

# 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

<b>Red Letter Christianity</b> <i>Joe E. Trull</i> .....	2
<b>EthixBytes</b> .....	3
<b>A New Friend With the Gift of Healing</b> <i>Calvin Miller</i> .....	4
<b>Health Care Reform—Yes, We Need It!</b> <i>Sherman Hope, M.D.</i> .....	5
<b>Love Beyond Your Theology</b> <i>Wade Burleson</i> .....	7
<b>Foy Dan Valentine: Helping Changed People Change the World</b> <i>David Sapp</i> .....	12
<b>The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life</b> <i>Tripp York</i> .....	17
<b>Breaking Up the Good Ole Boys Club</b> <i>J. Lee Grady</i> .....	18
<b>Bonhoeffer, Torture, and America</b> <i>David Gushee</i> .....	21
<b>Why Aren't You Drinking From the Tap?</b> <i>John Guildford</i> .....	22
<b>LGBT Pastoral Ethics in a Baptist Tradition</b> <i>Cody J. Sanders</i> .....	23
<b>"Show Me A Coin"</b> <i>Keith Herron</i> .....	25
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	
<b>Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics</b> <i>Reviewed by Joe E. Trull</i> .....	27
<b>The Rising of Bread for the World</b> <i>Reviewed by Darold Morgan</i> .....	27
<b>Finding God in The Shack</b> <i>Reviewed by Darold Morgan</i> .....	28
<b>Abortion, Execution, and the Consequences of Taking a Life</b> .....	28
<b>Retrieving the Natural Law</b> <i>Reviewed by Monty M. Self</i> .....	28
<b>INDEX OF VOLUME 15, ISSUES 73-76</b> .....	30
<b>KUDZU by Doug Marlette</b>	

# Red Letter Christianity

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

A renowned New Testament professor during my seminary days told our class he disliked Red-Letter Bibles, the ones that printed Jesus' words in red. His reason, which seemed plausible at the time, was simple: these Bibles implied Jesus' words were more inspired than the rest of Scripture, and, he exclaimed, "Every word of the Bible, be it Genesis, Isaiah, or Matthew, is equally 'God-breathed' and trustworthy!"

Well, I did not burn my red-letter version, but I did put it aside for awhile.

A year or so later another teacher, T. B. Maston, answered this dilemma. "Although the entire Bible is inspired and from God, there is a progressive revelation in Scripture of God's will for humanity. As Hebrews 1:1-2 clearly reveals, God 'bit by bit' and 'piece by piece' spoke to humanity through the prophets and other Old Testament writers, but in these last days God has fully revealed Himself in the life and teachings of Jesus."

As Jesus himself declared, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [fill full]" (Mt 5:17).

This truth is not only basic to biblical interpretation, it is also crucial for understanding the ethical teachings of the Bible. "What Would Jesus Do?" is not just a teen-age motto that oversimplifies the gospel—it is actually the key question for Christian discipleship.

In recent days, a growing number of evangelicals identify themselves as "Red-Letter Christians,"<sup>1</sup> believers who focus on Jesus' words and example. As Jim Wallis noted, "We Christians have a serious problem. Most people have the idea that Christians and the Church are supposed to stand for the same things that Jesus did."<sup>2</sup>

Last year when I asked rhetorical-

ly "Did Jesus Mean What He Said?" (after quoting several of Christ's non-retaliation teachings), I was amazed at the number who disputed the obvious meaning of Jesus' commands. They reminded me of ancient "eisegetes" who also sought to soften Jesus' words about wealth.<sup>3</sup>

If Jesus did mean what he said, and Christ intended his disciples to be "Red-Letter Christians," how does this premise impact our understanding of the Christian life?

First, **Jesus Did Not Bring Us Rules, But A New Relationship.**

Legalism is a constant threat to serious discipleship. Last year I visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem and witnessed again the austere legalism in Judaism. At this oldest section of the ancient Jewish Temple, devout orthodox Jews come to recite their prayers and creeds. However, only the men are allowed access to the oldest part of the wall; the women segregated at a distance. Everyone must wear a head-covering.

During another visit to Israel, I stepped off our tour bus in Nazareth to be accosted by a young Jewish seminary student, who fastened phylacteries<sup>4</sup> on my arm and began praying in Hebrew—he was doing missionary work, restoring wayward Jews to the faith.

Nor are evangelicals immune to legalism. When discussing legalistic ethics during my seminary teaching days, I often illustrated with the "Rules" of Falls Creek (a summer youth camp in Oklahoma). To prevent young people from "sinning" through "mixed bathing," the first rule required separate swimming hours for males and females. But the boys watched—thus a second rule was needed to keep males at a safe distance. But then the guys used binoculars! When rule three forbid binoculars, the girls decided to walk by the boy's dorms in their swim

suits! Thus the need for rule four—robes that covered the knees! On and on. . . .

Legalism always fails because the list is never long enough!

Jesus did not come to earth to bring us a new list of rules. He came to establish a new relationship between God and humanity. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). As his disciples, we are called to "walk as he walked" (1 Jn 2:6).

Red-Letter Christianity is based on a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Second, **Jesus Did Not Establish An Earthly Kingdom, But A Spiritual One.**

Visits to Israel usually include a trip to Masada, the natural flattop mesa rising 820 feet above the Dead Sea. A band of rebellious Jews held the fortress there during the first revolt against Rome (A.D. 66-73). When the Tenth Legion raised an enormous siege ramp and broke through the walls, they found over 900 Jews, victims of a suicide pact.

Today, Israeli officers are commissioned atop Masada, for it symbolizes Jewish nationalism. The disciples of Jesus, like most oppressed Jews in the first century, hated Romans and longed for the Messiah to arrive, for they believed he would drive out the invaders and establish again the kingdom of Israel.

Yes, the kingdom of God was the central image in Jesus' preaching and teaching (Mt. 13; Mk 1:14-15). But Jesus had to correct his followers, who expected a material, earthly kingdom. "The kingdom of God is not coming with things observed . . . 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For in fact, the kingdom of God is within (*entos*) you" (Lk 17:20-21). According to Christ, the kingdom of God is God's rule and God's reign.

(continued on page 11)

# EthixBytes

## A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”

*Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).*

“A great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries.”

*Barack Obama on why Russia and the U.S. should reduce their nuclear arsenals.*

“Air power contains the seeds of our own destruction. . . . We can lose this fight.”

*Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the new American commander in Afghanistan, pledging to sharply restrict the use of airstrikes there to reduce civilian deaths (NY Times, 6/09).*

“America’s health care system can be compared to the sinking Titanic. The third-class passengers (the poor), on the lower decks, have already drowned. The second-class passengers (the middle-class) are being devoured. . . . The first-class passengers (the rich) are dry and happy on the upper deck, claiming the ship isn’t sinking. A few passengers occupy the life rafts (Medicare). All will sink if something isn’t done.”

*Andrew Carl, Dallas Morning News, Letters.*

“U.S. debt quadrupled during the Reagan/Bush years, declined slightly under Bill Clinton, and doubled under George W. Bush, from \$5.73 trillion to \$10.7 trillion. [The] statement that Obama more than doubled the debt in six months is a fallacy.”

*Jane Dodd, Dallas Morning News Letters.*

“For all the letter’s [Pope Benedict XVI’s *Charity In Truth*] invocations of

solidarity with ordinary people, it fails to connect with their problems. The pope speaks in such generalities that his teachings have little force.”

*Dennis P. McCann, Christian Century (8/25/09).*

“I wanted to make a point that humanitarianism is not a crime, and water’s not littering.”

*Walt Staton, convicted in Tucson for littering after leaving water bottles for immigrants in the desert (L A Times).*

“The CIA spent several million dollars hiring the private security contractor Blackwater USA in 2004 as part of a secret program to assassinate top al-Qaeda operatives, but did not capture a kill any terrorists before CIA Director Leon Panetta told Congress in June of the illegal program.”

*(N.Y. Times).*

“The world is a dangerous place not because of those who do harm, but because of those who look at it without doing anything.”

*Albert Einstein (The Week, 6/21/09).*

“Americans wait longer to see primary-care physicians than patients in Britain, Germany, Australia, or New Zealand—all countries with strong public-health systems.”

*Study by the Commonwealth Fund (Newsweek, August, 2009).*

“When I look back on my own conversion, I cannot credit a gospel tract or an altar call or an exposition of John 3:16. . . . Rather nature, classical music, and romantic love formed the channel of grace that awakened my senses to perception of God. Through that channel I came to believe first in a good world and then a good God. It is a terrible thing to feel gratitude and

have no one to thank, to feel awe and have no one to worship.”

*Author Philip Yancey in First Things (2/09).*

“When we’re [Christian Zionists and Jews] standing in Jerusalem and the Messiah is coming down the street, one of us is going to have a very major theological adjustment to make.”

*San Antonio Pastor John Hagee quoted in Commonwealth (3/2009).*

“Abortion statistics: At present the fetus is not viable before 22 weeks and is viable after 27 weeks; 1.3% of abortions occur after 21 weeks, while 88% occur before 27 weeks.”

*Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN News (6/2/09).*

Barna’s **Seven Faith Tribes: Casual Christians:** 66% of the U.S. adult population who identify as Christian, but are lax in belief and practice. **Captive Christians:** 17% of adults, with biblically consistent beliefs and behaviors. **Jews:** about 2%. **Mormons:** about 2%. **Pantheists:** less than 1 %, including Eastern and New Age religions. **Muslims:** far less than 1%, but growing. **Skeptics:** 11%, including atheists and agnostics.

“For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.” ■

*Sen. Ted Kennedy (1932-2009).*

# 4 A New Friend With the Gift of Healing

By Calvin Miller, Birmingham, AL

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

1. Shortly after my arrival in the city I made another new friend, Helen of Hierapolis. She is a dynamic lover of people, and is so bound up in her love for Christ, that she walks in an aura of esteem. 2. I am not usually so taken with traveling healers. 3. You will remember my disaffection for Hiram the Healer of the Hellespont who claimed instant health for all who would in faith touch his sequined toga. 4. He lost much of his following in West Asia because he couldn't get relief from a toothache.

5. But Helen is different. She came to Philippi with a conviction that God loves the suffering and she determined to participate with God in this love. 6. I met her near the synagogue when she was talking to a group of blind beggars, I was surprised when she didn't even try to heal them, but bought each of them a new cane and reminded them that the curbs on Caesar's Boulevard were especially high. 7. She reminded them that they should be especially careful because it is so hard to hear a chariot coming down an unpaved road. 8. "Someday," she told them as we walked away, "light will be universal, and every eye will behold eternal love."

9. They didn't feel as though she had cheated them. 10. She is not much of a show woman, I'm afraid. She just mixes with humanity in order to take divinity as far as it will go. 11. I am the richer to know her.

12. Sister Helen opened a great crusade in Philippi on Thursday, and is the sensation of the leper colony. 13. She rarely does anything one could

call a miracle. 14. Last week she laid hands on a little crippled boy and was not able to heal him, but she gave him a new pair of crutches and promised to take him for a walk in the park here in Philippi.

15. Yesterday with my own eyes I saw her pass an amputee selling styluses. She touched his legs and cried, "Grow back! Grow back! . . . In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, grow back!"

16. Well, Clement, I so wanted to see the legs grow back, but they did not. Poor Helen. What's a faith healer to do with an amputee that refuses to grow legs on command?

17. She sat down with the little man, crossed her legs on the cold pavement, and began selling styluses herself. 18. Soon she was talking to him, and before very long they were both laughing together. For an hour they laughed together, and by nightfall they were having an uproariously good time.

19. When it was time to go, Helen's legs were so stiff from disuse, they refused to move.

20. Her legless, stylus-selling friend cried in jest, "Grow strong! . . . Grow strong! . . . Grow strong!" Helen only smiled and staggered upward on her unsteady legs.

21. She looked down at her lowly friend and said, "I offer you healing, you will see. It is only one world away. Someday . . .," she stopped and smiled, "you will enter a new life and you will hear our Savior say to your legless stumps, 'Grow long! . . . Grow long!' Then you will know that glory which Sister Helen only dreamed for you."

22. He smiled and said, "Do you heal everyone this way?"

23. "It is better to heal with promises than to promise healing."

24. "You are right, Sister Helen. But more than right, you are an evi-

dence that our Father yet heals the spirit of amputees—even when they will not grow legs. And, once the spirit is healed, the legs can be done without."

25. Helen turned and walked on down the street. She was near the amphitheater where she holds her great crusade when she saw a young girl without any arms.

26. "Grow long! . . . Grow long! . . . In the glorious name of Jesus Christ, grow long!" she cried.

27. The girl looked puzzled and looked at her shoulders where her arms refused to be. They did not seem to her to be growing.

28. "I was afraid of that," said Helen. "Oh, well, I can miss my meeting one night, I guess. Young lady, how long has it been since anyone combed your hair?" 29. And she sat down beside her new friend and took out her comb. For the first time in my life I wanted to be a faith healer, Clement.

30. After the crusade was over last night, Helen came to our home for squab and honeycomb. Wouldn't you know it, she brought a couple of hungry lepers. ■

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## A PERSONAL COPY OF THE PHILIPPIAN FRAGMENT

Calvin Miller is reprinting this classic work this Fall and CET will offer a copy to our subscribers. Watch for details in our Thanksgiving letter to our readers.

# Health Care Reform—Yes, We Need It!

By Sherman Hope, M.D. Brownfield, TX

Whether we like it or not, money drives our society, including the medical system. How to reform our health care to get the most for our medical dollars is the real question in the current debate over health care reform. Unfortunately, it has become a public scandal as many Republicans block reform unless they get their way and some Democrats do essentially the same.

If we are going to have any real reform, there are certain basic economic facts that need to be addressed. These need to be resolved with cooperation—not with hostility and conflict. Our nation has the best medical care in the world, but it can be improved.

**1. Our current system gives essentially a monopoly to about a dozen insurance companies, who operate to make money for their shareholders, NOT to provide health care.** They set their rates (which go up yearly); they decide which doctor their customers can see; they set the doctor's fees; they decide if and how long the patient can stay in the hospital; they withhold payment from the doctor and providers as long as possible; and they deny claims through unlimited bureaucracy and paper work.

Insurance companies and government agencies have set drugs lists from which the doctor must choose or else the drug isn't covered by their plan. These lists are changed at least yearly, and are not always the best drug for a particular situation. It is estimated that about 20% of every dollar companies receive goes for their profit, administration, and political activities, but not for health care. Since health care comprises about 10-15% of all of the gross national production of our nation, this gives millions of dollars of profit to a very small, self-serving group, and takes more millions away from actually providing services for patients. If the public thinks that government medi-

cine is bad, at least it is not trying to make money for itself, and it couldn't be much more "controlled" than how our current system works.

**2. Tort reform (lawsuits and medical liability laws) is a must.** Virtually all doctors and medical providers spend excessive amounts of time, and certainly order excessive laboratory and imaging studies (X-rays, CAT Scans, MRIs) in order to be prepared for legal defense when (and not if) they get sued. Almost invariably, some time in their career, there is a very strong possibility that they will be sued. Virtually every twisted ankle gets an X-ray (\$100 or more) and virtually every head problem—whether headache or a bruised head—gets a CT scan or MRI (\$1,000—\$2000) even if the symptoms and physical findings are minimal. The same tests are usually repeated if another doctor or institution is consulted.

When there are no laboratory and imaging studies and a medical lawsuit occurs, there is a greater chance of getting judgments against medical providers. But in the end the public pays the bill. The doctors and institutions must increase their charges to cover the cost of malpractice insurance. These excessive and medically unneeded tests also hike the cost to the patient.

Tort reform is also needed to decrease drug costs. It is estimated that drugs cost twice what would be necessary because of the law suit problem—the multiple million dollar settlements and the nationwide TV advertised class action suits. Tort reform needs to be national not just statewide. Tort reform has been blocked by the lawyers, who compose the majority of our national congress, both Republicans and Democrats.

**3. Standardized billing for medical services should be instituted.** The current billing system for medical services is a fiasco. Doctors and institu-

tions all have different ways to bill for their services. Almost never is the first statement accurate and in most cases it takes months to get the payments, co-payments, and deductibles correct. Delays in payments and uncertainty of what will be paid by the insurance companies and Medicare/Medicaid confuse everyone—both the patients and the providers of medical care.

**4. Portability of medical insurance should be nationwide.** When people change jobs or move to a different state they should be able to continue their medical insurance. Local states should not give a monopoly to a particular medical insurance company.

**5. Access to the medical community must be available.** Having insurance, or a government program benefit, is of no use if there are not enough physicians to furnish services, especially primary care services. This means providing money and emphasis on training of more primary care physicians. Under our current system, most specialists will earn from two to six times the annual income of the primary care doctors, so of course, there is a great tendency for young doctors to go into specialties, or even super-specialties, where the money is better and the working hours are usually shorter.

**6. Health care reform is not socialized medicine.** Physicians, laboratories, hospitals, and all health care providers are already under supervision through licensing laws, recertification requirements, etc. Hospital peer review committees, medical societies, and state government groups can and do review quality of medical care. Freedom of choice of medical care providers and treatment will remain in the hands of the patients even with health care reform—at least as much as it is now.

**7. Access to the medical community also means access to choices in health insurance plans.** No company

or government entity should have a monopoly on medical care. There must be competition produced by cost, service, availability, and quality of care. Nothing deteriorates the quality of care (and at the same time increases the cost) as much as an institution (whether government agency, charitable hospital, or private provider) having a monopoly or major dominance of the medical market with little or no competition. Under our current system, very few people actually have a choice in their care or medical insurance. The choice is made by their employer who makes contracts with medical insurance companies on a financial basis, and not necessarily in the best interest of the patient.

#### **8. Preventive health care should be a priority in medical reform.**

Preventive health care is less costly than trying to treat or cure a disease. For example, treating hypertension (high blood pressure) is less expensive than treating its complications of heart disease and strokes. Taking care of diabetes is less costly than the care of the amputee and the blind patient resulting from uncontrolled diabetes. Finding breast cancer via mammogram and treating it early is less costly than the care of the advanced cancer patient. Immunizing patients is less costly than treating the complications of a disease. Good prenatal care is less expensive than treating premature and damaged infants.

Thus far, everything I have mentioned is either cost saving or at least cost neutral, and it would improve our current medical delivery system. Only partisan politics (both Democrat and Republican) and vested self-serving financial interests stand in the way of these reforms. With the attitude of “keep it the same” and “don’t mess with the best medical care in the world,” there is great opposition to reform. But, nothing as complicated as medical care and its delivery on a fair basis is not so good that it cannot be improved.

#### **9. Now I will get into the more controversial area—expanding medical care to our people.**

This does cost

money, lots of money. Is it worth it? It depends on a person’s viewpoint of what the government should do. The basic function of government has been historically to provide peace and protection for its citizens. So initially, even in our own country, it consisted of military defense, police protection, and fire fighters.

Then public health, such as clean water and sewage disposal, became a government function, costing more. Additional money was spent by the government on public education, as this responsibility was assumed (although this is still opposed by some groups). Then came public work projects—roads, dams, canals, airports—all costing more money. Social projects, such as public housing, food stamps, public hospitals and, agricultural price support became part of our society’s policy and expectations—again costing much more money and generating more opposition.

But the costliest of all social projects are Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid. Still the public has been willing to pay for these programs.

The current question is whether or not our people are willing to provide more medical care to the public, and how to finance it. Should we expand our medical care to those who do not have adequate resources for their own medical care? Should we require insurance or government coverage for those who are already sick (have pre-existing problems)? Should we allow insurance companies to drop coverage on patients that have multiple claims or have expensive chronic diseases? Is health care a “right” or a “privilege”? Is it a social issue, a moral issue, or a political issue? Again, this depends on one’s viewpoint.

*Morally*, most ethical and religious groups recognize an obligation to help the sick and infirm. *Economically*, a healthy population is more productive for a society’s well being. *Socially*, our country is more congenial when there is not the great division between the “haves and have-not” (in obtaining medical care or other issues of social justice). *Medically*, allowing all people

access to affordable care (via insurance or otherwise) will help relieve the strain on our Emergency Departments and other urgent care providers. *Institutionally*, providing some form of payment for the poor will help the general public in part because hospitals would not have to “soak the rich” (meaning those who pay their medical bills) to make up for the losses from those with no financial resources.

So, how do we pay the bill? I leave that to the professional politicians who seem to find money for the other “necessary” government functions as well as for their local pet projects that keep getting them reelected. Certainly a nation at peace has more resources than one that is spending multiple billions of dollars fighting two wars.

Regardless of the method used to provide for our nation’s most needy, the problem should be addressed. And even if this problem of providing additional medical coverage is not solved in the current political climate because of the cost, partisan politics, or other reasons, there is still no excuse not to begin instituting some of the reforms and improvements needed. Health care reform? Yes, we need it. ■

# Love Beyond Your Theology<sup>1</sup>

By Wade Burluson, Pastor Emmanuel Baptist Church, Enid, OK

**Note:** Active in Southern Baptist denominational life, Burluson has been a member of the International Mission Board, President of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (2002-2004), and he was also named Oklahoma Religious Broadcaster of the Year in 1998. This address was delivered at the Midwest Regional Conference of the New Baptist Covenant in Norman, Oklahoma, on August 7, 2009.

Shortly before His betrayal, Jesus gathered His disciples around him and said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By (your love for one another) all people will know that you are my disciples*” (Jn 13:34-35).

On July 4, 2009, Baptist pastor Rick Warren spoke at the 2009 Islamic Society of North America Conference in our nation’s capital. Over 40,000 Islamic believers gathered in Washington, D.C. for this conference, considered to be the largest annual gathering of Muslim Americans. Pastor Warren challenged the gathered Muslims to join Christians in *modeling for the world* what it means to:

First, **respect the dignity of every person** by not merely tolerating people . . . but valuing them.

Second, **restore civility to civilization** by disagreeing without being . . . disagreeable.

Third, **reinforce the protection of the freedoms of speech and religion** for . . . every individual within our respective cultures.

Warren proposed that in this very diverse world, when Christians and Muslims model this mutual respect and love for each other, while protecting the freedoms of the individual, an even greater *common* good will arise—peace. Warren pointed to the 60,000 different kinds of beetles as evidence

that the God of all peace loves diversity. As for me, I believe that God’s love for diversity is irrefutably proven by the 60,000 different kinds of *Baptists* God has created!

Rick Warren—a family friend since the late 1970s when he attended Southcliff Baptist Church, a church which at the time was pastored by my father—acquitted himself and all evangelicals quite well in his speech before those 40,000 Muslims. Some Baptists have expressed surprise that the Muslims issued Rick an invitation to speak. Other Baptists have expressed regret that he accepted. My disappointment is that the different kinds of Baptists like those of us represented here at the New Baptist Covenant Conference, and others who are not here, were not in the audience in Washington D.C. to hear the speech ourselves.

For it seems to me that we Baptists can never really value Muslims, treat them with civility, or grant them the freedom to speak and believe as *they* see fit until we first learn to treat our different kinds of Baptist brothers and sisters around the world in the same manner. In other words, until I can treat **all** my Baptist friends with dignity, value them as people, and respect their views—particularly and especially those Baptists who disagree with me—it will be impossible for me to treat Muslims in the same manner. Likewise, until my liberal or moderate Baptist friends experience Christ’s love in their hearts for me, a theologically conservative Baptist, and until they value my personhood, respect my views, and work with me toward a greater common good, it will be impossible for them to do the same for Muslims. The greatest barometer for how well we Baptists understand the importance of *agape* love, which Scriptures call **the** distinguishing mark of followers of Jesus Christ, is our

treatment of each other.

This evening I would like to make a personal confession to you my Baptist brothers and sisters, who do not see eye to eye with me either theologically, socially, morally, spiritually, or politically. I come from a long line of Baptist preachers. The Burluson family settled in Texas with one ancestor, Dr. Rufus Burluson, becoming the first President of Baylor University. My branch of the Burlusons moved to Oklahoma at the turn of this century, and several of the Burlusons would eventually become pastors or missionaries. We like to talk about the Baptists in our family, but don’t often mention the Burluson who is the only person to ever escape from Alcatraz [smile]. I have served two terms as President of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO), and now I pastor a large church in northwestern Oklahoma. Tonight I speak for myself only. My confession and corresponding repentance is personal, spoken with a heart that genuinely desires to do my part to build bridges between all Baptists who name Christ as Lord.

The people I pastor know what kind of Baptist I am—Calvinistic in my soteriology, partial-preterist in my eschatology, open communion in my ecclesiology, conservative in my theology, inerrantist in my bibliology, and continuationist in my pneumatology. (*I know this sounds like a medical diagnosis, but these are the proper labels for my theological views*). I held these views when I began pastoring over a quarter of a century ago, and I hold to them unto this day. I have not changed what I believe, **but I myself have changed in one very critical area over the past few years.**

I now believe deep in my heart that Jesus is more concerned with *how we Baptists treat each other* than He is with *what we Baptists teach each other*. The people loved by Christ—particularly

those who differ with me—are to be far more precious to me than any finer point of *theology* believed by me. Jesus did not tell me that it would be by my “truth” that all people would know that I am one of His followers, but by my “love.” The only description ever given of our Lord was that He was a person “full of grace and truth.” Word order is important in Scripture. Grace should not just precede truth, it should permeate it. Or as our host Jimmy Allen so brilliantly puts it: “*Our love should reach beyond our theology.*”

A few years ago, Pastor Julie Pennington-Russell held the hand of her seven year old son Taylor as she walked through the picket lines that had formed outside Calvary Baptist Church, Waco, Texas. The picketers, Baptists from surrounding churches, were there protesting Julie’s call to become the pastor of Calvary. As she walked through the picket line her little boy squeezed her hand, pulled his mother down where she could hear, and then asked, “*Mommy, who is Jezebel and why are they calling you that?*”

It has been said that when the old Irish immersed a babe at baptism they would leave out the babe’s right arm

so that it would remain “*pagan for good fighting.*” I have sometimes wondered if it is our custom as Baptists to plunge all but the convert’s mouth into the baptismal waters to keep the Baptist tongue “*pagan for good fighting.*” I confess that in years past, it has been easier for me to stand behind a principle and say something negative about the character of those who disagree with me than to simply love my fellow Baptists who do not see eye to eye with me theologically.

I have not changed what I believe, nor have I moved away from a conservative view of the infallible sacred text, but what has changed is the need to point out that people who disagree with my interpretations of the Bible are less Christian, less “spiritual,” and less loved by God than I. This is simply not true. The love of God for His people never changes or wanes, regardless of our actual or imagined *theological* unfaithfulness. Or perhaps it should be stated by me more precisely. God’s love for His people never wanes or abates regardless of my fellow Baptists actual or imagined theological unfaithfulness. Jesus warned us that we tend to focus on the speck in our brother’s eye while ignoring the plank in our own. I am now commit-

ted to follow the commandment of my Lord and to display total and unconditional grace, kindness, and love to all my Baptist brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of our theological differences. *You* are more important to me—more so than even my principles—and this is both biblical and Christian. To me, this is the peculiar mark of real, genuine Christianity.

This, of course, does not mean that we should not speak out when we perceive an injustice against God’s *people*. It is often the wise and prudent course to graciously keep silent when we hear fellow-Christians voice interpretations of Scripture that are contrary to our own interpretations, knowing that we are fallible people dealing with a sacred text. But when a fellow human being, ESPECIALLY a believer in Christ, is personally being abused or mistreated, our silence or non-action can never be justified or condoned by Christ and His sacred command to love one another. Those who risk everything to correct injustices against Christ’s people, who diligently protect the powerless in God’s kingdom, who defend the downtrodden in this world, who rescue the abused, and who care for the needy are expressing the love that Christ mentions as the peculiar mark





of His followers.

It has come to my attention these past few years that my sisters in Christ within the Baptist faith are often in need of such defense. The parallels between the modern American Baptist woman and the 19<sup>th</sup> century American Baptist black person are numerous. To defend a gifted Baptist woman today is considered by some Baptist men as an unbiblical act. To call any mistreatment of Baptist women today “un-Christian” is tantamount to treason in the eyes of some Baptist leaders. Many Baptists, particularly in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), believe that to defend Baptist women and to attempt to set them free to serve to the full extent of God’s call and giftedness in their lives is a denial of the faith. But I propose that any action taken to prevent the mistreatment of Baptist women in ministry is the most loving thing that can be done to both the victim and the one who is oppressing. In my opinion, the protection of a Baptist woman who minister is the fulfillment of Christ’s biblical command to love each other as Christ has loved us.

In 2004, Dr. Sheri Klouda was terminated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s faculty as the distinguished professor of Hebrew because the seminary’s new male administration held to a principle that a “*woman should never teach a man.*” Dr. Klouda was released from the job of her dreams and forced to relocate to Indiana, taking a position of far less pay at a Christian college. Sheri’s husband, Pinky, whom the SWBTS administration knew was suffering from critical cardiac problems at the time, had to leave his medical care in Fort Worth because of the forced relocation. Sheri’s daughter also had to leave her much beloved high school where she was to graduate the very next year. Sheri and her family were forced from a house in Fort Worth that they had purchased just a few months earlier—all because of a seminary administration following a perceived “theological principle.”

When our church contacted Sheri a few months after her termination, we discovered she was selling pints of

her own blood to help meet medical expenses for her husband. Regardless of one’s views regarding women “teaching” men at Baptist seminaries, the question each Baptist faces is whether or not the treatment of Sheri Klouda fulfills Christ’s commandment that *we love one another as Christ has loved us*. If it does not, then something must be done. The God who shed his blood for us would not want us turning a blind eye to His people selling their own blood for the sake of others. Over several months our church helped raise over \$20,000 dollars for the Klouda family. Christ’s command to love one another precludes silence or indifference when injustices occur. We are not even allowed by our Lord to hide behind our principles when it comes to loving His people. *Our love should reach beyond our theology.*

For this reason, it seems to me, that if we Baptists are serious about loving one another in the manner that Christ has loved us, then we cannot, we must not, remain quiet or silent when we see our Baptist sisters in Christ suffer. Baptist women in ministry, believers like Sarah Stewart, from whom we heard a testimony tonight, are women we are called to love, support, and protect. These women profess a call from God, show real evidence of being set apart by Christ, and they have experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified to the world—yet many of them are being subjected to abuse, and that by Baptists. When our Baptist women in ministry experience such personal mistreatment, ridicule, or harm, we are commanded by Christ our Lord to bind up their wounds—and sometimes we must even take the weapon of abuse out of the hands of the perpetrators of those wounds.

In 2004, during the last business session which I moderated at the BGCO, an extraordinary, godly woman from Quail Springs Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, was elected second vice-president. I will never forget the sight from the platform as several men throughout the auditorium stood and literally turned their backs

to the platform as they voted “against” the first woman to be elected to a general office within the BGCO. That moment was an awakening for me. I realized that any cherished principle that would ever CAUSE a Christian to be uncivil, unkind, or unloving toward a sister in Christ is a principle that should be thrown out for the sake of obedience to the command of Christ to love one another. I am not offended by those who wish to argue with me over this point for your argument is not ultimately with me, but with Jesus Christ. It is His command, not mine.

History will one day look back on how we Baptists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century treated our women who were called by God to minister. It is my prayer that conservative, Bible-believing men will not make the same mistake our Southern Baptist forefathers made when they remained quiet two centuries ago as another minority experienced abuse. The ground at the foot of the cross is level so that there is no supremacy of whites, no supremacy of males, and no supremacy of the rich—the wall of partition has been removed, and we are called to love every believer in Christ the way Christ loves us.

I will never forget the email I received from one of the young ladies in our Baptist seminaries who wrote me, confiding that she typed with tears in her eyes, having just come from her “preaching class” where the professor allowed all the “men and boys” in the class to remove themselves from the room so they would not be subjected to hearing a woman teach the Word of God. The young lady found herself preaching to the walls and wondered whether or not she had a place in Baptist life. I reminded the young lady that she was not preaching to the walls, but to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit who were One in her midst as she preached. The prophet declares that God sings over His people with joy (Zeph 3:17) and I guaranteed her that the Father sings all the louder over a woman who unashamedly and boldly declares the glories of His Son!

One of these days we Baptists will get to the place when we realize that

publicly censoring women preachers like Julie Pennington-Russell, firing Baptist women professors like Sheri Klouda, walking out on women preachers like that young seminary student, or turning our back on women Baptist leaders—acting as if women don't have a place in the kingdom of God—says more about *our lack of love and grace* toward all the followers of Jesus Christ and our own disobedience to Christ's great commandment than it does our *"love for truth."*

Last week National Public Radio religion editor Barbara Bradley-Hagerty interviewed me for a piece she was doing entitled, "Baptist Leaders Face Challenge On Women's Roles." She quotes me in the radio interview saying, "*Jesus treated women as equals,*" and reported that I believe *"there is a quiet underground movement within the convention to rethink women's roles."* After my quote you can hear slow laughing from a deep voice in the background—"Ha.. Ha..Ha.." It was the Director of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, who was with the interviewer in Washington D.C. He then tells the radio audience, "*Burleson is dreaming.*"

I reflected on the Director's statement. He is a brilliant man, capable of playing three dimensional chess and formulating his rationale with cogent logic. He, like I, believes in an inerrant Bible. Upon reflection of his statement that I was dreaming, I came to the conclusion that he is right. "*I have a dream . . .*"

*I have a dream* that a woman like Wendy Norvelle, former acting Vice-President of the International Mission Board, will be promoted to a permanent position of leadership among Baptists because of her qualifications and gifts—and not barred from promotion because of her gender.

*I have a dream* that a Southern Baptist woman like Major Paige Heard, the Regimental Army Chaplain at the historic West Point Military Academy, will be heard preaching the gospel at 10:30 a.m. every Sunday at the historic Cadet Chapel, and we Baptists

will all know and believe that Major Heard is honoring Christ in her proclamation of the gospel and be proud to call her one of our Baptist chaplains.

*I have a dream* that Baptists will one day make much over the gospel that women like Sarah Stewart preach and absolutely nothing over the gender they possess.

*I have a dream* that unlike slavery in the 1800s, Baptists in the South will realize the Bible speaks *against* patriarchal homes where wives are slaves to their husbands, autocratic churches where women are servants to leaders, and authoritarian societies where women are subservient to men.

*I have a dream* that young women in our Baptist conventions can follow great women missionaries of the past and travel overseas to share the gospel with both men and women, baptizing converts in the name of Jesus Christ and nurturing them in the ways of Scripture—just as Lottie Moon did in China over 150 years ago.

If some Baptists would say to me that my dream is simply capitulation to the agenda of radical feminists, I respond with loving, but firm words: "*No! Setting Baptist women free to serve is not relenting to societal or cultural pressures, but rather, it is fulfillment of the commandment of Christ Jesus Himself.*" Regardless of whether or not my fellow Baptist conservatives agree with what I believe the Bible teaches regarding the real equality of women in Christ's kingdom, there is no wiggle room when it comes to the commandment of our Lord. *Every Baptist is obligated to love our Baptist women as Jesus has loved us.*

I do not know of one time when Christ has ever withheld from me any good gift, has stifled my expression of any praise of Him, or shut me up from proclaiming His Word—so logically His commandment to love my sisters in Christ as He has loved me should negate any and every attempt to withhold from our faith community a Baptist woman gifted by Christ. Our obedience to His command should preclude any attempt to stifle a

Baptist woman compelled to publicly praise Jesus Christ. It should lead us to resist any effort to shut up or censor any Baptist woman called to preach Christ and Him crucified. It is impossible for my Baptist brothers to point to any text—let me repeat this—*it is impossible for my Baptist brothers to point to any text*, properly understood in its context, that ever compels Baptist men to suppress Baptist women in terms of ministry. On the contrary, we are called by our Lord to support and love these women of faith just as our Lord has loved us.

Black Mesa is in the far northwestern edge of Oklahoma's panhandle. Its summit is 4,972 feet above sea level, just under a football field of being one mile high. It is the highest point of elevation in Oklahoma. People come from all over the world to observe the stars that "kiss your nose" at night on Black Mesa. This past June, on a sunny afternoon, I hiked to the top of Black Mesa. As I rested and reflected on the plateau before my descent, my eye caught a passenger-jet flying east to west above me. I could clearly see the plane's fuselage and the long, white crystallized cloud the jet formed as it crossed the blue sky. I thought about the couple of hundred passengers heading west.

Then I looked down and saw a Burlington Northern-Santa Fe train snaking its way west as well. Beside the train was a modern state highway where a handful of cars were also heading west. Just a few miles south of the railroad tracks and the highway, easily seen from my position on Black Mesa, was the old Santa Fe Trail (Cimarron Cutoff). Most travelers and traders heading west in the 1800s took this trail by horseback, wagon, or even on foot. As I was thinking about all this, I pulled out my Blackberry Curve and saw that I had missed a couple of calls.

And then it hit me. For the past 200 years the mission of every person who traversed the land before me was simple: Go West! Their mission never changed—it was always the same—West, West. Go West! But the

methodology of going to the West has changed over the years—by foot, on horseback, in a wagon, by train, to car, and now by plane! How foolish would it be for someone today to insist on the earlier methods that were used in the 1820s, to accomplish their present mission of heading westward!

For Baptists our mission has not changed for the past 200 years—nay, for the past 2000 years. Our mission is to proclaim Jesus, to preach Jesus, to publicize Jesus, to present Jesus, and to give Jesus to a lost and dying world. *Our mission is all about the story of Jesus.* Men and women of faith are called by the One who commissioned us to support and love one another as we seek to fulfill that mission.

It is time we Baptists see that the methodology by which we share Jesus *must* change, or we will die a slow death without ever accomplishing our mission. Whenever institutions crystallize their methodologies rather than their mission, that institution becomes brittle and dies. Jesus commands us to love each other—love those different from us, love those on mission with us, love each and every follower of Jesus. How we fulfill our mission will continually change. The walls are down. Our methodologies should be fluid, but our mission shall never change.

You may not like the fact that women are now being called by God to preach, or called by God to do missions, or called by God to teach. You may even consider it a violation of your principles for a woman to teach a man, or preach Christ to a man, or baptize a man, or lead a man, but there is one thing that you and I cannot and must not forget.

*You and I are called to love each and every sister in Christ who feels called to ministry.* We are called to affirm the dignity of every Christian woman called to minister. We are commanded to treat them with respect and civility. We are also called to love, respect, and affirm the autonomy of local Baptist congregations and denominations that utilize these gifted women in ministry as they see fit. To censor them, reject them, abuse them, or condemn their character is a sin of the first order.

The principles Rick Warren gave to the Muslims one month ago are just as relevant to all us Baptists today and for the years to come. The only way we will ever have peace between Christians and Muslims in this world is when we Baptists first begin to value the dignity of our sisters in Christ who are called to minister, to respect those churches that call them to serve, and to protect the individual freedoms of our fellow Baptists to think, believe, and act as their conscience leads them in obedience to Christ and

His Word. It is only then are we will we display the kind love that Jesus says will distinguish us from the rest of the world.

May the God of all peace give us the grace to live in this manner before all people for Christ's sake. Amen. ■

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## Red Letter Christians

(continued from page 2)

Red-Letter Christianity is composed of citizens under God's rule, a spiritual kingdom.

**Third, Jesus Did Not Teach Hatred And Retaliation, But Love And Forgiveness.**

The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) seemed unrealistic to that first-century audience. Most felt it was too radical and idealistic. At best, naïve and impractical. To respond to evil with love and forgiveness would be foolish!

And 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians struggle with the same questions. Did Jesus really mean what he said? Is forgiveness and love possible in a world full of hatred and retaliation?

If we are honest, we know most Christians simply ignore these ethical ideals, believing they are impossible to obey in the real world. Other followers of Jesus try to interpret them as historical exaggerations or literary hyperbole. But for those disciples who accept the veracity of the Scripture, these teachings cannot be so easily dismissed.

The *lex talionis*—"an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"—was the common law of retaliation in the first century. But Jesus countered, "Do not resist an evildoer . . . turn the other cheek . . . walk the second mile" (Mt 5:39-41).

The accepted rule in Jesus' day was "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy," but Jesus abolished that rule by commanding, "Love your enemies

and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:41-42).

Later Jesus told Simon Peter that Christians are to forgive not just seven times (the Law required three times), but seventy times seven (Mt 18:21). By that number Jesus meant not just 490 times, but rather a habit of forgiving that stops counting!

So again the crucial question, "Did Jesus really mean what he said?" If he did, then is not our response as children of God, as citizens of the kingdom of God, and as disciples of Jesus Christ, to walk as he walked, to live as he lived, and to love as he loved?

Red-Letter Christianity is not only possible, it is imperative. ■

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1 Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008), 21-29. Campolo spoke on this subject October 14 at Gambrell St. BC Ft. Worth at a CET sponsored event.

2 Ibid., 9.

3 Commentaries are replete with the fabricated story about a certain entrance called the "eye of the needle" that required a camel to kneel to enter, to diminish Jesus' statement that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom" (Mt 19:24).

4 Small leather cases holding Scripture passages from Deuteronomy 6.

# Foy Dan Valentine: Helping Changed People Change the World

By David Sapp, Second Ponce-de-Leon BC, Atlanta, GA

Foy Dan Valentine was for twenty-seven years executive director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the ethics agency of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination. During that time he served on two presidential commissions, he was identified by *The Christian Century* in 1975 as one of the twenty most innovative leaders in American Christianity; and he helped to move the SBC toward a greater ethical consciousness, particularly in the area of racial justice.

In my years of knowing him, I have become convinced that the key to understanding the contributions of Valentine is that he was an activist, not a philosopher or an original scholar, although his scholarship was keen. He labored with relentless courage and unshakable conviction to move the world toward righteousness. Others theorized; others systematized; others wrote more prolifically; but no one contributed more toward changing the world.

As a matter of fact, Valentine's motto was "Helping Changed People Change the World." He had it inscribed on small desk plates. He kept one on his desk for many years. He gave them to his staff as a reminder of the task they were about. After thirty years, I still have mine in prominent view on my own desk.

I first heard the name Foy Valentine when he came to the campus of Mercer University to speak in the mid-1960s during my time as a student there. Several of my professors were so excited about his visit that it was obvious, even to this somewhat oblivious freshman, that he was a very different kind of denominational executive. The faculty's admiration for Valentine was based strongly on their deep admiration for his courage and his insight, particularly on the race issue.

I had just completed my final degree and was working on the staff at Southern Seminary, when one day a receptionist buzzed my and announced, "There's a man named Valentine on the phone." That phone call led to five years of employment at the Christian Life Commission, and it birthed a life-long friendship with the man who had so influenced me when he had spoken at Mercer a decade earlier.

Over the next thirty years I was to know Foy Valentine as friend, colleague, and consummate advisor. He was, in the phrase of some forgotten way, both my mentor and my tormentor. I write as one who knew him well, but I cannot write as one who would critique his work with objectivity. Still, I believe I have learned in very special ways the immense contribution this man has made to the field of Christian ethics.

## Forces That Shaped Him

Every person is a product of the forces that come to bear upon him or her. Among other things, Valentine was a Texan, a child of the Depression, a Baptist, a Huguenot descendant, a family man, and a theologian.

His roots grew deep in East Texas soil. Born on a farm in Edgewood, Texas, on July 2, 1923, the son of fiercely independent farmers Hardy and Josie Valentine, he grew up during the Great Depression, possessed an independent spirit, and possessed one of the most profound senses of self-discipline ever seen.

Valentine was oriented to that place as well. He was shaped by its brand of hardscrabble living and by its fiercely independent spirit. His home county, often called the Free State of Van Zandt, was the site of an 1877 battle in which residents took their guns to a field to fight over which town would be the county seat.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he was most profoundly shaped by

his beloved Pleasant Union Baptist Church where, in his word, he "got a good case of religion" and where he was buried January 11, 2006.

Perhaps a bit of that Van Zandt County independence arose from people who, like him, had French Huguenot ancestors. He was immensely proud of his Huguenot heritage, and that pride seemed somehow to result in his acquiring the same confident and defiant spirit that possessed those courageous French Protestants. He stood against racism, against immorality in general, and against fundamentalism in ways that would have made the Huguenots take pride in him.

Valentine left Edgewood to go to Baylor University and his student career put him at the feet of several great teachers. He became fascinated with geology, developing a lifelong avocation of studying and collecting rocks. Among the most influential of his teachers was the Browning scholar A.J. Armstrong. Quotations from both Browning and Shakespeare colored his popular preaching and writing.

One other teacher is worthy of special mention, although he was not a professor. Just after his graduation from Baylor in 1944, he spent a summer at Koinonia Farms with the famed Clarence Jordan. So at the youthful age of twenty-one, Valentine traveled to Georgia to work under Clarence's tutelage. There he experienced firsthand a powerful model of interracial living. In Clarence Jordan, he found a kindred spirit, a preacher deeply rooted in scripture, and a Christian tenaciously committed to its radical teaching.

The bond that formed that summer was strong. When he was ready to leave, Jordan gave him a signed, blank check, with instructions to fill it out and cash it whenever he had a need. Until his death, Valentine carried that check in his wallet, cher-

ished but uncashed. He would visit Koinonia again in 2002 to participate in the fiftieth anniversary of its founding where he displayed the uncashed check as he recounted his experiences at the farm.<sup>2</sup>

He hitchhiked from the farm back to Texas at the end of that summer to enter Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. There he encountered his most revered teacher, T.B. Maston, professor of ethics. Valentine became one of Maston's many doctoral students completing a Th.D. degree under his supervision.

Valentine was also very much shaped by the family of his adulthood. His wife, Mary Louise, and their three daughters, Jean, Carol, and Susan, shared his convictions and stood by him in his fight against moral corruption. Mary Louise was his equal (she would say his superior) at Scrabble—and at life. Without doting, she constantly reinforced him in his public role.

### Contributions to the Christian Life Commission, SBC

Unlike most prophets, Valentine was an organization man. While he despised what the Southern Baptist Convention became after the fundamentalist takeover began in 1979, he worked as a Southern Baptist Convention insider for most of his life. He understood the danger of institutions and never gave them unquestioning loyalty, but he also understood

their value and their power. He worked hard to harness that power for good and opposed abdicating it to evil.

In 1960 Valentine was invited to become the executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission of the SBC, a role he would maintain for twenty-seven years. His arrival at the commission represented the convergence of two streams in Southern Baptist life.

The first stream derived from the Social Service Commission, an agency that was established by the SBC as a small recognition of the relevance of the gospel to the culture around it.

The Texas Christian Life Commission was born in 1950 and employed as its first executive director Dr. A.C. Miller. Miller had for the previous six years headed the Department of Interracial Cooperation for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

When the national Christian Life Commission (CLC) was born as the successor to the Social Service Commission, A.C. Miller was tapped to be its first executive secretary. With his appointment, the name was changed to "The Christian Life Commission," and the confluence of the two streams was complete. The year was 1953. Southern Baptist ethics work had begun in earnest.

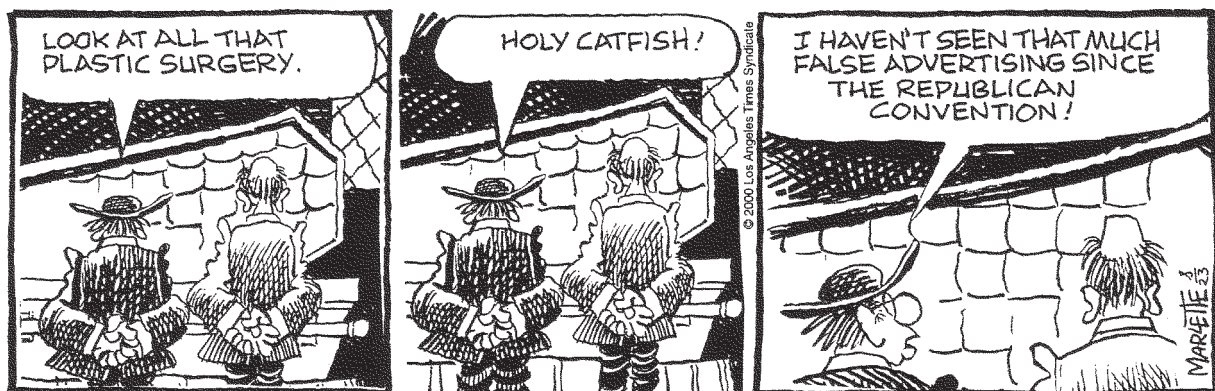
Meanwhile, The Texas Christian Life Commission turned to Valentine as its second leader. He had served during 1949-1950 as a campus min-

ister for colleges and universities in Houston, Texas, following his seminary graduation; was serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Gonzales, Texas; and moved to occupy the role of director of the growing commission. Again, Maston was influential in recruiting his doctoral graduate to this role where he served as chairman of the commission's elected board.

By 1960 Miller had retired from the commission, later to teach at Fruitland Bible Institute in North Carolina. Meanwhile, his young successor in Texas was tapped to head the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Valentine was only in his mid-thirties when he went to the SBC commission's helm. The CLC took a new turn under his leadership. He made it into an agency that was a model of effectiveness on the American religious scene. While a graduate student at Southern Seminary, I heard historian Martin Marty call the CLC "one of the most creative forces in American Christianity." To the extent that this was true, it was largely because of the work of Foy Valentine. If it is true that an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man, the CLC was his very large shadow.

Under Valentine's leadership, the commission fostered the formation of ethics departments in several of the Baptist State Conventions. These included such Baptist strongholds as Mississippi, North Carolina, and



Virginia. These state ethics organizations were effective in standing against such negative social evils as gambling and alcoholism, and they fought strongly to strengthen families and apply the gospel in the arena of daily work.

Under his leadership, the CLC raised the ethical consciousness of Baptists. Both he and the staff wrote prolifically for Baptist periodicals. Young Baptist leaders were cultivated for the cause. Valentine and the commission's staff were quoted frequently in the national press, and they testified with regularity before Congress and presidential commissions. Wherever they could speak a word for righteousness, they did it.

The nature of the CLC's assignment placed it often in the center of controversy, but in spite of numerous motions made on the floor of the annual SBC, one of which (to Valentine's amusement) called for the CLC "to be dissolved," he did not regard most of them as serious threats.

There was one serious threat to the commission's existence prior to the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC in 1979. It occurred about midway through Valentine's tenure when a group called "The Committee of Fifteen" threatened to recommend to the convention the elimination of the CLC. This move was serious because it was backed by a few very powerful Southern Baptist administrators.

Ultimately, this effort failed, and the destruction of the commission was postponed until the fundamentalist movement ended it by transforming it into an instrument of the radical right.

Administration for him was simply another way to advocate the cause of Christian ethics. His administrative style was so tough and direct that staff members sometimes found it uncomfortable to work for him. He watched their work carefully, and he watched they work style and their work habits, subjecting all who worked for him to the same rigorous standards he set for himself. While this style had some clear disadvantages, it served the CLC well in the long run. His careful surveillance of the work of the staff meant that he was their most ardent defender whenever they might come under attack. His toughness gave him the ability to take the heat when in the fiery furnace of moral debate and enabled him to stand firm against his enemies. As is so often the case, what appeared to some to be a flaw turned out to be a strength.

Finally, the agency he built was lost. The political revolution of 1979 changed the SBC into something it had never been before. The CLC was given a new board of trustees populated by people with a different vision. Under direction from powerful fundamentalist leaders, they transformed Foy Valentine's beloved commis-

sion into the ethics voice of the religious right. It is now the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC.

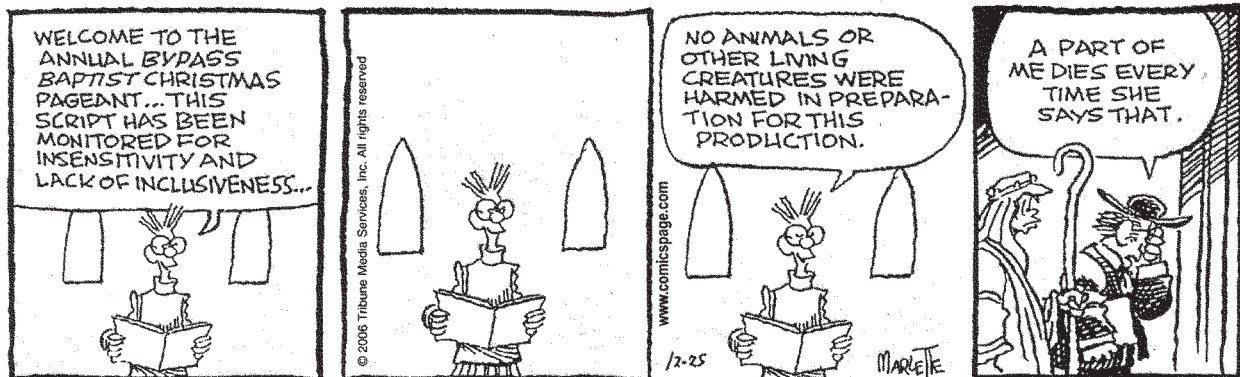
Some might say the corruption and dissolution of the CLC demonstrates the futility of investing one's life in institutions. But the good that was done for the kingdom during the years of the CLC's influence more than justifies Valentine's investment. The achievement was bigger than the institution and outlives it. Furthermore, in the spirit of the prophets, once more a seed had been planted.

### Contributions to Baptists

Foy Valentine helped raise the ethical consciousness of a generation of Baptists. Through a variety of means, he was able to use the platform of the agency he headed to advance the cause of Christian ethics.

As one of its principal activities, the CLC published tracts on moral issues. These tracts were published as series with titles such as "Issues and Answers" and the "The Bible Speaks," and sought to give readers biblical food for thought and current information on which to base ethical judgments. These tracts were sometimes controversial, especially as seen by those who disagreed with their ethical perspective.

The commission also conducted a National Seminar each year that featured many of the moral movers and shakers of the American culture as



speakers. This meeting took on such importance that it was considered by many to be the most significant meeting in Baptist life. Not only did it become a forum where Baptist leaders were challenged to think about the great issues of the day, it was also a forum that nearly always made significant news, often on a national scale. Other conferences were held with regularity, some of them small regional conferences and some of them issue-oriented conferences.<sup>3</sup>

The CLC also played an instrumental role in the SBC's resolutions on moral issues. The convention had historically adopted resolutions, which ranged from those expressing thanks to the host city to those speaking on some particularly pressing issue. Valentine seized the opportunity to press the convention toward a more responsible voice. Resolution after resolution spoke to the pressing ethical needs of the day, and many of those resolutions had their origins in his mind.

During my service on CLC staff, we often drafted resolutions for people who wanted to introduce them, and occasionally we introduced resolutions ourselves. He saw this as a part of the commission's role in being the conscience of the convention.

In recent years, however, some Baptists have called into question whether such resolutions, adopted by a group of people meeting in annual session, are a good idea. They are often the occasions for controversy, and some feel that they are so divisive that ethical perspective must be expressed by other means. Valentine never agreed with this perspective. He had much more in common with other outspoken ethicists, like Isaiah and Jeremiah. For him, righteousness was a cause to be championed. It was a reality to be fought for. It was a dream to be realized. The fact that debates over righteousness stirred deep passions only reinforced for him the conviction that evil was real and that it was splendidly and powerfully arrayed against the forces of God. In his view it needed bold champions, not timid sympathizers.

Something of this contentious part of his character evidenced itself in retirement when he preached in a local church in Dallas. The pastor approached him afterward and said, "Dr. Valentine, I envy your retirement. It frees you to speak your mind." He replied in a flash, "Oh, I didn't wait on retirement. I've always done that." Having been closely associated with him for many years, I can vouch for the accuracy of his self-perception.

In the end, Valentine was committed to a cause, not to an institution. But unlike so many others, he understood that the cause must always find an institutional expression in order to be effective. He operated out of a sense of divine call, not out of a contractual obligation.

In his retirement he made what may prove to be his most important contribution. He birthed the Baylor Center for Ethics, now thriving at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He also birthed *Christian Ethics Today*, a periodical devoted to the causes to which he gave his life. Even in his waning years, he was building for the cause that had consumed him first in Edgewood, Texas.

### **Contributions to the Larger Culture**

Valentine's role at the CLC gave him a unique opportunity to contribute to the culture's discussion of ethical issues. He made the most of the opportunity and quickly earned a reputation as one who did not always espouse popular views.

*Race.* Valentine's leadership on race began to emerge on the national scene as early as 1954. On May 17, 1954 the Supreme Court of the United States handed down one of the most important decisions of American history. The decision, known ever after as *Brown vs. Board of Education*, struck down the separate but equal doctrine that had protected schools since the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision in 1896. *Brown vs. Board of Education* was obviously unpopular among white Southerners, but almost immediately three leaders of the SBC went to work to get the convention to support the decision. A.C. Miller of the Southern Baptist

CLC, T.B. Maston of Southwestern Seminary, and J.B. Weatherspoon of Southern Seminary joined forces to act.

Their lieutenants were a notable group of young leaders: Texas pastor Jimmy Allen, Texas CLC Director Foy Valentine, former Social Service Commission leader Hugh Brimm, and a host of others went to work. Their work was productive. In June 1954, just weeks after the decision was handed down, the SBC meeting in annual session in St. Louis, Missouri adopted a statement supportive of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. This action had great significance, but it has largely been forgotten by contemporary Baptists.

Then in 1968, at the height of civil unrest in America, Valentine persuaded the SBC to adopt another statement, this one called: "A Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation." The statement contained a courageous confession. "As a nation we have allowed cultural patterns to persist that have deprived millions of black Americans, and other racial groups as well, of equality of recognition and opportunity in the areas of education, employment, citizenship, housing, and worship. Worse still, as a nation we have condoned prejudices that have damaged the personhood of blacks and whites alike."

These are but two examples of hundreds of efforts he made to move the culture toward justice. In addition to actions like these, Valentine tirelessly traveled, preached, and wrote promoting the cause. No doubt the platform his position gave him garnered attention that others would not have received, but his courage and eloquence commanded their own share of attention as well. Through it all, he contended for righteousness and gained a reputation for moving the white Baptists of the South into a new day.

*Separation of Church and State.* Another issue Valentine considered to be of consuming importance was separation of church and state. During the earlier part of his career, Southern

Baptists held true to the 400-year old Baptist commitment to church-state separation. Dallas First Baptist Church pastor George W. Truett gave a famous speech on the steps of the United States Capitol on this subject. Southern Baptist leaders like Atlanta pastor Louie Newton had been instrumental in forming Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, now known more simply as Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Baptist commitment to this cause was unquestioned, just as it had always been.

Then, late in Valentine's career, a seismic change occurred. The emergence of the Christian Right marked the transition of evangelicals in general and Baptists in particular from a marginal minority to what some perceived as a "Moral Majority." With increased political clout, many "Baptists" decided that the separation of church and state stood in the way of their access to power. What had always been a hallmark of Baptists suddenly became a hallmark of liberalism.

Foy Valentine never moved. The SBC had assigned church-state separation to the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs. The CLC never engaged the issue of church-state relations, but he was nevertheless an ardent defender of this time-honored Baptist principle. He wrote on the subject, and despite stinging criticism, he served several terms as president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The case he made was always the historic Baptist case: religious liberty can only be insured when church and state are separate. Our liberty is too precious to trade for a seat at the table of political power and too precious to abandon to the vagaries of Baptist public opinion.

*Abortion.* The abortion debate was at its peak when Valentine retired from the CLC. While he was basically conservative on the issue, Valentine believed that abortion was in some circumstances the least available evil. He led the SBC in those years

to adopt resolutions supportive of that position, and he signed a highly publicized statement in support of abortion rights, "Call to Concern," circulated by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights in 1979. For this, he was roundly condemned by the religious right. As a matter of fact, one of the first actions the fundamentalists took after taking over the leadership of the commission was to replace its pamphlet "Issues and Answers: Abortion."

Valentine addressed nearly every other issue that arose, but his manner of addressing these issues is worth noting. One of his primary tools was his writing. A denominational leader has no pulpit, of course, but he does have a pen. He was a gifted writer and one of the few people I have ever known who could write a first draft in what I considered to be publishable form. (He disagreed with my assessment of his abilities.)

He used his pen poignantly. Over the course of a career, he wrote thirteen books, a host of articles, a plethora of speeches, and many sermons. According to his sense of his own calling and identity, his books were not philosophical explorations, but practical applications of the gospel to life. In his writing, as in everything, he was content to leave philosophizing to others.

Valentine was also a careful steward of public righteousness. He actually believed that testimony before congressional committees, quotes in newspapers and magazines, and public speeches made a difference. I believe Jeremiah would have agreed with him, as would Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt. Even Adolph Hitler, working for a very different cause, would have affirmed the power of a speech. Nevertheless, the moderate Baptist movement of today has many adherents who believe that this method of addressing issues is counterproductive. They choose rather to abandon the field of public discourse to the religious right. His life and ministry was based on a different perception.

Of course, there is no substantive way to measure one person's contribution to a conversation as large as the one in which he participated. One can only point to the fact that through the influence of Valentine and others, the nation's attitude about race has changed. The legal protection of a woman's right to choose is in place. Church-state separation has lost ground, but has not disappeared. His efforts were not in vain.

I stood misty-eyed beside his grave January 10, 2006 as he was laid to rest. Pleasant Union Baptist Church served as a poignant backdrop. Yet even as we put his body in the ground, another issue of *Christian Ethics Today* was being prepared, dozens of those whom he influenced were continuing his cause, and God's truth was, as always, marching on. Even as Foy Valentine now rests in peace, somewhere God is raising up another prophet, as yet unknown. ■

*This article is reprinted by permission of Mercer University Press, 2008, from the book, **Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics** (Larry L. McSwain, Editor; Wm. Loyd Allen Historical Consultant). For a review of the book see that section in this issue.*

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- 1 Texas State Historical Association, *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online).
  - 2 Larry L. McSwain, interview with Foy Valentine, 1 November 2002, Koinonia Farm, Americus, Georgia.
  - 3 Foy Valentine, ed. *Peace? Peace?* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967) was a compilation of one such conference held at the Southern Baptist Convention conference centers in Ridgecrest NC and Glorietta NM.



# The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life

By Tripp York, Instructor of Religious Studies, W. KY U., Bowling Green, KY.

I have never cared for the pro-life vs. pro-choice debate. Linguistically, it is not even possible to have an argument as the words 'life' and 'choice' do not mean what the debate requires them to mean for there even to be a debate. The issue of semantics, however, is not why I am writing this article. In terms of abortion, I am far more concerned with the manner, style, and content of Christian witness in terms of not only what we argue, but how we argue. Specifically, I am concerned with how some of those who deem themselves pro-lifers underwrite a form of witness that assumes, ironically, a posture of atheism.

Christianity makes a number of claims about itself, one of them being that a life lived in obedience to God is a fulfilled life. That is, in conforming one's will to the will of God, a person is realizing their ultimate purpose. A Christian's true end is found in the worship and glorification of the Triune God. Throughout the history of Christianity, many theologians have even ventured so far as to suggest that in order to know what it means to be fully human one must know Jesus (a claim that, unfortunately, has had disastrous anti-Christ like repercussions). Jesus is the exemplar of full humanity, tradition argues, due to the perfect accord of his will with the Father's. Therefore, for those of us who follow Jesus, we do not know beauty, goodness, peace, and truth until we conform our lives to the life of Jesus.

I do not imagine, for a moment, that many of us find the life of Jesus genuinely attractive. That is, if you are looking for a paradigmatic model for how to get rich, lose weight, shape your body, make friends, or find a 'soul mate' (a thoroughly pagan concept if I have ever heard one), then the life of Jesus is probably not for you. He was hated, reviled, had no place to lay his head, didn't have a savings account,

and suffered the indignity of capital punishment. The vast majority of Jewish prophets before him, as well as Jewish and Gentile disciples and apostles after him, met similar fates as they lived similar lives. The early church, for her first 300 years, was neither tolerated nor enjoyed the sympathies of many of its detractors. Followers of Jesus were ostracized, ridiculed, and burned at the stake for their commitment to Jesus. Their way of life, modeled after Jesus, was not acceptable to the various 'authorities.'

Yet, despite it all, Christianity grew. For some reason, many people found it compelling—even attractive. It did not offer riches, fame, or cultural comfort. There were no self-help books attached to the path of Christ. The Joel Osteens, Joyce Meyers, and Robert Schullers of our day would never be possible in the early church. Christianity was not attractive based on what it could possibly do for your resume, status, or bankroll. It attracted people because Christians were willing to die to themselves, to give up control on the reigns of history, to live as outcasts and exiles, and even found it better to die at the hands of their enemies, rather than fight back or kill them. For many people in the first few centuries, this way of life was absurd; yet, some, strangely enough, were compelled to it. There was something about the way the church, on its best days, gave witness to Jesus that attracted others to its fold.

What does all of this have to do with the abortion debacle? My fear of an implicit atheism at root in some pro-life advocates is that their desire for the elimination of abortion assumes that Christianity, on its own merits, is no longer compelling. Rather than do the hard work of providing the kind of life predicated on Christ that could attract others, many Christians would rather make and enforce laws that would

require others to live as they live. It is as if they concede, a priori, that their way of life could never compel another human being to think differently about, in this case, abortion, so they take the easier route by forgoing the difficult task of constructing alternative communities predicated on the path of Christ and choosing, instead, to force others to live as they would have them live. This is, I think, both a subtle and a desperate form of atheism that assumes a Christian's way of life could never be appealing to a non-Christian. This makes me question whether or not such a life contains any truth to it since it cannot be shown, but must be imposed.

To summarize, I have no theological problem with the convictions that renders a Christian pro-life. To be honest, I only wish that many pro-lifers would take their claims more seriously and apply this appellation to issues dealing with, for instance, capital punishment and war. My major contention with many pro-lifers is their incredibly shortsighted understanding of what constitutes life. Pro-lifers exhibit great concern about the preservation of blastocysts, yet if we extend the argument to criminals, non-human animals, and enemies of our tribal nation-states, many quickly become radically anti-life. I would actually like to see more consistency on their part.

But what I would really like to see is how we, as Christians, can live our arguments in such a way that we do not need to coerce others to live the way we want them to, but that we can actually show the beauty implicit within the path of Christ by the way we live our lives. Abraham Heschel claimed that there are no proofs for the existence of God, only witnesses. If you want to convince others of what you see as problematic about abortion, then live a life that reveals what

*(continued on page 29)*

# Breaking Up the Good Old Boys' Club

By J. Lee Grady, Editor, *Charisma Magazine*.

My Southern Baptist parents taught me to open doors for women. But in the polite culture in which I grew up, I didn't see too many pastors practicing that habit. Sure, they allowed women to teach children's classes, take care of babies, have prayer meetings and cook fellowship meals. But women weren't allowed near a pulpit unless they were singing a solo.

I never heard a woman preacher until I joined the charismatic movement in the 1970s. It took a while for me to get used to the idea, since the church I grew up in taught that women were most spiritual when they were silent. It wasn't long, however, before I realized that most women in charismatic and Pentecostal circles struggle to fulfill their ministries. I began to see evidence of discrimination—and even abuse—everywhere:

- One woman started a drug-rehab ministry and led more than 80 people to the Lord. She met with them twice a week doing discipleship and teaching as well as hours of personal counseling. When she asked the senior pastor if he would designate her as staff pastor, he met with his elders and then announced that she would be called “half-pastor”—simply because she was female.
- In many churches the wives of pastors are expected to work long hours alongside their husbands doing ministry work, yet they are not paid. They are viewed as lesser-important appendages.
- I have talked to countless women who were labeled “Jezebels” because they simply asked their pastors if they could teach a class or have a ministry opportunity.
- I have stacks of letters from women who suffered in abusive marriages. When they went to their pastors to get help, they were told the abuse

would stop if they would become more submissive.

- A pastor reprimanded one woman who was leading a women's retreat because she served communion to the ladies without a man present.
- Another woman was told that the ladies in her Bible study would be deceived if a man did not sit in the back of the room to “cover” the meeting.

All these examples point to a “good old boy” culture that still permeates our churches. Much of it is simply rooted in a false understanding of New Testament passages about women. In some cases, male leaders are uncomfortable around women, either because of insecurity or a misogynous spirit.

It's way past time for Christian leaders to move from male dominance to gender partnership. Here are seven truths we must ponder as we make this shift:

## 1. God has always empowered His daughters.

During Israel's wilderness journey the five daughters of Zelophehad asked Moses if they could have an inheritance in the Promised Land. They made this bold request at a time when women had no civil rights and no hope for equality. Under the rules of the day, their family was denied land rights because all of Zelophehad's children were female.

When Moses prayed about this dilemma, the Lord contradicted the male-dominant culture of the day. He said: “The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them” (Num 27:7).

We rarely hear sermons about these daughters today, even though their names are listed in the Bible in five different places. Even in the old cov-

enant period, God made it clear that His daughters were not to be relegated to second-class status. How much more are they to be considered “fellow heirs” (1 Pet 3:7, NASB) under the new covenant!

Pastors today must learn the same lesson God taught Moses. In some churches women are offered nothing but limitations, discrimination, and neglect. Yet God has placed in them a desire to possess spiritual territory. They want to partner with us in battle and share our victories. Will we open the door for them—or slam it in their faces?

## 2. Jesus included women on His team.

Traditionally minded Christians believe Jesus recruited only men to be His disciples. I want to shake these folks and ask, “Do you actually read the Bible?” It's true that all other rabbis in Israel in the first century ignored women and viewed them as the source of all the evil in the world. But Jesus was a very different rabbi!

Jewish leaders believed it was wrong to teach a woman from the Torah, but Jesus allowed Mary of Bethany to sit at His feet and learn from Him. Other rabbis would not stoop to associate with women in public, but Jesus allowed a sinful woman to anoint His head with her perfume. Rabbis would not get near bleeding women because they were ceremonially unclean, yet Jesus healed a woman who had bled for 12 years.

And in the time of Jesus, women were not allowed to testify in a court of law because they were considered ignorant and untrustworthy. Yet Jesus' women followers were the first to testify of His resurrection on Easter morning. Jesus broke every religious rule in the book when He allowed Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and His other women followers to be a part of His entourage (see Luke 8:1-3).

It is true that only men were among the 12 disciples. Those original apostles were also exclusively Jewish, yet we have never suggested that only Jews could be church leaders today. Why then do we point to the gender of those 12 disciples and insist that women should be excluded from leadership positions?

### 3. Pentecost broke the gender barrier.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the inauguration of a completely new season in church history. God did a new and marvelous thing. He took the anointing oil that had been reserved only for Jewish priests of the tribe of Levi and poured it out on both men and women, young and old, rich and poor, and Jew and Gentile.

When the Spirit was poured out on the men and women gathered in the upper room, each of them received a holy flame. The Bible does not say the men had blue flames while the women had pink flames. The anointing has nothing to do with gender and everything to do with Jesus Christ, the one who baptizes us with His Spirit.

This is why the apostle Peter quoted the prophet Joel in his Pentecost sermon, declaring, “Your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, emphasis added). And this is why Paul later told the Galatians that in Christ “there is neither male nor female” (Gal

3:28). Theologians have long referred to that passage from Galatians as the Bible’s great emancipation proclamation. Those who would deny a woman the anointing to preach might as well go back and live under the old covenant.

Equality in Christ does not mean that men and women should be androgynous. Empowering women is not about denying sex roles—nor is it about women overthrowing men. But if we want to be truly Pentecostal people we must release women to take their place in this newly anointed priesthood.

### 4. The apostle Paul trained and released women leaders.

For centuries traditionalists have misread and twisted Paul’s words about women. Citing two difficult passages (1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:12) they have forged a doctrine of female silence and subjugation that runs contrary to the rest of Scripture.

We don’t have room here to dissect these passages, but it should be noted that Paul was dealing with specific crises in Ephesus and Corinth when he made these statements. If we are to honor God in our biblical interpretation we must look at all Paul said about women, as well as how he worked alongside women.

When closing his letter to the

Romans, Paul mentions several women leaders who served on his apostolic team—including Phoebe, a deacon; Priscilla, a skilled Bible teacher; Tryphena and Tryhosa, whom he described as “workers;” Pesis, a Persian woman he labeled “hardworking,” and Junia, who obviously served in apostolic ministry (Rom 16:1-4, 7, 12). In other epistles he mentions women who led churches, such as Chloe (1 Cor 1:11). He also tried to reconcile Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:1-3), female ministers who had some kind of ministry dispute.

Paul obviously saw women as a strategic part of God’s plan. When he ventured into Europe he went to the place where women prayed—and Lydia, a businesswoman, was his first convert (Acts 16:13-14). The Paul who clamped down on female false teachers in Ephesus is the same Paul who supported his female ministry comrades. We need to stop making him out to be a chauvinist when he was the best model of a male leader who empowered women.

### 5. God’s family is made of both fathers and mothers.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see a constant theme of male/female partnership: Abraham and Sarah inherited their promise together; Deborah and Barak won a great mili-



tary victory; Mordecai and Esther overthrew a genocide plot; Priscilla and Aquila laid apostolic foundations in the early church.

Solomon wrote: "Hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother" (Prov. 1:8). From the beginning God called male and female to reflect His image—and the biblical family was formed with one father and one mother. God needed both genders to accomplish His purpose.

Yet in many churches today a woman's spiritual influence is minimized. We've either muzzled our women or simply displayed them like decorations on a shelf. When godly women are silenced the whole church suffers.

Many Christians are rightly concerned about the advancement of the homosexual agenda in our culture. We oppose the acceptance of same-sex marriage—as we should. But many of the same churches that argue for traditional marriage have adopted a policy of "same-sex ministry." They only allow men to preach, teach, disciple believers, and pastor the flock.

God is calling brave, passionate women of integrity today to step into the role of being a spiritual mother. Will we make fun of them like Eli did when Hannah groaned in prayer at Shiloh? Or will we bless them and make room for their spiritual gifts?

**6. The church cannot address social injustice against women without their involvement.**

There was a time in our nation's history when women were not allowed to attend medical schools. In the late 1800s doctors perpetrated the idea that women didn't have the intellectual capabilities needed to perform surgery or treat disease.

When women finally entered the medical field, women's health immediately began to improve in the nation: the child mortality rate declined, advances were made in gynecology and obstetrics, and a host of other problems were addressed—all because women who understood their own bodies could now contribute to medical progress.

The same holds true in the spiritual realm. Certain things won't change until women get involved. As long as women are denied opportunities in pastoring, evangelism, missions, and theology, we cannot move forward. When women are included, the church can authoritatively address important issues including sexual abuse, abortion, single-parent poverty, child slavery, gender discrimination, and domestic violence.

**7. We will reach more territory for Christ when both men and women are engaged in ministry.**

Even before women won the right to vote in the United States, an army of women missionaries was sent from this country to China, India, and Africa. Many of these women were single and weren't allowed to pastor churches while they were on hallowed

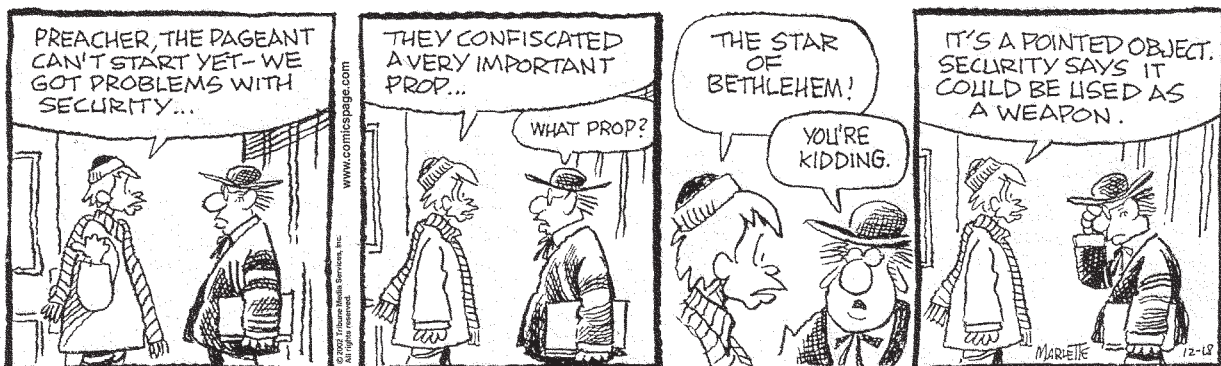
American soil. But when they got to the jungles and remote villages of the developing world they were transformed into apostolic ambassadors.

One Scottish woman missionary, Mary Slessor, single-handedly pioneered eastern Nigeria for Christ in the late 1800s and laid the foundations of the revival that still burns there today. Yet today, there are still churches in our country that would have told Slessor that she was only qualified to teach children in Sunday school or lead the women's prayer group.

This is the primary reason I have dedicated my life to raising up women leaders. I know that right now a large segment of the church has their hands tied behind their backs. Women have been bound, squelched, limited, devalued and denied—yet they represent a huge untapped potential. We need them on the mission field, just as we need them starting Christian businesses, defending the family, pastoring churches, evangelizing our cities, running for political office, and pioneering social reformation.

It's time for us guys to drop our fears and our macho attitudes—and anything else we've used to stop our mothers, sisters, and wives from claiming their spiritual inheritance. I challenge you to open as many doors for them as possible. ■

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# Bonhoeffer, Torture, and America

By David P. Gushee, Distinguished University Professor, Mercer University and President of Evangelicals for Human Rights

*"We begin this section by calling attention to one of the most astounding experiences we have had during the years of trial for all that was Christian. Whenever, in the face of the deification of the irrational powers of blood, of instinct, of the predator within human beings, there was an appeal to reason; whenever, in the face of arbitrariness, there was an appeal to the written law; whenever, in the face of barbarism, there was an appeal to culture and humanity; whenever, in the face of their violation, there was an appeal to freedom, tolerance, and human rights . . . then this was sufficient to evoke immediately awareness of some kind of alliance between the defenders of these threatened values and Christians."*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (339-340).

I spent the summer immersed in the massive Fortress Press critical edition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. I needed Bonhoeffer. I had been licking my wounds from three years heavily engaged in the fight against torture as an official instrument of United States foreign policy. That fight, in one sense, was won on January 22, 2009, when Barack Obama signed executive orders that marked a near total repudiation of Bush-Cheney policies which had officially permitted waterboarding and other forms of brutal abuse toward prisoners.

But before one could breathe a sigh of relief, the counterattack began. Led by former Vice President Cheney, President Obama was charged with endangering national security by taking such "valuable tools" as waterboarding and wall slamming out of the "interrogation" repertoire of the CIA. President Obama has not changed course, but the counterattacks have had their effect. Spring 2009 polling by Pew revealed that half of the American public said torture of terrorists could "often" or "sometimes"

be justified, with only 25% saying it could never be justified.

These results were bad enough. But what made them worse was that support for torture was positively correlated with religiosity, especially evangelical religiosity. Sixty-two percent of white evangelical Protestants supported torture often or sometimes, with only 16% of this group answering Never to torture. These results were higher than any other religious group and far higher than non-churchgoing secularists.

After the poll created a stir, Pew comforted us with the reminder that "Religion is only one of many factors correlated with views on the justifiability of torture . . . [Political] party and ideology are much better predictors of views on torture than are religion and most other demographic factors." Basically, two-thirds of Republicans support torture as opposed to roughly one-third of Democrats. Because most white evangelicals are Republicans, most support torture. So the problem, if it is a problem, isn't really religion.

Forgive me if I am not particularly comforted by this caveat. I somehow think that commitment to Jesus Christ, and grounding in the resources of Scripture and Christian faith, ought to function as the primary source of moral discernment for self-identified Christian people. And somehow it ought to be possible to move from commitment to Jesus Christ to unequivocal opposition to torture. In various ways over these years, I and others have sought to make this case.

While our side has won some victories and gained key supporters, we have to face the fact that despite everything, if a president announced today that it was time to start torturing again, three-fifths of my co-religionists would support such a decision. We haven't won the argument about torture in our own faith community. This president will not authorize torture. But the next one

might, and would find considerable support from the crowds who gather to sing "Amazing Grace" on Sundays.

This brings me back to the quote from Bonhoeffer with which I opened this reflection. Reading it brought to mind the many wonderful human beings and organizations I have encountered as allies in this fight against the descent into legally-sanctioned torture. While the Christian Right remained silent or supported torture; while the Christian "street" acquiesced in or supported torture; while the media engaged in he said/she said debates about the effectiveness of torture, these other people simply said a clear no.

I have met people I consider heroes. I applaud lawyers like Mark Denbeaux, John Chandler, Gita Gutierrez, and Tom Wilner, all of whom have represented Guantanamo detainees. I honor those who work with and for victims at the Center for Victims of Torture. I honor Jewish leaders like Rabbi Charles Feinberg and Rachel Kahn-Troster of Rabbis for Human Rights, and Muslim leaders like Yahya Hendi, and Mohamed Elsanousi of the Islamic Society of North America. I honor intrepid scholars and writers like Karen Greenberg, Jane Mayer, and Mark Danner, who have told us the truth when no one else would. I honor retired military leaders like John Hutson, Don Guter and Steve Xenakis who said no to torture at the time and today. I honor the human rights bulldogs at places like Human Rights First, the ACLU, and the Open Society Institute.

And so, to rework Bonhoeffer: *I call attention to some astounding experiences we have had during the years of trial and Christian apostasy. Whenever, in the face of the deification of nation, security, and the Way of Jack Bauer; whenever there was an appeal to reason, to international*  
*(continued on page 29)*

# Why Aren't You Drinking From The Tap?

By John Guilford, Engineer, Dallas, TX

Last month, as I have done for the past three years, I took a week-long mission trip with my church to Honduras. The trip had its challenges, not the least of which was an expulsion of the president within hours of our return flight. But by and large it was a great experience. We left with a feeling of kinship and support for our brothers and sisters in Honduras. We also left with a feeling of relief in not having to use bottled water exclusively.

One of the first things I did upon my return to Dallas was to drink long and deep from a water fountain. Such devices are non-existent in developing countries such as Honduras. Other water-based luxuries that we take for granted, such as ice in our fountain drinks, or slush drinks from the convenience store, simply are not to be found. Even if these things were available on the streets of Tegucigalpa, for example, virtually no one would use or buy them because the public water supply is full of bacteria and parasites.

During the Mission Trip, I worked in our makeshift pharmacy in support

of the doctors that we brought down with us. I can tell you that at least 90% of the patients we saw had active or recently treated parasites. I'm sure the public water supply is to blame.

With all this in mind, why is it that so many of us in the United States still purchase and drink bottled water? Our cities and governments have spent billions of dollars to provide us safe, drinkable water at pennies per gallon. Many cities and towns tout their "Superior" public water supply ratings. Yet I am regularly amazed when I see people shell out a dollar or two for filtered tap water, in many cases.

I have heard the reasons why: "It's cold." "Tap water tastes funny." "I'm in a bar and I'm an alcoholic." All of these are, at times, reasonable reasons why we might use bottled water. But on a national basis, the use of bottled water contributes to so many ecological problems, that I wish people would reconsider their approach.

For example: Bottled Water produces up to 1.5 million tons of waste each year. [Foodandwaterwatch.org](http://Foodandwaterwatch.org)

reports that it takes 47 million gallons of oil to produce those bottles. Other groups studying the issue report that it requires three times as much water to make the bottle as it does to fill it, and 60 million plastic bottles are disposed of every day in America alone.

My ideas were given a test on Saturday night at the July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks show at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. It was very warm and with no breeze blowing, everyone was looking for something cold to drink. For sale at the concessions there was a choice—Soft drinks or bottled water, each for \$3. Why weren't there just long lines at plentiful water fountains?

The recession has forced many people to curb their bottled water use. While we are learning to do without, I suggest that it might be a good time NOT to restart the habit of drinking bottled water once we can afford it again. So many countries' residents drink bottled water by necessity. Thankfully, the United States is not on that list. We do have choices. We should at least think twice before picking up that case of bottled water. ■



# LGBT Pastoral Ethics in a Baptist Tradition

By Cody J. Sanders, PhD Student, Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, TX.

If this article's title provokes confusion, it may be because the letters LGBT are noticeably missing from the lexicon of moderate Baptist life. For those unfamiliar with the acronym, the letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. If the acronym is relatively unknown among Baptists, it is perhaps because the words behind the letters are steadily avoided as anxiety-producing and divisive terms. It is clear, however, that moderate Baptists cannot forever avoid the issue of sexual orientation. This was made even clearer by Broadway Baptist Church's recent ousting from the Southern Baptist Convention. Both our sister denominations and the culture at large have faced LGBT issues head on for decades now and, with the exception of a few sweeping proclamations from denominational bodies (including the Southern Baptist Convention), Baptists have largely been content to keep silent (some might say "in the closet") on issues of sexual orientation. It is time for Baptists, particularly those of the moderate persuasion, to engage in serious, prayerful and intelligent discussion about sexual orientation.

## An Issue for Congregations

If for no other reason, sexual orientation is an issue for the congregation by virtue of simple statistics. Social science research suggests that around four percent of the population of the U.S. is of a non-heterosexual orientation. If a local congregation is a microcosm of the surrounding society, that means that for a church of 100 individuals, approximately four persons are of a non-heterosexual orientation. Add to this the startling reality reported by The National Institutes of Health that 30% of all youth suicides are committed by gay or lesbian youth,<sup>1</sup> sexual orientation seems an issue that congregations cannot afford to ignore. For most of these youth

there exists an extreme lack of supportive relationships with understanding adults. These statistics challenge us to alter our question from "Is this an issue for our congregation?" to "How will our congregation respond to the reality in which we live?"

Even in the face of this reality it is tempting to concede to a collective fear of divisiveness and disunity and doggedly avoid the subject of sexual orientation in the congregation. Ignoring an issue of such importance will not create a climate of genuine unity, nor has such a head-in-the-sand posture any hope of speaking a prophetic witness to the culture at large. As we take our lead from the prophetic ministry of Jesus, who regularly acted on behalf of the outcast, David Gushee rightly calls for "the complete recognition that when Jesus calls us to love our neighbors, that includes especially our homosexual neighbors, because the more a group is hated, the more they need Christ's love through us."<sup>2</sup> Surely no genuine love or Christian embrace can be extended until there is honesty, openness and a commitment to unity amid diversity within the local congregation and among the wider body of Baptists. That unity cannot be forged in silence.

## Reframing the Questions: A Pastoral Ethical Approach

Approaching dialogue on an issue garnering such intensity of emotion requires a sense of purpose that reaches beyond merely arriving upon a definitive "answer" to the complex multitude of questions raised by sexual orientation. Rather, for such a risky endeavor of congregational inquiry to take place, we must have in our sights the human beings affected not only by the outcome of our discussions but the content and methodology we use in such a dialogue. Many who tackle LGBT issues from a congregational perspective do so with the intent of

arriving upon a moral answer that can be promulgated as the congregation's "position" on sexuality. This quest often takes place with the guidance of the seven scriptures in the Old and New Testaments thought to speak of homosexual activity. David Lull, however, suggests that if our congregational conversation is limited to the hermeneutical or interpretative questions of scripture then "the church will be stuck in the gridlock created by two mutually exclusive and irreconcilable approaches to the interpretation of Scripture."<sup>3</sup> While keeping one's attention fixed on the text of scripture seems appropriate in a congregational context, one misses the importance of the "living human document" brought to prominence by Anton Boisen, founder of the Clinical Pastoral Education movement. In addition, we should all have our hermeneutical assurances tempered by the diversity of interpretative conclusions derived by individuals and churches across the theological spectrum on issues of sexuality.

Providing what seems a more complete frame for a discussion of LGBT issues, Stassen and Gushee ask, "What shall we say to, and about, men and women who (a) experience their sexual desire as being insistently directed to members of the same sex; and (b) desire to bond with a member of the same sex in the same kind of permanent faithful monogamy that some heterosexuals enjoy?"<sup>4</sup> Notice the directionality of this question. What do we say *to*, not just *about*, LGBT persons? While "saying about" seems purely ethical in its intent, "saying to" ventures into the realm of the pastoral. The melding of these two foci requires us to cling a little less exclusively to the answers derived from an interpretation of the written text alone, driving us into the complexity of the living human document with which we must continually dialogue.

While the written text of scripture may suffice for a more distant, comfortable, and safe discussion of LGBT issues, the voice of pastoral theology helps us to face with intellectual and spiritual integrity the complexity of the human situation that is inextricably involved. Once again reframing the focus of our dialogue on LGBT issues in a pastoral ethical light, John Cobb suggests, "Instead of putting matters in purely moral terms, the Christian church should ask a different question. What does it recommend as a lifestyle to those whose sexual attractions are for members of their own sex?"<sup>5</sup> Such a question demands more from us than putting down in print a cold proclamation about sexuality to present to those interested enough to read it. Rather than a "word *about*," it requires that we speak a "word *to*" LGBT persons and the congregations charged with their care. This venture is what David Switzer describes as going "into situations that may be frightening, the out of the way places, to talk with 'foreigners,' to those of whom many of our church members do not approve, often when we have something else to do . . . when we are very tired, when we feel anxious, when we are not sure how we are going to respond helpfully."<sup>6</sup> Such a conversation is a risky venture indeed.

### Why Being Baptist Makes a Difference

Being Baptist makes several contributions to our discussion of LGBT issues, some liabilities and some assets. The first is that we are already a bit behind in the conversation regarding sexual orientation. Other denominations and the wider American culture have openly explored LGBT issues for some decades now and moderate Baptists have much ground to cover in order to even be up to speed. Another issue with which many Baptist congregations must contend is a latent suspicion, perhaps even distrust, of the scientific and psychological fields. Pastoral theology and the field of ethics have much to gain from a dialogue with the biological and social sciences.

In no case is this truer than in matters of sexual orientation. Whether we shut ourselves off from these modes of inquiry or open ourselves to their valuable voices will largely depend upon the congregation's willingness to put these fields into conversation with theological and biblical material.

What moderate Baptists have going for them, however, far outweighs these potential setbacks. The first of our assets in dealing faithfully with LGBT issues is the historic Baptist principle of the autonomy of the local congregation. Whereas our sister denominations are often bound to toe the official denominational line on issues of sexuality, Baptists have the privilege of engaging in dialogue at a congregational level. While this provides great freedom of inquiry for each congregation, there exists a fear that is kindled anew with each passing year of being removed from associational or convention rosters for falling too far outside of an "orthodox" position on any given hot-button issue, perhaps especially sexual orientation.

Gradually moving away from our temptation toward exclusion, we might hope to rediscover the beauty that exists in the freedom of each congregation to cooperate with diverse sister congregations in the *missio Dei* (the Mission of God) without need for doctrinal conformity. Wherever our dialogue may lead us, let us be true to the Baptist principle that each soul is competent to prayerfully and faithfully engage in the ever-expanding search for God's truth wherever it may present itself. And may we be humbled by the acknowledgement that in whatever diversity of ways our search may lead us, we may all be wrong. Thus, engaging in genuine dialogue on LGBT issues asks us to take a posture of openness in which there remains the possibility of having our minds changed.

Finally, our recent history as Baptists in the South exists as both liability and asset. We are emerging from a precarious history that imbues our collective memory with the pain

and divisiveness created when issues of controversy are used as weapons against others for the sake of forced unity or the acquisition of power. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, no issue stands a greater chance of replacing the inerrancy issue of the past than that of sexual orientation. We must maintain an awareness of those who would seek to use LGBT issues for political gain, bludgeons against "heretics," or litmus tests for orthodoxy and strive to say outside of those ranks. While our history holds the potential for repetition, our past can also serve as a great asset if we are open to learning from its valuable lessons. ■

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- 1 Robert Brammer, *Diversity in Counseling* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2004), 179.
  - 2 David Gushee, "Opinion: On homosexuality, can we at least talk about it?," *Associated Baptist Press*, 27 March 2008, accessed 2 July 2008, online: <http://www.abpnews.com/3100>. article.
  - 3 David J. Lull, "Jesus, Paul, and Homosexuals," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34:3 (2007), 199-207.
  - 4 Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 309-310.
  - 5 John B. Cobb, Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, ed. Walter Wink (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 91.
  - 6 David K. Switzer, *Pastoral Care of Gays, Lesbians, and Their Families* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 9.



# “Show Me a Coin”

By Keith D. Herron, Senior Pastor, Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, MO

As Jesus approached the massive portals of the Temple he was surrounded by the crowds gathered there for the observance of the Passover. He dismounted from his humble little burro, gave the animal a gentle pat on the rump and soulfully started up the steps. Almost immediately he was approached by an aggressive, opportunistic businessman. “Step right this way! I can tell you’re from out of town so let me be of service to you before you go into the Temple. Those Roman coins in your pocket won’t do you any good here. They have a picture of Caesar on them and some of them even claim Caesar is a god. That won’t do here! The first Commandment expressly forbids the making of a graven image. No Roman coins here, so step right over to my humble booth and I’ll help you out by exchanging those idol-worshiping coins for some good Jewish money. Then you can worship in the Temple!”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He ignored the incessant chattering of the little man and let his eyes drink in the scene swirling around him in the Temple courtyard: Moneychangers were in their kiosks and the plaintive sounds of animals was almost overpowering. Lambs bleated loudly, and the doves cooed nervously as they were sold at outrageous prices to be slaughtered in the Temple as sacrifices for worship.

Suddenly the sense of holy desecration was overwhelming. With fire in his eyes, he grabbed the first table he encountered and flung it violently until it broke apart spilling its contents on the ground. The crowd froze in stunned silence. Seizing a whip, he sent the vendors and their animals scurrying and at the top of his lungs he shouted: “This is supposed to be a place where people pray! Instead, you’ve turned it into a place where people get robbed!”

The next day, Matthew tells us, the Pharisees plotted their trap by forcing him to answer their trick questions about authority. So they sent their zealous young disciples to ask him, “Teacher, we know you’re sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with the truth, and we know you show deference to no one. Tell us then, is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?”

Jesus knew what they were sent to do. He knew they were up to no good. “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?” he answered them. “Show me the coin you use for the tax.” One in the group immediately produced a denarius. Looking at the coin, he asked them, “Whose image do you see on this coin?”

The trap set for Jesus was sprung instead on them. “The Emperor’s,” they meekly answered. “Then give to the Emperor the things that are the Emperor’s, and give to God the things that are God’s,” he said in reply.

“Show me a coin,” Jesus said to them. And one of them fumbled in his pocket and fished out a Roman coin and gave it to him.

Interesting, isn’t it, when Jesus asked for a coin, they didn’t have Jewish coins in their pockets, but coins with the graven image of Caesar, who claimed to be divine? Some have preached these words as a lesson that articulates the differences between Christian belief and patriotism. How is it we hold in tension the twin realities of our identity as Christ’s followers while also being citizens of the state?

How do Christian believers keep the balance between religious practice and the commitment we have to have a society where everyone’s faith is respected equally? We hear a lot these days about the political power (clout) we have in our time and the issue of ultimate allegiance seems as relevant as ever. How do we strike the proper

balance between our allegiance to God and using our political power as Christians without bankrupting our faith in the process?

That question could not be more pertinent than this day when we argue over the faith commitments of Supreme Court nominees whose chief commitment is to the law of the land. What role does faith play in how justices view the law? In what ways are Supreme Court Justices pressured to interpret the law through the filter of their faith? We’re struggling with the issue of a dominant religion and its undue influence at military academies. We’re struggling to know what to teach about the origins of the universe in the science classrooms where the battle is over textbooks and theories of beginnings. We continue to struggle with the issue of school prayers and vouchers and the pledge of allegiance.

These are terribly difficult questions that demand our best efforts at being honest in our intentions. It also demands that we allow the freedom of raising the issue in the community of faith.

We see in many churches flagrant displays where the American flag adorns the altars of our worship or forms the backdrop behind the pulpits in our sanctuaries of worship. We have a right to ask the question: “Whose kingdom reigns here?”

Being a Christian in America raises the question: “What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus and a citizen of the most powerful nation in the world?”

Many Christians in this country have a nationalized faith that merges American patriotism with divine favor. That merger is one in which all our national endeavors are understood as the exercising of divine right. It’s a merger in which every action of our country is understood as an extension of God’s reign and power in the world.

The problem religious patriotism raises is this question, "Whose image do you see?" Jesus wants us to understand it is idolatry whenever our allegiance to our nation supersedes the allegiance reserved for God alone.

"Show me a coin," he said to them. "Whose image is on the coin?" Jesus' use of the word "image" is intriguing here. It was the Greek word *eikon*, the same word used in Genesis 1 to describe the image of God stamped on every human soul. The word *eikon* is the word that we derive our English word icon, meaning "image" or "likeness."

"Whose *eikon* is on the coin?" Jesus asked the young religious disciples sent by the Pharisees. "It is the *eikon* of Caesar," they answered.

And Jesus said, "Then give Caesar that which bears the *eikon* of Caesar." The coins might be under Caesar's control, Jesus reasoned, but people

who bear the *eikon* of God should be under God's control, not under the domination of the culture that wants to mar that original image by compromising the allegiance meant for God alone.

Jesus held up a coin and challenged them over the issue of ultimate authority. Then he turned the tables on them by challenging the idolatry that had ensnared them and was keeping them from the truth. The issue of paying our taxes opens up to the larger concerns of how much the needs of the state can be served by religion or vice versa. I'm proud of our heritage as Baptists on this delicate concern. When religion crawls into bed with the state, it does neither one much good. When religion uses the power of the state to do its work, it ceases being the work of God. And when the state seduces religion into a partnership of control for the few, freedom is

lost for the good of all.

Our Baptist forefather, Dr. George W. Truett, for many years the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, stood on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. and declared, "Christ's religion needs no prop of any kind from any world source, and to the degree it is thus supported is a millstone hanged around its neck."

Jesus asked those who questioned him "Render unto Caesar all those things that are Caesar's, but render unto God all those things that are God's." It was a good question then and it's good today. ■

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction adapted from a scene described in *A Word To and About Children* by Lib McGregor Simmons, University Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, TX (10/17/99).



# Book Reviews

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

## Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics

Larry L. McSwain (ed.)  
Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008.  
*Reviewed by Joe E. Trull*

McAfee School of Theology professor Larry McSwain has made a major contribution to the field of Christian ethics with the publication of this historical overview of nineteen Baptists who made significant contributions to the arena of social ethics. Look over the list: Rauschenbusch, Maston, Barnette, Clarence Jordan, Martin Luther King Jr., President Jimmy Carter, Tony Campolo, J. M. Dawson, James Dunn, and Foy Valentine—familiar names all!

McSwain and historical consultant William Loyd Allen also include a British pastor, two female voices for social justice, and an African-American liberation theologian, along with lesser-known Baptist teachers, thinkers, and writers who helped shape a century of ethical thought and

action. Most chapters are written by persons who had an intimate knowledge of the Baptist ethicist described.

Critics might accuse the editors of including a few who were not as significant as some who were omitted. Nevertheless, in a day when Christian ethics is either corrupted in some SBC seminaries or completely ignored in a flagship moderate seminary, perhaps this work will aid Baptist students with a basic understanding of the principal ideas and major contributions of Baptist ethical leaders of the last century. ■

## The Rising of Bread for the World

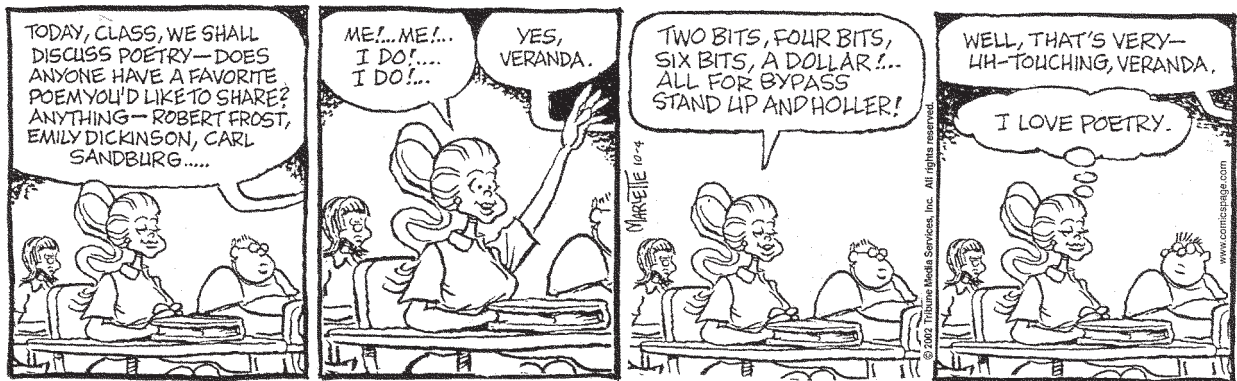
Arthur Simon  
New York: Paulist Press, 2009.  
*Reviewed by Darold Morgan*

When anyone becomes aware of efforts to meet the overwhelming challenges of hunger throughout the world, they almost instantly think of Arthur Simon and the universally acclaimed movement—"Bread for the World." This is perhaps the foremost citizen's lobby on hunger. This book,

authored by Simon, is not only his interesting and surprising autobiography, but it documents the birth and eventual maturity of this genuinely effective movement to get food to the starving multitudes throughout the world.

Simon's early years as a Lutheran pastor's son, his close relationship with his brother Paul (later one of the nation's truly great politician and statesman), his college and seminary education in the ultra-conservative Missouri Lutheran synod, his years as a Lutheran pastor in the tenement sections of New York City, his developing genius as an organizer and synthesizer—all come together in this delightful and powerful reading experience as one traces the unfolding of an idea of feeding the poor and hungry—a very successful life indeed!

The author's determination to keep "Bread for the World" authentically Christian is a major thing of beauty in his book. Alongside his delightful discovery of his organizing skills, one rejoices in his pulling together a blending of religious and political leadership that indeed is a primary reason for the



success of this effort to get food to the hungry. It began as a Lutheran effort, but Simon enlisted strong Roman Catholic, American Jewish, and Protestant leadership of all types—all coming together to fashion an effective way to address hunger and poverty.

A warm word of commendation is directed to Patricia Ayers and Phil Strickland of Texas Baptist life for their contributions to “Bread for the World.”

What emerges from this small paperback is a powerful reminder of how God can lead one man to levels of extraordinary usefulness. The issue of world hunger is a challenge that will not go away. The need is constant and increasing in intensity.

How Arthur Simon developed a keen eye and a steadfast heart for political effectiveness in Washington, D.C. and beyond is almost beyond belief. How he enlisted in this organization the men and women of outstanding influence is a story which is still unfolding. His original and unswerving commitment to feed the hungry is still the focus of “Bread for the World.” Read this book for the amazing story and you will be informed and inspired. ■

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## Finding God in *The Shack*

Roger E. Olson

Madison, WI: IV Press, 2009.

*Reviewed by Darold Morgan*

Professor of Theology at Baylor’s Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas, Roger Olson has authored numerous books on theology. He adds to his reputation as a serious thinker and a relevant commentator in this reflection on the remarkable literary phenomenon, the novel *The Shack*.

Millions of copies have been sold world-wide, launching a multitude of questions about the controversial portrayals of the Christian Trinity in the book, as well as the author’s concept of evil, redemption, and consummation. Is the novel heresy? Is it Christian? Can one find an authentic approach

to the philosophic enigmas of evil and redemption in the pages of this brutal, yet interesting novel?

Dr. Olson takes the view that the novel has a powerful and refreshing (and often controversial) basic Christian cast, and he writes perceptually, critically, and reasonably about the themes which emerge from this intriguing “Great Sadness” at the heart of the novel. Overall, Olson has a positive view of the theological and philosophical issues raised and he meets head-on some of the critical problems. Olson also forces the reader to determine which approach he or she will take, rather than demand that his own conclusions be accepted.

As a guide to biblical theology, Olson contends the novel has major weaknesses. And Olson does not gloss over these issues, but discusses them forthrightly. However, the extraordinary success of *The Shack* and the wave of discussions it has engendered combine to make Olson’s work an important commentary.

Overall, Olson is very positive about this best-selling novel, for he contends any book that provides understanding about the presence and power of evil is worth reading. ■

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## Abortion, Execution, and the Consequences of Taking Life

James D. Slack

Transaction Publications, 2009

*Reviewed by Gregory S. Butler, New Mexico State Univ.*

An extraordinary book of profound relevance for our time. The work will be of interest to scholars and students alike seeking an understanding of the manner in which the core values of Western civilization intersect with the most compelling public policy issues in American politics today. Slack has managed to produce a concise, well-researched volume that is at once scholarly and highly readable. His analysis of the central theoretical and practical issues at

stake in contemporary debates over abortion and capital punishment is particularly impressive. The sensitivity and humaneness that is a welcome departure from the cold utilitarianism that marks to many treatments of the subject. ■

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## Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things.

J. Daryl Charles, *Grand Rapids:*

Eerdmans, 2008, \$34.

*Reviewed by Monty M. Self, Little Rock, AR*

As the momentum of the twenty-first century picks up speed, it seems that morality and ethics are left behind. Each day brings a new technological advancement. Every week the world becomes smaller. Today, we sit at a table debating moral issues, but no resolutions emerge. We are caught like the early residents of Babylon, each speaking a different language. In our attempt to provide a place at the table for each religious and ethnic group, we have lost our common language for moral discourse. As the biomedical revolution reaches the speed of a supersonic jet, Christian ethicists are in desperate need of common ground for moral decision making.

J. Daryl Charles (Associate Professor of Christian Studies, Union University) attempts to lay the tracks for an open and public debate about biomedical issues on a foundation of Natural Law Theory. He writes, “The burden of this volume, rather, is to argue afresh for the acknowledgement of moral ‘first things,’ particularly as they affect ‘life issues,’ whether these be beginning-of-life, life-enhancement, or end-of-life in nature. Because the debates that rage today concern the very meaning and essence of life, they point us back to the natural law” (295).

In short, Charles’ new book *Retrieving the Natural Law* attempts to do several things. First, Charles argues that natural law theory is the com-

mon median which can be use for an open debate in a pluralistic society. In our thrust for mutual respect and the elimination of discrimination, we have moved away from the ideal of tolerance and towards philosophical apathy where no one seeks objective truth. In order to have a truly open debate about moral first things, society must build its dialog upon what we all share in common.

Whether one is Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, or Buddhist, it is difficult to reject the idea that we share a common nature and that nature is grounded in the natural law. Charles writes, "Natural-law thinking presupposes both the existence of universal moral norms and a basic awareness of these norms in all humans, Christian and non-Christian. The natural law is an imprint made on nature itself, inscribed by the moral Governor of the universe. Because it remains universal, eradicable, and immutable, the natural law provides guidance for life in a real world of contingencies" (155).

This common impression which is universally shared has the potential of providing a foundation for moral discourse in this pluralistic society. Charles argues, "Natural-law thinking thus provides a common grammar for moral discourse and a common basis for moral judgment in a pluralistic environment" (44).

Next, Charles provides an extensive survey of the history of the natural law and its interaction with Protestantism. Chapter three provides a detailed history of natural law theory. Charles goes beyond Aquinas and Augustine and traces the idea back to Heraclitus, Socrates, and Aristotle and then outlines its development through the post-World War II era. While chapter three is a valuable academic resource on its own, chapter four focuses upon the protestant rejection of natural law thinking. Unlike other authors, Charles does not shy away from common criticisms of natural law. He openly discusses problems associated with original sin, he responds to the accusation that Natural Law is not Christ centered and details the influ-

ence of the Barth-Brunner debate. Charles goes as far as to openly engage Hauerwas' criticism of natural law theory in *The Peaceable Kingdom*.

Last, *Retrieving the Natural Law* attempts to apply natural law thinking to biomedical issues. Charles is absolutely correct in his assertion that "It has become increasingly evident in recent years that most—if not all—of our culture's critical ethical and bio-ethical issues hinge in some way on the question of personhood" (195). One cannot really understand what "personhood" is without asking what it means to be human.

The book is commendable for three primary reasons. First, Charles provides a detailed but readable account of the natural law tradition. Next, *Retrieving the Natural Law* is a refreshing presentation of Natural Law from a Protestant perspective. In a since, Charles is the catalyst for encouraging many Protestants to return to the moral theory of the reformers.

While the book has a lot to offer the academic and popular reader, it is not without growing points. Charles needs to do more with his reconstruction of history. He needs to do more to explain the shift and explore the anti-catholic tendencies in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism. Next, the work appears a little disjointed. There is a clumsy transition from theory and history in the first half of the book to biomedical application in the second half. In addition, Charles' heavy use of emotive arguments like his heavy use of Nazi illustrations in chapter eight distracts from the power of a natural law argument against euthanasia and other biomedical issues.

In conclusion, *Retrieving the Natural Law* is an excellent text on natural law theory. It is encouraging to note that in a world where man-made laws are drafted and broken and drafted again with each new generation that there are some laws which have the power to stand the test of time. ■

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## The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life

(continued from page 17)

it means to reside in God's peaceable kingdom. This is an eschatological kingdom, already here, yet still to come, where the killing of any kind will be absent. By attempting to create and implement laws in a democratic society where Christians must live peaceably with non-Christians (and other Christians for that matter!), we are demanding that the state enforce our particular way of life, despite the fact that we have conceded, in the very act of attempting to create certain laws, that such a life has no compelling merits of its own. This, it seems to me, is atheism. ■

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## Bonhoeffer, Torture, and America

(continued from page 21)

law, or American law before it was corrupted; to culture and humanity, to freedom, tolerance, and human rights . . . it was possible immediately to discern some kind of alliance between the often "secular" defenders of these threatened values and to that minority of Christians who saw such values as an aspect of their own faith. ■

# Christian Ethics Today

*Index to Authors/Subjects* Volume 15, Issues 73-76 (2009)

**Note:** A complete index of Issues 1-58 (1995-Winter, 2006) is available on Compact Disc (CD) for a donation of \$50. The index of Issues 1-31 is also printed in Issue 31 (December, 2000), and an Index of each year's articles from 2000 to the present is found in the last issue of each year 2001 to the present.

## A

### Abortion:

- Can We Find Common Ground?, 73, 11.
- The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life, 76, \*.
- When Does Human Life Begin?, 75, 4.

### America:

- America's Never Been a Christian Nation, 75, 10.
- The Constitutional Convention, 75, 9.
- How To Save America, 75, 11.
- A Time to Rebuild America, 74, 18.
- Virginia and Religious Freedom, 75, 10.

## B

Baptists: Love Beyond Your Theology, 76, 5.

### Biography:

- Theology in the Service of the Church (Fisher Humphreys), 74, 10.
- Words From Walter Rauschenbusch, 74, 14.
- Foy Dan Valentine: Helping Changed People Change the World, 76, \*.

### Book Reviews:

- Abortion, Execution, and . . . Taking a Life, 76, \*.
- Baptist Theology, 74, 29.
- The Baptist Story, 74, 29.
- Does Ethics Have A Chance? , 73, 26.
- The Faith of Barack Obama, 73, 26.
- Finding God in The Shack, 76, \*.
- Harbingers of Hope, 75, 29.
- Hot, Flat, and Crowded, 73, 27.
- Life and Death Matters, 75, 30.
- A Pilgrim in Rome, 73, 30.
- Preaching and Professing, 75, 29.
- Quitting Church, 74, 30.
- Retrieving the Natural Law, 76, \*.
- The Rising of Bread for the World, 76, \*.
- Strategic Preaching, 75, 29.
- Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics, 76, \*.
- W.H. Whitsett, 74, 29.
- Zion's Christian Soldiers, 75, 29.

Brattston, David W.: Early Christian Opposition to War, 75, 21.

Burleson, Wade: Love Beyond Your Theology, 76, 5.

## C

Campolo, Tony: Can We Find Common Ground On Abortion?, 73, 11.

Church: Good Neighbor and Bad, 75, 17.

Corts, Thomas E.: Theology in the Service of the Church, 74, 10.

## D

Death: "When Death Becomes Birth," 73, 2.

Disney, Lindsay: When Does Human Life Begin?, 75, 4.

Downie, Alison: (Movie Rev.), 74, 24.

Dreher, Rod: What I Wish I'd Heard at Graduation, 75, 8.

Duley, Tom: The Church: Good Neighbor and Bad, 75, 17.

Dunn, James: God and Politics, 73, 9.

## E

### Ecology:

- Why Aren't You Drinking From the Tap?, 76, \*.
- Evangelicals and the Environment, 74, 13.

### Education:

- Fraud in Academia, 75, 24.
- What I Wish I'd Heard at Graduation, 75, 8.

Ethics: Two Essays on Kingdom Ethics, 76, \*.

EthixBytes: 73, 3; 74, 4; 75, 2; 76, 2.

Evangelicalism: The Coming Evangelical Collapse, 74, 21.

## F

Financial Report for 2008, 73, 31.

Flynn, Robert: (Bk. Rev.), 73, 30.

Fortune, Marie M.:

- Is the Gospel of "More Sex" Really Good News? 73, 15.
- Southern Baptists: Yes, but..., 74, 20.

## G

George, Timothy: Rick'n Jesus, 74, 9.

Gourley, Bruce: Hating Others, Loving Self, 75, 25.

Grady, J. Lee: Breaking Up the Good Ole Boys Club, 76, \*.

Guildford, John: Why Aren't You Drinking From the Tap?, 76, \*.

Gun Control: Would Jesus Carry a Gun to Church? , 74, 12.

Gushee, David: Bonhoeffer, Torture, and America. 76, \*.

## H

Harper, Mike: The Church: Good Neighbor and Bad, 75, 17.

Health Care Reform—We Need It!, 76, 5.

Herron, Keith:

- America's Never Been a Christian Nation, 75, 10.
- Show Me A Coin, 76, \*.

Homosexuality: Talking Points for a Tough Issue, 75, 20.

Hope, Sherman, M.D.: Health Care Reform, 76, 5.

Humor: A Simple Prayer to . . . , 74, 23.

Humphreys, Fisher (Bk. Rev.s):

- Harbingers of Hope, 75, 29.
- Life and Death Matters, 75, 30.

## K

King, Martin Luther, Jr.: Letter From a Birmingham Jail, 73, 4.

Knox, Marv: Torture, Life, and Moral Constancy, 75, 16.

## L

Langley, James A.: The Peril of Avarice, 74, 31.

Letters From Our Readers, 74, 5; 75, 26.

Love: Hating Others, Loving Self?, 75, 25.

## M

McCollum, David: Obama's Peter Moment, 73, 10.

Making Moral Decisions—An Artful Ability, 74, 6.

Marty, Martin E.:

- Evangelicals and the Environment, 74, 13.
- Reflections on the Presidential Election, 73, 8.
- Virginia and Religious Freedom, 75, 11.

Miller, Calvin:

- A New Friend With the Gift of Healing, 76, 4.
- A Visit to the Monastery of St. Thaddeus, 75, 3.

Minister/Ministry:

- Diary of a Young Pastor, 73, 12.
- Going, Staying, and Leaving, 73, 16.
- LGBT Pastoral Ethics in a Baptist Tradition, 76, \*.
- A New Friend With the Gift of Healing, 76, 4.

Rick'n Jesus, 74, 9.  
 A Visit to the Monastery of St. Thaddeus, 75, 3.  
**M**organ, Darold (Bk Rev.s):  
 Baptist Theology—A Four Century Study, 74, 29.  
 The Faith of Barack Obama, 73, 26.  
 Finding God in The Shack, 76, \*.  
 Hot, Flat, and Crowded, 73, 27.  
 Preaching and Professing, 75, 29.  
 The Rising of Bread for the World, 76, \*.  
 In Search of the New Testament Church—The Baptist  
 Story, 74, 29.  
 Strategic Preaching, 75, 29.  
 W.H. Whitsett—The Man and the Controversy, 74, 29.  
**M**ovie Reviews:  
 Defiance, 74, 26.  
 Doubt, 73, 22.  
 Fireproof, 74, 28.  
 Frost/Nixon, 73, 22.  
 Grand Torino, 73, 23.  
 The Reader, 75, 27.  
 Slumdog Millionaire, 74, 24, 25.  
**M**yerson, Harold: Fair and Balanced, 74, 19.  
**N**  
**N**orris, Glen (Bk. Rev.): Quitting Church, 74, 30.  
**P**  
**P**atterson, Burton: A Matter of Ministerial Ethics, 73, 16.  
**P**ierard, Richard V.: Evangelicals and Torture, 75, 15.  
**P**oetry:  
 Discomforting Worship, 73, 29.  
 A Franciscan Benediction, 73, 28.  
 Living Words, 74, 3.  
 The Peril of Avarice, 74, 31.  
 The Vicar of Bray, 75, 31.  
**P**olitics:  
 Change Comes Slowly But Surely, 73, 7.  
 Fair and Balanced, 74, 19.  
 God and Politics, 73, 9.  
 Obama's Peter Moment, 73, 10.  
 Reflections on the Presidential Election, 73, 8.  
 Show Me A Coin, 76, \*.  
**P**oston, Larry: When Does Human Life Begin?, 75, 4.  
**R**  
**R**ace: Letter From a Birmingham Jail, 73, 4.  
**R**eed, Charles: A Time to Rebuild America, 74, 18.  
**R**eligion: An Atheist and a Minister . . . , 73, 21.  
**S**  
**S**anders, Cody: LGBT Pastoral Ethics in a Baptist  
 Tradition, 76, \*.  
**S**app, David: Foy Dan Valentine: . . . , 76, \*.  
**S**elf, Monty: (Bk. Rev.s)  
 Does Ethics Have a Chance? , 73, 26.  
 Retrieving the Natural Law, 76, \*.  
**S**etzer, Bob, Jr.: Talking Points for a Tough Issue, 75, 20.  
**S**exual Ethics: Is the Gospel of "More Sex" Really Good  
 News? , 73, 15.  
**S**mith, Drew: Would Jesus Carry a Gun to Church?, 74, 12.  
**S**outhern Baptists: Yes, but..., 74, 20.  
**S**pencer, Michael: The Coming Evangelical Collapse, 74, 21.  
**S**taggs, Al: Words From Walter Rauschenbusch, 74, 14.  
**T**  
**T**homas, David A. (Movie Rev.s): 73, 22-23; 74, 25-28; 75,  
 27.  
**T**homason, Todd: An Atheist and a Minister . . . , 73, 21.  
**T**orture:  
 Bonhoeffer, Torture, and America, 76, \*.  
 Evangelicals and Torture, 75, 15.

Torture, Life and Moral Constancy, 75, 16.  
**T**owery, Britt:  
 Change Comes Slowly But Surely, 73, 7.  
 How To Save America, 75, 11.  
**T**rull, Joe E.:  
 Making Moral Decisions—An Artful Ability, 74, 6.  
 Red Letter Christianity, 76, 2.  
 When Death Becomes Birth, 73, 2.  
**T**ruth, Sojourner: "Ain't I A Woman?" , 75, 13.  
**W**  
**W**ar: Early Christian Opposition to, 75, 21.  
**W**hitton, Mark: The Constitutional Convention, 75, 9.  
**W**ilkey, Don: Diary of a Young Pastor, 73, 12.  
**W**illiams, Walter E.: Fraud in Academia, 75, 24.  
**W**omen:  
 Breaking Up the Good Ole Boys Club, 76, \*.  
 Sojourner Truth: "Ain't I A Woman?", 75, 13.  
**Y**  
**Y**ork, Tripp:  
 A Simple Prayer to the..., 74, 23.  
 The Subtle Atheism of Being Pro-Life, 76, \*.

**\*Denotes an article in this Issue 76 of the Journal.**

# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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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.

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