul” is present in both the sperm and the egg when they unite, and the combination of the two entities forms a new “soul” automatically and immediately. Traducianism has been held by at least some adherents since the Church’s earliest years. Tertullian (c.160-c.225), for instance, wrote “we allow that life begins with conception, because we contend that the soul also begins from conception; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does.”<sup>8</sup> Clement of Alexandria held the same view, holding that “the seed being deposited, the spirit, which is in the seed, is, so to speak, appropriated, and is thus assumed into conjunction

in the process of formation.”<sup>9</sup>

The Traducianist view was also held by Gregory of Nyssa (335-c.394) and Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662). The latter’s argument was based on the example of Christ, who was fully human and fully divine from the first moment of his conception—implying that he possessed a spiritual soul from that instant. Since Christ was like us (humans) in all things except for sin, then all human beings must receive a spiritual soul at conception as well.<sup>10</sup>

Some scholars hold that the Traducianist view best explains the transmission of original sin. Bruce Waltke, for instance, concludes “that man’s spiritual element is passed on mediately from Adam and not as the immediate creation of God, who does not author sin.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **Creationism**

The doctrine of Creationism maintains that each individual “soul” is created directly by God and introduced into a fetus at a point of God’s choosing. Genesis 2:7—a key text for Creationists—says that “*God formed the man from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.*” Ecclesiastes 12:7 adds the comment that “*the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*” And Hebrews 12:9 makes the distinction between “*human fathers*” and the “*Father of our spirits,*” concerning which theologian Francis Turretin comments, “Why should God be called ‘the Father of spirits’ in contradistinction to ‘the fathers of the flesh’ unless the origin of each was different?”<sup>12</sup>

Berkhof and Turretin are just two of the more recent representatives of a stream of thought that is rooted both in ancient Hebrew beliefs and in Aristotelean philosophy. “In general,” Aristotle believed, “soul is imparted to the body in stages as each part is formed, and the specific soul is not actually present until the form is complete. . . .”<sup>13</sup> This “completion of form” takes place on the fortieth day after conception for males, and on the eightieth day for females. Augustine (354-430) was a proponent of this

view, and Thomas Aquinas (1205-1274) adopted Aristotle’s schema practically in its entirety. Aquinas held that “the body was formed gradually through the power transmitted by the male seed but the spiritual soul was directly created by God when the body was ready to receive it. Thus the embryo was believed to live at first the life of a plant, then the life of a simple animal, and only after all its organs, including the brain, had been formed, was it given, by the direct and creative act of God, an immortal spiritual soul.”<sup>14</sup>

The Creationist views of Augustine and Aquinas were the norm in the Christian West from the early fifth century to the late nineteenth century. As a consequence, the Justinian Code of the sixth century excused from penalty abortions performed prior to forty days after conception. Pope Innocent III (c. 1216) and Pope Gregory IX (c. 1241) both affirmed the distinction between “vivified” fetuses (older than forty days) and those younger than so.<sup>15</sup> Not until the *Effraenatum* of Pope Sixtus V in 1588 did the forty-day rule vanish and abortion was declared illegal at *any* stage of fetal existence. But even this ruling was rescinded by Sixtus’ successor Gregory XIV, and the repeal lasted until 1869, when Pius IX reinstated the earlier decision. Even so, Pius’ decree did not become canon law until 1918—a mere ninety years ago.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Implications**

Our discussion of ensoulment has clear implications for many of the leading issues with which our contemporary societies are dealing. Chief among these are abortion, contraception, *in vitro* fertilization, and stem cell research. Simply put, if one is a Traducianist, completely convinced that an embryo is a fully-ensouled human being from the first seconds of its existence, the destruction of unused fertilized eggs, the harvesting of stem cells from fetal tissue, forms of contraception that are essentially abortifacients, and all elective abortions performed at any stage of the gestation period must be considered the ter-

mination of *human* life. If, however, one is a convinced Creationist, holding that ensoulment does not occur until—at the earliest—the fortieth day after conception, and possibly not until as long as thirty days after birth itself, then one's convictions concerning the abovementioned procedures may be vastly different from those of the Traducianist. Let us examine the implications of these views more closely.

### **Traducianism**

Given their presuppositions, it is completely logical for Traducianists to be convinced that "... abortion is nothing less than murder, the taking of innocent human life."<sup>17</sup> There are, however, several problematic aspects of Traducianism. For one thing, Pro-Life advocates must often present their case in a skewed fashion. This is so because "lacking a secular rationale, pro-life forces nevertheless try to marshal *apparently* secular support for the fetal right to life. One stratagem is to generate moral concern for early stages of human life by playing on their later stages . . . abortion opponents never carry posters depicting newly conceived embryos, which when magnified look more like buckyballs than people."<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, Traducianists find it difficult to prove that abortion causes mental harm (in the form of guilt or trauma) as well as physical harm (in the form of sterility and other gynecological difficulties). The general assumption that exists within the Christian community—that those who have undergone abortions incur *higher* rates of psychological distress—is not borne out by objective research. According to the American Psychological Association's briefing paper on abortion, "well-designed studies of psychological responses following abortion have consistently shown that risk of psychological harm is low. Some women experience psychological dysfunction following abortion, but postabortion rates of distress and dysfunction are lower than pre-abortion rates."<sup>19</sup> Based on these studies, it would be possible to argue that

refusing to allow the termination of an unwanted pregnancy could conceivably add *more* to the sum total of pain and distress in the modern world than an abortion would yield.

Also problematic is the fact that Traducianists are often not consistent in their position regarding pre-birth embryology. If the Pro-Life advocate's purpose is to save lives by saving embryos, why are fertility clinics, which house frozen embryos that are discarded when no longer needed, not targeted to the same extent as abortion clinics. Such inconsistencies seem to indicate that many Traducianists choose to emphasize implications that are the most "trendy," or have not considered that their views have implications for other areas besides abortion.

Finally, there are serious theological problems that arise for those holding the Traducianist position. According to *New York Times* writer Gina Kolata, thirty-one percent of women experience a known miscarriage,<sup>20</sup> and this figure is considered by many to be on the low side: "the true rate of early pregnancy loss is close to 50% because of the high number of chemical pregnancies that are not recognized in the 2-4 weeks after conception."<sup>21</sup> This statistic becomes extremely problematic if all miscarriages are deemed actual human beings. Consider that the cumulative population of the earth throughout history is estimated to be approximately 60 billion persons.<sup>22</sup> If that number represents the 50% that survived pregnancy, then there are, at least, 60 billion souls that did *not* survive. If those souls are innately evil—as Christianity teaches on the basis of such passages as Psalm 58:3—"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies"—then more than 60 billion human beings were essentially born into Hell. Most, of course, would argue that fetuses and infants are innocent beings, and therefore those 60 billion souls are all in "Heaven." But even this claim is problematic, for would it not imply that "Heaven" is overwhelmingly populated by fetuses that were spontaneously or intention-

ally aborted?

### **Creationism**

If the tenets of Creationism are true, and a fetus does not have a soul until God in His sovereignty introduces one into a body, then the social issues we have discussed above do not *necessarily* involve the termination of an innocent human life. The Creationist view appears to be most in line with what is, to many, psychologically obvious: "We intuitively understand this [that embryos do not have souls] when we judge, uncontroversially, that it is *not* a human tragedy that a high percentage of fertilized eggs never achieve implantation but are expelled naturally during menstruation."<sup>23</sup> Proponents of Creationism are able to say in good conscience, "God does not create a soul for a fetus that He knows is going to be a spontaneous or induced abortion, or for a fertilized ovum God knows will be discarded."

### **Conclusions:**

We as Christians are called upon to speak about that which science—with all of its remarkable and subtle instruments—can say nothing. It is our lot to speak of "the soul;" of how its presence within a collection of living tissues distinguishes mere "biological life" from truly "human life." We believe that inherent in this task are at least three objectives to which we should give our full attention.

*First, we must teach in our churches and in our classrooms in such a way that the general public understands that the matter of ensoulment should never be viewed simplistically.* We must show by example that the implications of such a complex issue must not be undermined by denial or neutrality, but should be approached in a loving, fair, and nonjudgmental fashion. We must explain that religious beliefs regarding this subject—even within Christianity—span a very wide spectrum, and all attempts to simplify these matters in an unrealistic manner will doom us to continued misunderstandings and acrimony.

*Second, in our discussions we should adopt a vocabulary that avoids hyperbole and unwarranted assumptions.*

Terminology that is brutal and accusatory, such as “murderers” and “baby-killers,” should be eliminated. If there is no incontrovertible revelational teaching regarding this issue, might we not essentially be violating a moral requirement that *is* incontrovertible (i.e., “*thou shalt not bear false witness*”) by misinforming the public concerning “what God has said” regarding these subjects? Why not focus our attention and resources on larger issues, such as the spiritual, sociological, psychological, and physiological tragedies that give rise to the very ethical issues we are discussing? After all, there are many reasons for objecting to elective abortions.

*Lastly, we should do all in our power to provide a “middle way” between the extremists that inhabit both ends of the Pro-Life/Pro-Choice spectrum. We believe that a majority of Christians are embarrassed by and apologetic concerning the fanatical attitudes of many Pro-Life advocates. But separating ourselves from extremists will require more than pink-cheeked apologies. Gaining credibility in the eyes of a watching world will require patient listening, careful and thoughtful discussion, and self-sacrificing compassion. It will require a frank willingness to acknowledge a multitude of possible truths, and therefore, a necessary change in the overall approach of opponents of abortion to these issues.*

These are truly awesome responsibilities. As ambassadors of the kingdom of God, our words and our

actions concerning these issues can have profound implications for social structures, for moral and ethical considerations, and for the psyches of both women and men. Let us therefore be “*shrewd as snakes, and innocent as doves*” in our stewardship of the concept of “ensoulment” and of its implications or humanity. ■

- 1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1994), 606, 607, 618.
- 2 “An Orthodox View of Abortion,” <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/abortion.aspx>.
- 3 “Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions on Abortion,” <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html>.
- 4 “H.R. 618—Right to Life Act,” <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-618>
- 5 *Babylonian Talmud*, “Hulin,” 58a. Cited in Feldman, *Birth Control*, 253.
- 6 Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus*, II, 19.
- 7 Feldman, *Birth Control*, 253-254.
- 8 Tertullian, “A Treatise on the Soul,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, edited by A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A.C. Coxe (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1980), 27.
- 9 Clement, “Excerpts of Theodotus,” in *Ibid.*, 50.
- 10 Cited in David Albert Jones, “The Appeal to the Christian Tradition in the Debate about Embryonic Stem Cell Research,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (July 2005): 274.
- 11 Bruce K. Waltke, “Reflections From

the Old Testament on Abortion,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 19.01: 12.

- 12 Francis Turretin. “Creationism or Traducianism: The Origin of the Soul,” *On Doctrine* (2002). 15 November 2007 <http://www.ondoc-trine.com/2tur0005.htm>.
- 13 Cited in Jones, *Appeal*, 274.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 275.
- 15 See John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 88, 91, 232.
- 16 See David M. Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 268-269.
- 17 Waltke, “Reflections,” 3.
- 18 Thomas W. Clark, “Faith in Hiding: Are There Secular Grounds for Banning Abortion?” *The Humanist* (July-August 2007): 27-31.
- 19 David M. Fergusson, L. John Horwood, and Elizabeth Ridder, “Abortion in Young Women and Subsequent Mental Health,” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 47.1 (January 2006): 20.
- 20 Gina Kolata, “Study Finds 31% Rate of Miscarriage,” *New York Times* (27 July 1988): 15.
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# What I Wish I'd Heard At Graduation

By Rod Dreher, Editorial Columnist, Dallas Morning News

The bad news, high school graduates, is that you can't have it all. You aren't as free as you think you are. Sorry, but no matter what optimistic flapdoodle your commencement speaker tells you, that's the truth.

The good news is that somebody's telling you this now, before you have to discover it on your own. I wish somebody had told me the same thing when I was under the mortarboard almost 25 years ago.

That morning, I was furious at my father. My friends were headed off to prestigious East Coast universities. I had a state-university scholarship, while my Ivy-bound classmates were taking out big student loans. Dad, jerk that he was, told me he couldn't let me go deeply into debt to finance an undergraduate degree.

As it turned out, that was one of the best things he ever did for his son. "Avoid debt" is a fairly prosaic prescription, but you'll find life is far more prosaic than you think. A meaningful life is not usually built on grand gestures but, rather, on the habitual accumulation of ordinary ones.

A few years ago, I stood on the Brooklyn Bridge and watched the south tower of the World Trade Center collapse. In the minute I had before police closed the bridge, I had to decide whether to turn back to Brooklyn to protect my wife and child or make a break for lower Manhattan and risk my life reporting on the biggest story of my life-time.

I chose the dull, dutiful thing: to go home and look after my family. We now know that had I run toward the

disaster, I almost certainly would have survived, would have gotten a great story and had tales of high adventure to tell my colleagues.

But there were countless small decisions I'd made all my life before that fierce moment. I realized in the crucible that my family meant more to me than my career. Perhaps I chose wrongly, but I don't think so. The point is, by training myself to put my family first, I had made the decision to go home before I decided it.

Sooner or later, most of us will face our moment on the bridge. The little choices you make between now and then will determine what you do when it really matters.

What's more, unless you're an incurable romantic or an American politician, you eventually will learn that life is more tragic than you were led to believe. You will discover your own limits. You will fail at something, even if you succeed by the standards of the world.

The failure may save you; success may destroy you. A friend grew comfortably wealthy in high finance but looked around one day, horrified to see what luxury had done to his colleagues' character. Shaken, he left the firm and embraced his ancestors' Judaism. He eventually quit finance entirely, fearing the inevitable consequences of Wall Street's money-driven collective madness. They all thought they were invincible.

Four months later, the stock market crashed. Every one of his friends was wiped out. What happened to them is tragic, in a way, but not the

worst thing. Leon Bloy, the French Catholic novelist, had it right when he ended one of his novels with the following line: "There is but one tragedy, not to be a saint."

In secular terms, this means the only thing that matters is a life of self-sacrificing virtue, whether a prince's or a pauper's. People wonder how to get what they want but rarely think about what they *should* want. Don't be true to thine own self; be true to the truth. Most of us will never become rich or famous or even be remembered over time. But the capacity for everlasting greatness, as Bloy say, lies within us all.

You don't fully control your fate, but you do control the formation of your character. That matters in ways we cannot foresee and can only appreciate once we lose the illusion that we are self-created. George Eliot ended her novel *Middlemarch* with a line about the effect, over time, of ordinary goodness lived out by ordinary people like us: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

That's not optimistic, but it is true. It's the kind of realistic hope you can build a life on. And should. ■

*This article was originally published in the Dallas Morning News on May 24, 2009, and is reprinted by permission of the author, who may be contacted at [rdreher@dallasnews.com](mailto:rdreher@dallasnews.com).*



# A CHRISTIAN AMERICA? The Constitutional Convention

By Mark Whitten, Prof. of Philosophy, Lone Star College—Montgomery The Woodlands, Texas

Religious Right advocates of “Christian America” make two claims, which they most often confuse.

First, they assert that the American people and their social and cultural institutions have been profoundly influenced by a Christian religious heritage—that the American people have been a “Christian nation” in an historical-cultural sense. Then, they assert that the Founding Fathers intended, and the Constitution instituted, a national government based directly and primarily upon Christianity—that America is a “Christian nation” in a legal-institutional sense.

They are substantially correct concerning the former assertion and radically wrong concerning the latter.

The proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 constitute the most powerful argument against the claim that the Founding Fathers intended to create a national government based upon the Christian religion. The following facts concerning the proceedings of the Convention are inconsistent with the claim that the United States of America is a Christian nation in any legal-institutional sense of “nation.”

The Convention made a deliberate decision not to begin their proceedings with official public prayers. Since meetings of the Continental Congress had done so, and as the First Congress would create a chaplaincy and implement opening prayers in meetings of Congress, the Convention’s decision is noteworthy. Is this fact consistent with the Religious Right description of the Founders as pious Christian ideologues meeting to create a Christian nation?

During the darkest days of the Convention, Benjamin Franklin offered an eloquent motion noting the omission of prayers and recommending that they be instituted.

Time and time again I have seen apologists for Christian America assume or deceitfully insinuate that Franklin’s motion was well received and that the initiation of prayers in the Convention was the moment of breakthrough, resulting in a miraculous, God-blessed Constitution. In fact, a debate broke out over Franklin’s motion and it was never voted upon. Franklin wrote that the Convention “except for three or four persons, thought prayers unnecessary.” Is this fact consistent with Religious Right claims concerning “Christian America?”

A service was held outside of Convention proceedings on July 4 with members of the Convention in attendance. This provides a helpful reminder for some that separation of church and state does not require a separation of the religious values and convictions of individuals from their political convictions and activities as individuals. It is also an instructive example of the necessary distinction and independence, institutionally and ideologically, between religion and government that constitutes true separation of church and state.

James Madison’s *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*, our best source for what took place in the deliberations of the Convention, evidence that no biblical or religious arguments, rationales or purposes were presented in the course of the Convention’s debates. No religious intentions, whether sectarian or ecumenical, find expression. Secular, public reason arguments and rationales were offered for the goal of achieving secular, political, public-good purposes. Is this fact consistent with Religious Right claims concerning “Christian America?”

The text of the Constitution makes no reference to God, Christ, Christianity or the Bible. It states no

religious purposes or rationales. It is a God-less document, not in the sense that it is opposed to or inconsistent with religious principles, but in that it makes no appeals to religion-based doctrines or principles. The only substantive mention of religion is Article 6 Clause 3, in which the Constitution prohibits any religious test for holding public office. It was rightly recognized and wrongly objected to by the “Christian Americanists” of the day that such a prohibition would allow an adherent of any religion, or of none, to hold public office in the national government is this fact consistent with Religious Right claims concerning “Christian America?”

(Those who appeal to the “Sundays excepted” clause in the Constitution or the concluding “in the year of our Lord 1787” are grasping at straws, implicitly recognizing the significance of this column’s point concerning the text of the Constitution.)

The *Federalist Papers* were written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay to win public support for the ratification of the new Constitution. They are the preeminent commentary on the substance and philosophy of the Constitution. It is again noteworthy that, as in the Convention’s proceedings, no biblical or religious arguments, rationales or purposes are offered in these writings.

There is nothing like, “This is a Christian, Bible-based, God-blessed Constitution that all good Christian people should happily endorse.” Instead, one finds secular, public reason arguments and rationales for the goal of achieving secular, political, public-good purposes. Is this fact consistent with Religious Right claims concerning “Christian America?”

The Constitution’s lack of biblical and Christian language, rationales and purposes was quite evident to “Christian Americanists” of the

Founder's era. The Constitution and the Constitutional Convention were criticized for this lack. Timothy Dwight, orthodox Christian president of Yale University, wrote: "The Nation has offended Providence. We formed our Constitutional without any acknowledgement of God; without any recognition of His mercies to us as a people, of His government, or even of His existence. The Convention, by which it was formed, never asked, even once, His direction, or His blessings, upon their labors. Thus we commenced our national existence under the present system, without God."

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, efforts were made to amend the Constitution to provide religious language and purposes that it so clearly lacked. All of these efforts failed. These objections and efforts are definitely inconsistent with Religious Right claims concerning the Constitution and "Christian America."

It is only in the past few decades that Religious Right advocates of Christian America have asserted that the Founders were Christian ideologues and that the Constitution is ideologically Christian—something their predecessors clearly recognized not to be the case.

The conduct of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and the Constitution they produced form a powerful rebuttal to claims by members of the Religious Right that the United States of America was founded to be, in any legal and institutional sense, a "Christian nation." ■

**Note:** The writer is also author of *The Myth of Christian America* (Smyth & Helwys, 1999). This article and the next one are reprinted by permission from *EthicsDaily.com* (1/05/09 & 4/29/09), where fresh news and opinions appear every day on this ethics website, one highly recommended by CET.

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## America's Never Been a Christian Nation

By Keith Herron, Senior Pastor,  
Holmeswood Baptist Church

Kansas City, MO.

We live in a new world. It's not the same world we lived in a decade ago when most were just learning to use e-mail and getting wired. It's not the same world because we're more polarized as a people than ever. It's not the same world because it's harder and harder to get a sense of "What's happening and what does it mean?" without it coming in the form of left and right.

Now, it's too much information 24/7 and we're inundated with so-called news from all quarters, the vast majority of which should be labeled opinion rather than given the same respect as news.

Recently, I was in the Panera's near my home and one of the members of my coffee church made an offhanded comment to me, suggesting we are indeed a Christian nation. I responded I didn't think we were.

"People become Christians, not nations," I said along with recognizing we are a pluralistic nation that comprises likely every religion practiced anywhere. (California helps make this point.) He responded with, "Well, don't you at least think the Muslims are our enemies?" I replied I didn't think so. Radical Muslims are no more the final word on Islam than the Ku Klux Klan is the final word on Christianity. We don't tolerate either one too well, I noted. Again, being a Baptist minister and not sharing his viewpoint startled him. It seemed to be out of line from what he hears in his own church.

Recently, we've had a renewed national conversation on President Obama's claim we're not a Christian nation. There's nothing original about his claim; it's been a longstanding debate, and he's merely voicing his view on the subject. But the fact he identified himself so clearly on the topic is something new as most poli-

ticians treat ardent patriotism with empty symbols worn on their suite coats signifying they are true patriots no matter how they vote or what compromises they've made in the name of political survival.

In the April 17 issue of the *Kansas City Star*, columnist Michael Gerson speaks directly to the question of whether we're a Christian nation with this observation, "Christian America has always been a heresy, a historical error and a blunder."

He explains it's a heresy because "no human kingdom, however admirable, can be properly identified with the Kingdom of God." Back to my point that people, not nations, are capable of making a commitment to follow Christ. Jesus never set his sights on leading a political movement represented by a nation state, and it's difficult to explain how the actions of our government might represent God's kingdom. If that were so, how do we explain the state of the poor, the overpopulation of our prisons, and the state of our health care with our millions of citizens with little access to adequate medical care—all concerns of Jesus and at the heart of his mission in the world?

Gerson claims a Christian America is a historical error. From the beginning, the founders created a federal government that was "wisely nonsectarian." As Christians, do we want to rule (lord) over all other religions? What would that mean? Would we show favoritism to Christians but not to other religions? Would we imply the state religion would be Christian and all other religions would necessarily go underground? Four centuries of Baptist history would go to naught for this idea. If so, we would need to cease calling ourselves Baptists in my estimation.

Finally he claims a Christian America is a blunder. He should have said a major blunder. James Dunn says it often, "The cross never looked good wrapped in red, white and blue" (or something to that effect). In other words, the cross was never meant as an endorsement for any nation or gov-

ernment. Nor should any nation think adopting “Christian” as an adjective is anything but a direct assault upon the primacy of God. We should be wary of any use of the word and concept of “Christian” as an adjective without considering whether we’ve crossed over and manipulated the holy by turning it into an idolatry.

My coffee buddy was surprised a Baptist minister would hold these views, but I do. Maybe it’s because I’ve been given a Baptist heritage that helps me understand it’s a matter of keeping my kingdoms in proper relationship to one another. ■

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## Virginia and Religious Freedom

By *Martin E. Marty*, Chicago, IL

In January of 1777 in Fredericksburg, Virginia, a committee met to revise Virginia’s laws as it was becoming a state. Thomas Jefferson then and there drafted a “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom,” an antecedent to the First Amendment of the Constitution. I’ve been to several celebrations in Richmond, where the Statute was enacted in 1785, to Charlottesville in 1985 for a bicentennial conference on the subject, and this year spoke at an annual forum at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. Such occasions lead me to reflect on this—dare I call it ‘epochal’—document, and now will follow up with a comment on a particular point.

While *Sightings* is dedicated more to framing issues than spreading ideology, ideas and commitments do stand behind the work of historians and reporters who are not trying to make stump speeches. Here, in compressed and summary form, is part of what I get asked at observances like the ones mentioned above—and also in an election year in which religion is so much at issue in society: “While you are not a strict ‘separationist’ on church and state, why are you so nervous about enactments that prescribe public school prayer and the ban-

nering of religious symbols in public places? Are you on the side of secular humanists who want to banish ‘God’ and ‘religion’ from public life?”

Yes, questioners, you are right: I am not a strict separationist, and I do not think that it’s the best use of civil energies to try to get “In God We Trust” and similar almost meaningless creeds off our coins, to abolish public funding for military and some other kinds of chaplaincies, or to chase the chaplains out of the legislatures. Yes, you observe correctly: I can get nervous about government prescriptions of religious observance. I am neither on nor off the side of secular humanists, but I am not a would-be banisher of religion. But, in the light of the “Virginia Statute,” let me add some positives to my answer.

Jefferson, the Virginia legislators, James Madison, the constitution-drafters and First Amendment inventors, and others, drew a line between what we can call “persuasive” versus “coercive” approaches to religion in public life; or we can draw the line between what is “voluntary” and what is “imposed” or “state-privileged.” As for the persuasive and voluntary front: Let all the advertisers sell us God or any other deities if they will. They have a perfect right. Let the presidents of the United States form their piety and policy with their view of God in mind. Let others vote them down and out if they disagree.

America was not founded as a Christian nation with a Godly-Constitution. Because it was not, as the Virginia Statute and its follow-ups make clear, there is room for Christian and other expression and energy virtually unmatched anywhere else, and certainly unmatched wherever religion was ever given governmental coercive power, establishment, or law-based formal privilege.

The founders, “fallible” as the Statute says all governing and other people are, did know and say that “all attempts to influence [the free mind] by . . . civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness.” They are departures from

the “Lord” who “chose not to propagate [religion] by coercions. . . .” All people “shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion. . . .” “Religion” is more than opinion, to state it more surely than Jefferson did, but with the opinions of free minds is a good place to start—and to stay, two centuries later. Virginia has much to celebrate, as do we all, non-partisanly. ■

*References:* The full text of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Statute\\_for\\_Religious\\_Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Statute_for_Religious_Freedom). For further information, visit The Council for America’s First Freedom at <http://www.firstfreedom.org>.

*This article originally appeared in Sightings (1/28/09), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School.*

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## How To Save America

By *Britt Towery, SBC Missionary (ret.)* San Angelo, TX

A Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, in the sixth century B.C.E., prophesied an unavoidable disaster coming upon Jerusalem and what was left of the divided kingdom of Israel. He began his campaign to wake up the people in his home village, which immediately rejected him. He complained to God of this treatment, saying, I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.

Little wonder Jeremiah is called “the weeping prophet.” No one would give him the time of day. They saw him as a fool when he told his own people what a mess they were in. Jeremiah remembered that two hundred years earlier, the Assyrians wiped out Israel’s northern kingdom. Now he is saying the same fate was coming to Jerusalem and the southern kingdom.

No one likes bad news. It is discouraging to think you are barefoot on a slippery slope. It is disappointing to realize your city walls are no lon-

ger strong enough. It is frightening to think that the Babylonian armies were out there in the dark somewhere.

Jerusalem, an ancient city even then, could not accept a prophet who talked of their sin and faithlessness. This is the great City of David. Hard times are coming Jeremiah kept saying. They knew they were the chosen of God, and things would be better if Jeremiah would leave town. This Jeremiah must be a false prophet, otherwise he would not “run us down” before the world.

Because of their pride and arrogance, the people of Jerusalem could not accept the truth. To them, Jeremiah was the problem. He had put a shadow over the land. So they kept a few idols around and didn't go to the temple much. He shouldn't run down our country. If they were not throwing rocks at him, they were laughing at who they considered the village idiot.

This resulted in the people getting their way in the coming destruction. Jeremiah was so outspoken about the doom that was coming. King Zedekiah saw Jeremiah as an outlaw. This traitor should be dealt with. They wanted to live in a land without a dis-

couraging word. Jeremiah was locked up in the King's dungeon. (Somewhat the way President Woodrow Wilson's party treated a rival candidate once.)

Eventually his prison time saved his life. The enemy came and destroyed the city and temple. After his release, he tried to ease the overwhelming pain of those not carried away captive. God still cared for them in their suffering. Not heeding the truth had turned the people into homeless refugees. The people, sitting in their rags in crumbling hovels were not impressed with that word either.

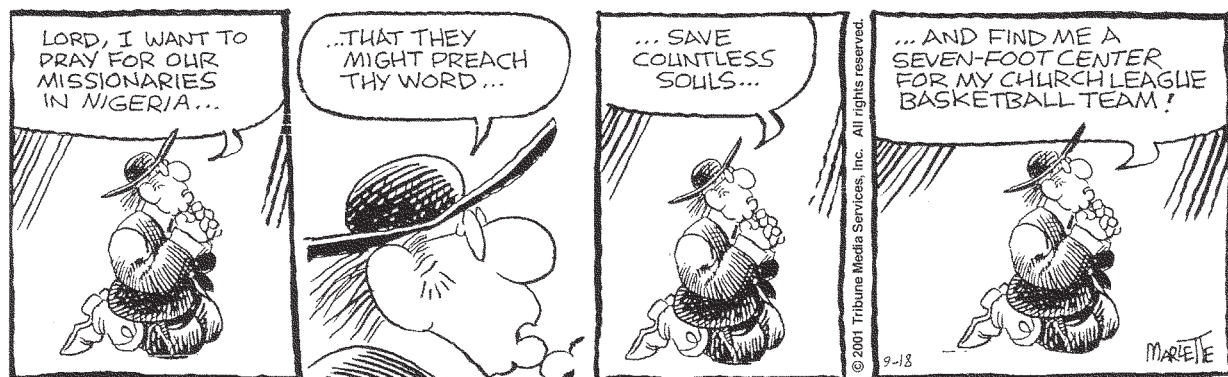
Some finally realized their problem was turning truth into a lie and refusing to take the long hard road to recovery. Without knowing it at the time, they were the last of the once rich Kingdom of Israel. It was annihilated.

There are modern-day prophets insisting America is failing and needs to return to God. Save America from itself. *Where were these people when credit card companies re-invented usury? Where were these people when Iraq was invaded on false pretexts? Where were these people when our highest officials turned to torture? Where were these people when suspected terror-*

*ists were shipped off to countries for torture? Where were we when people could be arrested and never tried? Where were we amid the outrages of the last decade?*

The protests of today's bad government is a bit late and off-target. These are difficult times. We don't need to be reminded, but consider how long this fall has been coming. Consider that there has been little oversight by anyone on anything: making mistakes and misjudgments without learning anything from them; and blaming the present government only covers the real problems. Protest is good when the facts are used. Playing the “blame game” solved nothing in old Jerusalem and will solve nothing in today's government.

Craig Ferguson on the CBS Late Late Show had a solution: “President Obama is doing too much or he is not doing enough, or he is doing it wrong. It is the new president's time before the firing squad. I think everybody should just calm down. Give Obama four years. See what he can do. Then if he's a miserable failure, we'll do what we did with George W. Bush and elect him to a second term.” ■





# Sojourner Truth: "Ain't I A Woman?"

**Note:** In May, 2009, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and first lady Michelle Obama attended the unveiling of the bust of Sojourner Truth at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington.

Sojourner Truth, born in about 1797, was a woman of remarkable intelligence despite her illiteracy. Truth had great presence.

She was tall, some 5 feet 11 inches. Her voice was low, so low that listeners sometimes termed it masculine, and her singing voice was beautifully powerful. Whenever she spoke in public, she also sang. No one ever forgot the power of Sojourner Truth's singing, just as her wit and originality of phrasing were also memorable.

Sojourner Truth: ex-slave and fiery abolitionist, figure of imposing physique, riveting preacher and spellbinding singer who dazzled listeners with her wit and originality. Straight-talking and unsentimental, Truth became a national symbol for strong black women—indeed, for all strong women. Like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, she is regarded as a radical of immense and enduring influence; yet, unlike them, what is remembered of her consists more of myth than of personality. She was a complex woman who was born into slavery and died a legend. Inspired by religion, Truth transformed herself from a domestic servant named Isabella into an itinerant Pentecostal preacher; her words of empowerment have inspired black women and poor people the world over to this day. As an abolitionist and a feminist, Truth defied the notion that slaves were male and women were white, expounding a fact that still bears repeating: among blacks there are women; among women, there are blacks.

*"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world*

*upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get right-side up again. And now that they are asking to do it, the men better let them."*

Isabella Van Wagenen was born into slavery in Hurley, New York in 1797. She was one of 13 children but she never got to know her brothers and sisters because they were quickly sold as slaves.

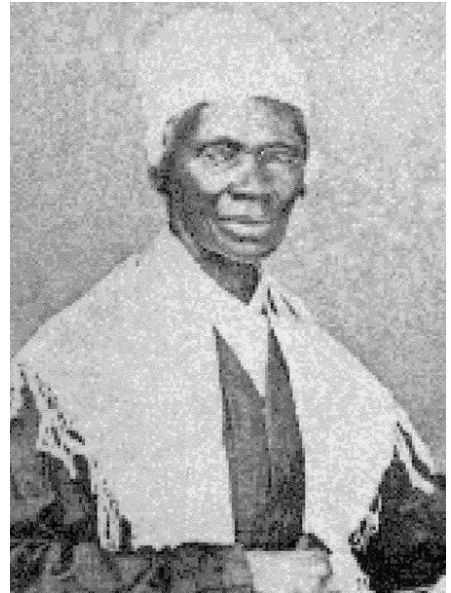
Her master, Mr. Dumont, arranged for her to marry Thomas. She had 5 children with him, but her master sold some of them.

She was released following the New York Anti Slavery Law of 1827, however, slavery was not abolished nationwide for 35 years. She lived for a time with a Quaker family who gave her the only education she ever received. They also helped her get back one of her children.

She became an outspoken advocate of women's rights as well as blacks' rights. In 1843, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth. Everywhere she spoke she made a lasting impression. She was physically strong and over six feet tall and she had a powerful, booming voice.

She actively supported the black troops during the Civil War and helped get the government to give these soldiers land. She continued to travel and preach throughout the Northeast and Midwest from her home in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she died at the age of 84 in 1883.

Sojourner Truth gave her famous "Ain't I A Woman?" speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. (The women's rights movement grew in large part out of the anti-slavery movement.) No formal record of the speech exists, but Frances Gage, an abolitionist and president of the Convention, recounted Truth's words. There is debate about the accuracy of this account because Gage did not



record the account until 1863 and her record differs somewhat from newspaper accounts of 1851. However it is Gage's report that endures and it is clear that, whatever the exact words, "Ain't I a Woman?" made a great impact at the Convention and has become a classic expression of women's rights.

Several ministers attended the second day of the Women's Rights Convention, and were not shy in voicing their opinion of man's superiority over women. One claimed "superior intellect," one spoke of the "manhood of Christ," and still another referred to the "sin of our first mother."

Suddenly, Sojourner Truth rose from her seat in the corner of the church.

"For God's sake, Mrs. Gage, *don't* let her speak!" half a dozen women whispered loudly, fearing that their cause would be mixed up with Abolition.

Sojourner walked to the podium and slowly took off her sunbonnet. Her six-foot frame towered over the audience. She began to speak in her deep, resonant voice.

"Well, children, where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter. I think between

the Negroes of the South and women of the North—all talking about rights—the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this talking about?"

"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps *me* any best place. *And ain't I a woman?*"

"Look at me? Look at my arm. I have plowed, I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. *And ain't I a woman?*"

"I could work as much, and eat as much as man—when I could get it—

and bear the lash as well? *And ain't I a woman?* I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. *And ain't I a woman?*"

She pointed to another minister. "He talks about this thing in the head. What's that they call it?"

"Intellect," whispered a woman nearby.

"That's it, honey. What's intellect got to do with women's rights or black folks' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?"

"That little man in black there? He says women can't have as much rights as men. 'Cause Christ wasn't a woman.' Where did your Christ come from?"

"Where did your Christ come from? From God and a Woman? Man had nothing to do with him!"

The entire church now roared with deafening applause.

"If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get right-side up again. And now that they are asking to do it the men better let them." ■

## Green Believers

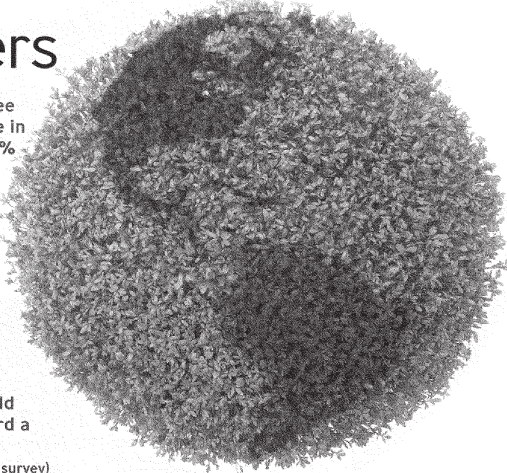
**90%** of evangelicals would like to see fellow Christians take a more active role in caring for creation in a biblical way. (62% of mainline Protestants agree, as do 52% of Catholics.)

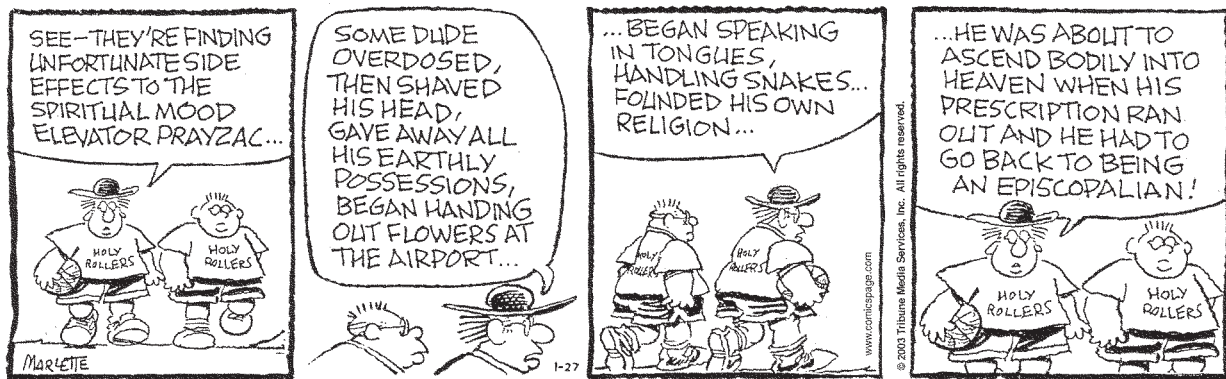
**45%** of evangelicals report making environmentally conscious lifestyle changes in the past year.

**85%** of active churchgoers have never heard the term "creation care."

**64%** of active churchgoers, told it means "being good stewards of the world God created," said they have never heard a sermon on the topic.

—from Barna.org (August 2008 survey)







# TWO PERSPECTIVES ON TORTURE

## Evangelicals and Torture

By Richard V. Pierard, Professor of History Emeritus, Indiana State University, Hendersonville, NC

I have for most of my life regarded myself as an evangelical. In my early years I was a fundamentalist Baptist but I eventually outgrew this, and I experimented with various Baptist and other evangelical denominations before settling on the American Baptist Churches U.S.A., a denomination which affirms it is both evangelical and ecumenical. After retiring to North Carolina, I looked for a church of like faith and practice and joined a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship congregation.

Although I have evangelical credentials—I have published with several evangelical firms, served a term as president of the Evangelical Theological Society, and after retirement from my university professorship taught for a few years at Gordon College in Massachusetts—the evangelical establishment generally pays no attention to me. Perhaps it is because I spent nearly my whole professional career warning evangelicals of the dangers inherent in their linkage with conservative political and social ideologies and unquestioning identification with the Republican Party.

My most forthright statement of the problem was in *The Unequal Yoke: Evangelical Christianity and Political Conservatism*, published first in 1970 and reissued by Wipf & Stock in 2006. The problems I identified here—a politicized faith, support for a pointless foreign war, white racism, American nationalism, and free market capitalism—are as much a problem for evangelicals today as they were then.

Thus, the data released by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life from a poll taken April 14-21 that revealed white evangelical Protestants are far more likely than those in other faith traditions to support the use of torture against suspected terrorists came as no surprise to me whatsoever. As the electoral data gathered by John

Green and his associates over the past quarter century stunningly demonstrates, white evangelicals have been increasingly voting Republican—in fact, 74 percent in the 2008 election—while most other religious groups were turning against the GOP.

These data were an enormous embarrassment to the evangelical leadership, and when Martin Marty drew the obvious conclusion from them in his May 4th *Sightings* column, *Christianity Today* editor David Neff cried foul. He maintained that the evangelical leaders had issued statements condemning the use of torture, but he admitted “it is unfortunately true that evangelicals in the pews” are “among the most likely” to approve so doing with suspected terrorists. Nevertheless, he insisted, the evangelical leadership was every bit as clear on this topic as the Catholic bishops were in their 2006 statement, i.e., the board of the National Association of Evangelicals adopted a statement in March 2007 that formally condemned the use of torture. In addition, although Neff did not mention it, evangelical ethicist David Gushee, who had recently moved from the Southern Baptist related Union University in Tennessee to Mercer University in Georgia, organized Evangelicals for Human Rights and through this body and his many writings unequivocally denounced torture.

Yet, one of the leading voices on the Christian right, Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, pooh-poohed the NAE document as “an exercise in moral self-congratulation,” while James Dobson of the powerful lobby Focus on the Family said that concern with such matters as torture and the environment divided evangelicals and undermined their moral witness in contemporary culture. It distracted



An image of “water torture” circa 1556 bears a stark resemblance to photos of U.S. interrogators using “enhanced interrogation techniques” against suspected terrorists.

attention from what he regarded as the real moral issues—abortion, stem-cell research, and gay marriage.

Still, the question must be asked: If the leaders were so forthright in their actions, why had this not filtered down to the pews? For one thing, the ordinary congregants overwhelmingly supported the Bush-Chaney war policy, as they did all the major actions of Republican administrations since World War II. They were not going to change their views just because some of those above them did, especially when it seemed apparent that many of these normally very conservative leaders did so reluctantly because of pressure from younger progressives in their own ranks and public opinion in general. Evangelicals had surrendered their spiritual values for politics, and the Pew pollsters exposed this for all of the world to see.

Those in charge bear a large responsibility for having led their constituencies down the primrose path of conservative Republicanism and for

pandering to their political prejudices. They had not provided the simple believers with spiritual weapons to combat the political and social sins of our day.

It was much easier to stir up their people with fiery sermons about such inconsequential issues of personal morality as abortion, stem cell research, and homosexuality than to condemn the greed of Wall Street, the power interests blocking reform of our broken health care system, rampant militarism, and national hubris on the world scene. Even when some courageous evangelicals tried to speak out on the environmental calamity facing us and the specter of global warming, they were ignored or even silenced. The abrupt ouster in December 2008 of the NAE's vice president for governmental affairs, Richard Cizik, a very moderate Republican at best, was a good indicator of how the evangelical leadership would deal with those who deviated from the party line on social issues.

Possibly more than any other issue, supporting the use of torture to obtain information from alleged terrorists showed that American evangelicalism has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. They surrendered to a knee-jerk conservatism that eviscerated the power of the message entrusted to them. The life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ was bartered for a political gospel that offered them access to the centers of wealth and power. Now the latter seems to be slipping out of their hands as well.

Is it not time for repentance and for cleansing the evangelical churches of those false prophets who brought them to this point? ■

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## Torture, Life and Moral Constancy

By Marv Knox, Editor,  
*Baptist Standard*, Dallas, TX

What do you think about torture?

For most of our lives, that has seemed like a theoretical question.

Torture was the stuff of spy thrillers. So, your answer could have been based more on your antipathy for the villain in the latest James Bond movie or Robert Ludlum novel than on principled ethical decision-making.

Unfortunately, torture no longer is the stuff of fiction. Nor, sadly, can we pass it off as the exclusive domain of despots and dictators. Now, we are familiar with the places, legal theories and techniques that force us to acknowledge our beloved country has implemented torture for its own purposes. We know about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. We have read and heard about government legal briefs that justified torture. Most of us could describe how waterboarding works.

We cannot deny torture. We must confront its reality. We must come to grips with how we feel about it.

Recently, I have been disappointed to learn the demographic group in which I reside—white evangelical Protestant Christians—is the segment of the U.S. population that most enthusiastically embraces torture.

A new survey by the Pew Research Center reveals 62 percent of white evangelicals believe the use of torture against suspected terrorists can often (18 percent) or sometimes (44 percent) be justified. This compares to 49 percent of the total U.S. population who believe torture can often (15 percent) or sometimes (34 percent) be justified.

I know many of you—in fact, apparently, most of you—disagree with me. (On this issue, I take ironic comfort in joining company with an ultra-conservative ethicist with whom I often disagree, Richard Land, and a moderate/progressive ethicist with whom I usually agree, David Gushee.) But it's embarrassing to realize the population at-large is more likely than evangelical Christians to take what I believe to be a Christlike position regarding torture. No matter how I analyze the situations and possible outcomes, I cannot picture Jesus torturing someone—for any purpose.

Of course, torture is exceedingly complicated. Although we don't have

the space to do it here, we must differentiate between “enhanced interrogation techniques” and torture. Some physically and psychologically demanding practices do not cross the line into torture. But most reasonable people agree waterboarding is torture. And my own tribe of Christians leads the way in embracing it. This is disturbing.

Some people defend torture because they believe torturing a small number of foreigners can be justified to save the lives of a larger number of Americans. This argument should be dismissed on two counts. First, it's based on a questionable assumption. Considerable evidence suggests torture is less effective than many other interrogation methods. More significantly, however this is a utilitarian approach to ethics. At root, it means the end justifies the means. Americans, not to mention Bible-believing Christians, historically have taken pride in being better than that. We must avoid such flimsy ethics, even when we approach something as scary as terrorism.

Ironically, many Christians who practice utilitarian ethics to justify terrorism excoriate others who argue the ends justify the means to support embryonic stem cell research.

This brings us to a broader point: Christians must lead the way in developing a consistent ethic that supports life. Christians who oppose abortion but then endorse torture and support capital punishment (particularly in the fact of mounting evidence of wrongful convictions) are not consistently pro-life. Catholics come the closest to being consistent, but evangelicals are far from it.

These are difficult issues. Consensus is challenging. Still, for the sake of righteousness and the gospel, we must be consistent. ■



# The Church: Good Neighbor and Bad

By Tom Duley and Mike Harper, Urban Ministries of the United Methodist Church Birmingham, AL

There are times when the Church is the best neighbor you could possibly hope to have. At those times we are very neighborly—at those times we rise to the occasion. At those times we actually love our neighbors as we love ourselves. In those moments we remember that when Jesus told us to love our neighbors he wasn't talking about the folks across the fence or down the street. We remember that he meant that every other person on this planet is our neighbor—everyone.

At those times we are indeed good neighbors . . . the best stepping-into situations that no one else wants any part of to alleviate human need and care for our neighbors in profound and sometimes heroic ways. And yet, with all of our hard work, with all of our preaching, with all of our outreach there is still a question that haunts us on a regular basis.

With all the good things the Church has done over the many centuries why is there still so much need in the world and why aren't things getting substantially better?

As Pastors who work in a United Methodist mission agency in the inner city of Birmingham we can assure you that the situation is not getting substantially better. This modest agency, located in the western end of Birmingham, has worked diligently for thirty-three years and;

- still the phone calls come every single day asking for help to pay utilities and rent, more phone calls that we could ever respond to—in fact, we say “no” about 30 times for every occasion when we can say “yes”;
- still the people come to get food from our Food Pantry and line up for the noon meal five days a week in our Community Kitchen (we served over 26,000 meals in 2008);
- still there are houses of the poor

disabled and elderly to be painted;

- still there are children who suffer from poverty.

Thirty-three years of service and they still come. And that, of course, is just our story. A similar story could be told by the other helping agencies in our area.

With all of the good things the Church has done in recent years—and it has done a substantial amount—why isn't the situation getting better in terms of alleviating human need? Clearly the responsibility to address this need also belongs to groups beyond the Church. But, the Church is the institution we know best, the place of our vocation, our calling, the place where we have given our life.

Why hasn't the Church done better with this . . . and how might we do better in the future? The Church has quiet obviously been a good neighbor in many ways. The evidence of that goodness is easily demonstrated.

Our first example is the exceptional work the Church does in **disaster relief**. One of us had the privilege, for nine years, of coordinating the United Methodist disaster response effort across north Alabama. Many stories come to mind here but of particular significance was the way in which a broad variety of religious groups cooperated in significant ways to relieve human need during times of disaster.

Many of the larger denominations have an arrangement with the American Red Cross as to what element of disaster relief they pursue. For Southern Baptists, immediate feeding is the focus. The Catholics and Lutherans concentrate on case management for persons undergoing disasters. The Church of the Brethren focuses on the special needs of children in disaster. For our Seventh Day Adventist friends, the management of donated goods is the target. They also have a unique disaster response ministry. They have,

pre-positioned, in large trucks all over the United States, clothing appropriate for all ages, by sex and size, “from underwear out” ready to pass along to those in need. Incredible!

The United Methodist piece of disaster work has always been long-term rebuilding efforts. You may remember the devastating F-5 tornadoes in the Birmingham area that struck in April 1998. These storms killed over 30 persons, injured many more, and destroyed substantial portions of several communities in western Alabama.

One of us administered a several hundred thousand dollar commitment from the United Methodist Committee on Relief which, along with many other groups, rebuilt hundreds of homes, many of them from the ground up. This extraordinary witness to God's love came about with the use of hundreds of volunteers over a several month period.

It was a work of the spirit that rebuilt homes, restored lives, and brought hope to many who had lost a great deal. It was a great witness to the Church as good neighbor.

Second, working with those who are **homeless** is another area where the faith community's response has been exemplary. In our city a “Conference on the Human Emergency” sponsored by Greater Birmingham Ministries was held in the mid-1980s. Out of this conference the Old Firehouse Shelter for Homeless Men was given birth and the groundwork was laid for what later became the First Light Shelter for Homeless Women. The United Methodist Church of the Reconciler in downtown Birmingham offers services, worship, and activism to the homeless community. The Birmingham Hospitality Network uses many of our churches to house homeless families on a temporary basis.

The work that continues in these places (and several others) is a model

of compassion, efficiency, and the excellent use of volunteers. Hundreds of persons have broken the cycle of homelessness through these efforts and found employment, safe housing, and a new life through the patient work of staff and the broader faith community. Around our city and in many other cities the Church is mobilized to address the needs of homeless individuals and families.

It is an effort that we can take pride in and be grateful for as it continues to bring wholeness and healing to many of our neighbors. It is a great witness to the Church as good neighbor.

Third, the significant and thoughtful ways that the Church responds to **family crises and death** is without peer in terms of effectiveness, integrity, and graciousness. All churches relate to parishioners and others in times of serious illness and death. Our religious communities still do this with deep patience and great skill—we understand how to do this work, as we well should. The ways in which faith can bring stability and healing in these settings is self-evident. And it is one of the most needful and important things we do. This too, is a great witness to the Church as good neighbor.

The Church does many good things. Quite often, in sustained and effective ways, we are good neighbors. We know how to do these things and we do them with great compassion, effectiveness, and demonstrable results. We need to continue to provide these sorts of occasions for all within our influence to exercise their Christian discipleship in service to the world.

We could continue with other examples of how the Church is a good and faithful neighbor to many people in many places, at many times. We wish that we could tell you in all honesty that the Church is always and everywhere a good neighbor and that we always rise to the occasion and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We wish we could but we can't.

The truth of the matter is that there are times when the Church is a bad neighbor—there are circumstances under which the Church fails

miserably at loving our neighbors as ourselves. We would like to share with you three instances in which we think that the Church is a bad neighbor.

First, the Church is a bad neighbor when **we practice radical exclusiveness rather than the radical inclusiveness of Jesus.**

In the Church we are almost as deeply segregated as we ever were. We will grant that some progress toward inclusiveness has been made but the progress that's been made is tiny compared to what we still have to do.

We are so deeply segregated that we still use segregation language when speaking about our churches. We talk about white churches, black churches, Asian churches, and Hispanic churches, as if it is a perfectly right and natural thing to do as followers of Jesus. Let us assure you that it is not.

There are virtually no poor people in our local churches. For all intents and purposes the church is a service provider to the middle, upper-middle, and upper classes. Poor people have no place, are not wanted, and in fact, our United Methodist history is to run away from them. Since 1984 the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church of which we are members, has closed over 30 local churches in the city of Birmingham. While we were doing that the demographics of the city were getting poorer and more African-American. It is no coincidence that those two things were happening at the same time.

Just as we have systematically excluded poor people from the Church we have also excluded gay, lesbian, and transgender people from the Church while at the same time vilifying them. The time has come for us to lose our hatred, fear, and prejudice toward gay, lesbian, and transgender people. The time has come for us to welcome them into the life and ministry of the Church.

Jesus got in trouble all the time because he welcomed everyone. He shared his life with them. He didn't condemn them or run away from them. Call us crazy but we think that it is time for the Church to be neigh-

bor as Jesus was neighbor—to get in trouble because we seek out and welcome everyone and because we make a place for everyone.

It is time for the church to reformulate our understanding of what it means to be Church. It is time for the Church to make following Jesus our highest priority.

Second, the Church is a bad neighbor when **we love charity but we avoid justice.**

Don't get us wrong here. Even though the Church does a great deal of charity work, the Church must do even more. There are literally thousands of people in our city and around the world that rely on the charity of the Church to help them make it day to day. We need to make a greater commitment to charity; we need to share more of our money, more of our time, and more of our resources with those who are living at the margins. Charity always has been and always will be a central aspect of the Church's ministry. But, charity without justice makes us a bad neighbor.

We must come to grips with the fact that God's vision in Jesus Christ moves forward on the wings of God's justice. God doesn't just want us to minister to the homeless—God wants us to end homelessness; God doesn't just want us to help our neighbors in times of disaster—God wants us to insure that our neighbors are adequately protected from natural disaster. God doesn't just want us to feed the hungry—God wants us to end hunger. God doesn't just want us to aid the oppressed—God wants us to end oppression.

The God of Jesus Christ calls for a politics and an economics that starts with a concern for what is good for the poorest and weakest among us. Unfortunately, that is diametrically opposed to the politics and economics that are practiced in our country right now. We live in a time when politics and economics start with a concern for what is good for the richest and most powerful among us and doesn't move much further than that.

Perhaps William Sloan Coffin has said it best: "*Had I but one wish for the*

*Christian churches of America, I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation.”*

The Church must get involved in public life; we must become familiar with public policy and the effects of that public policy on people’s lives, especially on the lives of the poor and marginalized. We must not shy away from politics but embrace it, think about it and talk about it because it is the political decisions that create the public policy that in turn affects people’s lives for good or for ill.

Jesus taught us that this is clearly a part of our responsibility as his followers. Jesus was killed because he refused to go along with the oppressive public policy of his day. He refused to go along with the purity codes, refused to go along with the corruption of the Temple, refused to bow down to the Romans, and he refused to be quiet about it. Jesus announced in Nazareth that his mission was a mission to bring good news to the poor and to free the oppressed. That mission got him killed—it is that mission that we have inherited.

It is time for the Church to reformulate our understanding of what it means to be the Church. It is time for the Church to make following Jesus our highest priority; to believe Jesus when he teaches us that our mission is a mission to bring good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed. When we fully embrace the work of justice the Church will be neighbor as Jesus was neighbor.

Third, the church is a bad neighbor when **we embrace and perpetrate violence while rejecting the non-violence of Jesus.**

Violence in all of its forms does more to cause chaos in the human family and create human need than anything. When there is violence among individuals, human need results. When

there is violence among families and other groups of people, human need results. And when there is violence among nations, untold human need results. Until the human family says no to violence there will always be untold suffering and human need.

What better people are there to lead the way out of violence and into non-violence than the Church? We can’t think of any other people better suited to do so. Jesus taught, lived, and died a life of non-violence. He had many opportunities and much encouragement to resort to violence to accomplish his mission. He never did.

Unfortunately, the Church ignores the life and teaching of Jesus on this point. The Church is just as entangled in the web of violence as any other institution in our society. Our children play violent video games, listen to music that glorifies violence, and watch violent TV programs and movies. And we think little about it.

The vast majority of Christians agree with our political leaders when they resort to violent solutions for local, national and international problems. We send our sons and daughters off to the military and to other institutions that are built on the use of force and violence, and think nothing of it.

And why were there not loud and consistent voices from our churches about the idea of pre-emptive war. Lord, have mercy—Christ, have mercy—Lord, have mercy.

Today, the Church is captive to fear rather than faith. Our captivity to fear leads us to think that violence is right whether we use it in retaliation for something done to us or in an effort to keep violence from being inflicted on us. The tolerance of violence, the use of violence, and the support of the use of violence are just as prevalent among Church folks as in the broader society.

It has not always been so. For the first three hundred years of the Church’s existence the Church was a totally non-violent movement. [See “Early Christian Opposition to War” in this issue] Those first Christians understood that Jesus was a teacher of non-violence and since they sought

to pattern their lives after his life they chose non-violence as their way of life. It is time for 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians to rediscover what the early Church knew.

It is time for the Church to reformulate our understanding of what it means to be Church. It is time for the Church to make following Jesus our highest priority; to believe Jesus when he teaches that his way is the way of non-violent love rather than the way of violent domination. When we make a commitment to non-violent love the Church will be neighbor as Jesus was neighbor.

None of these challenges will be easy. In fact, each will be hard, counter-cultural work. Such change cannot be accomplished in one lifetime. Yet, remember the encouraging words of Reinhold Niebuhr: *“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.”*

It is a high calling and a great honor to be a follower of Jesus. It is also a difficult task with a great many challenges and adventures. At the very heart of what it means to follow Jesus is the command to *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* At times the Church rises to the occasion, sets self-interest aside and loves our neighbors as ourselves. Thanks be to God for those times. At other times the Church sets self-interest and fear squarely in the forefront and willingly cooperates with exclusion, oppression, and violence. God forgive us for those times.

God help us to make following Jesus the most important work of the Church. Remind us that the Church belongs to you and not us. ■



# Talking Points for a Tough Issue

By Bob Setzer Jr., Pastor, First Baptist Church of Christ Macon, GA.

Recently, both Miss California and mega-church pastor Rick Warren got slammed for speaking on the issue of gay rights. While each pleased some and infuriated others, both got beaten up pretty badly in this very public and often nasty debate.

Perhaps I feel more sympathy than most for these public figures because I have never said or written anything on the subject of homosexuality without unintentionally hurting or angering people I love.

Still, the question of how our church and culture should respond to the issue of gay rights is not going away. Is it possible for Christians to enter into a constructive conversation on such a contentious matter?

Toward that end, let me suggest some “talking points.”

First, gay people are not first and foremost an “issue.” They are people. And as people, they are beloved of God (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:8). Even those who regard certain people as their “enemy” are called by Christ to love them (Mt 5:44-45).

Second, gay people are part of just about everybody’s family or extended family and just about everybody’s

church. Before making strident statements about this issue from either side of the divide, please remember you are talking about someone’s son or daughter, sister or brother, or perhaps your own friend or neighbor.

Third, for serious Christians, the Bible must be part of our moral discernment process.

Two common extremes must be avoided: (1) the Bible is irrelevant to this debate because it was “wrong” about slavery, women’s rights or whatever, or (2) the Bible condemns homosexuals, end of discussion.

Instead of ignoring the Bible on the one hand, or cherry-picking passages to condemn homosexuals on the other, the Bible should be read holistically on this and every issue. It should be read in the Spirit of Christ (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-15) and in dialogue with other believers (2 Pet 1:20; Mt 18:20).

In all such readings, a key question for me is “What reading of the Bible is closest to Christ’s own heart as revealed in the Sermon on the Mount?” (Mt 5-7).

Fourth, the question “What *Did* Jesus Do?”—not just “What Would

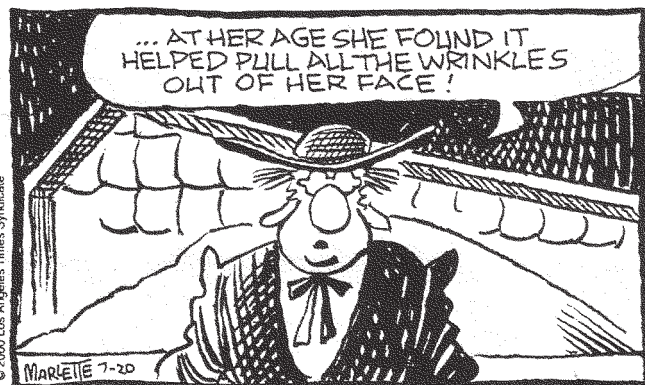
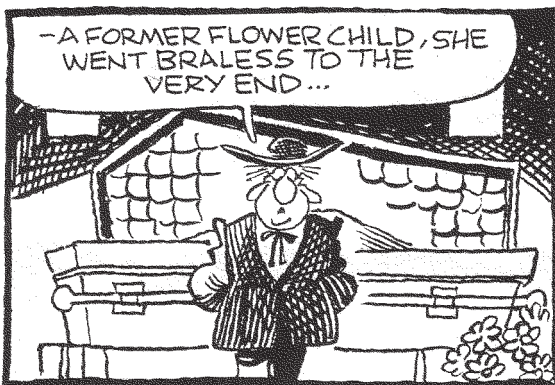
Jesus do?”—can be answered only by a careful reading of the New Testament in general and the Gospels in particular.

What did Jesus teach about God’s intention for sexuality (Mk 10:6-9; Mt 19:10-12)? If we believe Jesus is the fullest revelation of God’s truth, then how does his teaching on sexuality shape our thinking?

And when Jesus encountered those who clearly fell outside the norm of God’s intention—such as the woman at the well (Jn 4:16-18) or the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:10-11)—how might Jesus’ response to them shape our response to others in our own place and time?

I certainly don’t expect the “talking points” I’ve proposed to bring complete agreement about the difficult moral and theological questions of our day. Our differing experiences, assumptions, and interpretations of both the Bible and life make that impossible.

But surely the church can and should be a community of serious moral inquiry where kind, thoughtful conversation replaces the angry tirades so common in our culture. ■





# Early Christian Opposition to War

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

All Christians before the mass Apostasy of A.D. 249-251 who wrote on Christian participation in war opposed it on ethical grounds. Although some Christians were in the Roman army, their exceptions prove the rule.

The earliest sources are mid-second century: Justin Martyr, Christian interpolations into the *Sibylline Oracles*, and the *Acts of John*. Among the transformations in character and behavior noticed upon conversion to Christianity, Justin detailed that people who used to murder each other now refrain from making war on their enemies.<sup>1</sup> Although not stating so explicitly, Justin spoke of the Roman army as consisting wholly of pagans without any Christians being soldiers. In its Christian redaction, the Sibyl is represented as classing people who make wars in the same category of sinner as those who dishonor their mothers, plot against their brothers, and betray their friends.<sup>2</sup> The *Acts of John* 36 consigns warmongers to hell, along with tyrants, murderers, robbers and poisoners.

Shortly afterwards, the pagan philosopher Celsus criticized Christians for shirking their civic duties by not participating in the armed forces, which he feared would lead to barbarian conquest and therefore the end of civilization and the *pax romana* if too many Roman men became Christians, and ironically destroy the Christian religion itself.<sup>3</sup> Thus, even pagans of the period recognized noninvolvement in wars as an official Christian characteristic.

Bishop Hippolytus of Ostia in central Italy and onetime rival bishop of Rome ranked war as a sin with murder, revenge, idolatry, selling a free brother into slavery, and separating oneself from God.<sup>4</sup> This statement cannot be dated other than before Hippolytus' death in A.D. 235 or 236.

However, his *The Apostolic Tradition* is generally dated as A.D. 217. In setting out the livelihoods disqualifying acceptance of applicants for church membership, it excludes idol-makers, prostitutes, pimps, gladiators and pagan priests along with military commanders.<sup>5</sup> Soldiers desiring to become Christians must be taught not to kill and even to disobey if ordered to do so.<sup>6</sup> Candidates for baptism and people already in the church who try to enlist in the army were to be rejected and expelled, as despisers of God. In the oral tradition preserved in this book, even joining up and taking the military oath were forbidden, in addition to killing in war.<sup>7</sup>

Another church manual dating from the first third of the third century likewise condemned government officials who were "defiled with wars" in the same passage as idol-makers, murderers, oppressors of the poor, false accusers, idolaters and extortionists.<sup>8</sup>

Tertullian's *De Corona* 11 addresses the topic "whether warfare is proper at all for Christians."<sup>9</sup> A Carthaginian, Tertullian was a convert to Christianity who became a presbyter and the founder of Latin Christian literature. His writings mentioned in this article date between A.D. 197 and 220.

Tertullian asked rhetorically, implying negative answers: "Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? And shall he apply the chain, and the prison, and the torture, and the punishment, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs?"<sup>10</sup> and: "how will a Christian man war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away?"<sup>11</sup> Tertullian declared outright that Christ "in disarming Peter unbelted every sol-

dier."<sup>12</sup>

But what of a man who is converted when already in the army? In reply to his opponents who cited Scripture in support of the proposition that Christians in good conscience can fight in wars, Tertullian stated: "Of course, if faith comes later, and finds any preoccupied with military service, their case is different, as in the instance of those whom John used to receive for baptism, and of those most faithful centurions, I mean the centurion whom Christ approves, and the centurion whom Peter instructs; yet, at the same time, when a man has become a believer, and faith has been sealed, there must be either an immediate abandonment of it, which has been the course with many; or all sorts of quibbling will have to be resorted to in order to avoid offending God, and that is not allowed even outside of military service."<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in my own mind, one must remember that the New Testament does not state that the two centurions were told to continue in the army in good faith. The Bible is silent on the point, such elaboration being irrelevant to the thrust of the pericopes.

In his reply to Celsus' attacks, Origen in the late 240s conceded that Christians did not serve in the armed forces, which Origen sought to justify and explain. The greatest Bible scholar, exegete, and teacher of his own time and for centuries afterwards, Origen was professor at the foremost Christian educational institution of the day (at Alexandria, Egypt) and later founded his own in Palestine. He was best placed to represent the consensus of Christian teaching in his time because he traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean as a theological consultant at the invitation of local bishops.

Origen asserted forthrightly that Christians have been taught "not to

avenge themselves on their enemies” and “they would not, although able, have made war even if they had received authority to do so”<sup>14</sup> He added, “we no longer take up sword against nation,” nor do we “learn war any more, having become children of peace, for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader, instead of those whom our fathers followed.”<sup>15</sup>

The proper defense against barbarian hordes, Origen wrote, is prayer. If all Roman men became Christians, as Celsus had feared and Origen hoped, there would be no such military or civil calamity, because Christian prayer would prevent invasion by foreign conquerors or, if not, they would themselves become Christians and therefore noncombatants and civilized.<sup>16</sup>

To quote Origen succinctly, “None fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God.”<sup>17</sup>

Further, “If all the Romans, according to the supposition of Celsus, embrace the Christian faith, they will, when they pray, overcome their enemies; or rather, they will not war at all, being guarded by that divine power which promised to save five entire cities for the sake of fifty persons.”<sup>18</sup>

As for God in the Old Testament commanding the Israelites to engage in war and their frequently doing so, Origen drew a distinction between the Jewish constitution received from Moses, and the Christian constitution received from Christ and which God and Christians now seek to implement. Their political sovereignty gone in the Christian era, Roman Jews no longer possessed a land or government of their own and no right to war on their enemies.

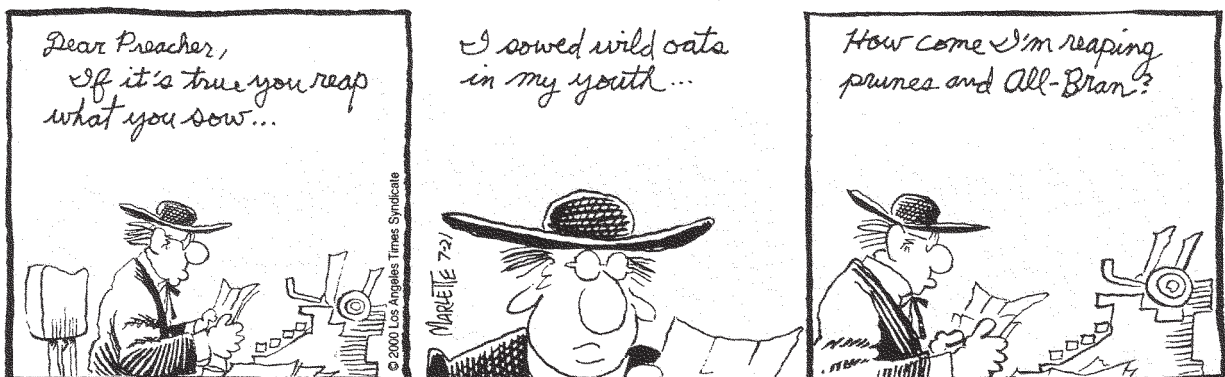
The gospel of Jesus Christ was instituted to end war and bloodshed by God’s people, and Christians therefore abstain from both. For Christians to fight in any war, wrote Origen, would fundamentally overturn their very constitution itself.<sup>19</sup>

Put another way, “If a revolt had led to the formation of the Christian commonwealth, so that it derived its existence in this way from that of the Jews, who were permitted to take up arms in defence of the members of their families, and to slay their enemies, the Christian lawgiver would not have altogether forbidden the putting of men to death; and yet He nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to any one, however wicked. For He did not deem it in keeping with such laws as His, which were derived from a divine source, to allow the killing of any individual whatever.”<sup>20</sup>

In two biblical commentaries Origen wrote that Christians do not, or ought not, to do anything “factious and warlike.”<sup>21</sup> He also preached: “If, therefore, you wish to be made worthy to pursue the inheritance from Jesus and if you wish to claim a portion from him, you must first end all wars and abide in peace.”<sup>22</sup>

There was a discrepancy between official church teaching and the actual practice of some individuals, just as there is today among “cafeteria Catholics” on matters such as birth control,<sup>23</sup> abortion, and divorce,<sup>24</sup> as also is the case of alcohol among members of abstinence-stressing Protestant denominations—not to mention fornication and adultery by members of every faith. Except for the New Testament examples cited above, all but one instance from our period are from Tertullian.<sup>25</sup>

One such was “The Thundering Legion.” Details of the incident remain under scholarly debate, but what matters for our purposes is that Christians for a few generations afterwards believed it to be true. Sometime in the A.D. 170s the Imperial XIIth Legion was in distress due to a drought and a surrounding enemy. The Christian Legionnaires prayed for rain, with the result that a downpour relieved the Romans’ dehydration and frightened off its enemy. Christians of the era touted this as



proof that Christianity is the true religion and that God answers Christian prayers. Besides Tertullian, the only near-contemporary attestation is the pseudonymous report attributed to the Legion's commander, the Roman Emperor himself.

Tertullian dismissed Christians that participated in the military as quibblers,<sup>26</sup> inferior exegetes, servants of two masters,<sup>27</sup> rejecters of the prophecies, those who "turn their backs on the Scriptures" and who "murmur that a peace so good and long is endangered for them."<sup>28</sup> Christ, he wrote, gave a new law in which all people are commanded to beat their swords into ploughshares and their lances into sickles, and nation not to take up the sword against nation and "no more learn to fight" nor to avenge itself by a sword nor "to inflict retaliatory revenge for injury."<sup>29</sup>

The pseudonymous report of the Emperor actually fortifies the proposition that Christians in our era of study were in conscience, non-violent pacifists and non-combatants. The record mentions that the Christians Legionnaires "began the battle, not by preparing weapons, nor arms, nor bugles; for such preparation is hateful to them, on account of the God they bear about in their conscience."<sup>30</sup>

Church fathers, a New Testament apocryphon, and at least one pagan during the first quarter-millennium A.D., and witnesses in such diverse localities as Italy, Carthage, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and elsewhere in the Roman Empire, were unanimous that no Christian could participate in war while none wrote to the contrary. ■

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Except where otherwise indicated, all patristic quotations are from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. American reprint ed. by A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885-96; continuously reprinted Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson) and indicated as ANF.

- 1 *Apology* 39.
- 2 *Sibylline Oracles* 1.75-78.
- 3 As preserved in Origen *Against Celsus* 8.68-70.
- 4 *Sermo de David et Goliath* 10.4.
- 5 *Apostolic Tradition* 16.10-18; 16.20.
- 6 *Apostolic Tradition* 16.17.
- 7 *Apostolic Tradition* 16.19.
- 8 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 18 trans. R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) 158.
- 9 *De Corona* 11 ANF 3.99.
- 10 *De Corona* 11 ANF 3.99.
- 11 *De Idolatria* 19 ANF 3.73
- 12 *De Idolatria* 19 ANF 3.73
- 13 *De Corona* 8 ANF 3.100.
- 14 Origen *Against Celsus* 3.8 ANF 4.467.
- 15 *Against Celsus* 5.33 ANF 4.558
- 16 *Against Celsus* 8.68-70.
- 17 *Against Celsus* 8.73 ANF 4.668.
- 18 *Against Celsus* 8.70 ANF 4.666.
- 19 *Against Celsus* 7.26.
- 20 *Against Celsus* 3.7 ANF 4.467.
- 21 *Commentary on Ephesians* 6.11; *Commentary on John* 19.156.
- 22 *Homilies on Joshua* 19.1 trans. Bruce-White Fathers of the Church Series vol. 105 © 2002 Catholic University of America Press, 168.
- 23 Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco as noted in Charles E. Curran *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 143f.
- 24 John H. Yoder "War as a Moral Problem in the Early Church: The Historian's Hermeneutical Assumptions" in Harvey L. Dyck (editor) *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, © 1996) 92.
- 25 *Apologeticum* 5; *Ad Scapulam* 4.
- 26 *De Corona* 11.
- 27 *De Idolatria* 19.
- 28 *De Corona* 1 ANF 3.[93].
- 29 *Answer to the Jews* 3 ANF 3.154.
- 30 *Epistle of Marcus Aurelius to the Senate* ANF 1.187

## A Visit to the Monastery of St. Thaddeus

(continued from page 3)

and shoved me onto the rough-carved bench. He dipped his quill into the ink and scrawled in large, angry letters across the parchment:

**31.** "NO! NO! NO! KEEP TONGUE! 'Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.' How shall they hear without a preacher?"

**32.** He stopped writing the giant letters and opened his mouth and faced me. There was an odd and powerless cavity. **33.** Nothing was behind his teeth, Clement. **34.** For the first time in my life I realized that silence cannot truly serve our dear Lord best. Only sound may serve. The sound must be trumpeted in faith. **35.** It must not quail before those who would seek to put to silence that speech of integrity that has something to say and has to say something . . . that sound that must trumpet a warning because it has seen the distant chasm and knows the pitfalls that the adversary has dug in the path of humankind.

**36.** Now I am back in Philippi. I am determined to preach the gospel.

**37.** Coriolanus may divert the flock from my affection, but he will not silence my tongue.

**38.** It may be foolhardy to preach in the face of my current alienation, but by the foolishness of preaching I hope to fill my world with saving sound.

**39.** Clement, remember the monks of St. Thaddeus! Twenty-two of them would give their lives if they could just stand one more time in the marketplace and cry out above the hostile unbelievers, "Jesus Saves!" ■

*This article is reprinted by permission of the author from his book, **The Philippian Fragment**, now out of print. For other works by the author, visit [www.calvinmillerauthor.com](http://www.calvinmillerauthor.com).*



# Fraud In Academia

By Walter E. Williams, Prof. of Economics, George Mason University

Soon college students will come home and present parents with their grades. To avoid delusion, parents should do some serious discounting because of rampant grade inflation. If grade inflation continues, a college bachelor's degree will have just as much credibility as a high school diploma.

Writing for the National Association of Scholars, Professor Thomas C. Reeves documents what is no less than academic fraud in his article "The Happy Classroom: Grade Inflation Works." From 1991 to 2007, in public institutions, the average grade point average (GPA) rose, on a four-point scale, from 2.93 to 3.11. In private schools, the average GPA climbed from 3.09 to 3.30. Put within a historical perspective, in the 1930s, the average GPA was 2.35 (about a C-plus); whereby now it's a B-plus.

Academic fraud is rife at many of the nation's most prestigious and costliest universities. At Brown University, two-thirds of all letter grades given are A's. At Harvard, 50 percent of all grades were either A or A- (up from 22 percent in 1966); 91 percent seniors graduated with honors. *The Boston Globe* called Harvard's grading practices "the laughing stock of the Ivy League." Eighty percent of the grades given at the University of Illinois are A's and B's. Fifty percent of students at Columbia University are on the Dean's list. At Stanford University, where F grades used to be banned, only 6 percent of

student grades were as low as a C.

Some college administrators will tell us that the higher grades merely reflect higher-quality students. Balderdash! SAT scores have been in decline for four decades and at least a third of entering freshmen must enroll in a remedial course either in math, writing or reading, which indicates academic fraud at the high school level. A recent survey of more than 30,000 first-year students revealed that nearly half spent more hours drinking than study. Another survey found that a third of students expected B's just for attending class, and 40 percent said they deserved a B for completing the assigned reading.

Last year, the Delaware-based Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) published results of their national survey titled "Our Fading Heritage: Americans Fail a Basic Test on Their History and Institutions." The survey questions were not rocket science. Only 21 percent of survey respondents knew that the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people" comes from President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Almost 40 percent incorrectly believe the Constitution gives the president the power to declare war. Only 27 percent knew that the Bill of Rights expressly prohibits establishing an official religion for the United States. Remarkably, close to 25 percent of Americans believe that Congress shares its foreign policy powers with the United Nations.

Other questions asked included: "Who is the commander-in-chief of the U.S. military?" "Name two countries that were our enemies during World War II." "Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the federal government. What is one power of the federal government?" Of the 2,508 nationwide sample of Americans taking ISI's civic literacy test, 71 percent failed; the average score on the test was 49 percent.

Possessing a college degree often does not mean much in terms of basic skills. According to a 2006 Pew Charitable Trusts study, 50 percent of college seniors failed a test that required them to interpret a table about exercise and blood pressure, understand the arguments of newspaper editorials, and compare credit card offers. About 20 percent of college seniors did not have the quantitative skills to estimate if their car had enough gas to get to the gas station. According to a recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, the percentage of college graduates proficient in prose literacy has declined from 40 percent to 31 percent within the past decade. Employers report that many college graduates lack the basic skills of critical thinking, writing, and problem-solving.

The bottom line: To approach truth in grading, parents and employers should lower the average student's grade by one letter, and interpret a C grade as an F. ■

# Hating Others, Loving Self?

By Bruce T. Gourley, Interim Dir., Center for Baptist Studies Mercer University.

In 2002, Baylor University and Simpson University (CA) researchers conducted a study of the religious commitments of students. Eighty percent of students evaluated were members of a church. As a part of the study, students were asked how much more likely they were to adhere to the biblical commandment of “love your neighbor as yourself” as compared to their peers. On average, respondents claimed to be twice as likely to love their neighbors compared to others. An interesting correlation emerged from this study: the most religiously fundamentalist students claimed the greatest likelihood of loving others more than their peers.

Fast forward to May 2009, thirty years after the ascendancy of the Religious Right, and amidst the widely-recognized collapse of the American political party that many evangelical Christians considered to be the party of God. During a road trip, the down time between National Public Radio news and commentary led me to tune into what turned into three hours of self-described “conservative Christian” radio talk show programs over a two day period. All three hours focused on political issues and exhibited an air of panic. Discussing the looming Supreme

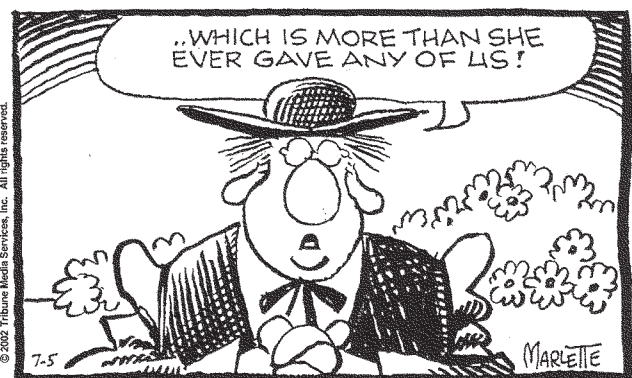
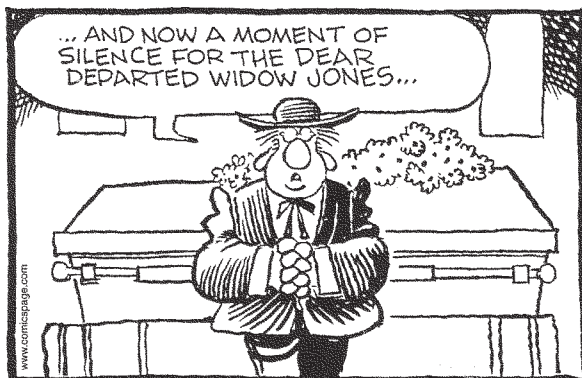
Court vacancy, poverty, minorities, women, homosexuals, Muslims, pluralism and an eight-foot tall cross in the Mojave National Preserve, talking heads made it clear they were not concerned about issues of justice. Speaking to President Barack Obama’s desire to select a new Supreme Court Justice who will “decide cases on the basis of fairness and justice,” one commentator scoffed at the concept of Supreme Court justices’ seeking . . . justice. Condemning the traditional American ethos of “equality and justice for all,” and specifically referencing minorities, women, homosexuals, and persons of non-Christian faith, one talking head declared, “if you have empathy for everyone, you have empathy for no one.”

There is no small irony that the most ardent “America is a Christian Nation!” advocates are distraught and fearful of the prospect of America’s judicial system putting into practice . . . Jesus’ ethical and moral teachings. Conservative Christian radio is frantically telling listeners that Christians must assume a “defensive posture” to prevent the extension of mercy and justice to others, and warning that a government that pursues such an agenda “will not stop” until Christianity is

illegal or driven underground.

The panic emanating over the radio waves from conservative Christian activists, following their spirited defense of torture under a poor American administration, is just the latest reminder that Jesus’ teachings frighten many people who lay claim to the name of Christ. While Jesus’ ethical and moral teachings permeate the Gospels, speak to civilizations across time and space, and are echoed in hundreds of religions and moral codes worldwide, some American Christians seemingly dislike Christ’s instructions and example.

Why the resistance? Perhaps because the ethics and morality of the Gospels harbors some similarities to a modern, Western political “liberalism” that at its best insists that the basic human rights of others are no less important than that of one’s self. Indeed, far beyond the narrow context of today’s “conservative” and “liberal” labels, Jesus has historically been most resisted by entrenched power structures and most readily embraced by the powerless and oppressed. Listen closely to today’s self-proclaimed conservative Christian radio talk shows, and you too will hear the timeless tug of war between the powerful and powerless. ■



# We've Got Mail

## Letters From Our Readers

"Thanks for your excellent work with *Christian Ethics Today*. Foy Valentine would be proud and a lot of folks are proud. The publication is a spark of challenging light, a breath of inspiring air, a refreshing immersion in insightful thought. For folks such as I who live and strive to minister in the hinterland, *CET* is a connection to the minds beyond. Here is [a contribution] to help you with the bills. I would just buy fishing lures with it anyway!"

**Lynn Clayton**, *New Life Baptist Church, DeRidder, LA [and former Editor of the Louisiana Baptist state paper]*.

"Like always, *Christian Ethics Today* (Spring 2009) hit a home run! Excellent articles, good job."

**Bernardo A. Moraga**, *CBF Church Engagement Specialist, Albuquerque, NM*

"We read *CET* in our home. I am in the doghouse because I discarded a copy in which my wife was reading "When Death Becomes Birth." Belinda's dad passed away recently

and this article was meaningful to her as she works through her grief. Would you send me another copy? [We did gladly]"

**Albert Reyes**, *Buckner Children and Family Services and former President of Baptist University of the Americas.*

"I want *Christian Ethics Today* to make it. I read you regularly. Wish I could give more."

**Cecil Sherman**, *Richmond, VA.*

"Thank you very much for ethics books and CD ROM. They are now in the MIT library. I am quite sure that the books will immensely help both the teachers and students in their ethical reasoning and living."

**Go Van**, *Lecturer in Theology and Ethics, Mymmar Institute of Theology, Yangon. Note: Through the Piper Fund, CET has given back issues of the Journal and the set of books and CDs which we offer to our readers to about 15 Christian colleges and seminaries in foreign countries.*

"I read *CET* from cover to cover, even the Book Reviews. Every article has

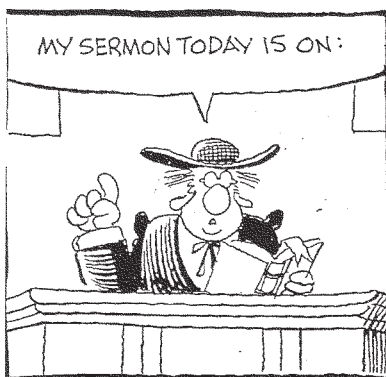
a message of hope and food for some deep thinking."

**Capt. Jack R. Peters**, *Oklahoma City.*

"Thanks, Joe, for your help and encouragement!"

**Myra Williams Ottewell**, *Surrey BC, Canada, who is producing a television documentary about racial conflict in the South during the mid-1900s and will utilize the experiences of Dr. Randall O'Brien (former Baylor University Provost and now President of Carson-Newman University), as he related in his CET article "A Bronze Star for Brenda" (Issue 68, 4).*

In our "Letters" file was also a small green card from several years ago, with this poem and a note: "I receive so much from others while my giving is so scant. I rest in the shade of trees which I do not plant. I feed from fields I do not till. I travel roads I do not build" Then this handwritten note: "Joe, I am debtor to you. **H.B.**" A card from Henelee Barnett that I shall always treasure. JET ■





# Christian Ethics and the Movies

Reviewed by David A. Thomas, Prof. of Rhetoric, Emeritus, University of Richmond<sup>1</sup>

## The Holocaust and Moral Apathy

*The Reader* (2008)

Kate Winslet won the 2008 Best Actress Award at the Oscars, the Golden Globe, and the Screen Actors Guild for her breathtaking portrayal of Hanna Schmidt, the former Nazi prison guard at the center of *The Reader*. *The Reader* explores the issue of German guilt over the Holocaust, particularly, the wide gulf between the older and younger generations of the German people.

*The Reader* is a faithful adaptation of a 1995 German novel by Bernhard Schlink. Many viewers never get past the way the movie focuses more on the sexual entanglements between Hanna in her midlife and her 15-year old lover in Act I, than on the philosophical context for telling this complex story as a whole. *The Reader*, the novel, is Schlink's powerful literary effort to condemn the perpetrators of the Holocaust, and simultaneously, to attempt to understand them. As Schlink said, it is easier to condemn than to understand, for conscience demands that condemnation must be total.

The novel, now translated into thirty-seven languages, is representative of a major movement called the Post-Holocaust West German Literary effort by both Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals to break the silence about German guilt.<sup>2</sup> *The Reader* is on the required reading lists in many German Holocaust studies. As a tragedy, it approaches Shakespearean depths.

**The Story.** The movie is structured as a three-act drama covering about forty years. It is told from the perspective of the protagonist, Michael Berg. In the opening act, set in Berlin in 1958, Michael as a young schoolboy is suffering from a serious illness. When he becomes nauseated on his way

home from school one day, he encounters Hanna Schmidt, a thirty-something bus conductor. She takes care of him that day. Shortly thereafter, when Michael returns to her apartment with some flowers as a thank-you, she immediately takes him into her bed. Their instant sexual relationship continues through the summer while he is recovering his health. Hanna ends it suddenly, in fact cruelly, when one day she just moves out and leaves no forwarding address.

Since this is Michael's first experience, he falls in love with her, although she never shows any real affection for him. She is always detached, even in intercourse. Their most intimate moments occur when Hanna asks Michael to read aloud to her from Homer's *The Odyssey*, his homework, each visit. (*The Reader*, means "oral reader" in German.)

Act II takes place nine years later. Michael, now a law student enrolled in a legal philosophy seminar, attends a German war criminal trial. He is surprised to see that his former lover is one of the defendants. Hanna and a group of other women are on trial for murder. They had once been employed as prison guards by the German SS during WWII. As part of their job, they each named ten prisoners per month for Auschwitz. They also participated in a Death March, which resulted in the loss of over 300 Jews in a fire.

As Michael listens to the judge read these indictments against the women [continuing the *Reader* motif], it becomes clear that a key part of the case against Hanna is based on a handwritten document that she allegedly wrote. In a flash of insight, Michael realizes that Hanna is actually illiterate, but too ashamed to tell the judge. [A contra-motif, *non-reading* as a basis for social shame.] Logically, one of the other defendants must have written the incriminating document, not

Hanna. Withholding this defense results in short prison terms for all the other women, but a life sentence for Hanna as their leader, in consequence of that shame.

Michael struggles over whether to come forward to offer his inside information. Should he confess that he knew Hanna Schmidt personally, especially to reveal that they had been lovers when he was a minor? Only by doing so could he help her defense against the most serious charges. He decides to remain silent, ostensibly to protect Hanna's sense of dignity by not exposing her inability to read and write to the world. But the sub-text is, Michael, too, is ashamed to acknowledge his own responsibility.

Finally, Act III takes place in the mid-1990s. Hanna is now up for parole after serving over thirty years behind bars. She has been a model prisoner; in fact, she taught herself to read. Michael, now a lawyer [played by a deadpan Ralph Fiennes], is asked to help facilitate Hanna's re-entry into society, since he is the only person to ever correspond with her. At some point during those prison years, Michael started recording some books on tape for Hanna to listen to [continuing the title motif], although he never felt a desire to visit her. As an adult, Michael had married and later divorced a fellow law student. It is clear that, because of Hanna's treatment of him, he is unable to maintain a committed relationship with women, though he has never forgotten Hanna, his first love.

At the warden's invitation, on the eve of Hanna's parole date, Michael visits her in prison to see her and tell her personally that he has arranged for a little apartment for her, and a job. He sees how drastically Hanna has aged in prison. He makes it clear to her that he wants nothing further to do with her once she is released. This is not acceptable to Hanna. Though she does not

complain to Michael, that night, she hangs herself.

**Ethical Implications.** Hanna Schmidt is emotionally and morally numb, both to her personal relationship with Michael, and her wartime job as a cog in the Nazi Holocaust apparatus. Her only driving motivation seems to have been to keep her illiteracy a secret; nothing else seems to penetrate her moral consciousness.

American audiences, in particular, comment often on the fact that what Hanna did in bed with Michael as a fifteen-year old boy was, in fact, sexual predation. It was a crime then, as it is a crime now. Just to film the bedroom scenes between Winslet and David Kross, the adolescent actor who played the young Michael Berg, the producers waited until the day after Kross turned eighteen just to forestall any possible child porn charges. Inside the narrative world of Hanna Schmidt, she seems not to have realized that what she was doing just to have a sex life with the young Michael was very wrong on a number of levels. Certainly, she exhibited no shame on that account.

Beyond her sexual behavior, there is also the matter of her culpability for acting criminally in her capacity as a prison guard. Even when the judge read the charges against her, she seemed not to understand why it was wrong for her to take part in the murder of hundreds of Jews. She asked the judge, "It was my job. What should I have done? Should I have not taken that job?"

In part, the argument that killing Jews was justified as a job requirement

echoes the discredited "We were only following orders" excuse. In the larger cultural context, it also reflects the limited choices anyone like Hanna had as an unskilled woman just entering the job market in wartime Germany – working for Siemens was a paycheck. She was not a decision maker, merely a turnkey staffer. Her plight differs only in degree from that of many people who work in some capacity within industries that engage in ethically objectionable trade. Given the dominance of interlocking, multinational corporations today, Most of us are connected with some such company by direct or indirect pocket-book ties. Should we, like Hanna, be held accountable?

As a literary metaphor, Hanna and Michael represent the gap that exists to this day between the younger and the older German generations. Some of the WWII generation were actually complicit in the Holocaust, and all Germans of about that age, presumably were aware, or should have been aware of its horrors. The deep psychological guilt of the nation has devolved upon succeeding generations who say, *we* had nothing to do with the Holocaust ourselves, and we cannot understand how you could have done so.

Hanna's illiteracy is symbolic of the older generation not acknowledging, let alone taking responsibility for, their guilt. Michael's naïve boyhood involvement with her represents a misplaced trust, which she could never reciprocate on any level beyond the physical. The story of his conflicted feelings of nostalgia and

yet his lifelong estrangement from her is intended as a microcosm of the complex larger issues of the German people as a whole. There are no easy answers in this movie.

As Christians, we are confronted with the same dilemmas over the church's ethical and moral response to perennial conflicts between the demands for justice and for a redeeming forgiveness. Neither the book nor the movie indicts Christianity as being causally related to German guilt for the Nazis and the Holocaust, but the question remains: where is the church in this picture? The Pope has been criticized for his silence, and therefore his tacit approval, of the Nazis during WWII.

Throughout history, social and ethical ills that were produced by past practices of colonialism, imperialism, the Crusades, the Mid-East conflict, etc., are characterized by lingering cultural shame. People would prefer not to talk about them, and just "move on." Yet ongoing guilt over slavery, genocides, environmental degradation, refugees, poverty, and other dire victimage, does not evaporate so easily. *The Reader* is not a pleasant entertainment to watch. It brings up some unpleasant but unavoidable issues in dealing with the Holocaust that we would really rather just forget and hope it goes away. ■

1 David Thomas may be reached at davidthomas1572@comcast.net.

2 See Ernestine Schlant, *The language of silence* (1999). Routledge. Ch. 9, "Post-Unification" discusses Schlink's *The Reader* at length.



# Book Reviews

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

## Zion's Christian Soldiers

Stephan Sizer  
Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

## Strategic Preaching

William E. Hull  
St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006.

## Preaching and Professing

Ralph C. Wood  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009.

*Reviewed by Darold Morgan,*  
Richardson, TX.

Currently on the reviewers desk are three books recently sent to CET from three different publishers. All three are of serious value and are related primarily to pastors whose major responsibilities pertain to preaching, teaching, and planning. Wise leadership in matters of theological and ethical concepts as related to persuasive preaching is indeed endless and vital. Parenthetically, the laity would profit substantially with an acquaintance with the issues raised in these particular books.

First, let us look at the Sizer book. It is past time for pastors and laity alike to get their perspective on modern Israel and a balanced eschatology from solid biblical interpretation, rather than from a barrage of wildly successful novels and dramatically effective television preachers who march under the banner of so-called Christian Zionism! Forget, if you can, the lingering influence of J. N. Darby and his successor, the Scofield Reference Bible, and the insistence of biblical literalism. In this book we have an under-publicized paperback from the pen and heart of an English Anglican vicar. Simply stated, this is an outstanding book on this subject, answering current and volatile issues with a balanced and sensible eschatology. The book meets a real need in this confused area as Sizer gives excellent biblical responses in his approach to hot-ticketed subjects. For example, to people who are encouraging the nuclear bombing of

Iran, how do you respond? Sadly, there is a peculiar quietness about these serious questions that desperately need a genuine voice of quality biblical interpretation.

In Sizer's book one has a very helpful response to these issues. Here are well-written, interesting, and balanced insights. For to long American Christians have been mesmerized by the colorful but questionable magnetism of Christian Zionism. If you want an intelligent answer to this enigma, here it is.

The second book is *Strategic Preaching* by one of America's preeminent preachers and theologians. Dr. William E. Hull has been a Professor of New Testament and a pastor of a major Baptist church in the South, closing his remarkable ministry in a university setting with major administrative responsibilities, research, and prolific writing.

Drawing from this myriad of experience, Hull has written a wise, mature, and a much needed volume on the techniques of planning pastoral preaching and exerting pastoral leadership in the local church, especially during times of radical social change and challenge.

Today many pastors and congregations are experiencing radical challenges to the church fellowship because there has been a peculiar absence of pastoral planning and guidance. This need not be. Hull's book is brimming with solid help for the pastor and lay leadership alike. He illustrates step by step how this need can be met. The text is replete with searching and powerful illustrations from his years as pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana. These personal references alone make the book worth its purchase price. This book should be required reading in every seminary and theological school in the land, and certainly not just the Baptist brand alone!

The third review is for *Preaching and Professing*. Do not let the idea that this is a book of sermons diminish its appeal. Frankly, this is one of the finest books of

sermons and addresses this reviewer has come across in many a moon! If you are among those who are discouraged about the level and substance of preaching today, get this book.

Dr. Wood is not an ordained pastor. He is a layperson who is the University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University. In his text you will find manuscripts of sermons delivered all across the nation, and some delightful ones delivered in England. One of the best sections of the book is found in his funeral eulogies. They are simply classics in this field! Here is a Baptist teacher totally at home in multiple denominational settings, sharing solid biblical exegesis, along with warm and entrancing personal experiences from his childhood in rural East Texas.

Not a dull page can be found in this nearly 300-page book. It is full of major quotations and applications from his superb grasp of both the world of literature and theology. Quotation after quotation, allusion after allusion, pour forth from these sermons which afford a world of illustrative material for any seeking pastor—all couched in fresh insights from an amazing knowledge of the Bible.

What a treasure one can discover in these pages—refreshing insights from the Bible and multiple reminders to the potential of the pulpit ministry. ■

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## Harbingers of Hope: Claiming God's Promises in Today's World

William E. Hull  
Birmingham: Samford University Press, 2007.

*Reviewed by Fisher Humphreys,*  
Birmingham, AL

Dr. William Hull preached these twenty-seven sermons at Mountain Brook Baptist Church where he has



served as theologian-in-residence since 1991. His faith in God and love for God's people and God's world are evident throughout the book. So are his massive biblical scholarship, his pastoral wisdom, and his brilliant mind. These are bona fide sermons, preached to a Christian congregation, employing biblical texts, and full of wonderful stories, analogies, poetry, and quotable sayings, but they are as thoughtful as formal essays (there are footnotes), and they confirm what Dr. Hull's friends have always known, namely, that he is routinely thinking three or four steps ahead of most of us.

The sermons are divided into groups dealing with six topics: preaching, God, salvation, growth, renewal, and service. The first sermon, entitled "This Is My Story," is autobiographical and is a winsome example of the old-fashioned Christian practice of "giving a testimony." In it Dr. Hull reviews his life as a professor of New Testament, educational administrator, and pastor. The last sermon, entitled "Will We Be 'Left Behind?'," is a careful analysis of whether dispensational pre-millennialism is biblical. It closes with these words: "All of us would, I am sure, welcome a shortcut to glory, but I would rather be left behind to share [Jesus'] saving gospel of suffering love with friend and foe alike until time shall be no more."

One of the attractive things about these sermons is that in them Dr. Hull brings as much knowledge and care to the task of interpreting the life of the church and the world today as he does to the task of interpreting the Bible. For example, in "Religion in an Age of Terror" he provides an illuminating interpretation of the crisis that radical Islam has created in our world.

Dr. Hull addresses intensely personal issues as well as public, global ones. For example, in "The Sound of Silence" he says that, in the face of suffering and injustice, it is sometimes the case that we "hear" God in silence rather than in words. On Mt. Horeb Elijah "heard" God in "a sound of sheer silence" (1 Kgs 19:12, NRSV); at the climactic moment

of his life Jesus "spoke" "like a sheep that before his shearers is silent" (Isa 53:7); the Spirit of God intervenes for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26).

Regular readers of *Christian Ethics Today* may remember reading in the December 2008 issue Dr. Hull's moving sermon "Finding God in the Darkness." In it he described the terrible illness ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) which he is now experiencing. If you found that sermon helpful in your faith and life as a Christian, then *Harbingers of Hope* is for you. ■

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## Life and Death Matters: Seeking the Truth about Capital Punishment

Robert L. Baldwin

Montgomery: NewSouth Books, 2009.

*Reviewed by Fisher Humphreys,*  
Birmingham, AL

On a Sunday evening in the early 1950s eight-year-old Robbie Baldwin and his family were walking home from church near Mobile, Alabama, when they saw a cross burning in the front yard of a black family. Robbie asked his mother what it meant, and she said that it was a warning from the Ku Klux Klan that someone in that family had done something inappropriate.

The Old South has changed a lot since then, but Dr. Robert Baldwin, M.D., thinks it still has a long way to go. The criminal justice system is not evenhanded: people who are mentally ill, poor, or black do not fare as well as people who are healthy, wealthy, and white.

Dr. Baldwin is one of the most outspoken opponents of the death penalty in Alabama; recently he publicly challenged the state's Attorney General, Troy King, to participate in a public discussion or debate with him about the issue. That probably won't happen, but Dr. Baldwin's new book on the subject is

conveying his interpretation of this issue to political leaders, church leaders, and ordinary citizens throughout Alabama, and beyond.

The narrative thread in this book is Dr. Baldwin's own story of growing up with racist attitudes and awakening to the fact that he had been mistaken. With great humility he describes his conversion and evolution from racism to being a real follower of Christ. He tells about some of his professional colleagues and personal friends who are made uncomfortable by his vigorous opposition to the death penalty. He writes about prisoners he knows and their experiences of salvation in prison, and, in one case, about the execution of one of them.

Professors will be interested to read in this book about how much Dr. Baldwin was influenced by a professor at Birmingham-Southern College. Medical doctors and others will receive information about the pharmaceutical cocktails used to kill the condemned. Historians will appreciate the accounts of the history of incarceration and of the death penalty in America. Those who appreciate statistics will have massive data about the death penalty at their disposal after reading this book. All readers will benefit from the many stories about criminals, their families, victims, their families, and those who attempt to minister to all of them.

I found Dr. Baldwin's case for eliminating the death penalty convincing. Although I think that it is morally wrong for anyone to get revenge, I think it is morally right for society through its government to punish criminals, and I think that some criminals do things that are so awful that it would be morally appropriate to execute them. But I want to belong to a society that understands enough about grace to know that it is all right to treat such people better than they deserve by giving them life without parole rather than death. I believe that, when we do this, we will be a better society. I trust Jesus was right when he said, "Blessed are the merciful." ■

# The Vicar of Bray

*Note: This satirical English verse is about a minister who adjusts his faith to political demands. Symon Symonds, the vicar of the English village of Bray, served under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Bloody Mary, and Elizabeth, twice as a Catholic and twice as a Protestant!*

In good King Charles' golden days, when loyalty no harm meant,  
A zealous high churchman was I, and so I gained preferment.  
To teach my flock, I never missed  
Kings are by God appointed  
And damned be he who dare resist or touch the Lord's anointed.

## Chorus

*And this be law, I shall maintain  
Until my dying day, sir  
That whatsoever king may reign,  
Still I'll be the Vicar of Bray, sir.*

When royal James usurped the throne, and popery came in fashion,  
The penal laws I hooted down, and read the Declaration.  
The Church of Rome, I found, did fit  
Full well my constitution  
And I had been a Jesuit, but for the Revolution.

When William was our King declared, to ease the nation's grievance,  
With this new wind about I steered, and swore to him allegiance,  
Old principles I did revoke  
Set conscience at a distance,  
Passive obedience was a joke, a jest was non-resistance.

When Royal Anne became our queen, the Church of England's glory,  
Another face of things was seen, and I became a Tory.  
Occasional conformists base  
I blamed their moderation;  
And thought the Church in danger was from such prevarication.

When George in pudding time came o'er, and moderate men looked big, sir  
My principles I changed once more, and I became a Whig, sir.  
And thus preferment I procured  
From our new Faith's Defender,  
And almost every day abjured the Pope and the Pretender.

The illustrious house of Hanover and Protestant succession  
To these I do allegiance swear—while they can hold possession.  
For in my faith and loyalty  
I never more will falter,

And George my lawful king shall be—until the times do alter. ■

# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

## MISSION

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

## PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

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## OUR ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS

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

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

VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE: [www.ChristianEthicsToday.com](http://www.ChristianEthicsToday.com)

CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY

Post Office Box 1165  
Argyle, Texas 76226

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