

Christian Ethics Today

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

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The Rest of the Story

In 1995 Foy Valentine developed a grand plan—a Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. His vision combined three vital elements—a **Journal** of Christian Ethics, a **Center** for conferences and research, and a **Director** who would also teach Christian ethics at the new Truett Seminary.*

Foy named the journal *Christian Ethics Today* (CET) and began publishing it out of his own home, sending the first issue to a few hundred of his friends. By 1998, readership had grown to almost 2000, and plans for the Center at Baylor were developed and submitted to President Sloan of Baylor and the Regents.

The struggle began. First, the Baylor president wanted Truett to be a European-type seminary—small (no more than 100 students) and one that taught ethics as a part of theology—mainly theological ethics. (James McClendon derided this approach noting ethics “is always left until the last, and then usually left out!”). In addition, Foy was told some regents had read an article in CET which questioned the “free market system,” and they wanted Baylor to have no such publication on their campus.

Foy was frustrated. Yet, being a “practical-minded politician,” he decided half-a-loaf was his only choice, and so the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor was born. Today it holds conferences, publishes a journal, and has a notable staff—however, the director teaches philosophy at the university—Truett still does not have a Christian ethics teacher, though it has grown much larger than originally planned!***

The directors of the Journal decided to continue publishing CET as an independent voice for Christian ethics by dissolving the former entity, electing a new Board of Directors, and finding a new editor.

I was in transition after early departure from the Baptist seminary in New Orleans (where I had taught Christian ethics for 15 years)—the first Board had interviewed me about the initial position that was nullified by Baylor leaders. I gladly accepted the new position.

It is important to note here (as is printed on the back page of every issue), that Foy insisted from the beginning that the Journal “should be sent free of charge to anyone requesting it” and continued “as long as money and energy permit” (can you see Foy’s wry smile as he adds this last phrase?).

The new Board wondered how long this unique arrangement would last. Yet, the early 2000 readers have grown this past decade to 6000 plus. Although most are unable to support the journal financially, about 900 readers each year give about \$25-50, with a few dozen who are financially blessed able to give \$500 to \$1000, and a few a bit more.

Other publishers, struggling to survive, are amazed that CET has been able to not only continue to publish, but grow in numbers. Foy’s vision was not a pipe-dream!

NOW THE REST OF THE STORY. Was it providential that Foy’s original idea was nullified by Baylor officials back in the 90s? How often do we later look back at events and realize God was more in control than we realized?

My point: imagine with the present group of Baylor Regents and the new Baylor president, how severely restricted CET would be if we operated there under the control of the present Baylor administration. (My guess would be that many, perhaps most, of the articles (and certainly the editorials!) would never see the light of day!

So, despite the difficulties, the voice and vision of Foy Valentine lives on through this publication. It is indeed, as the Scripture he chose for the masthead reads, “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’.* (Isa 40:3; Jn 1:23)”

Now my personal pitch. If you are able to join this band of about 900 of our readers, to enable thousands of laity, ministers, educators, students, and educational institutions to receive *Christian Ethics Today*, any gift will be deeply appreciated. But, as I always say, our main goal is readers—not gifts.

Spread the word about CET. You, our readers, are our best advertisement!

Joe E. Trull, Editor

Fisher Humphreys, Ch. Board of Directors

P.S. Remember for any gift of \$50 or more we would like to offer our latest reprint—Calvin Miller’s classic work, *The Philippian Fragment*—or any of our previously published works: Maston’s *Why Live the Christian Life?*, Valentine’s *Whatever Things Are Lovely, Minister & Politics Conference* (Audio or Video), Issues 1-50 CD-ROM, and the Trull’s *Putting Women In Their Place*. ■

*Although to date Truett Seminary does not have a Christian ethics professor or even one course in their curriculum, the endowment fund for the Foy Valentine Chair of Christian Ethics at Truett has reached \$800,000—only \$200,000 short of a professorship and \$700,000 from an endowed chair.

**A Christian ethics teacher was listed as the “Number One Priority” of a list of ten presented to a BGCT Committee (of which the editor was a member) a decade ago, if the Texas Baptists would increase funding to Truett Seminary. The convention did so, but the promise was never kept.

EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou.

Comments Concerning Ken Starr and Baylor University:

"I don't see Starr as a Robert Gates-type, who transcended past political affiliations and jobs (CIA) to lead A&M." "I'm not sure why Baylor would even want someone at the helm who, no doubt, will spark negative reactions among a large number." *Jim Mitchell and Colleen McCain Nelson, editorial board members Dallas Morning News blog.*

"Baylor is well suited to reflect on the growth of the central government" *Ken Starr.*

"Notice that he did not say the 'role' but the 'growth' of the central government. And this is to be Baylor's focus on the world? This man comes with an unsurprising political agenda, which he already has broadcast in his interview with the *Standard*. No one can say they weren't warned." *Hal Wingo, Sante Fe, NM.*

"He represents the very best of what it means to be an active churchman who puts his belief into action through his local congregation." *Ken Hall, Advisory Comm. Chair.*

"It was a personal disappointment that the new president . . . would not have a vital firsthand connection to Baylor and be an exemplary churchman." *Dr. Russell Dilday.* [Note: Starr was raised and baptized (by his pastor-father) in the Church of Christ, his church membership is in a McLean, VA Bible Church, and since 2004 while law professor at Pepperdine University (Cal.) he has attended the Church of Christ, but he plans to join a Baptist church.]

"The church has lost its ability to be a disciplined community because we're now, religiously, in a buyer's market. Christianity has to bill itself as very good for your self-realization, and that's killing us because we're not very good for your self-realization. We're good for your salvation, which is not the same thing." *Stanley Hauerwas.*

"Concerning the trials of terrorists, there have been 3 convictions under military tribunal, and 2 of them are now free! Over 300 have been tried in civil courts, and all are in prison today." *Rachel Maddow on Meet the Press (2/4/09).*

"In 2008 more people were murdered in Chicago (509)—mostly with guns—than U.S. soldiers were killed in Iraq (314). More soldiers committed suicide in 2009 than were killed in either Iraq or Afghanistan."

The Christian Century and Congressional Quarterly.

"Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* was composed on the edges of newspaper, pieces of toilet paper and anything else his confidants could smuggle to King. The letter was first reproduced only in bits quoted in national news outlets, then in full by the Friends Service Committee."

The Christian Century (1/12/10).

"In January, 2010, after receiving bailout from American taxpayers, Goldman Sachs awarded \$16.2 Billion in bonuses/salaries to employees, an average of \$498,000 each—that figure would build three Aircraft Carriers, or 14 Cowboy Stadiums, or provide \$900,000 per American in unemployment compensation."

NBC Nightly News

"Of the world's 200 largest economies, 133 are corpora-

tions and 67 are nation-states." *Sojourners, 3/2010*

"A new study from NASA reports that 2009 is tied as the second warmest year since recording began in 1880, falling a fraction of a degree behind 2005, and also that 2000-2009 was the hottest decade on record."

Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

"Over one-half of the churches in Texas do not have even one minister making a contribution to a retirement plan."

Mike Harris, consultant with Guidestone (SBC).

"If Goldman Sachs wants to pay the entire cost of every congressional campaign in the U.S., the law of the land now allows it."

Political analyst Jonathan Alter in Newsweek.

"The Supreme Court ruling that removed corporate campaign limits is the reversal of the Dredd-Scott decision on slavery (that ruled *persons are property*)—the majority ruled *property is a person* and opened the floodgates for special interests, including foreign corporations, to spend without limits in our elections!" *JET.*

"HEALTH CARE: 46.3 million Uninsured Americans, 6 million (25.1%) Uninsured Texans, with 12 million under 18, the highest in the nation." *U.S. Census Bureau, (9/09).*

"Globally, America has the 37th highest quality of health care—just after Costa Rica and just above Cuba!"

Kathy Kay, BBC reporter on Meet the Press.

"Poverty is the worst form of violence." ■

Mobandas K. Gandhi

A “Successful Ministry”?

By Joe E. Trull, Editor

The chapel speaker, pastor of a large metropolitan congregation (and at that time also president of the SBC), was addressing students at the seminary where I taught. His subject: “How To Be Successful In Ministry.” One of his twelve secrets of success was to “Preach Creatively.” He illustrated by sharing his present sermon series titled, “What Would Jesus Say To Madonna . . .” or “Bill Clinton . . .” or other notable public figures.

That very week my daughter sent me a long newspaper interview of his son, who was at that time a rising star in the D-FW area. The young minister explained his success was due to “preaching creatively.” “Right now,” he told the reporter, “I am preaching a series that is drawing large crowds entitled: “What Would Jesus Say To Madonna? or Bill Clinton? or other celebrities.”

When a student in our Ministerial Ethics class asked how father and son could be preaching the same series simultaneously, my first thought was: “The son is probably preaching dad’s sermons!” But I was wrong. Another student brought a new book of sermons, written by a Chicago minister titled: “What Would Jesus Say To . . .?” with pictures of Madonna, Clinton and other celebs adorning the cover.

Lecture two that week was on plagiarism!

But that is only the prelude to a never-ending story. A few years later the luxurious home of the famous father was featured in a special magazine section of his metropolitan newspaper titled, “Homes of the Rich and Famous.” City officials noted the mansion was illegally declared exempt from local taxes, and although church lawyers tried to exclude the pastor’s affluent home from taxation, the city ruled otherwise.

Recently the Sr.-father devoted a

sermon to problems he sees with the American tax system, criticizing the President and congressional tax leaders as he advocated several conservative tax proposals, which included several inaccurate claims and old popular emails that had been debunked by FactCheck.org.¹

Now comes the most recent story about Jr.

Our ABC affiliate carried a lengthy “investigative journalism” story about the son, “now pastor of one of the largest and fastest growing churches in the nation.” The reporter noted this minister is “splashy and hip; his message contemporary and cool. His marketing is tops in the world of evangelism, making huge waves with his sermon in 2008 titled ‘Seven Days of Sex’ (preached with a king-size bed on the podium).”²

Yet, concerns are being raised by church members and by church staff—one former associate described it this way: “The lack of accountability, the lavish lifestyle that keeps increasing, while the attendance keeps decreasing.”

The TV special reported that the church’s chief financial officer was replaced by the pastor’s “personal attorney, business partner, and fishing buddy,” who helped create “a complex series of business transactions, including travel around the country in a French-made Falcon 50 private jet; estimated value, \$8.4 million.”

Parishioners have never been told about the aircraft, staff members are told there is no plane, the pastor declined comment, and “several staff members who have actually been on the plane have denied that there is a plane.” FAA records show that the minister took possession of the jet in 2007, then logged a week-long trip to the Bahamas, and one month later the jet logged a six-day trip to Chetumal, Mexico.

But it is not just the jet and the international travel that is undercover. News 8 also learned that the pastor’s 10,000 square foot, \$1.5 million estate on Lake Grapevine is not listed on the tax rolls in his name, but rather as “Palometa Revocable Trust.”

Records show that the mega-pastor was paid \$240,000 a year parsonage allowance; that’s in addition to a \$1 million yearly salary, according to WFAA sources. The inquiry also learned that in 2007, the popular pastor sold the intellectual property of his church’s marketing Web site, CreativePastors, as well as the church’s membership mailing list, to a newly-formed, for-profit company called EY Publishing.

Today, CreativePastors.com is used to sell the minister’s sermons and books for profit.

One critic, Ole Anthony of the Trinity Foundation in Dallas asked: “When did the intellectual property, the preaching and the Bible notes and the books—become the property of the pastor? That’s the property of the church.” After three years of monitoring, the Trinity Foundation believes this pastor has fallen into the same trap as other televangelists Anthony has investigated over the years. “They are sanctifying greed, and that’s what’s so evil.”

SMU law professor Wayne Shaw, a former IRS agent who specializes in tax law, says it’s not unusual for pastors to accrue wealth from church resources. But it must be disclosed and separate from any for-profit business.

“They’ve been given a very special duty, and they get benefits for getting that special duty, such as tax exemptions, charitable contribution deductions,” Shaw said. “I think it’s owed to the public that there is transparency, that the public sees that there is not something bad going on.”

(continued on page 24)

Civility: In Society and In Politics

By Ambassador Lyndon Olson, Waco, TX

Note: These remarks were given by Ambassador Olson upon accepting the Texas Legacy Award from the Center for Public Policy Priorities at the Eighth Annual Texas Legacy Luncheon, November 12, 2009, Austin, TX.

Thank you very much for this honor. I appreciate the kind remarks of my friend, Congressman Edwards. I also appreciate the opportunity today to talk to this distinguished group about a concern of mine.

I want to talk with you about civility, both in society in general and in our politics in particular.

In encourage you to think back . . . for some of us way back . . . to those report cards we got in the first grade. Most everyone had different type cards and categories, but they were pretty much variations on the same basic theme. I'm not talking about your arithmetic or reading or penmanship grades. I'm talking about the comportment column, with things such as *Exercises self-control . . . respects the rights of others . . . indicates willingness to cooperate . . . uses handkerchief* (important even before the H1N1 virus) . . . and, my favorite was usually right up at the top of that 6-week report card and it's of particular significance to our discussion . . . "*Plays well with others.*"

We were being taught about and graded on one of the most fundamental skills of our civilization: how to get along with others. There is a reason that *plays well with others* was one of the first things we were taught and evaluated on. And folks, I don't think we're getting a very good grade on *plays well with others* these days. Many of us don't even *want* to play with someone we don't like or agree with.

Where did all of this come from? In the majority of my life this hasn't been the case. Those of us in this room

over 40 or 50 didn't grow up in anything like this environment. We didn't live like this. Not in our communities . . . not in our politics. We lived in a political world with strong feelings and positions, yes. And we took swings at each other politically. But it didn't come down to the moral equivalent of street brawls and knife fights.

Politics has always been a contact sport, but the conflict didn't permeate every aspect of our society and rise to today's level of social and verbal hostility. It is very unhealthy. And I'm not sure what to do about it. But I know it when I see it and hear it. And I know it is time we focus as much attention on our civil behavior as we do on achieving our personal and partisan agendas. How we do that, I don't know. But I want to raise the issue, ask the questions, and encourage you all to give it your consideration as well.

We live in an era of rudeness, in society in general, in the popular culture, and in our political life. Our culture today, in fact, rewards incivility, crudeness, and cynicism. You can get on TV, get your own talk show or reality series if you out-shout and offend the other guy. Everyone screams, no one listens. We produce a lot of heat but little light. The proclivity is to demonize our opponent. People don't just disagree . . . the challenge to the other is a battle to the death. Character assassination, verbal abuse, obnoxious behavior, and an overbearing attention on scandal and titillation—all that isn't just reserved to day-time TV anymore—it's the currency of prime-time, of late night, of cable news, of the Internet, and of society in general.

What happened to us? Should this be a sign of alarm? Is the problem selfishness—we won't be denied, we must be immediately gratified? We want everything we've ever seen in the movie? How do we live and get along like our parents and their generation?

They had to sacrifice. They didn't get what they wanted when they wanted it. Is today's need for instant gratification a problem?

We are more inclusive today . . . and that is a good thing—but has that good made for increased tensions?

Is it the 24-hour news cycle? The 24-hour news cycle demands instantaneous news, which feeds off of controversy, scandal, and easy answers to difficult questions. There is scant time for reflection or reasoned analysis. Market forces demand instantaneous information and jarring entertainment values, not sober analysis or wisdom. The news media are more prone to focus on the loudest, the most outrageous, and the most partisan actors. And given the rise of the political consultant class, candidates and campaigns are louder, more outrageous, and meta-partisan. Political consultants have helped create a permanent campaign where politics takes precedence over governance. The political consultants egg on all this for profit, creating controversy where little or none exists so the message, the theme of the day, is played out on TV and the media. They're paid handsomely to cause strife and create conflict in order to raise hackles, money, and attention . . . fomenting issues to suit their agenda.

It's all about the message, not the solution, not the negotiation, the debate, the compromise to move forward. It's about who is controlling the message, who is defining the message, who is creating the message, who is keeping the conflict alive often where none existed before the consultant decided one was needed. Is this what keeps us at each other's throats?

Is it talk radio, attack TV? Is it the talk shows, the shout festivals where absolute hyperbole is the only currency? Mean-spirited hyperbole and hyperpartisanship breeds cynicism.

Citizens are increasingly cynical about politics and about their government's ability to work. The damage to the ship of state, to the fabric of the nation begs repair.

Whose job is it to change course and effect the necessary repairs? I'm not sure I have the answer to that, but I propose that in a room full of policy makers and politicians, men and women who talk to the media, who work in the public arena, who hire consultants, who set agendas, maybe we have a role to play in making things better.

You know, I can say that there are some people in this room, people I consider dear friends, who understand this problem and I believe share my concern. To those friends I say, you and I both know that we disagree very fundamentally on some very big issues, but the truth is that we could care less about our disagreements and are more concerned about where we can find consensus and reasons to work and live together to construct a better future. I consider this kind of commitment to trust and open dialogue crucial to maintaining a sustainable society.

And indeed, isn't it about building a better future for our community, for our country, and for our children? I say that even on the most intractable of issues, there is room for constructive debate, for consensus building, for the search for some common ground.

President Johnson once said to his Democratic colleague, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama, during the crisis of civil rights in the South: "What do you want left behind? You want a great, big marble monument that says, 'George Wallace: He built.' Or do you want a little piece of scrawny pine lying there that says, 'George Wallace: He hated'?"

The people I know in this room are builders. But we are confronting a world today where hate seems to be a predominant factor in the crisis of incivility confronting our politics. Where are the rules that govern conduct? What happens eventually after

this continuous rancor tears the fabric of our society completely asunder? Can we survive with this tenor . . . taking no prisoners, giving no quarter?

I'm asking these questions because you folks here are blessed with skills, talent, experience and a commitment to a positive public policy. You understand the importance of maintaining and protecting our commonwealth where we strive to serve our clients, our community, our country, and our state. If civil discourse self-destructs, we cannot move on the issues that matter. Think of this as an environmental crisis . . . the environment being our civil society and our very ability to live and work and prosper together.

I don't want to sound pious or preachy here, but if we are to prevail as a free, self-governing people, we must work together. We shouldn't try to destroy our opponents just because we disagree. We have to govern our tongues. The Proverbs tell us, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (18:12). How we choose to use words—for good or for wrong—is clearly our choice. The health of our democracy depends upon a robust public discourse.

Recognize that I am not saying that conflict in our political life is to be avoided. Hardly so. It is not only proper but necessary for candidates to vigorously debate the issues of our day and examine their opponents' records. Don't let people confuse civility with goody two-shoes niceness and mere etiquette. Civility is a robust, tough, substantive civic virtue, critical to both civil society and the future of our republic. Civility entails speaking directly, passionately, and responsibly about who we are and what we believe. Divisions based on principles are healthy for the nation. Vigorous and passionate debate helps us to define issues and to sharpen positions.

Conflict cannot, *should not* be avoided in our public lives any more than we can avoid conflict with people we love. But just as members of a household, as a family learn ways of settling their differences without

inflicting real damage on each other, so we, in our politics, must find constructive ways of resolving disputes and differences.

Our work is here. We build from the base. We will foster change first by our example . . . by working together, respecting one another, and negotiating our differences in good faith and with mutual respect.

Civility is neither a small nor inconsequential issue. The word comes from the French *civilite*, which is often translated as "politeness." But it means much more. It suggests an approach to life . . . living in a way that is civilized. The words "civilized," "*civilite*," and "city" share a common etymology with a word meaning "member of the household." To be civilized is to understand that we live in a society as in a household. There are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household.

So, too, are there rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. As we all learned in the first grade a long time ago, we owe certain responsibilities to one another. Perhaps we spend a lifetime learning how to play well with others. So be it. It is a crucial goal for a civil society. ■

Baptists, Globalization, and Poverty

By Ellis Orozco, Pastor First Baptist Church, Richardson, TX

Note: *This message was delivered at the regional meeting of the New Baptist Covenant in Norman, OK, on August 6, 2009.*

There is a scene in the book of Nehemiah where Nehemiah has inspected the conditions of Jerusalem and has called the people together. He informs them of the situation as he sees it and then calls them to action saying, “You see the bad situation we are in . . . let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.” The people responded saying, “Let us arise and build.” The Scripture then says, “So they put their hands (together) to working for the common good” (Neh 2:17-18, NRSV).

Baptists have always been those who somehow (in spite of their differences) have been able to “put their hands together to working for the common good.”

My paternal grandfather came to the United States from Monterrey in 1909 to save his family from the starvation precipitated by the Mexican revolutionary war. When I was a child my grandfather lived with us. He didn’t speak much English. He would speak in Spanish. I would answer in English, and we understood each other perfectly.

As a child the thing I loved most about my grandfather was that he always had candy and money—and he would give it to me. He would see me and say, “Venga aqui” (Come here). I would go sit on his lap. He would hold me tight and whisper in my ear, “Nunca olvidas” (never forget). And I would say, “Whatever, Grandpa—you got any money?”

He would place a few silver coins in my little hand and would say, “*Nunca olvidas.*” And I would say, “Yeah, sure grandpa.” I didn’t understand . . . but now I do. Never forget means never

forget who you are . . . never forget where you come from . . . never forget your heritage. I get it grandpa.

I didn’t always get it. There was a time (during me teenage years) when I didn’t want to remember. I didn’t want to be Mexican, because I didn’t want to be different. But I get it now, Grandpa . . . and you were right. I pray that Texas Baptists would hear my Grandpa’s words . . . “*Nunca Olvides.*” Baptists have always been those who, somehow, (in spite of their differences) have been able to “put their hands together to working for the common good.”

I want us to reflect tonight on why, historically, that has been so, and why that innate Baptist ability to organize and work together for the common good has shaped us into a force that is uniquely prepared for the challenges of the 21st century. Specifically, the challenges we will face as change agents in a world that will grow increasingly hostile toward Christianity and increasingly apathetic toward the poor.

The most pressing issue for all of us is globalization. We must preserve a distinctively Baptist witness in the world because the world has changed and continues to change dramatically. Change has always been a part of life. That is nothing new. What is unprecedented in human history is the rate of change. The acceleration of change is killing us. Corporations are falling like monolithic giants. Nations are going bankrupt. The world is shrinking at an exponential rate and collaborative efforts are expanding at the speed of a microchip.

The world will not be the same ten years from now, and the church is not immune. Churches are trying to live with four and five distinct and very different generations worshipping under the same roof. And while we fight our worship wars, ecclesiological battles, creedal clashes, and doctrinal

differences, there are millions suffering under the oppressive forces of poverty. It is a mind-blowing and dizzying time to be alive—and most Christian groups will begin to shrink away and build fortresses of protection against every perceived danger or threat. But I believe that we, as Baptists, have been shaped as a people for such a time as this. We have in our arsenal of faith practices the tools we need to ride the waves of change.

Those pieces of our Baptist legacy that we have all studied and cherished as formative values in the practice of our faith, things like soul competency, the priesthood of every believer, religious freedom (and its soul mate—the separation of church and state), voluntary cooperation based on missionary zeal, church autonomy (and one of its essential benefactors, non-creedalism). These stand like great communication links towering over the landscape of Baptist life. They connect us and benefit us even before we’re able to name them.

Our Baptist heritage—these Baptist distinctives—make us a powerfully effective Christian force in a rapidly changing world. Please understand, any one of our Baptist distinctives is held by a number of different Christian groups, but none can claim the unique combination of beliefs we hold. As Bill Pinson puts it, it is “the combination of beliefs and practices (that) sets Baptists apart from other Christian groups. There is a distinctive group of doctrines and politics for Baptists, *a sort of Baptist recipe.* Like most recipes, each of the ingredients *is not unique to Baptists, but the total mix is distinctively Baptist.*”

And I would add, it is that recipe that makes us strategically positioned for the race to globalization, and therefore, strategically positioned to be Jesus Christ to the world’s poor.

Our conservative Biblicism com-

bined with our love for religious freedom—our penchant for autonomous thought and practice combined with our passion for cooperation—our disdain for hierarchal governance combined with our respect for accountability through congregational leadership—our theological center of grace and grace alone, combined with our innate suspicion of anything that smacks of legalism or creedalism—all combine to make us especially adept for the challenges of the next century.

As an example, allow me to refer to just two aspects of globalization as discussed by Thomas Friedman. The first is from his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, and the second from his more recent work, *The World is Flat*.

In the first Friedman describes the characteristics of the countries and institutions that will collapse under the weight of globalization and compares them to those that will prosper. In his characterization he notes that the nations that are inflexible, totalitarian, and dictatorial will suffer and languish behind a changing world. By the same token, institutions that are controlling, legalistic, and demand conformity at all costs will wither under globalization. Such nations and institutions will NOT carry us into the future (212-247).

Nowhere is this more important to understand than in our own nation. Jim Wallis reminds us that “Spiritual

and religious values should influence our perception of and participation in politics—making a difference in the systems that govern and either hurt or help people. But while religion belongs in the political world, religion and ideology are not good partners” (*The Soul of Politics*, 34).

Yale law professor Stephen Carter, in *The Culture of Disbelief*, warns against “reaching conclusions on political grounds and, afterward, finding religious justification for them, instead of letting genuine religious conviction shape honest political judgments.” And Jim Wallis concludes that “perhaps the best test of the spiritual integrity of our political commitments is their predictability or unpredictability” (34). It seems to me that most of what is coming out of the larger Christian community in America is extremely predictable.

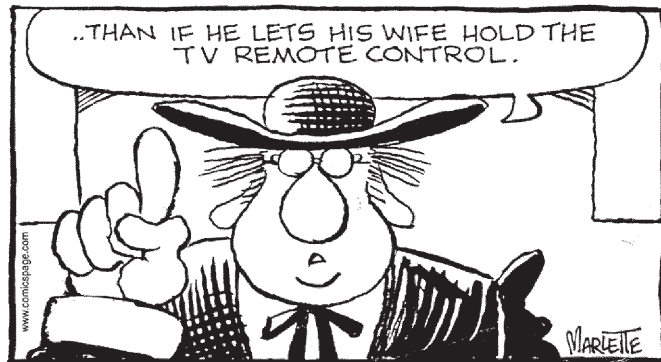
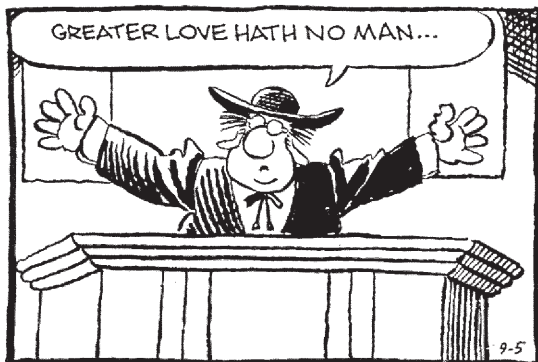
The problem is that no one is talking to each other. If the last three elections have taught us anything, they have taught us that the polarization of America is complete. And American religion is just as polarized . . . a polarized American church that is the mirror image of our polarized culture.

Wallis concludes that “the inability of either liberalism or conservatism to lead us forward is increasingly clear” (21) and that “the two dominant forms of religion in our time have failed to provide the spiritual guid-

ance that might inform a politics of moral conscience. Both conservative and liberal religion have become culturally captive forces that merely cheer on the ideological camps with which each has identified,” and he warns, “Religion as a political cheerleader is invariably false religion” (36).

The religious right, for instance, feeling pushed to the margins, “woke up” in the 1970s and 1980s and decided to become a prophetic force in American politics, and I applaud that thought. I am just left wondering where this “great moral force” was in the civil rights battles of the 1950s and 1960s. Most Southern (White) Baptist Churches were eerily silent during those years when our nation desperately needed a moral compass and a prophetic voice. Or even worse, they were very vocal on the side of evil. And, more recently, I have to wonder if they did not have a severe case of laryngitis when our country entered into an unprovoked war, against the better judgment of most of the rest of the world.

This is hard for me. I love my country. I’m an avid Olympics fan and I tear up every time I hear the national anthem. I feel the pain of every American athlete who didn’t have a good day. AND I feel the pain of being pushed away from the national conversation because of my Judeo-Christian perspective. Carter,



in *The Culture of Disbelief*, contends that “a prejudice against the influence of religious commitment upon political issues now characterizes many sectors of American society, including the media, academia, the law, and the corridors of political power.” He notes that “religious conviction is trivialized and becomes quickly suspect when it seems to be affecting political matters” (*The Soul of Politics*, 32).

In plain English, the Christian Church in America is being pushed to the margins. And as an ethnic minority in America I say to the church, “Welcome to the margins! We’ve been waiting for you!” I agree with most of the values of the religious right. Where I think they get it wrong is that they see being pushed to the margins as a bad thing—something to fight against. I see it as a good thing. In fact, it may be the very thing that saves American Christianity.

The church cannot serve a socio-political ideology and Christ at the same time. The church can speak prophetically only from the margins of society—only from outside the corridors of power, never from the center. Both the left and the right seem to be fighting for a place at the center of political power. And any Christianity operating from that position will be a controlling, legalistic, and spiritually oppressive force, unable to distinguish the voices of political allies from God’s voice. And, I would add, that is the very kind of institution that will wither under the weight of globalization. It is, therefore, imperative that we remain distinctively Baptist because we have the right recipe to be a prophetic voice, speaking from the margins, in a shrinking and dynamically changing world.

The other aspect to globalization I want to briefly mention is what Friedman calls “Open-Sourcing.” In *The World is Flat*, Friedman discusses the ten forces that flattened the world. Flattener #4 is “Open-Sourcing,” or what Friedman calls, “Self-Organizing Collaborative Communities.” which basically is “thousands of people around the world coming together

online to collaborate in writing everything from their own software to their own operating systems to their own dictionary to their own recipe for cola—building always from the bottom up rather than accepting formats or content imposed by corporate hierarchies from the top down” (81). Everyone in the group is allowed to add their improvements to the product and, they offer the product for free! Talk about grace! It’s like the Cooperative Program on steroids. It’s even beyond that. It’s the walls coming down, all of them, and it’s messy. If you don’t like messy then you’re going to have a very difficult time in the 21st century.

The larger Christian witness in America doesn’t like messy. They like clean lines; black and white; a place for everything and everything in its place—doctrinal purity (as if that were really possible). The problem with those who seek to purify the church has always been that they wind up looking more like those who crucified Jesus than those who followed him.

It seems to me that in a day when all the walls that have separated nations and people groups are coming down making room for larger and more effective cooperation, the larger Baptist witness in America is pulling out of collaborative efforts and building more doctrinal walls than ever before. It is one the most frustrating problems in Baptist life today. It is absolutely essential that we hold close and dear the precious ingredients of our Baptist recipe which allow us to ride the wave of collaborative communities. If we don’t, I’m not sure who else will. AND if we don’t, the ones who suffer the consequences of our failure are the poor.

Remember, we do it for the sake of the poor, the hurting, and the lost. We must preserve a distinctively Baptist witness in the world because the poor, the hurting, and the lost are depending on it. Gandhi said, “Poverty is the worst form of violence.” I was a pastor for ten years in the poorest county in Texas and one of the poorest in the nation. The poverty in our state and

world is simply overwhelming. The poor are depending on our witness in the face of the strongholds of systemic evil in our state and nation--what Walter Wink calls “the domination system,” or “the powers that be.”

The larger Baptist witness in America seems to have fixated on a few politically salient issues, and although those issues are not unimportant, in fixating on them we have largely abdicated our prophetic voice where it counts the most. We have failed to throw the full weight of our Baptist strength behind the life and death issues that affect the most people. I speak here of the multiplicity and complexity of issues surrounding the plight of the poor.

Tony Campolo points out that the Christian Coalition, the most successful religious lobbying group in American history, was formed to address the need for the government to support “traditional family values,” as it defined them. And yet, the voter guides which the Christian Coalition distributed to millions of Christians, completely ignored the needs of the poor (*Speaking My Mind*, 126).

I don’t have to remind this audience of Jesus’ concern for the poor. It was all-consuming for him. In the Old Testament, the subject of the poor is the second most prominent theme. Idolatry is the first, and the two are often connected. *In the New Testament, one out of every sixteen verses is about the poor. In the Gospels, the number is one out of every ten verses; in Luke’s Gospel one of every seven, and in the book of James one of every five.*

All the politically charged issues of Jesus’ day were (it seems to me) sidestepped by him in lieu of his concern for the poor. In his inaugural homecoming message at Nazareth Jesus sets the agenda for his ministry when he says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18a, NIV).

Jesus starts his most famous sermon by saying, “Blessed are the poor” (Luke 6:20). And if Hans Dieter Betz is right in identifying the literary genre of the Sermon on the Mount as the

Greek “epitomai,” and I believe he is, then the epitome of Jesus’ teaching (as compiled by Matthew) is his concern for the poor and the marginalized and the oppressed, who comprised 90% of the population in his day. And because of both the Roman and the religious taxation systems, the Jew could not afford to both tithe and live. Thus they were labeled the “unrighteous ones” (*Am Harez*).

According to Richard A. Horsley, around the first century there arose for the first time in Hebrew history, a minority class of people who lived in the cities (mainly Sepphoris and Tiberias) and produced nothing, living instead off the taxation system. These citizens of the “consumer city” were an elite class living off of the working poor, the *Am Harez* or the “unrighteous ones” of the land (*Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 79).

These working poor were the ones who loved Jesus the most, because he first loved them. His heart was always with them. In fact, there is no written record that Jesus ever entered the cities of Sepphoris or Tiberias, the two largest and most important first century cities in Galilee. He spent all of his time, it seems, in the small villages with the poor.

If we lose our distinctively Baptist heritage, there will not be a unified, coherent Baptist voice speaking for the *Am Harez* of our state and our nation, and a greatly diminished one speaking for the poor of the world. Both the left and the right in American Christianity have sold out to one political perspective for thirty pieces of silver offering promises that never come true, and trickle-downs that never trickle). Their political litmus tests ignore the largest, and in global terms, the most devastating issues of our times: all the issues fueled by abject poverty. Their alliances (or more often, their failure to align with certain groups) betrays their deeper concern with preserving the “American Way of Life” and the truth as America sees it, rather than standing with the one who said, “I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life” (Jn 4:6, NIV).

Richard Lischer in his Lyman-Beecher lectures at Yale said, “Contemporary religion focuses on its own successes and avoids at all costs the paradox of the cross, a move that has produced a flood of compensatory words” (*The End of Words*, 9). The larger Baptist witness in America is in grave danger of a great “Christological distance”—what Erhardt Guttgemann calls “the distance created by the tendency to redefine Christ in some more ‘contemporary’ meaning, less dependent on just who the crucified Jesus was” (*The Politics of Jesus*, 120).

Do you know who Jesus was? He was poor—he was born poor, he lived poor, he lived with the poor, he died poor, and he rose again for the poor!

John Howard Yoder, in *The Politics of Jesus*, reminds us that “to follow after Christ is not simply to learn from him, but also to share his destiny” (124). We Baptists love to sing, “Wherever He leads I’ll go. Wherever He leads I’ll go. I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I’ll go.” Really? Wherever he leads? He leads us to the doorsteps of the poorest of the poor. He points to them and then turns to us and says, “Whatever you have done for the least of these, you have done for me.” (Mt 25:40, NIV)

This means to follow Christ wherever he takes me, WHEREVER He takes me—without being labeled a socialist or a communist or a liberal or, even worse, dare I say a Democrat! I don’t believe that I’m any of those labels. And, at one time or another, I have probably been all of them, and will be again.

But the words of Paul keep ringing in my ears, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11, NIV).

I want to know Christ!

And so, I follow no man, no socio-political ideology, no denominational apparatus, no career path. I JUST WANT TO KNOW JESUS; I

JUST WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS!
WHEREVER HE LEADS I’LL GO.
AND JESUS ALWAYS LEADS US
TO THE POOR!

My mother is at the age where she is starting to give her children (my sister, my two brothers, and I) pictures from her treasured collection of family albums, some of her most treasured memories preserved by Kodak. I told her there is only one picture I want. It is my father’s first grade class picture (from 1939). If you look you’ll find him on the third row, three kids over from the right. The reason I want that picture is that there is a hole in the picture, a hole where my father’s feet should be. There are about forty kids in the picture, and apparently he was one of only two children in the class who was too poor to own a pair of shoes.

The school took the picture and my father didn’t have shoes. At the age of seven he somehow understood that there was something wrong about that, and, therefore, something wrong with him. So he brought the picture home and before anyone could see it, he cut his own feet out of the picture. I can see my father as a little seven year old boy so filled with shame that he takes out his pocketknife and carefully cuts out his own feet.

I want that picture because it defines my father’s life: work hard, work hard, work hard, to make as much money as you can so that none of your children will ever have to cut their feet out of their school picture.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we must preserve our distinctive witness because no child should ever have to cut their feet out of any picture of their life.

In the spirit of Nehemiah, I say to you, “You see the bad situation we are in, let us arise and rebuild our Baptist heritage and identity so that we will no longer be a reproach.”

And may we as a people respond saying, “Let us arise and build.” And may the generations that follow say of us, “So they put their hands (together) to working for the common good” (Neh 2:17-18, NRSV). ■

The Difference Christ Makes: Marriage

By David Gushee, McAfee School of Theology Atlanta, GA

Note: *This article is adapted from the second of three lectures delivered at Missouri Baptist University, October 21, 2009.*

As I promised, each of these three talks will have three movements: I will begin with a really honest description of what I think is going on in American culture in relation to marriage. Then I will try to review with you the basics of what the Bible and the Christian tradition have said about that subject. Each time we will see an obvious gap between contemporary culture and historic faith. Finally I will offer some practical suggestions about “the Difference Christ Makes,” or ought to make, for you in this area of life. In every case I will try to be totally honest and realistic and not hide behind any safe Christian platitudes or religious talk.

Marriage and American Culture

It used to be that America was a culture in which pretty much everyone was expected to get married and to stay married. I am not talking about that long ago—even as recently as the 1950s and early 1960s, the culture constantly found ways to reinforce the message that the normal path of the man and the woman was to fall in love and get married, to have children and raise them together, and to stay married for life.

Of course there were exceptions. Most people had relatives who did not quite follow the script. Not everyone got married. A baby was born out of wedlock now and then. And in some rare circumstances couples separated or got divorced. It was rare, almost a scandal you weren’t supposed to talk about, as when we find out that the mother in the World War II era movie “Miracle on 34th Street” is divorced. If you trace the numbers back far enough you see that the divorce rate in America began rising during and after World War I, peaked again right after World War II,

then stabilized in the 1950s.

But from 1965-75 the divorce rate doubled, and though it didn’t keep doubling, it never came back down again. By then, which was during my childhood, divorce had moved from being a rare thing to a very common occurrence. For every two marriages in a given year in this country, there is one divorce, and that number essentially hasn’t changed in 35 years.

The other entirely new development was that many people began opting out of marriage altogether. The idea that standing at an altar promising lifetime commitment was just what people are expected to do began to be radically questioned. Cohabitation rates shot up beginning in the 1970s and those continue to rise. There had always been a small number of couples who never bothered to get married. But these were outliers. Now, people who live together and even raise families together but never officially “tie the knot” have become a substantial part of the population. In 1970 there were 500,000 cohabitating households. Today, there are over 5 million. Not coincidentally, the marriage rate declined in this country by 20% from 1995 to 2005.

The fact that such a large number of people have abandoned the conviction that sex belongs only in marriage, of course played a huge role in this change. For many men, especially, sex was the great prize that awaited us after the long dating and courtship game ended in marriage. Once we committed, we got sex. Now, when sex is available on the first, second, or third date—and really, what is dating anymore, anyway? Why bother to get married? In a classically offensive expression that I think I first heard from my parents, “Why buy the cow if you can get the milk for free?” By the way, I think this change has not been to the benefit of women, who are more at risk from sex outside of marriage and I think more likely to

get their hearts broken when trying to play by these new rules.

But this does not mean that marriage is dead in our culture. We are not quite Europe, where it seems that marriage has become truly optional and may eventually be the experience of only a minority. No, we continue to get married here. But we also get divorced. A lot. A fairly typical path now for the average American is to marry two, three, or four times, and to have children in several marriages, thus creating a reality in which they are constantly trying to weave families together from the fragments of earlier unions, while also sharing custody with ex spouses or lovers. The level of complexity involved in trying to manage families like that is truly mind-boggling.

This has its effects, both on the frazzled adults and on the kids. I wrote a book about marriage that was motivated by my years of teaching college kids at Union University, down the road in Jackson, TN. I was astonished at the number of kids there who had gone through divorce one, two, or multiple times. College is often when kids have the first chance to really process what it was like going through their parents’ divorce and parental dating and cohabitating and remarriage and divorce again and so on. The data is quite clear that except in a minority of cases in which abuse or violence occurs, kids are better off being raised in stable environments by their married mother and father. Kids can be resilient and can learn to adjust to many things, but to call these constantly morphing family structures a perfectly normal reality is to go against all the data and thousands of years of human history.

All kinds of movies are about the effects of divorce. Some of them are played for laughs, like *Mrs. Doubtfire*, which is really about a brokenhearted and insanely jealous Dad/ex husband, played by Robin Williams. Some of

them are extremely sad, like the Sandra Bullock movie, *Hope Floats*, which is devastatingly realistic about the impact of divorce on the character played by Sandra Bullock, and on her daughter. You could name many other movies that are really about divorce.

Trying to understand why things have changed so much has consumed the best efforts of a lot of really smart people. Some of these factors might surprise you; for example, divorce rates seem to be linked to women's employment and empowerment in contemporary societies. Women are more free to choose whether to marry and more free to leave marriages that they find unsatisfying. This has saved many women from having to deal with abusive or horrible marriages, but it has also contributed to overall increases in the instability of marriage.

Another factor seems to be that people have grown accustomed in our capitalist society to trading in or abandoning products that they don't like anymore. When you buy a car or a home in 2009 you feel no obligation to keep it forever. Some sociologists are suggesting that the fluidity and market mentality of capitalist societies makes it very easy for people to look for a better deal in every area of life, even their most intimate relationships.

Expectations for marriage have also risen. People expect marriage to bring great emotional and sexual satisfaction. And people increasingly feel entitled to try again with someone else if those needs are not being met to the level they expect. Meanwhile, the idea that the greatest duty we have is to ourselves, rather than others, has taken broad hold in our culture.

So your generation is now approaching what used to be called marriageable age. Many of your cohorts are delaying marriage; some are deciding not to marry. Others are still taking the plunge. But all of us—and especially all of you, at your age—are affected by the instability and uncertainty and pain of contemporary marriage.

That is where we are.

Historic Christian Faith on Marriage

And amidst that culture some may

go to church and may hear something like this. It will strike them as very odd: "Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.' But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate'" (Mk 10:2-9).

Actually, there are a lot of churches where you will never hear this passage read or preached. It is far too controversial, unpopular, and painful. I remember a time when I gave a series of lectures at a seminary, of all places, and nearly got thrown out of the place because I offered a series of talks on the actual teachings of Jesus about marriage and divorce. No, these are not popular words right now. But I promised to expose you to what the Bible and the Christian tradition have actually said about these issues, so that's what I am going to do here.

This particular passage is the main place Jesus talks about marriage and has probably proven more influential than any other single Bible passage about marriage.

Scholars have shown that the Pharisees were apparently trying to get Jesus to weigh in on a legal dispute they were having about the proper grounds for divorce. Rabbinic liberals said the Bible permits a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Rabbinic conservatives said divorce is permitted only for sexual immorality. In Mark's version of the story Jesus simply refuses to take sides in this dispute. Instead, he drives all of his listeners back to the creation story in which God made Eve and gave her to Adam as his bone of bone, flesh of flesh life-partner, the only suitable partner for him.

This story says that man and woman

are made from each other, made for each other, and made to celebrate each other when they unite in a one flesh relationship. And that relationship is described as marriage. Jesus reaffirms that beautiful narrative as God's original intention for marriage. He says that a husband and wife are really no longer two, but one—their lives are joined, by God himself. And no one is supposed to shatter that bond. No one. Jesus goes on in the very next passage to say that divorcing someone to marry another is really just the same as adultery.

So for the church, the passage in Genesis 2, plus Jesus' interpretation of it, plus the scattered other references to marriage in the Bible, led to a very specific understanding of marriage. It has for 2000 years been viewed as a relationship between one man and one woman; to be sexually exclusive and faithful; the context for the birth and raising of children; and lasting until the death of one spouse.

There have been variations on the theme in different times and places. For example, the Catholic Church developed the idea that marriage is a sacrament that confers divine grace on the couple; they also developed the tradition that marriage is literally indissoluble. This means not just that divorce is wrong, but that it is impossible. This idea underlies official Catholic teaching to this day, which is why the Catholic Church almost never accepts the legitimacy of divorce.

John Calvin, the great Swiss reformer, emphasized that marriage is a sacred covenant, drawing from a few biblical passages that suggest this idea as well as from the comparison of the husband-wife relationship to that between God and his people or Christ and the church, as in Ephesians 5. Today most Christian churches and wedding services communicate the idea that marriage is a holy vow made between husband and wife and God. It's not just a love affair or even a contract like buying a house—it's a sacred covenant.

The idea that marriage is for love is a relatively late development in western culture and has had fateful consequences. The church has not always taught

that marriage should be based on romantic love and was always worried that basing marriage on warm romantic feelings made it vulnerable to people thinking they were free to divorce when those warm feelings cooled. For about a hundred years, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the church tried to hold the line in this way—it said to people that it was O.K. to marry for love, but only once, for better or worse. Now people marry for love over and over and over again, often ending up in a sad progression of worse and worse relationships.

Under the impact of Christianity, both Europe and America once made divorce very difficult to obtain. While the interpretation of some of the biblical passages is complex, Christian leaders understood the Bible to say that divorce should either be never permitted or only permitted in rare cases like adultery or abandonment. The laws until relatively recently reflected these values, and so if you wanted a divorce, you had to prove in a court of law that your spouse had done something wrong according to the laws of that state. Now of course, you probably know that you can get a divorce for any reason whatsoever. No one has to have done anything wrong. You can divorce for “irreconcilable differences” even if you’re the only one who thinks there’s a problem. That change happened only 40 years ago in U.S. law.

So that is where the church has been for its 2000 year history. It has never said that everyone has to get married. But it has said that if you do get married, it is to last for a lifetime. It is to be the only place where sexual activity happens. It is where kids are to be raised and cared for. Divorce is to be a rare exception for terrible circumstances.

The Difference Christ Makes

So here we have the second of our three great clashes that we will consider in these three lectures: American culture has essentially abandoned the marriage ethic that once shaped our culture and laws. Now marriage is optional, and lasts as long as we both shall *love*, not as long as we both shall

live. This is a fundamental rejection of the Christian message about marriage.

You will get to choose the path that you will follow. You can go with the classic Christian understanding of marriage. Or you can go with the prevailing cultural pattern. Which will it be for you?

I hope you will go with the Christian version. I hope that not only because I think that self-identified Christians are supposed to follow Christ’s teachings. But I hope it is also because (a) it tends to lead to happier lives for adults, and (b) it tends to lead to much happier lives for children, and (c) it tends to be much better for society.

But the difference Christ makes on this issue is not only that you might believe in a Christian approach to marriage rather than a cultural one. It is also in the development of both the internal and the external resources that are required to actually live out this ethic.

The reality is that our culture will never go back to a time when people have to get married to have sex or have to stay married if they do get married.

If you are going to choose classic, Christian, faithful, lifetime marriage, you will need to be the kind of person who has the capacity to pull that off. That means that you will need those resources of character and temperament that are required to navigate a relationship with another person over a whole lifetime.

You might recognize this list: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, humility, gentleness, and self-control. It’s the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5. Successful lifetime marriage requires two people who exhibit these wonderful characteristics on a daily basis—and who also have the seemingly endless capacity to forgive themselves and each other when they fall short.

You will have to be the kind of person who knows how to endure hard times with resilience, toughness, and courage. Most marriages go through one or more very difficult times. Many times today people give up during those times, often regretting that deci-

sion over time. You will need to be the kind of person, and to marry the kind of person, who hangs in there during hard seasons.

In my marriage with Jeanie over 25 years now, we have moved nine times, had three children, lost two babies to fetal death, adopted a young adult with great stress on our family, lived through one daughter’s serious car accident, had one cancer scare, sent two kids off to college, had one of them survive a tornado, faced various severe job stresses, and more than once had to wonder where the money was coming from to make ends meet. Such is life. You need not just the right beliefs during hard times. You need Jesus. You need the Holy Spirit.

You will also need a certain kind of Christian community around you. One of the things that our cultural changes has meant is that no one really expects marriages to last a lifetime and no one much gets on you if yours doesn’t. Churches go soft, the culture seems to laugh at or encourage divorce, and the law makes divorce relatively easy. Meanwhile friends often seem to think that friendship means blessing whatever our friend wants to do.

One difference Christ can make is when he helps us decide to make Christian friends and join a church that calls us to faithfulness instead of blessing whatever junky decision we feel like making. We don’t need church to be just another voice telling us to give in to cultural voices and look out for number one. We need a community of people who help us follow Christ and be our best selves. Is that who you have around you?

There are many reasons to dream of and work for cultural changes that can maybe help reverse these devastating changes in marriage in our society. But it begins with Christians remembering our own tradition and following Christ again. Culture will care little about our words until we embody, not just talk about, a different way of life. This will be the way our culture will come to believe in the difference Christ makes. ■

All I Want Is The Truth . . .

By Steve Blow, Columnist Dallas Morning News

Max in Richardson probably wishes he had never mailed me. I had the gall to ask a question.

A few days ago Max forwarded me and 39 others an item about how President Barack Obama was irked with U.S. military veterans.

It said Obama wanted veterans to carry private health insurance to cover service-related injuries, but that opposition forced him to scrap the idea.

The e-mail said: *The President admitted that he was puzzled by the magnitude of the opposition to his proposal.*

"Look, it's an all-volunteer force," Obama complained. "Nobody made these guys go to war. They had to have known and accepted the risks. Now they whine about bearing the costs of their choice? It doesn't compute . . . "I thought these were people who were proud to sacrifice for their country," Obama continued. "I guess I underestimated the selfishness of some of my fellow Americans."

The e-mail cites the quotes as proof that Obama is "the worst president in American history" and urges readers to "pass this on to everyone."

I wrote back to Max and asked for the source of the quotes.

"I wish I could," he replied. "This was an e-mail that came to me, and I forwarded it. I have heard or read these comments before, but I don't know the source."

A few minutes later he e-mailed me

again. "My memory is not infallible," he wrote, "but I seem to remember hearing these quotes on Channel 8 or Channel 4 news."

No, he didn't.

It took me about 60 seconds on the Internet to discover that the president never said those outrageous things.

Of course not.

The made-up quotes come from a satirical column written to ridicule the president.

But now they get passed around as fact. And I sign once again over our low regard for truth these days.

A few days before Max's e-mail, I got a similar one. Seems like this guy's name was Pete.

He forwarded a popular e-mail making the rounds and asked why the media never reports such things.

That was easy.

"Because it's not true," I replied.

This one had to do with Michelle Obama supposedly ordering champagne and caviar from room service at the Waldorf-Astoria. It even includes a copy of the signed bill.

But it's all bogus. Ms. Obama wasn't even in New York at the time.

I attached a link to a Web site with more information about the hoax. Pete wrote back: "No, not that. The other."

I scrolled further down his original e-mail and found the one about Ms. Obama supposedly having a far larger staff than any previous first lady.

Not true either. Her staff may be slightly larger, but it's right in line with that of Laura Bush and other predecessors.

The Internet is a wonderful thing. It spreads information like never before.

But it spreads lies just as quickly.

Do we care? Or do we care more about smearing our political enemies?

Neither Pete nor Max showed any hint of regret about spreading false information.

This isn't partisan concern. I'd say the same if this was circulating about a Republican in the White House. And, no, the jabs at former President George W. Bush never reached this level.

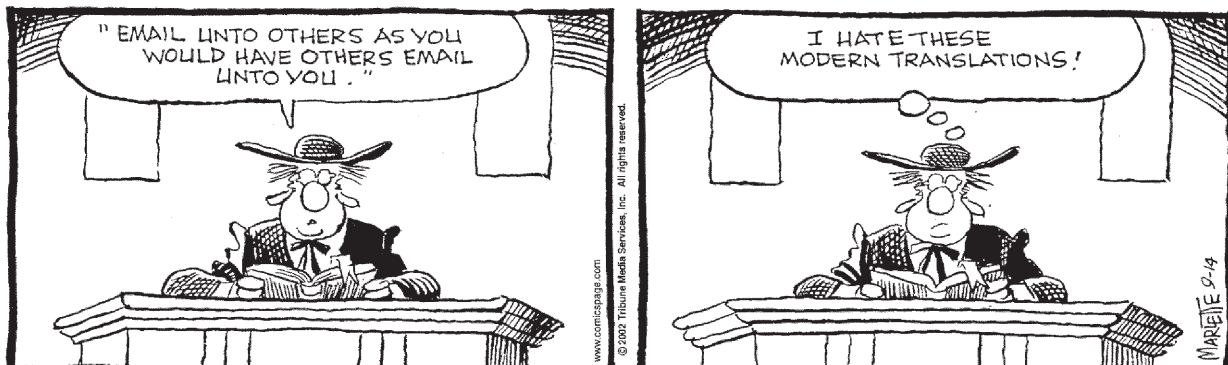
It's so easy to determine if a circulating e-mail is true or false. Go to www.snopes.com or www.factcheck.org. Or just type a few key words into Google.

Please resolve to do that before forwarding anything. If you can't confirm it, don't send it.

Our editorial pages embarked on a campaign last week to bring more civility into public discourse.

That's nice. But right now I'd settle for more truth. ■

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Baylor Regents Devalue Churchmanship

By Robert Parham, Executive Director Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, TN

Baylor University regents and advisory committee members cheapened Baptist church membership with their introduction of Ken Starr as the institution's next president. One member of the group completely misrepresented the nature of Starr's current church.

All told, those who spoke watered down the definition of authentic church membership.

Introducing Starr, Dary Stone, chairman of the regents, said that the Baylor community needed to understand "what an outstanding life that he has lived as a Christian leader."

"He has been an outspoken Christian leader. He's a man of faith. He's a family man, a church leader," claimed Stone. "Kenneth Starr embodies all that characterizes Baylor University."

Stone said that Starr had "a servant leader's heart."

Joe Armes, the search committee chair, said, "Starr is a mature and thoughtful Christian with a vibrant faith that truly defines who he is."

Ken Hall, chair of the presidential search advisory committee and president of Buckner International, said, "He represents the very best of what it means to be an active churchman, who . . . puts his belief into action through his local congregation of faith." Hall added that Starr is "the epitome of what it means to be a Christian servant leader."

While Stone, Armes and Hall strung together spiritual accolades without evidence to back up their assertions, Tom Phillips, a retired judge and advisory committee member, misstated the nature of the church where Starr has his membership. He claimed it as a Baptist church.

According to media reports, Starr belongs to McLean Bible Church, located in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Starr doesn't belong to University Church of Christ in Malibu, Calif., as some have wrongly claimed, although he does attend.

Judge Phillips said that Starr belonged to an "independent Bible church, which if it had to be in a slot would be called Baptist, at least we would claim it, with perhaps a better right than any other denomination."

Now, would Baylor and other goodwill Texas Baptists really claim McLean as a Baptist church?

The church Web site says, "We are unashamed to say that we understand the Bible literally, believe that it is inerrant and infallible." On another page, the church identifies itself as being governed by elders, one of whom has a degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. All nine elders are men, per proof texts.

McLean Bible Church is not a Baptist church.

What do we know about McLean Bible Church's pastor, Lon Solomon? Solomon received a doctorate of

divinity degree from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in 2005. He has been on the board of Jews for Jesus since 1987 and is now the board's chairman.

No wonder Paige Patterson, one of the architects of the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, spoke with enthusiasm about Starr's election. Starr belongs to a church that affiliates with same crowd that SBC fundamentalists do. Starr's church uses the same words to define the Bible that SBC fundamentalists use.

It was those words and fundamentalism's truncated understanding of faith that led former Baylor president Herb Reynolds, John Baugh and others to fight for Baylor's autonomy and security from the Baptist General Convention of Texas when it was under threat of fundamentalist control.

Phillips either is confused or doesn't see a problem with fundamentalism.

If ignorance of the law is no excuse, then untruthfulness is inexcusable. Phillips flatly misrepresented the nature of Starr's church.

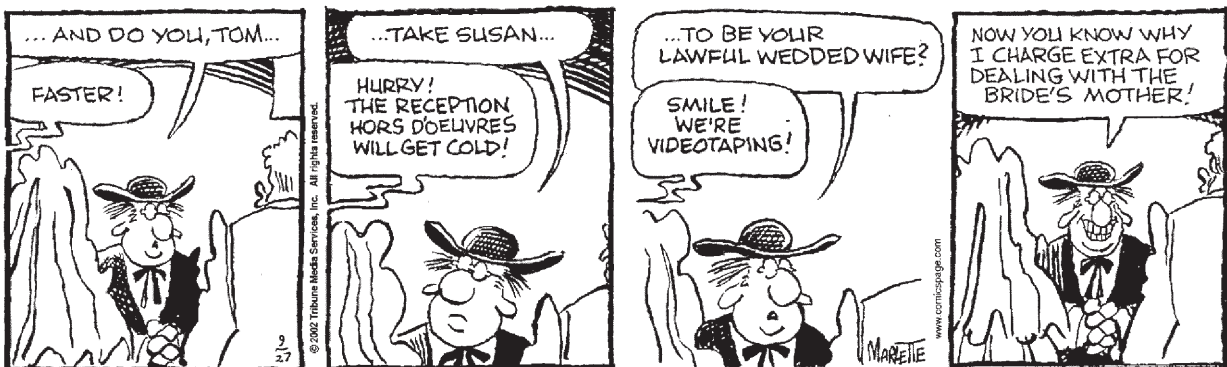
Another individual appears to have overstated Starr's churchmanship.

Hall said that Starr "represents the very best of what it means to be an active churchman."

Oh, really?

Starr's membership is in a church in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. He works at a law school in Malibu,

(continued on page 24)



Pardon Me, but I missed your apology . . .

By Henry Alford, Author of "How to Live"

Isometimes find strangers' manners so lacking that I have started engaging in an odd kind of activism. I call it reverse etiquette: I supply the apology that they should be giving me.

When the ebullient young woman behind the cash register at the grocery store dropped my apple on the ground, she smiled nervously, picked it up and put it in my bag, but said nothing. So I offered, in a neutral tone of voice, "Oh, I'm sorry." This did not elicit the remorse I hoped it would—she simply grimace-smiled and said, "That's OK." So I added, "Sorry about that—I really didn't mean for you to drop that." At which she stared off into the mid-distance as if receiving instructions from outer space.

A few weeks later, the skinny, 20-something gentleman manning the cash register at the pizzeria told me, "I can't break a 20." So I asked, "Would you mind terribly if I went next door and got change?" He said "That's fine." When I returned, no thanks or apology forthcoming from him, I said in a flat, non-sarcastic voice, "So sorry—I hope I didn't keep you waiting?" Confused, he shook his head no. "I forget stuff sometimes," I said—a cue that went unmet.

How did I get here? I'd feel like a marm or a scold if I told a stranger that he has bad manners; so instead I wage a campaign of subtle remonstrance. That this subtle remonstrance was, in its initial forays at least, mostly lost on my interlocutors did not faze me; being able to sublimate my irritation was its own reward.

But I like to think that in some instances my behavior, by causing others to wonder what I'm going on about, may help to carry out etiquette's mandate: to promote empathy. It's my distinct hope that the person who is apologized to when she drops my apple is a person who will have an epiphany the next time someone drops her apple.

And yet, placated though I am by the realization that I am providing others with gentle, time-released lessons, sometimes the angry little man inside me wants more. Much more. To wit, an apology.

So I have become more explicit in my acts of reverse etiquette. The other day I apologized to a tall, bearded man who slammed his duffel into me at Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street in New York. Then I told him, "I'm saying what you should be saying." He

responded, "Oh, right."

Though this response could not be described as blanket-like, it nevertheless gave me enough ground to see that I was on the right track. I realized that I just need to be even more explicit with people. So the other day, when a stroller-pushing mother semi-vigorously bumped into me at Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street—this corner is apparently the Bermuda Triangle of manners—I expressed remorse, and added, "No one says I'm sorry anymore, so I do it for them."

"OK."

"My idea is that if I say I'm sorry, then at least the words have been released into the universe."

She stared at me with equal parts irritation and faint horror, as if I had just asked her to attend a three-hour lecture on the history of the leotard.

I continued: "The apology gets said, even if it's not by the right person. It makes me feel better. And maybe you'll know what to say next time."

"Wow," she said. (The tickets for the leotard lecture were \$200, or \$500 at the door.)

And then, finally, came the words I have longed these many months to hear: "I'll think about it." ■



Is Your Quiver Full?

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

Quiverfull-theology advocates [QuiverFull.com] are almost universally conservative, evangelical Christians. They seek to convince people that “God alone” should determine the size of one’s family since having a “quiverfull” of children is a “blessing” from God (Psalm 127:3-5). For this reason, they will tell you that any kind of contraception or any desire to prevent the conception of a child during the coital act is a sin against God.

In 1985, Mary Pride wrote a foundational text for quiverfull theology entitled *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*. Pride argued that family planning leads to a slide toward the acceptability of abortion and feminism, two things incompatible with Christianity. Pride wrote that Christians should reject women’s liberation in exchange for the principles of submissive wifehood and prolific stay-at-home motherhood—thus the modern birth of quiverfull living.

To help others know that there are evangelical, conservative Christians who reject quiverfull theology, I offer the following eight holes in the theological position of quiverfulls from a conservative, evangelical (Calvinistic) Christian point of view:

1. Quiverfull theology is based on an Old Covenant that also had other precepts, commandments, and laws from God that we Christians no longer abide by. The Old Covenant laws were “shadows” or “types” to teach us of Christ, and when Jesus came, He fulfilled and abolished the Old Covenant types. The Old Covenant command was to “go, be fruitful and multiply.” The New Covenant command, under which we live, is “go and make disciples.”
2. The notion that anyone “prevents” God from naming the number of kids a family has is anti-biblical, anti-logical, and anti-God at its core. Contraception no more “prevents” God from creating a baby who “could have cured AIDS” or “been the president of the United States,” than a man shouting at the sun can keep it from shining. God ordains the creation of each human soul, and nobody prevents Him

from accomplishing His plans. The sheath of a condom, or the dissolution of a pill, is no more an obstacle to God in the creation of a human being than the lack of matter was an obstacle to God in creating the universe.

3. Holiness or righteousness is obtained by faith in Christ alone. We are declared perfectly righteous (justified) by a holy God. The woman with faith in Christ who tries her entire life to have one child, and cannot for physical reasons, compared to the woman with faith in Christ who could have multiple children, but does not for contraception reasons, compared to the woman with faith in Christ who does have 20 children because of her quiverfull theology and refusal to use contraception—are all equally holy, equally blessed, equally loved by God and equally honored. To say anything less is a denial of the gospel itself.

4. There are cities full of children who are abused, abandoned, and in need. The 2009 motion picture *The Blind Side* demonstrates what happens when an evangelical Christian family adopts a needy inner city child. It is as Christ-honoring to be naturally childless and help the needy children in the city as it is to have a dozen of your own naturally-born children.

5. The idea that Christians should have more children because we are losing the “culture wars” and by having more and more kids one day we will “out-populate” the Muslims, the cults, and pagans is to lose absolute sight of the New Testament truth that entrance into the kingdom of God is not based on flesh and blood (or culture, color or creed), but faith in the good news that is proclaimed about the unique Son of God. We do not need an army of Christian children separate from the world; we need an army of Christian witnesses as salt and light in the middle of a decaying and dark world.

6. It is true that a woman who marries, stays at home, bears children, and nurtures them in the ways of the Lord is to be honored. But it is also true that the woman who marries, but works outside the home

and doesn’t have children, is to be honored just as much. Christian honor should be given for who a person is, not what a person does or doesn’t do. We are always cautioned in the Scriptures against honoring people based upon the amount of their “blessings” or the “size” of their wealth. We are to honor people because they are people. Period.

7. We Christians are “pro-life”—that is, we believe in the sacredness and sanctity of every human life. Our “pro-life” arguments, however, ring hollow when we remove our churches from inner city neighborhoods where our presence could help those with poor qualities of life; when we leave our states backlogged with tens of thousands of foster children on the rolls, forcing states to often give multiple foster children to unfit foster parents; and when we do little or nothing for those lives that are trapped in hospitals, prisons and community centers. The blessings of a culture and a community might soar more when God’s people put more money, more focus, and more energy in caring for the lives already born than talking about those lives yet to be born.

8. Quiverfull theology, if followed logically and consistently, leads a husband and a wife to confusion about one’s true and eternal identity in Christ. Confusion about who we are on earth is not good preparation for eternity. There will be no marriage in heaven. There will be no procreation in heaven. It is the individual’s relationship with God that is preeminent, and the notion that a male is to be “the covering” for the female, and the female’s role is to simply procreate the progeny of the male as a helpful subordinate to the male, is to abdicate the NT teaching that every believer in Jesus Christ (male or female) is a “priest” unto God. Only when full equality of males and females is comprehended and experienced on earth will we ever have a taste of what human relationships will be like in heaven. ■

This article is adapted from a longer version that appears on the author’s blog.

Sarah Palin and God's Plan

By Bill Austin, Waco, TX

In a recent news article, Sarah Palin was quoted as saying that John McCain chose her to be his running mate in 2008 because "It's God's plan." She is not the first or the last politician (or preacher) to affirm that her (or his) agenda is the specific plan and will of the divine Creator.

To me, this is not a political or partisan issue. Democrats as well as Republicans have made similar pronouncements. This is a theological issue that goes to the very heart of personal faith, and should be approached with great reverence and humility. To speak with certainty about our plans being God's plans raises questions about personal interpretations and ultimate consequences.

If it was truly "God's plan" for her to run for the vice presidency, does that mean that Sarah Palin's candidacy was one of the means that God used to get Barack Obama elected? Or

does it mean that God was positioning her for a future role in national politics? Either view could be right, or they could both be wrong.

Church leaders often try to sell their programs by insisting it is God's will. Every time I hear someone say they have a direct message from God, I remember the story about the preacher who told his congregation that Jesus had spoken to him and told him to resign from the church. The entire congregation sprang to their feet and started singing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

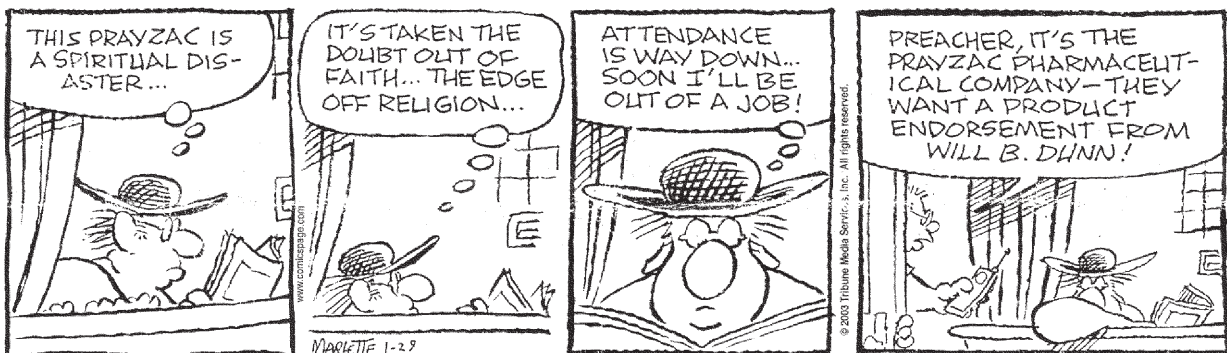
There are usually two distinct approaches to interpreting the will of God. One approach is conduct-centered—the other is goal-centered. The latter approach sees God's will in terms of achieving a certain goal, such as getting a particular job or house, getting a certain person elected president, or winning the battle

for programs, budgets, and buildings.

The other—the conduct-centered approach—emphasizes that what God wants above all else is for us to use godly methods and tactics regardless of the outcome of the vote or project. In this approach, how we conduct ourselves is understood to be the will of God. In the goal-centered approach, what we accomplish is understood to be God's will.

I have always felt that behaving with Christ-like conduct and integrity is more in the character of God's will than achieving certain goals. In other words, God's will is doing everything in God's way, whether we win or lose. ■

The author is a former chaplain at Baylor University and wrote this article as a Guest Column in the Waco Tribune-Herald.



The Rich History of Evangelical Feminism

By Mimi Haddad, President, Christians for Biblical Equality, Minneapolis, MN

One of my friends works in Christian ministry at a large, secular university. She is passionate about Christ; she is a gifted teacher, preacher, and apologist; she has dedicated her life to loving college students. She is tenacious in using her spiritual gifts and willing to live on a very limited salary. And, as she told me, “My church spends thousands of dollars so I can share the gospel with college students, both men and women. Yet they will not permit me to preach from the pulpit because I am a woman. This is not only inconsistent. What is worse, they are telling me that there is something wrong with being female!”

However, in the memory of those still living, things have been very different in the evangelical movement. Recently, three women in their 80s came into the office of Christians for Biblical Equality to volunteer. All three attended evangelical churches. All three were raised evangelical and went to Wheaton College. And all three remember hearing of female evangelists such as Amy Lee Stockton and Rita Gould preaching throughout the Midwest, in places that would surprise some of us today. One of the women, Alvera Mickelsen, told me, “You know, it wasn’t until 1950 that women preachers were considered ‘liberal.’ Before that, no one thought twice about women preaching the gospel.”

The contrast between the experience of these women and that of many evangelicals in college today tells us that something vital has been lost for evangelicals. While the patriarchal view, which holds that women are subordinate in their role and their very being, has been around for much of history, it was only in the 1970s that a new patriarchal religious strain emerged within the evangelical community: the so-called “complementarian” view, which argues that, while men and women are created in God’s image as equals, women have

different “roles” or “functions” than men. By “role” or “function” they mean one thing: that women are to be submissive to male authority.

This dissonance between what women are (created equally by God) and what they are to do (take a subordinate role to men) is a challenge to logic. But is it also a challenge to Christian history and scripture? In fact, what evangelical “complementarians” are missing is the fact that the shared authority and ministry of men and women were embraced in egalitarian ways in the work of the apostles—and in the writings and ministry of the early evangelicals of the 1700s.

Because early evangelicals believed that conversion marks the clearest division in life, they included all believers in the work of evangelism, even if it meant challenging social taboos by giving women and slaves new positions of leadership and freedom. The priority they gave to evangelism loosened the grip of prejudice within the body of Christ, challenging the patriarchal assumptions that dominated church culture after the death of the apostles.

To appreciate the roots of this break that evangelicals made with patriarchy, let us consider how the earliest Christian church—that of New Testament times—had made its own break from the society in which it arose. Remember, the Christian church emerged in a society where most gender expectations had been shaped by Greek philosophy, which assumed that women’s ontology—their being, nature, or essence—was less morally pure, rational, or strong compared to men’s. As Aristotle put it in the fourth century B.C.E., “the relationship between the male and the female is by nature such that . . . the male rules and the female is ruled.” And such philosophical assumptions had consequences in everyday life. Women in the ancient world had no authority in decision making within

social structures, and vast numbers of girl babies were exposed—left in the open to die—after birth.

Consider how differently the church in New Testament times functioned! Women—Pricilla, Junia, Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Phoebe, and more—served in positions of leadership. Baptism, open to both men and women, replaced circumcision as the other expression of our inner relationship with Christ. Women were not required to be obedient, but to offer voluntary submission, just as Paul asks all Christians to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).

When Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28 that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female, are all one in Christ, he offered these words to a culture in which nearly half of all people were slaves and more than half were female. His words are radical indeed when you consider that, in Paul’s culture, your identity and sphere of influence were determined by your gender, ethnicity, and class. To this world Paul boldly declares that our value and influence come not from our parents but from God, from whom we receive our ultimate inheritance, and our sisters and brothers in Christ receive the same inheritance equally from God’s Spirit. Rebirth in Christ opens opportunities from equality of function within Christ’s new covenant community.

Sadly, after the death of the apostles, the church adopted the cultural devaluation of women. As Chrysostom (347–407 C.E.) put it, “The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account therefore he saith, let her not teach . . . for the sex is weak and fickle.” Throughout the Middle Ages, while women such as Catherine of Siena, Hildegard, and Theodora provided moral leadership to the church during war, conflict, corruption, and the plague, theologians such as Aquinas continued to argue that women were inferior in nature and ser-

vice. Later, Protestant reformers such as John Calvin and John Knox kept rank with the patriarchal assumptions of earlier theologians, even though women were prominent in advancing Protestant faith throughout Europe. Women such as Lady Jane Grey in England; Jeanne D'Aalret—defender of the Huguenots—in France; and Katharine von Bora, Martin Luther's wife, in Germany courageously promoted Protestant faith, even though many were tortured and martyred.

The egalitarian view of the New Testament church began to re-emerge in 1666 with the writings of the Quaker Margaret Fell Fox. It gained enormous momentum in the 1800s, during what has been called the “golden era” of missions—the largest missionary impulse the world has ever known. New centers of Christian strength and vitality were flourishing in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, according to mission experts such as Dana Robert. More than half of all Christians were found outside the region that had been the historical heartland of Christianity for nearly 1,500 years. In all of this, women, who outnumbered men on mission fields 2 to 1, played a central role; so did people, such as Amanda Smith (see below), who had been born into slavery.

The success of women and former slaves as missionaries called into question gender and ethnic bias in interpreting scripture—and the church began to see the importance of liberating them both in church and in society. Between 1808 and 1930, more than 46 biblical publications were issued in support of women's gospel leadership. These documents signify the emer-

gence of the first wave of feminists—a movement that was deeply biblical.

For example, A.J. Gordon (1836-95), perhaps the most prominent evangelical pastor of his day, was a leading advocate of abolition, missions, and women in ministry. Gordon believed that Pentecost was the “Magna Charta of the Christian church,” in which those who had once been viewed as inferior by natural birth (their being and nature) attain a new spiritual status through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's gifting no longer rests on a “favored few, but upon the many, without regard to race, or age, or sex.”

Perhaps the most extensive egalitarian reading of the Bible was advanced by Dr. Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946), a medical doctor, missionary, Bible translator, and activist who exemplified the period's combination of missionary work, social activism, and first-wave feminism. Her book *God's Word to Women*, released in 1919 and still in print, advanced the equality of women—a position that grew out of her study of scripture in the original languages, her observations of women's leadership on the mission field, and her medical efforts to help abused women both in the U.S. and in India.

Bushnell begins her theological basis for women's equality in Genesis, by observing that Adam and Eve were both equally created in God's image and called to share dominion in Eden. Satan, not Eve, was the source of sin (Genesis 3:14-15), and sin led to the domination of men over women (Genesis 3:16). Most important, Bushnell and other evangelical egalitarians assessed women's essence

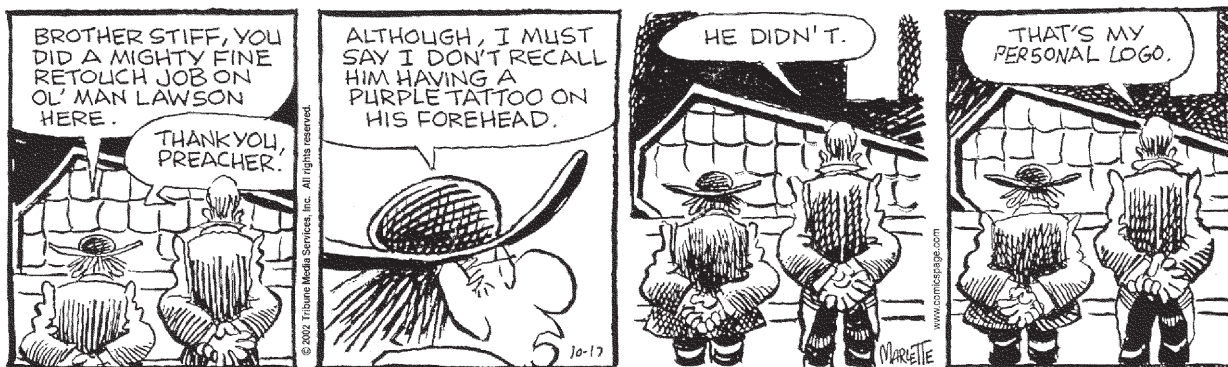
and capacity for ministry—just like men's—based not on the Fall, but on Christ's victory at Calvary.

The egalitarians of the 1800s affirmed the authority of the scriptures and provided a challenge to the presumed inferiority of women and slaves, as it had been put forward by previous generations of Christians. Ultimately, first-wave feminists offered a serious blow to any biblical support for determining one's scope of service based on attributes such as gender, class, or ethnicity.

Early feminists not only established the hermeneutical groundwork for later generations of egalitarians to build upon, they also fueled activism that dealt a death-blow to the institution of slavery and made it possible for women to gain the right to vote and become preachers of the gospel. As we can see, the liberation of women was a deeply biblical movement; it began not with secular feminists such as Gloria Steinem in the 1970s, as is often argued, but with Katharine Bushnell, Amanda Smith, and A.J. Gordon in the 1800s and earlier.

The priority given to conversion, so highly valued by evangelicals, pressed them to give women and slaves new ministry opportunities. The call of evangelism can press us today to acknowledge and embrace the gospel leadership of women—empowered by God since the empty tomb! ■

*This article is reprinted with permission from the August 28, 2009, issue of **Sojourners** (800) 714-7474, www.sojournal.net. Contact Christians for Biblical Equality at www.cbeinternational.org or (612) 872-6891.*



Is Obama a Christian Realist?

Q & A with Robin Lovin, Dallas, TX

The Christian realism that theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr presented after World War II has come alive again in the Obama years. The U.S. president says Niebuhr's work has influenced him, a point not lost on commentators assessing his first year in office.

Robin Lovin, Professor of Ethics at SMU, has written a new book on the subject, *Christian Realism and the New Realities*. Recently he shared these thoughts in a forum:

Q: What is a Christian realist?

A: That's someone who sees politics through the lens of a Christian view of history and human nature. That primarily means they understand politics as the work of fallible people who tend to overestimate their own wisdom and righteousness. For them, the most important thing in politics is to act within the limits of our knowledge and power.

Q: Given that definition, does the president qualify as a Christian realist?

A: It appears that he does. The way he has approached domestic politics and international relations is to move by limited steps and to be willing to compromise—too willing, some say. The willingness to compromise is characteristic of the realist's approach to politics.

Q: But spending \$850 billion to \$1 trillion to reform health care is not a limited step.

A: We see the realism in the contrast to the way President Clinton went about health care. The Clinton administration devised the ideal plan, put it before Congress and said "pass it." The Obama approach has been to say, "We've got to deal with these enormous health costs, we need to cover more people and I will begin with whatever reforms Congress is willing to put in front of me."

Q: Does the president's foreign

policy meet the broad definition of a Christian realist?

A: Here again, we go by what a leader does rather than what he says. But Obama's showing a willingness to engage Iran and North Korea. He seems ready to engage the world he's got, rather than the world he wants.

Q: But, Christian realism is not just about engaging other nations, it also understands leaders must use power to achieve certain goals.

A: This is perhaps where we need to look at his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. The president begins there to articulate a philosophy that is not hesitant to use power while being cautious about its limits. The Christian realist has to be willing to use power, but a realist also is careful not to claim more power than he really has.

Q: That's a hard balance. How do you achieve it?

A: It's a matter of learning from history. Certainly Reinhold Niebuhr, the 20th century great figure of Christian realism, talked mostly about learning from history. We're told that Obama is an interested reader of Niebuhr's book, *The Irony of American History*.

Q: You note in your new book how Christian realism informed the thinking of leaders like Niebuhr, including their balance of power emphasis that became the Cold War's guiding philosophy. If another round of Christian realism takes hold, how do you think we will look back in, say, 50 years to see how it affected our world?

A: The most important change in the post-Cold War era is that we no longer are concerned with only the balance of power among states. The world of international relations today is shaped by corporations, cultural movements and religions, too. The assumption that was valid in 1945—that states control what happens on a global scale—is no longer valid.

So, 25 or 50 years from now, we will measure the success of our policies that started in this century by whether they were able to create a balance of power between these different institutional and cultural forces. And whether they sustained peace and stability as well as the balance of power between states did after World War II.

Q: Christian realists warn against the pride and self-righteousness of powerful nations. How do Obama and his team avoid that? They seem awfully confident.

A: Yes. That's the great problem of leadership. It requires confidence. The role itself tempts people to overestimate their wisdom. That's why he needs prophetic voices, as well as political ones, to give him perspective on the political situation of the moment, who can help him see it in a historical context.

Q: Who's doing that for him?

A: That's an important question because it seems that the president himself is the primary realist on his team. ■

Honoring Walker L. Knight

Note: This article has been adapted from two papers delivered at a meeting of an informal group of 30 persons (most religious journalists), who worked for and with Walker Knight.

By Emmanuel L. McCall, Sr., Vice President Baptist World Alliance

June 20, 1995 was a momentous day in the life of Southern Baptists. On that afternoon, the SBC in annual session passed a “Resolution On Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention.” The SBC repudiated its racist past, asked African-Americans for forgiveness, and pledged complete allegiance to scriptural teachings regarding race.

One person who must have found redemption in the passing of that resolution was Walker L. Knight. As editor of the *Home Missions Magazine*, Walker had suffered much as he wrote voluminously on matters of racism in America and the need for racial reconciliation in the SBC. His efforts were not well received. They caused numerous cancellations of the magazine, ostracism, and public scorn.

I first met Walker in 1966. He had come to Kentucky to interview an interracial group of pastors who had been part of the Louisville Baptist Interracial Pastors Conference. This group, begun in 1962 under the leadership of Dr. John Claypool, had been very instrumental in helping Louisville avoid the racial trauma that occurred in other southern cities during the 1960s.

At its height, the conference had about 800 clergy including church staffs, denominational staffs, seminary faculties, and retired clergy in its membership. A united front was presented to the churches of both races about reconciliation.

Walker’s interview covered about eight pages in print and pictures. Other articles about race relations were in that January, 1967, edition of *Home Missions*. What really angered many Southern Baptists was the cover picture of Dr. William Holmes

Borders, African-American pastor of the Wheat Street Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA. Many Baptists cancelled their subscriptions.

Walker, however, was undaunted by the negative reactions. He had the support and encouragement of the HMB executive Dr. Arthur Rutledge and the good will of many of the staff. Most of all he had his own sense of God’s purpose and his personal integrity.

It was during this time that the false dichotomy between evangelism and social action raised its ugly head as a way to impugn the integrity of racial reconciliation. Walker demonstrated his theological abilities and drew upon the gifts of the Christian Life Commission and seminary staffs. There were ample men and women who were committed to interpreting scripture with integrity. He had a ready reserve of competent scholars. Beyond these, he found support from other SBC organizations, especially Woman’s Missionary Union.

When I think of Walker Knight, I think of the host of men and women in the SBC who were stalwarts in ministries of racial reconciliation—Victor Glass, Wendell Grigg, Arthur Rutledge, Wendell Belew, Hugo Culpepper, John Claypool, Henlee Barnette, Marie Mathis, Alma Hunt, John Havlik, T.B. Maston, Foy Valentine, Guy Bellamy, Carolyn Crumpler, and Carlisle Driggers.

The list of those who have given their lives in ministries of racial reconciliation is extensive.¹ Only God knows them all by name. But high in my mind, because of the vehicle he used and the awareness he created, has to be Walker L. Knight.

By Jim Newton, Religious Journalist (ret.) Clinton, MS

Professionally and personally, Walker Knight was and is the best editor and the finest Christian I have ever known. No other editor of a Baptist publication has done as much to motivate, educate and encourage Baptists to improve race relations during and after the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

For 23 years as editor of *Home Missions* magazine published by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Walker Knight did more to improve race relations than all other Baptist editors combined. Yet because of his modesty and humility, few Baptists who were not active before he retired as editor of *Baptists Today* in 1988 know or remember the significant role he played in Christian ethics. Today at age 85, he is publisher emeritus of *Baptists Today*, and his mind is as sharp as ever.

These are audacious words of praise for a religious journalist many Baptists, especially those not involved in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, may not know or remember. And that is the point of this article: there are Baptists among us who are rewriting history to eliminate facts and trends that do not fit the new directions Baptists have by majority vote chosen to follow during the last two decades. As a denomination, Baptists are in danger of forgetting people like Walker Knight who had the courage to take a stand on controversial issues.

When *Baptists Today* celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2008, the magazine paid tribute to his role as founding editor and publisher. But very little has been published about his pioneer days as editor of *Home Missions* and

MissionsUSA. The North American Mission Board discontinued the publication in 1997. During his 23 years as editor, Walker Knight spoke out editorially with courage, prophetic vision, and wisdom.

Walker Leigh Knight, a native of Kentucky who grew up in the newspaper business working for his father, felt God was calling him to the ministry when he was a journalism student at Baylor University following World War II, but he did not feel called “to preach.” The field of “religious journalism” did not even exist as a career option in those days, as editors of all Baptist publications were former pastors, not trained journalists. He served as associate editor of *The Baptist Standard* from 1949-1959. In 1959 he became associate editor of *Home Missions*, and was promoted to editor in 1960.

What were the characteristics that made Walker Knight such a great editor and religious journalist?

- He led by example; and had extremely high professional standards.
- He had the courage to be prophetic regardless of the personal cost.
- He was a man of vision who was always looking to the future.
- He believed his calling was to be an “agent of change.”
- He was always secure and confident, never afraid of losing his job.
- He acted on his beliefs and his convictions, rather than reacting.
- He was a servant leader in his local church, putting into action the principles he espoused in his national publication.
- He was always fair, honest, and transparent, with no hidden agendas.
- He never played denominational or office politics.
- He was always fair and balanced in coverage of controversy.
- He was innovative and always willing to try new approaches.
- He cared about people, and always put others first.
- He was humble and modest,

never egotistical or self-centered.

- He was gentle in his relationships, but forceful in writing editorials.
- He was an issue-oriented editor/Christian; he always saw the big picture.
- The one word that best describes him is the word “integrity.”

Walker was one of the first Baptist editors to deal with the race issue. In the May issue of his first year, he wrote an editorial on “Containing the Race Issue,” stating “The specter of race prejudice stalks the nation and has made its home in the South. Christians face a crisis which will require all the grace we have, not only toward those of other races but toward those with whom we disagree.” He offered 16 practical suggestions.

In September of 1962 a letter to the editor suggested that “it is wise for denominational leaders not to take a stand on integration because it would antagonize many of our people.” Knight’s response: “I have not taken a specific stand editorially favoring integration, but I feel that schools, churches, and businesses should be open to all people who want equal opportunities. I believe this is a moral problem and that possibly we should be antagonizing some of our people about the problem.”

One of his strongest editorials, published in January of 1968, dealt with the need for Baptist pastors to speak out on controversial issues from a free pulpit. “Silent pulpits are captives of the culture of present society and to be silent is to imply that the Bible says nothing or if it does that the minister does not believe it. We lose our integrity by our silence and the church loses its integrity because it does not practice what the Scriptures teach. . . . We have failed to hold up before our people a clear picture of what it actually means to be the church in our day. Too often the church waits in silence as though it has a vested interest in the status quo, refusing to challenge the patterns of culture, hoping instead to avoid the necessity of tension-producing confrontation.”

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, Walker responded with the weeping and wailing of a prophet crying in the desert: “Christians have reacted with a sense of shame, guilt and repentance wondering what they could have done or left undone to help create such a society where prophets of peace and nonviolence are killed Only a Christian and moral solution, only the changing of men’s hearts, only the application of the ethic of Christ, only the response of love can bring the necessary solution. Let us greet this tragedy and useless waste of life to purge our hearts of any and all attitudes and practices that would limit our witness to any and all persons. Let us confess and renounce the sin of prejudice that has separated us from our Negro brothers and has caused us to look the other way when they have been denied their civil and personal rights as men.”

Over the years, the magazine generated incredible reader response because it dealt with issues that touched the lives of the readers. Issues like the sexual revolution, birth control and the population explosion, the influence of society on the church and the church’s lack of influence on society, the plight of Mexican-Americans who live in poverty and abuse by the migrant farm industry, urban decay and suburban extravagance, evangelism and social action, the struggle of American Indians for equality and dignity, violence and riots in America, the Hippie movement, the leisure movement, poverty in America, the world hunger crisis, ecology, pollution and the environment, the agony of the aged and aging society, the telecommunications revolution, women’s changing role in the church, capital punishment, the laymen’s revolution, the Christian and politics, changing ethnic patterns in America, cooperation with government organizations, Baptist involvement in the Ku Klux Klan, Baptist churches and “Christian academies,” violence in the family, and war in an age of nuclear proliferation.

Perhaps the most beautiful writing ever published in the magazine was

Walker's 1972 poetic essay on world peace, entitled "The Peacemaker." It was so good Jimmy Carter quoted it in one of his presidential addresses. Here is what he wrote:

"It is not just hating war, despising war, sitting back and waiting for war to end. It is not just loving peace, wanting peace, sitting back and waiting for peace to come. Peace like war is waged. Peace plans its strategy and encircles its enemy. Peace marshals its forces and storms the gates. Peace gathers its weapons and pierces the defense. Christ has turned it all around. I am to love my enemy . . . do good to those who hate me . . . turn the other cheek. I am the peacemaker."

And that describes Walker Knight. He is the most Christ-like man I've ever known. I am proud and humbled to have had the privilege of working alongside this man of God whom I consider both my mentor and my beloved friend. Thanks be to God for Walker L. Knight. ■

1 Emmanuel L. McCall, *When All God's Children Get Together*, Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007.

A "Successful Ministry"

(continued from page 4)

The News 8 report stated, "No one is accusing him of breaking any laws, but perhaps he is violating the covenant of honesty with his congregation." When WFAA asked the pastor specifically if he has a personal jet, his spokesman told the reporter that the senior pastor travels using commercial, charter, and leased aircraft, and that he reimburses the church for any personal trips.

In addition, the pastor's spokesman told News 8 "his board approves all spending decisions, and their financial books are audited by an outside accounting firm."

But from a Christian ethics point of view, and especially in light of ministerial codes of ethics,³ it seems obvious that there is a lack of transparency and accountability and an abundance of wealth and opulence.

Jesus told many parables about the misuse of wealth, the danger of greed, and the love of money. In one he noted, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of things possessed" (Lk 12:15).

If Jesus told this modern story as a parable, might it be titled, "Successful Ministry?" ■

—J.E.T.

1 Read the full story in "Megachurch Pastor Decries Tax System" in www.ethicsdaily.com (2/11/10).

2 News reports stated the young pastor later confessed that he was unable to keep the pledge he challenged his congregation to make (a week of daily sex relations with one's spouse to "revive intimacy" in marriage), due he said, to personal fatigue—he lasted until Thursday.

3 See pp. 229-257 in Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* (2nd ed.), Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Baylor Regents Devalue Churchmanship

(continued from page 15)

Calif. He belongs to a church on the East Coast and works at a school on the West Coast, an arrangement that has been in place since 2004.

What kind of "active churchman" can't find a church where he lives and works—for six years?

How active can one be in his local church if he lives almost 2,700 miles away?

Why would a "church leader" not have a local church home where he lives?

If Starr represents "the very best" of what it means to be an "active churchman," then Baylor's leaders have redefined churchmanship for Texas Baptists. Call it minimalism or absenteeism. But for honesty's sake, don't call it active church leadership.

The Baylor leaders—who introduced Starr—have watered down authentic church membership and replaced it with the lowest common denominator from cultural Christianity. Conservative cultural Christianity would say that Starr is a conservative, which means he's a faithful Christian, according to some. Political ideology is more important than theology. Party membership is more important than church membership.

The need for the regents and advisory council to spin Starr's churchmanship is a deeply troubling signal about how they value church involvement.

Texas Baptists once believed in the centrality of the local church and expected faithful church members to be genuinely active. The tectonic plates of Texas Baptist theology have shifted. ■

This article originally appeared in EthicsDaily.com (2/26/10) and is reprinted with permission.

Christian Ethics and the Movies

"It is better to watch a good movie again than a bad movie once!"

Misuse of the Bible

The Book of Eli (2010)

Reviewed by Monty M. Self

Little Rock, AR

Good movies should take us out of this world and transform us into another reality, while at the same time either helping us recover part of our humanity that has been lost or forcing us to reconcile what is wrong with our world. *The Book of Eli* does both. This post-apocalyptic action-drama forces viewers to ask about the nature of religion and more specifically how society views the Bible.

The movie begins by introducing its viewers to Eli (Denzel Washington), a silent solitary pacifistic warrior who is on a divine mission to deliver a book to an undisclosed location out West. In addition to his devotion to the book, Eli is a spiritual man who regularly prays, attempts to avoid conflict, and is not tempted by sins of the flesh. Eli posses a singular purpose—to protect the book.

With a need for water and a desire to recharge the external battery of his Ipod, Eli arrives at a makeshift town ruled by a ruthless despot named Carnegie (Gary Oldman). Carnegie is an intellectual. Like Eli, he is one of the few people left who can read, but he is also a man of ambition. He desires to rebuild human civilization and become the master of a series of towns like this one, but he only needs one thing—he needs a particular book, which he tirelessly sends his minions to find. For Carnegie it is a text that possesses power—he who reads the book can interpret it however he desires. And people will follow as long as he uses words from the book.

After Eli whips a gang of Carnegie's men in a bar fight, Carnegie attempts to recruit Eli, tempting him with food, liquor, and a woman named Solara (Mila Kunis). Eli goes beyond simply

standing strong with his convictions; he shares a small portion of his faith with Solara by teaching her to pray. Eli is disturbed when Solara discovers that he is in possession of a book, which is his prized possession. While Solara lacks the ability to read or understand the significance of the book, she knows that Eli is different.

As the movie progresses, the viewer discovers that we are thirty years passed the last war which ended when the sky was opened and a powerful light scorched the face of the earth. After the survivors emerged out of hiding, they blamed religion and the Bible for the devastation and all Bibles were collected and burned. The sole surviving text rests in the possession of Eli!

Ultimately, Eli escapes the town with Solara, with Carnegie on his heels in pursuit of the book. The interaction with Solara changes Eli until he deviates from his mission and rescues her from a band of roaming thieves who desire to rape and eventually eat her. After killing her attackers, the two continue westward until they are forced to battle Carnegie and his men with the help of an elderly couple who has a long history of eating those who stop for tea. At the end of the battle, Eli is forced to choose between his Bible and Solara's life. After relinquishing the holy text, Eli is left for dead. Solara returns to Carnegie, taking him the book he is sure will give him power over all people on earth.

The story ends with an astonishing surprise twist that changes Eli's defeat into victory. Rather than reveal this ending for readers who plan to see the movie, let me simply say there are clues and predictions along the way that point the viewer toward this climax.

The Book of Eli is more than just another apocalyptic movie—it is a commentary on contemporary evangelicalism and religious abuses in

society. The movie has a lot to teach today's church.

In the movie are three sets of characters: those that roam the earth, Carnegie and his men, and Eli. The first group are those outside of civilization, who survive by eating human flesh. Unfortunately, the over consumption of human flesh causes neurological damage and death. These characters symbolize the lust of the flesh and the consuming nature of sin and our own appetites. This group is easy to find in our contemporary religious landscape. They are not necessarily self-consumed, but they are controlled and destroyed by their animalistic lusts and desires.

The next major group is Carnegie and his men, who are determined to control the Bible and use it to control the masses. Carnegie believes that the words of scripture have power, but he fails to realize that their true meaning is about human freedom, devotion to God, and compassion to humankind. Like the roaming cannibals, one can also see this second group every day, those who use religion for their own purposes or as a means of control to enslave others.

Eli symbolizes the last and most important group—those devout “people of the book,” evangelicals! His highest mission is to protect the text, which he usually keeps hidden. As stated above, Eli places the protection of the book ahead of everything, including the principles of justice. Several times Eli is faced with protecting those who cannot protect themselves from the aggression of this world. Early in the movie, he fails to protect an innocent woman from rape and several times he fails to free women trapped in slavery.

The early Eli can be seen often in our theological communities. He is a theologian who puts the preservation of religion and the “sacred text” ahead of the principles, which the text

teaches. His obsession with hiding and protecting the text borderlines on the worship of the Bible. Many devout evangelicals, like Eli, are willing to destroy all those who stand in the way of their mission.

How often have we placed the worship of the text ahead of the protection of the innocent or the fulfillment of the principles of justice found in the holy writ? How often have people been destroyed for the sake of religion? The early Eli represents this tendency in our modern day churches, the tendency to protect the text, yet miss its message. By viewing the early Eli and Carnegie, one is able to see why the screenwriters and directors proclaim that the Bible destroyed the world. It was destroyed by those who followed the paths of early Eli and Carnegie. Not until Eli embraces the ideas of justice and compassion found in the text, does he (and the viewer) discover the true purpose of the book and salvation.

The last of the major themes in the movie is the contrast between those who can see and those who cannot. Not until the end of the movie does the viewer learn that Eli is at least partially blind, if not completely without sight. He is unable to see the world. It is at this moment that his earlier statement, “walk by faith, not by sight,” becomes more powerful. During the movie only two characters are able to read from the Bible—Eli and Solara’s mother. The imagery is gripping—in a world desperate for the water of life only those who are blind can truly read from the book that quenches that thirst.

The Book of Eli is a powerful movie

for those who can perceive its message. Many will reject it for its religious themes, and others will reject it because it challenges their religion. Some Christians may reject the movie for its brutality and profanity. But for those with eyes to see, the movie reminds us that the religious often contribute to the ugliness of this world along with the secular.

In a sense, this movie is like a good science fiction film. It transports the viewer to another world and forces them to confront their own social fears, prejudices, and destructive assumptions.

Response by David A. Thomas

Sarasota, FL

Monty M. Self and I are on the same page when he notes that movies can provide an escape, but they can also transform viewers. My way of putting it is, movies are rhetorical because they are social texts. They use narrative, the sound track, and visual imagery to influence attitudes to either reinforce or subvert our values, both as a culture, and as individuals.

The Book of Eli is such a social text. It intends to make a spiritually significant statement, to be more than mere entertainment, although the star power of Denzel Washington (who is a devout Christian in real life), the kung fu action sequences (he did all his own stunts), and the romantic sub-plot are certainly entertaining enough.

This movie is one of several end-of-the-world sci-fi scenarios that Hollywood has offered recently. A lone protagonist struggles to preserve a treasured value against destruction by an overwhelming evil force.

Redemption is achieved when the protagonist overcomes evil, and there is a new avenue of hope for the future. We have previously critiqued *The Children of Men* in this journal. Yet another similar movie, *The Road*, based on Cormac McCarthy’s bestselling novel, was in the theaters this year. *The Book of Eli* is the most biblical of all these epics, no pun intended.

Mr. Self is correct that *The Book of Eli* is self-consciously centered on religious themes. It is the most explicitly religious movie of the year, given that the “McGuffin,” or the prize being fought over by the good guy and the bad guys, is the Holy Bible, which both parties value because of its divine attributes. The primary value conflict in *The Book of Eli* symbolizes the ongoing issues of many real contemporary religious conflicts: what is the true meaning and the proper use of the power of the Bible in life and in our society? Hence the title of Mr. Self’s essay, *Evangelicalism’s Misuse of the Text*.

The reader may agree or disagree with his specific interpretations, but not with the important function of movies as social texts. It is not my role either to endorse or to challenge his criticisms of the misuses of evangelicalism in these pages. The reader will determine whether the critic’s take on the story is true, in keeping with other stories one knows to be true, or whether it tells the whole story without leaving out important aspects. Those are the tests of narrative rationality. I am pleased that Mr. Self ventured to contribute his critique to the ongoing conversation. ■



Book Reviews

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

Seminary in Crisis: The Strategic Response of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the SBC Controversy

William E. Hull.
Atlanta: Baptist History & Heritage Society, 2010.

Reviewed by E. Glenn Hinson,
Baptist Seminary of Kentucky

You won't see them, but I'm shedding tears as I write this review. Not because it's a bad book; far from it, it's a brilliant and engaging book, a "must" read for anyone who cares as deeply as I do for Southern Seminary. No, I'm weeping deep down inside because, with his unmatched gift for words, Dr Hull has replayed in a graphic way the tragic story of the diversion of Southern Seminary from the purpose which James Pettigrew Boyce envisioned for it—the uniting of a diverse and divided people calling themselves Southern Baptists. I'm weeping even more because an awful debilitating disease, Lou Gehrig's, slowly eats away at the life of Bill Hull and will keep him from the writing of a sequel setting forth in more detail the road Baptists in the American South might travel to make Boyce's dream a reality in radically different circumstances and with a different set of challenges today.

The major focus of *Seminary in Crisis* is the contrasting strategies of two presidents—Duke K. McCall and Roy L. Honeycutt—who guided the institution Boyce founded 150 years ago through one of the most critical periods of its history since its rebirth with only seven students at the end of the War between the States. No one I know can equal Bill Hull—student, professor of New Testament, dean and provost during the McCall years—in his understanding both of the person-

alities of these two presidents and in his analysis of the strategies they pursued in response to the "conservative resurgence" in the Southern Baptist Convention, and he, rightly I think, attributes their radically different strategies especially to their personalities and experience in Southern Baptist life.

He portrays McCall, with whom he worked closely from 1958 to 1975, as a hard-nosed "realist" toughened by immersion in denominational life from seminary days onward as pastor of an influential church, President of Baptist Bible Institute in New Orleans (in process of becoming New Orleans Seminary), Executive Secretary of the SBC Executive Committee, President of Southern, and, before retirement, President of the Baptist World Alliance.

McCall's strategy, which his retirement in 1982 prevented him from implementing, was to line up financial and other resources which would enable Southern Seminary to survive independent of the SBC. He portrays Honeycutt, whom he knew as a fellow student but with whom he would not have worked closely as he did with McCall, as an "idealist" who was, above all, a respected academic with some experience in business but none of the intensive engagement in denominational life that set the pattern for McCall's leadership. The Honeycutt strategy, which I think Dr Hull has described fairly, accurately, and with commendable insight, relied on a confidence in the "covenant" that bound the denomination to the seminary and the seminary to the denomination. When his "holy war" speech failed to rally enough moderates at Dallas in 1985 to wrest control from inerrantists, he chose the route of accommodation as the best way to save the institution and the people who were giving their lives to it.

Dr Hull displays the qualities of a superb historian, objectivity and sympathetic insight, in his evaluation of these two strategies. One can only conjecture whether the McCall strategy to free the institution from denominational control might have worked, for the trustees, who had to make the key decisions, did not try it. For those who think they should have because numerous colleges succeeded in doing it, Dr Hull astutely notes how different are the constituencies of boards of colleges and the seminary—college boards largely composed of lay persons with no dependence on the denomination, the seminary of clergy more dependent and far less secure in relation to the denomination. The outcome of the Honeycutt strategy is clear: it eased the trauma of change and perhaps limited damage to the seminary while putting the reins of it fully in the hands of the inerrantists. Honeycutt did his best to protect faculty and staff, his colleagues for so many years, but by the time the inerrantist trustees eased him out, he had to watch with pain the departure of the majority of them.

You will want to know that Dr Hull did not end his final testament as a scholar on so somber a note. He suggests that Southern Baptists should be able to try still in a new day to fulfill Boyce's dreams. If they don't, they should expect to continue the "free fall" which the denomination is now witnessing. I can't use space here to outline the ideas he has laid out so carefully in a few pages. He insists that there is no inherent reason why conservatives and moderates cannot pursue theological education together in one outstanding school. He invokes the example of Fuller Seminary, which brought together conservatives and Pentecostals to become the largest evangelical seminary in the world. I can only express the ardent hope and prayer that some other scholars and

leaders with Dr Hull's intense concern for an educated ministry for Baptists might take up the challenge he offers in this final chapter. ■

Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence

Terrence J. Rynne
New York: Orbis Books, 2008.

Reviewed by Heike Peckruhn
Iliff School of Theology.

Rynne's book provides a study investigating the life of Jesus and Christian salvation theories through a lens informed by Gandhian non-violence. He provides an insightful summary and discussion of Gandhi's life and the concept of *satyagraha* (firmness in the truth), and highlights influences thereof on the theology of four white, male Christian theologians (C.F. Andrews, J.H. Yoder, B. Haering, and W. Wink).

Traditional Christian theories of salvation, Rynne argues, have been based in violence as God's means to bring about justice, and theorized Jesus' death on the cross as a historical, metaphysical, and bloody event settling God's desire for retribution-based justice. With the help of Gandhi and the selected theologians, Rynne reads the life of Jesus as essential component of God's salvific action, and provides a reconceptualization of salvation as nonviolent resistance to violent systems by communities following Jesus' example.

Rynne's book is insightful and relevant as it provides the reader with

careful summaries of the main thinkers discussed. However, it could be even more compelling had the author included other theologians proposing a non-violent Jesus, one obvious example being Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been influenced by Gandhi theologically and exemplified non-violent resistance in lived praxis. Yet, Rynne's book is a good starting point for those interested in discovering the theological, philosophical, and practical merits of non-violence. ■

The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes

Bryan Burroughs
New York: Penguin Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan
Richardson, TX

A first and lasting impression of Burroughs' very popular book is its readability—it simply makes for fascinating study. Non-Texans can learn quickly volumes about “the Texas Myth.” A second and lasting impression from this reading is the shock that comes when immense wealth and moral judgments meet head-on. Add the adjective “sudden” to these staggering and almost unexpected fortunes, and lo, these true stories seem hard to believe. The author mesmerizes his readers not only in the amazing story of the discovery of oil, but also in the impact of this huge wealth upon four families.

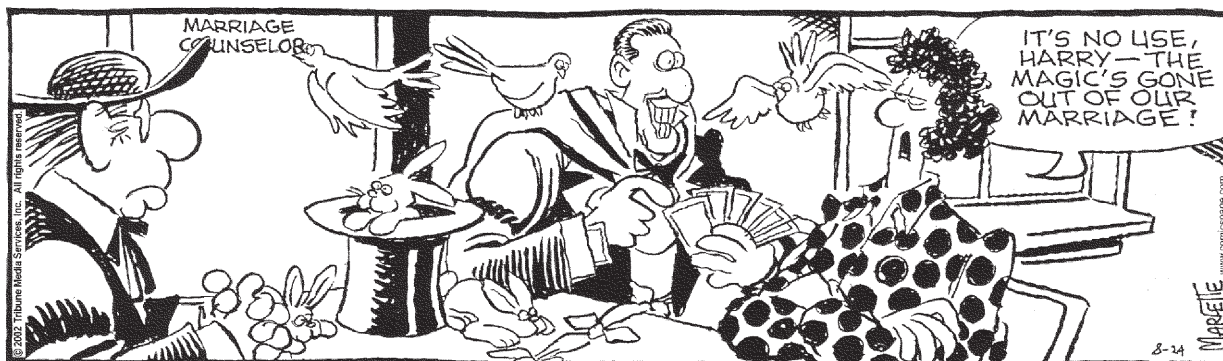
Lessons abound for Christians who are committed to ethical and biblical values, as it becomes so tragically

clear that these concepts are eons away from the minds and hearts of these entrepreneurs. That, of course, is the major reason for reviewing this book, which emphasizes very little of direct Christian insight. One is left to draw his own conclusions about the ethics of such behavior. There are multiple illustrations of the biblical prediction, “Whatsoever a man sows, that also will he reap.”

The author chronicles four families who have impacted for decades Texas life, history, politics, morals, economy, banking, sports and newspapers—families whose massive wealth originally began with the discovery of oil in the Lone Star State.

This book is about these four families—the Cullens, the Hunts, the Murchisons and Sid Richardson (and his relatives, the Bass family). Here are the accounts of the famed Texas wild-catters and their incredible luck—luck that often was tied into risk-taking, questionable timing, and mean-spirited decisions. Here were men who were street-smart, devious, hard-working, and colorful, with one characteristic in common—they garnered immense wealth for themselves and their families. And in the case of the Hunts, multiple families (the bigamy of H.L. Hunt is bluntly incredulous).

Interlaced with the emergence of staggering wealth (and we are talking about billions of dollars) are the intriguing stories of the abuse of wealth and its impact on children and grandchildren whose life-styles, to say the least, are far from typical Texas behavior—mansions, multiple marriages, huge ranches, private aircraft,



Neiman-Marcus shopping binges, governesses, private boarding schools, Ivy-league colleges, excesses in sex, and alcohol—all combine to make anyone with a commitment to solid Christian behavior almost gag with revulsion.

Then add to this strange list their peculiar ventures into ultra right-wing political waters and the use of oil money to influence politicians all the way to the American presidency. The author refers adroitly to the members of the Bush family and its relationship to Texas oil money.

An obvious error that missed the proof readers is their reference to W.A. Criswell (as “William”) and Dallas’ First Baptist Church (as Dallas Baptist Church), both major connections to the H.L. Hunt family.

Religion does come to some of these families, but it comes late—and not at all to many of them. Some have made major contributions to educational and medical facilities, but the waste of money and opportunity is classic in the unfolding tragedies these four families (Bunker Hunt’s attempt to corner the world’s silver market and the forced sale of the Dallas Cowboys by the Murchison family are two major examples).

The last chapters in the sagas of these unusual Texas families is yet to be written. Hopefully, some major and positive lessons have been learned from the facts and foibles of “The Big Rich.” The book does end with several of the progeny moving positively into positions of community leadership and generosity. May their tribe increase! ■

The Reason for God/ The Prodigal God/ Counterfeit Gods

Timothy Keller
New York: Dutton, 2008, 2008, 2009.
Reviewed by Darold Morgan
Richardson, TX

Timothy Keller, pastor for more than twenty years of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, has written three books, all of which are evidence of superb, relevant, and powerful preaching in an area not known today for responsiveness to evangelical truth. More than five thousand people, many young and single, gather for worship each week in this remarkable congregation. In addition to this graphic statistic, this congregation has established numerous other churches in this region and beyond.

Keller’s inaugural book, *The Reason for God*, is perhaps the strongest of the three. He hits head-on some of the surging issues confronting not only New Yorkers but people in all directions—doubt, agnosticism, the emptiness of a materialistic culture, the clash of evangelical truth with a dominant technocracy, and the theological issue of suffering and evil versus biblical supernaturalism.

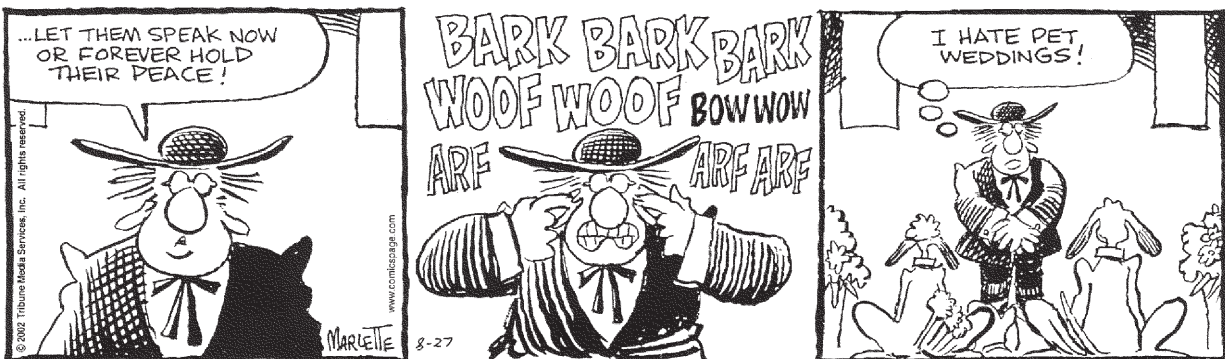
Though the jury may still be out (since we are so close to this Manhattan phenomenon), it appears that Keller is moving alongside some of the legendary New York preachers of another generation—Harry Emerson Fosdick (a Baptist) at the famous Riverside Church, George Buttrick at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church,

and Ralph Sockman, pastor of the Christ (Methodist) Church. Time will ultimately tell.

In *The Reason for God*, one can sense a blending of basic Christian orthodoxy and theology. The text evidences a wide reading of various authors, past and present. Add personal illustrations from the author’s experiences as a caring and sensitive pastor, and one immediately discovers full bodies, intellectual, warm, convincing, and solidly biblical material. There is a beautiful reaffirmation that one can be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ in this brittle age of skepticism, doubt, and pessimism.

Keller’s second book, *The Prodigal God*, is a refreshing insight into Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son. He continues to strengthen his original premise that in this age when technology has become so dominant, God had dynamically revealed himself in Jesus. Imagine nine sermons coming from this one parable, delivered in time at this New York pulpit—sermons with fresh insights built around his sub-title “Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith.” Indeed this is a good read!

The most recent of Keller’s books is *Counterfeit Gods*—the subtitle is “The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, Power, and the only Hope that Matters.” The ethical overtones of this volume are not only obvious, with multiple applications that are publicized daily in television news-casts, but Keller’s approach is compellingly persuasive as he confronts these ancient/modern idolatries of money, sex, and power in a contemporary way. Again his book is solidly grounded in familiar biblical theology,



and again he has multiple literary allusions and shared pastoral experiences. This is a hard-hitting book that confronts these savage demands in the society where Keller ministers. He has remarkable skills for probing ancient biblical stories which have surprising and succinct applications in a complex and modern day with multiple lifestyles

Each of these books is relatively brief. They lead quickly to helpful applications, not only in megaplex cities but wherever people are found who need reminding that biblical truth is relevant, timeless, and applicable to personal needs everywhere.

Consider not only discovering this New York pastor, but also sharing his books with someone who is challenged by the searing problems of suffering, doubt, sin, and theological confusion. ■

An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity Is Better Off With Religion Than Without It

Bruce Sheiman
Alpha Books, 2009.

Reviewed by John Scott

Dallas, TX

Arguments in best-selling books by militant atheists Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris recite and exag-

gerate negative things done in the name of religion. (cf. *Christian Ethics Today*, Summer 2007). This book by atheist Bruce Sheiman smashes all those arguments. And it is based on verified facts, not visceral feelings.

I began reading books on both sides of the God debate over 50 years ago. This is the first by an atheist that I can recommend—enthusiastically. However, strictly speaking, it is not on the “God” debate because Sheiman makes no arguments to defend his atheism. And he candidly acknowledges he *wants* to believe in God “because, on balance, religion provides a combination of psychological, emotional, moral, communal, existential, and even physical-health benefits that no other institution can replicate.” He says his book “is a first” as “there has not been a mainstream book defending religion as a cultural institution, irrespective of the God question.”

Sheiman has been a student of philosophy and theology for thirty years, but his writing is clear and concise. He supports his conclusions with findings from thousands of published studies. He shows that religious people are far more likely to abide by the Golden Rule than atheists and agnostics. He exposes a major flaw in a well-known survey conducted by Marc Hauser of Harvard that concluded, erroneously, that atheists and agnostics are just as moral as religious people.

Sheiman draws from the highly

acclaimed work on charity (*Who Really Cares* by Arthur Brooks). He cites historical evidence that a vast majority of violence attributed to religion was actually caused by political, psychological, and other influences. And he points out that atheistic cultures in the twentieth century (represented by Stalin, Mao and others) were responsible for many times more victims than religious extremists throughout all of history.

In a section headed “Empirical Evidence Atheists Cannot Deny,” Sheiman cites hundreds of studies showing that religion is associated with positive mental and physical health factors such as: altruism and generosity, consolation and coping, optimism and hope, gratitude and forgiveness, marital satisfaction and family commitment, et. al.

Two suggestions if you read this book: First, in the Introduction notice the interesting distinction Sheiman draws between what “consumers” of religion experience (meaning, values, purpose) and what “producers” of religion offer (organization, doctrine, scripture). Almost all critics of religion emphasize the latter to the exclusion of the former. Second, don’t get bogged down in Chapter 1—it is a good but esoteric discussion about the meaning of life and the purposes of myths and rituals. Subsequent chapters focus on concrete evidence that proves “the world is a better place because people believe God exists.” ■



Cumulative CO2
Emissions (1900-2005)
from fossil fuels,
in millions of metric tons

CANADA

24,300

CHINA

92,950

GERMANY

73,208

INDIA

25,895

SOUTH AFRICA

12,414

UNITED KINGDOM

55,034

UNITED STATES

318,432

Foreboding Future

By Al Staggs, Sante Fe, NM

It's Dickens-esque,
It's the kind of condition
That fostered the French Revolution,
When there are many with too little
And too few with too much.

The structures of laws,
Customs, policies and usual business practices
May soon be replaced by marches, strikes,
Protests and even violence
Growing out of this universal sense of despair.

A system that habitually and legally rewards
the rich Palestinians, at the expense of the poor
Is no longer legal,
No longer moral.
It's not the Great Depression
But the Great Oppression.

For the present to change
May require an upheaval
The likes of which this nation
has never before experienced.
Inevitably, eventually, a bold new change
Must be forced upon the opulent
Because they will not willingly agree to
The major reversals which are required to
Greatly reduce the great gap between the rich and
the poor.

Capitalism, the Free Enterprise system is on the hot seat
Trickle down had trickled out.
There's far less for the well-endowed to give
To charity and charity was never the answer to this
disparity anyway.

And the church whose overhead always mandated
Budgets which reflected mere pocket change to
human need
Will now be required to cut even deeper into those
meager allotments
The churches are trapped by their financial structure
and by maintaining
The houses in which they meet to pay homage to a
God who
Most certainly has a preferential option for the poor.

"Never Again" Once Again

Oppressive living conditions in Palestine
under the heavy hand of Israel
suggest the government of Israel
and many of its citizens,
along with many American Jews
and conservative American Christians
who gave their uncritical support to Israel,
are suffering from a state of denial.

Holocaust-deniers are reprehensible;
but so are all of those, mentioned above,
who do not acknowledge the sub-human
existence of the Palestinians.

Nothing is more outrageous than the brand of evil
that denies there is cause for criticism.
How can one understand Eli Wiesel,
Holocaust victim and Nobel Peace Prize recipient,
when he says that he cannot criticize Israel?
He, of all people, should know better.

Not to criticize Israel in the face
of this monstrous and militant injustice
forced upon the Palestinian people
is to denigrate the memory of the Shoah.
"Never Again" has happened once again.

Percentage decrease
in forestland (1990-2007)

BOLIVIA
7.3

BRAZIL
9.3

CAMBODIA
22.7

COLUMBIA
1.3

INDONESIA
27.3

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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