

Christian Ethics Today

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

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“For every complicated problem there is a simple solution; and it is always wrong!”

Quoted on PBS Radio.

“True Baptists distrust church hierarchy, abhor forced religion, view experienced religion as their centerpiece, place confidence in ordinary people, and tolerate dissent.”

Cecil Sherman, moderate Baptist leader who died last April.

“Asked whether Jesus was his ‘personal savior,’ a monk said, ‘No, I like to share him.’”

Christian Century.

“When Christians turn to the law, public policy, and politics as the last resort, they have essentially given up on a desire to persuade their opponents. They want the patronage of the state and its coercive power to rule the day.”

James Davison Hunter, CT (5/2010).

“Never complain—the world is better than we have been, but we are not as good as we could be.”

Maya Angelou.

“Congress has no business telling Americans when or how to pray.”

Americans United for Separation of Church and State in response to a ruling that the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional.

“Life must be lived forward, but understood backward.”

Soren Kirkegaard.

“If I knew then what I know now, I would have picked my own cotton.”

A bumper sticker in Florida, to which David Thomas replied, “You still have the opportunity—migrant workers for Yum Brands in Florida were paid 42 cents for a 37 pound bucket of tomatoes—the same rate as in 1978—

until adverse publicity forced a 1 cent raise!”

“The Christian right is now poised to become a women’s movement—and Sarah Palin is its earthy Jerry Falwell.”

Lisa Miller, Newsweek (7/21/2010).

“Payments on the ‘virtual fence’ (the electronic system to increase security along the U.S.-Mexico border) have been suspended—so far it has been a big dud, and an expensive one, costing \$1 billion to Boeing, who failed to design tests to work out the kinks.”

(Dallas Morning News Editorial, 3/10)

“We may all not have come over on the same boat, but we are on the same boat now.”

Rev. Jesse Jackson.

“If it was good enough for God . . . it’s good enough for me.”

Sarah Palin, explaining why she wrote talking points on her palm for a Tea Party convention speech, quoting Isa. 49:16: “See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

“In 2010, women had median weekly earnings of \$665—79cents for every \$1 men earned (\$844) in the same job.”

(MarketWatch, 4/2010).

“Taxation Statistics On Wealth and Income: The top 1 % of U.S. households received 57.5% of the income; the top 10% received 79.4%; the bottom 80 percent received 12.6%.”

Univ. of Santa Clara Study (2003).

“Between 2000 and 2050 the U.S. population aged 15 to 64—the key working and school-age group—will grow 42%, while the same group will decline by 10% in China and 44 % in Japan.”

(Newsweek, 4/2010)

“The U.S. military budget includes an

operating budget of \$549 billion, plus funding for the wars at \$159 billion, a total of \$708 billion—the largest in history.”

Sojourners (4/10).

“**Suspicious Americans:** 50% believe it is right for the government to monitor phone calls and emails without court permission to fight terrorism; 36% believe the government was likely involved in the 9/11 attacks; 33% don’t believe in global warming; 29% don’t believe news organizations usually get facts correct; and at least 13 states have active secessionist movements.”

Atlantic (Jan-Feb 2010).

“Money doesn’t make you happy. I now have \$50 million, but I was just as happy when I had \$48 million.”

Arnold Schwarzenegger.

We've Got Mail

Letters From Our Leaders

"I recently retired and will have to be reducing my giving on all fronts, but I wanted to respond to your Spring letter one more time. . . . You do an important and unique work for the cause."

Bill Moyers, NYC.

"Thank you for the articles by Emmanuel McCall and Jim Newton (Spring, 2010). . . it is meaningful for me that they appeared in the publication fathered by Foy Valentine. The first award I received came from the CLC when Foy was its director {and] without his and Arthur Rutledge support I would not have had the freedom to do the work we did."

Walker Knight, Decatur, GA.

"[CET] is a voice needed now more than ever . . . Thank you and all who work so fervently, to keep the voice heard."

Sarah Logan, Mt. Ida, AR.

"What an amazing year! On January 4, 2009, I collapsed at the altar while lifting the communion chalice and had no idea that *my blood* was cancerous. Now I am preparing to life the cup at Christmas Eve in awe that *Jesus' blood*

has set me free from the fear of death. . . . Thank you so much for the series of articles in CET [Fall 2009] on women in ministry. I have contacted Wade Burleson to thank him personally."

Rev. Joy Heaton, Pastor, Richmond, VA.

"Thank you for CET—it is a superb and much needed publication."

S. K. Bane, College Station, TX.

"I'd like to use your piece on 'A Successful Ministry?' in CET (Spring, 2010) as the basis for the take home final exam essay in our Life & Work of The Pastor course."

R. Robert Creech, Ph.D., Prof. of Christian Ministries, Truett Seminary.

"I want nothing more than the next issue of CET!"

Ben Mosley, Oklahoma City, OK.

"The red letters [words of Jesus] should not be twisted to make them fit the others. I am always surprised when I hear a theologian do it the other way around. I've heard many preachers quote a certain line from Paul as if it trumps certain words of Jesus. I suspect that would appall Paul."

A Dallas lawyer and close friend of Foy Valentine.

"We've been using some of the articles from CET with our Sunday School Class. It certainly makes for a lively discussion."

Sheila and Gary Rose, Midwest City, OK. (Gary is head football coach at Carl Albert H.S. and has led them to 8 state football championships in the last 15 years!)

"The Spring 2010 Issue was an eye-opener!"

Cliff Fields, Houston, TX.

"Great reading from honest Christians. I look forward to each issue."

Charles DeLa Garza,

"Thank you! The Spring Issue is profound! . . . excellent articles by you, Steve Blow, Robt. Parham, Wade Burleson, Bill Austin, and Mimi Haddad."

Ralph Hockett, Houston, TX.

"It seems to me that you are fighting the right battles in the right way."

Dr. Stan Nelson, Prof. of Theology (ret.), Golden Gate BTS, Surprise, AZ.



How My Mind Has Changed About the Pastorate

By Philip Wise, former pastor of Second BC, Lubbock, TX and FBC, Dothan, AL.

Note: This article is Chapter 10 in *For Faith and Friendship* (Insight Press, 2010), a book dedicated to the memory of the life and influence of Philip Wise, pastor and teacher, who was also serving as Chair of the Board of Directors of CET at the time of his sudden serious illness and death in 2009.

When the Trinity Group began to discuss the theme of this book, I suggested that we write about how our minds had changed over the years. Since the Trinity Group was founded to discuss theology, I was thinking about changes that have occurred in our theological convictions. There have been some changes in the way I think about God, but to be honest these changes are less significant than the changes in my thinking about how to be a pastor.

Since I've spent the major part of my life—thirty years this year—as the pastor of a local church, I want to detail the leadership principles in which I have come to believe. It is not my intent to denigrate the preparation I received in the seminary. The seminary prepared me for many of the responsibilities which every pastor must assume—preaching, teaching, counseling, and so on. However, the seminary did not provide the guiding principles I have adopted over the years as I've struggled to do my work more effectively.

These are principles which I learned in the school of hard knocks. Some of them I apply every day. Some of them are principles in which I believe, but find difficult to follow consistently.

I have divided these principles into categories: faith, making decisions, working well with others, personal behavior, organization, and challenges.

Faith

When I began my ministerial train-

ing, I took faith for granted. Since I was training to be a minister, I was by definition a person of faith. I took my own faith for granted. Perhaps I was an exception at seminary, but I don't think so. I think many ministers operate out of the assumption that since their work is religious, they don't need to be. The manifestations of this neglect are a failure to pray, to read the Bible devotionally, to reflect on what it is you do believe, and to develop spiritual disciplines.

What I have discovered is that a pastor's faith is critical to survival. If the pastor has not accepted the disciplines of Jesus Christ, then she can never instruct others in these disciplines without hypocrisy. Dostoyevsky wrote, "There is in the world only one figure of absolute beauty: Christ."

A pastor who is not committed to being a disciple of Jesus may be successful, but he can never be authentic. When I became a pastor, I thought I understood who Jesus was and what he taught. What I have discovered is that my understanding was parochial and narrow. I have learned a great deal about Jesus and "the Jesus way" of life by continuing to read and reflect on the Gospels. I no longer believe that I have grasped Jesus, but I am certain that he has grasped me. I have come to believe that a pastor can be a more effective evangelist by admitting that there are aspects of Jesus' life and teaching that remain mysterious and even contradictory to the faith we practice. Such honesty does no disservice to Jesus.

In fact, it acknowledges that he is who we say he is—the eternal creator of the universe whom we can never completely fathom.

Making Decisions

One of the drains on pastors is the number of decisions that must be made every day. These decisions are almost infinite in their variety

and complexity. These include decisions about purchases, personnel, time allotment, moral issues, counseling techniques, theological questions, denominational involvement, benevolent requests, strategic planning, and so much more.

There are many pressures that a pastor feels as she tries to make these daily decisions. Laypeople want decisions that coincide with their views and values. The denomination exerts a pull, one's peers express their opinions, the voices of "teachers past" speak in our ears, and the need for the church to prosper and grow is experienced as a need and a threat. Each of these forces—and many others—exerts a steady pressure on the pastor and he must decide which of these pressures will predominate.

I've come to believe that the surest pastoral guide in decision making is one's faith. This is not just a pious affirmation; it is a practical methodology. When I am perplexed about what decision I should make, I ask myself this question: "If I believe what I say about God, what ought I to do in this situation?" This question provides clarity when I am confused by the competing pressures that are trying to influence my decision.

This way of acting has something to do with integrity. If this is who I say I am, then how ought I to act? Integrity is a virtue that is often sadly lacking in today's church leaders—both clergy and laity. I have repeated a phrase so often to my children and to others that it has become a mantra for me—*No one can take your integrity from you; you have to give it away.*

There are some other principles of decision making that have served me well as a pastor. I have adopted these principles over the years, and I have trouble pinpointing the exact time when I came to accept them. Being willing to change your mind is one

of those principles. I've never been unwilling to change my mind about theology if I found a better way of thinking about God, but I have been reluctant to change my mind about church procedures or plans. Being willing to change your mind is a sign of strength, not weakness.

The same is true of being willing to say, "I was wrong" and "I'm sorry." Taking time to plan has become a priority for me. In my early years as a pastor, I found myself constantly reacting to events and people. In my mature years, I have found that planning ahead can avoid a lot of conflict and wasted time. Now when I feel overwhelmed with decisions, I try to shed some of my responsibilities in order to focus on planning. I get off of committees, complete assignments and don't accept others, and limit my civic involvement. This allows me to be more organized and make better decisions.

One of those critical decisions is choosing the right leaders—both lay and clergy. A pastor can't do all the work of the church, but she can choose the right leaders for the right tasks. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, discusses the importance of "Getting the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus." A pastor needs to know how to do this effectively.

Working Well with Others

If you had asked in seminary what I thought the hardest task for most pastors was, I would have probably said, "teaching and preaching." In fact, the hardest task for a pastor is relating to those with whom you work. If James Carville had taught seminary classes he would have emphasized, "It's the people, stupid."

In this regard the pastorate is no different from most other jobs where there is personal interaction. People in the business world and in other professions often tell me the same thing about their work.

In the case of pastors, there is the added phenomenon that every member of the local church has an opinion about how the pastor ought to do

her job. Many members are supportive and understanding when the pastor doesn't meet their expectations. Others are unreasonable in their expectations and complain bitterly to anyone who will listen—including the pastor—when their expectations go unmet.

It's an impossible task to keep every member happy about the church and the job performance of the pastor. Living with disgruntled members is not easy for most pastors. They have entered the ministry to help people and when they're told that they have not only failed to help, but have made things worse for some people, pastors become discouraged.

Every pastor that I've gotten to know well has admitted to such discouragement. I certainly have experienced it.

What is a pastor to do? Many pastors do what I have often done—work more hours. They reason, "If I just work a little harder the criticism will go away." It won't. It may lessen, but there will always be criticism.

A lot of the criticism is unfounded and unfair. Some of it is well-founded. The problem is that a pastor can never do all the work that is needed in a parish. There is always someone else who needs a visit, a note, or a phone call. There is always more work that can be done on the sermon. There is always some ministry in the church that would be strengthened if the pastor were there to help.

I have come to believe that making priorities is the most important task for a pastor. There's always more to do, but what is the critical thing I should do now?

One rule that I try to follow is: put people first. If you have to decide between a person and a program, put the person first. In the long run, people will forgive you for not executing a program or preaching a great sermon, but they won't forgive you for ignoring their need. If Jesus is our model, that priority seems to be consistent with his practice.

Even with that priority firmly fixed, a pastor cannot always ignore his responsibility as a planner and implementer in order to provide

pastoral care. There is no way to make the right call every time. You do the best you can and when you have failed to meet a human need, go to the person and say, "I'm sorry."

I asked a group of pastors I met with recently, what's the hardest part of your job? The consensus was that the hardest part is working with other church staff members. There are many potential problems in this arena. You don't measure up to the expectations of other staff members. You don't do things the way your predecessor did them. They report to you, and you have to critique their work. They've been in the ministry longer than you. They have their own constituency and use that as a threat against your interference in their ministry.

And sometimes, they just don't like you.

Some of my beliefs about working with other staff members haven't changed. One of those is that every staff member should be treated as a colleague. The maintenance staff and the church secretaries are sometimes treated as inferiors by ministers. I believe that this is wrong and wrong-headed. These folks can make you look good or bad. Members of the church will ask them their opinion of you. They can make your work easier or harder. I'm convinced that they will speak well of you and help you in your ministry if you treat them with respect and dignity. If I help them do their work, they will help me do mine. Picking up trash in the parking lot is a way to share the workload of the maintenance staff.

When you do your own menial tasks, secretaries notice. Including all the staff in staff meetings and prayer times makes a difference. Asking these support-staff folks for their opinions can often result in some good ideas. Finding out about their families and inquiring about their well-being can be a ministry to them and enriching to your relationship. Laughing and eating together is a balm that heals many wounds—oil that lubricates the relationship.

If I want to know what kind of minister a pastor is, I often ask some-

one on his/her maintenance or secretarial staff. In my judgment, the way you treat those folks says a lot about what kind of Christian you are.

Most pastors have difficulties relating to some of their ministerial colleagues. Among a group of ministers there are bound to be differences of style, work speed, philosophy, theology, background, and personality. Any one of these can create problems for the pastor as he tries to relate to each minister. Since you naturally gravitate towards some colleagues and not towards others, you can be accused of favoritism. If the pastor has a larger salary and more perks than his colleagues in most churches, jealousy can become a problem.

Professional malfeasance or moral failure can become an issue. I certainly haven't developed ideas about how to deal with all these issues. Many of them are idiosyncratic and must be dealt with as one-time events you may never encounter again. However, I have developed some principles that I try to follow in relating to my ministerial colleagues.

First, treat them as colleagues. Listen to their ideas and suggestions. Give them plenty of freedom to discover and use their gifts. Take the blame when things go wrong, and share the credit with them when things go right. Always defend them; save your criticisms for private conversations with them. Obviously, you

may have to discuss their shortcomings with the appropriate laypersons, but this should be done discreetly and with kindness. Be honest with your colleagues, but be gentle. We all have delicate egos and a kind word goes a long way. Talking with your colleagues about their aspirations can help you relate to and supervise them. No one has all the good ideas, so listen to your colleagues' ideas. Your ministerial colleagues may or may not be your best friends, but they should believe that you care about them as persons and that you will always treat them fairly.

Many of the problems pastors experience with their ministerial colleagues are a result of poor hiring decisions. My philosophy has remained fixed about working with colleagues who preceded me at a church. First, they should be respected and given an opportunity to succeed. My job is to help them succeed. The ministers who remain at a church where I am called to serve as pastor may be excellent ministers who have been given the wrong assignments. Finding the right assignment for each minister on the staff is the pastor's job. Only if I have tried and failed to find an appropriate assignment for a minister should I ask the question: "Does this person need to go?"

In hiring new ministers for the church staff, I have come to believe in two basic principles. First, hire good people who aren't afraid to work hard

and take risks. Second, when choosing between two equally qualified persons who meet the first criteria, go with the brains. This was advice I received years ago from the best administrator I've known, Dr. Thomas Cortis, the former president of Samford University.

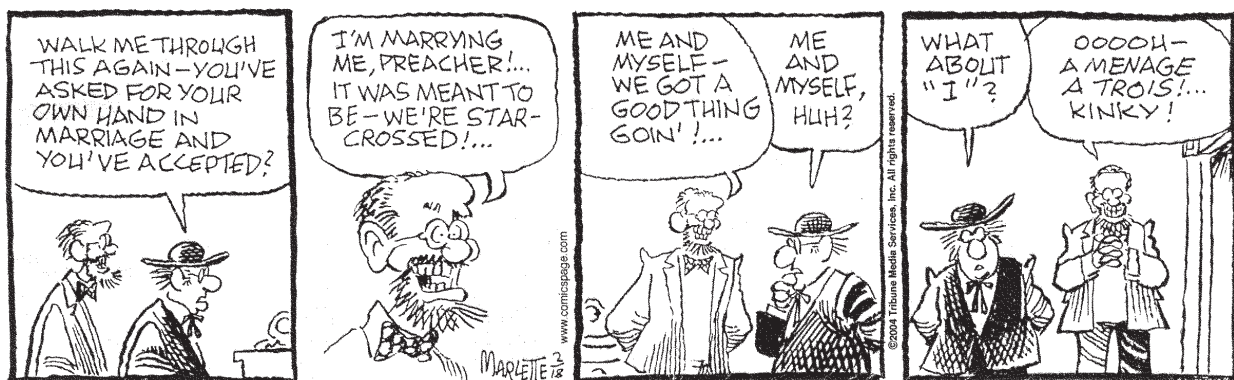
Though I believe in these two principles, I also have discovered that calling a ministerial colleague to work with you is like choosing a wife. You won't know immediately how well you and the church have chosen, but time will tell.

Personal Behavior

Every week, or so it seems, some prominent minister is fired for inappropriate behavior. I have come to believe that some of these ministers acted inappropriately so that they could leave the ministry. Some ministers are mentally or morally unstable. Many ministers who have had a moral failing have done so because they have not set some appropriate boundaries for themselves.

When I entered the pastorate, I was like most ministers—I thought I was immune from moral failings. What I discovered was that I had the same temptations that lay Christians have—to steal, to lie, to be sexually unfaithful.

One of the truths I have come to accept is that I am capable of giving in to temptation, so I need to do what the New Testament advises: flee temptation. That means that I do not



allow myself to be in a situation where I can be tempted to do wrong such as counting church money without someone else there, being alone at the church with a member of the opposite sex, turning in expenses without receipts, and the like.

I have found that it helps me to focus on my family—my wife and children—when I am tempted to do wrong. I don't want them to be embarrassed by me or ashamed of my behavior. A pastor can live with being criticized by his parishioners or colleagues; he cannot be content if he has disappointed those he loves the most by inappropriate behavior.

Challenges

Peter Drucker is often quoted as saying, "The four hardest jobs in America are the president of the United States, a university president, a CEO of a hospital, and a pastor." If he is right, pastors should expect to encounter many challenges in their work. As a young pastor, I never thought about these challenges. I got up every day and tried to do what I had to do to survive.

As I reflect on my experience in the four churches that I have served as pastor, I am convinced that there were a few "deciding moments" in each of those pastorates that determined my effectiveness in that church. In each of those situations, I was aware of the importance of the decision that needed to be made, but I wasn't always

aware that the decision reached would be pivotal for my pastorate there.

I'm not sure that you can identify those challenges in advance or at the time. In my experience it was always reflection at a later time that demonstrated their importance.

Some of these deciding moments concerned ethical decisions—should I speak the truth as I understood it or should I avoid conflict? Other deciding moments were business decisions—should we borrow the money or wait till we have the money in hand? Some of the deciding moments were personnel decisions—should he be given another chance or should he be asked to leave?

There are no easy answers to such questions. What I have come to believe is that I could have made better decisions if I had followed some simple principles.

First, contrary to my early and continuing inclination, it's not a good idea to make a snap decision. I have learned the wisdom of consulting with other pastors, with friends I trust, and with members of the congregation. Getting more information and consulting with a variety of people have always produced a better result.

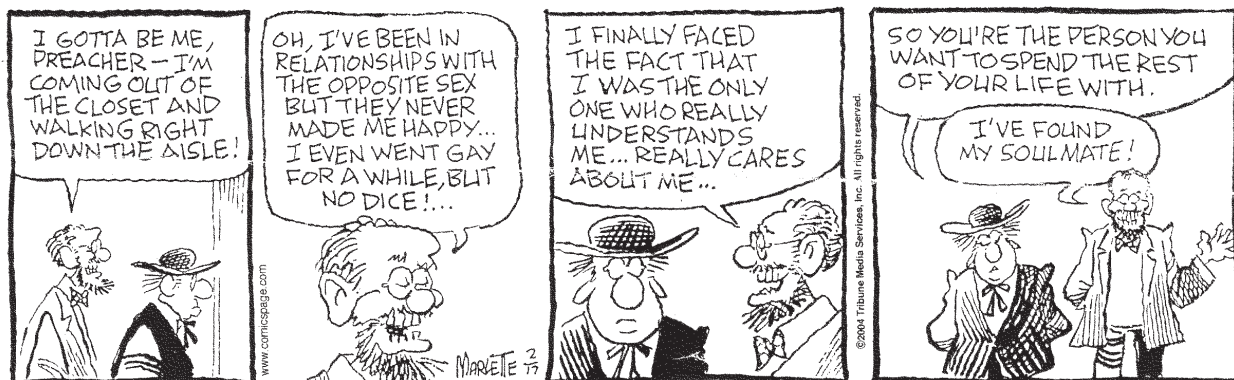
Second, no matter how important the issue may be, it must never become more important than the people involved. As a young pastor, I was more interested in making the right decision than I was in how the

decision was made. Now, I believe that the way you make the decision may be more important than the decision that's reached. If church members feel that their opinions are valued and their voices heard, they will support almost any decision that's made. Without their support, it's difficult to make any church decision a successful one.

Third, conflict can lead to progress. The important word in the last sentence is *can*. There are no guarantees that conflict will lead to progress, and in my experience it often leads to more conflict. I do not believe that pastors should avoid conflict; in fact, I have been and continue to be critical of pastors who avoid conflict at all costs. My experience is that you don't have to go looking for conflict; it will find you.

Finally, when conflict does come, it's important to remember that not every battle is Armageddon. Being on the losing side of a minor conflict can actually help the pastor if she demonstrates a Christian attitude in defeat. If you're going to risk your career and ministry over a particular conflict, be sure it justifies that kind of sacrifice. If you're going to die on a cross, make sure it's a big one.

As you work to resolve the conflicts in your church, never forget that if you die this week, they'll still have church on Sunday.



The Difference Christ Makes: Country

By David Gushee, McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta, GA

Note: *This article is adapted from the third of three lectures delivered at Missouri Baptist University, October 20-22, 2009.*

For those of you who were not able to be here yesterday or the day before, I promised an approach to these three talks that each time would have three movements. I begin with a really honest description of what I think is going on in American culture in relation to some subject—today our topic is country, or national loyalty. 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.

National Loyalty and American Culture

I am interested in exploring with you today the question of national loyalty, or the relationship of the citizen to the country in which he or she lives. In this context, I am going to explore what national loyalty looks like in the contemporary United States. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please think about your loyalty to your own nation.

I want to propose that deep cultural forces have changed the way most Americans think about their own country. The results are complicated; in general this talk will raise issues that are more complicated than the ones raised by our earlier discussions of sex and marriage. You’re going to have to think harder!

At one level, America seems to be a highly patriotic nation. People put

their hands over their hearts for the national anthem. We see numerous flags flown from public buildings, but also from homes and even sometimes from cars. You see people wearing those fairly hideous American flag shirts and blouses. There are many occasions on which we are called upon to “honor the troops,” and most of us are not reluctant to do that. Where I live, in Atlanta, it seems like anytime there is a service member in attendance at a Braves game or walking through the airport, everyone just starts clapping spontaneously for them.

July 4th remains a big day in most communities. Fireworks light up the night all over the country. Many churches host patriotic celebrations on the Sunday nearest to Independence Day. These are sometimes quite elaborate, with the presentation of colors, the military service anthems, recognition of veterans and active duty military, and sometimes paratroopers rappelling down the walls.

National loyalty was obviously quite evident after 9/11. It showed up in songs, car stickers, retail signs, and everywhere one happened to look. My favorite was a political candidate sign that said, “United We’ll Stand; United I’ll Stand.” This post 9/11 loyalty quickly funneled into a passion to avenge the deaths of that terrible day and to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again. This reminds us that very often national loyalty is linked in our country to the military and to national defense.

So one might be forgiven for thinking that America is a very patriotic nation brimming with national loyalty, and the issue would be whether Christians should participate in that. This is often how this issue is framed in American Christian ethics, but I think it is not quite that simple. Instead I want to propose that our

apparent patriotism is actually rather shallow. Often it seems like a thin veneer of sentimentality lacquered over a general indifference to life beyond myself and my dreams.

If we define national loyalty, for example, to include serious interest in the history and government, and serious commitment to the founding values of a nation, I suggest to you that this kind of national loyalty has been fading for quite a while among us. This is not a nation in which average people know very much about our history or much about the details of how our governing structures work. Nor is it a nation in which many people could name the core founding principles that helped motivate the birth of this country or speak intelligently about the development or alteration of those principles in succeeding generations or the major challenges facing them now.

If we define national loyalty in terms of a high level of motivation to act for the well-being of the nation as a whole, it is hard to see us right now as a people who can be described as loving our country in this way. Few wake up in the morning asking what they can do to make America a better place. Few business leaders make their decisions with any apparent drive to act on behalf of the nation’s well being rather than profit for the firm. This helps explain hard-eyed business decisions that improve the bottom line by shipping jobs overseas. Most of us are living our private lives and pursuing our personal interests. We don’t have a great passion for the well-being of America as a whole.

If we define national loyalty in terms of a shared public commitment to shape citizens with a certain set of values and a certain kind of character that can advance the national interest, it doesn’t seem to me as if there is really anyone who is trying very hard to

do that right now, at least not outside the military. I have yet to encounter a public school with a clear sense of mission to shape citizens for service to the United States. Graduation speeches emphasize the personal dreams and ambitions of the individual graduates, not the way in which they could or should use their gifts and education to serve the nation as a whole.

I have to say that even our politicians often seem so caught up in personal ambition or partisan interest—and bickering—that it is often hard to see their love of the nation itself and their willingness to sacrifice for it. Increasingly it seems that they would prefer for their side to win, or the other side to fail, regardless of what happens to the nation as a whole. This seems like a recipe for gridlock and disaster.

Finally, if we define national loyalty as it has often been defined, as a willingness to fight, kill, and die for one's country, no one could argue that this is where the majority of American young people are. We have an all-volunteer (which means all paid) military force. Less than 2% of our population serves currently in the military, and less than 10% has ever served in the military. Seventy percent oppose reinstatement of the draft, which would require people to serve in the military from every sector of American society, as happened with our wars through Vietnam. We appear willing to honor our troops, and to fund our troops, but not to join our troops. I think our residual national guilt about laying all this war fighting responsibility on such a small percentage of the population—and making them go back to Iraq and Afghanistan so many times—helps explain why we make such a fuss about them when we happen to see them at ballgames or the airport.

If we define national loyalty simply as straightforward, openly expressed love of country, I think we see less and less of that as well. It feels, well, old-fashioned. Who do you know who sits around the dorm and talks about how much they love this country? Maybe, just maybe, an immigrant friend or

two. As for native-born Americans, it can hardly be described as a common kind of conversation to run into.

Historic Christian Faith on National Loyalty

As I turn to the question of what the historic Christian faith has said about love of country or national loyalty, the complexity of this issue is once again reinforced. The church has given a lot of different answers as to the place of national loyalty in the Christian's life.

One factor is that the Bible actually offers us glimpses of at least two very different kinds of faith communities—Israel and the church. We implicitly and sometimes explicitly learn very different lessons about national loyalty as we read the Old Testament and then the New Testament.

Israel, of course, was a nation that was also a faith community. The Old Testament—over 2/3 of our Bible—tells the story of a nation created, chosen, and called by God. In the case of the Jewish people as depicted in most of the OT, loyalty to nation was also loyalty to God. To obey the laws of Israel was to obey the God of Israel who had given the laws. To love Israel was to love the God who gave birth to Israel. To fight and kill and die for Israel was to fight and kill and die for God.

Many American Christians make what might seem a rather straightforward move of transferring these categories of thought to the United States. Israel becomes the U.S.; the U.S. becomes God's new chosen people. To love America is to love God. To be loyal to the United States is to be loyal to God; the enemies of the U.S. are the enemies of God; to fight and kill and die for the U.S. is to fight and kill and die for God. After 9/11, many Christians who already read the Bible that way were reinforced in this pattern as they interpreted the attack on the U.S. as a Muslim Arab attack on Christian America. So the war on terror became a holy war, an American Christian defensive jihad. Some conservative Christian leaders and even military people spoke that way, and still do.

There are very many huge problems with doing this, but one place to start is to say that there is no biblical grounds for believing that any earthly nation should ever have been viewed as replacing Israel as God's chosen nation. The idea has always been wrong and historically has always worked out rather badly.

Biblically, neither the O.T. nor the N.T. justifies this. Only Israel was God's chosen people. Further, there are plenty of O.T. instances in which both Israel and Judah have been destroyed as nations and yet God continues to relate to the Jewish people as a people of covenant relationship with him. And when the church comes along, the theme is only intensified. For the New Testament, the church is the new Israel, which is not a new political nation. Revelation 5:9 puts it this way:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,

For you [Jesus] were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God

Saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,

And they will reign on earth.

From its early days, the church has transcended national boundaries. It has been defined by the fact that it was multiracial, multinational, multiethnic, and multilingual. The church has long understood itself as a "catholic" entity, meaning that it is universal, encompassing people from all over the world and just about every tribe, people, and nation.

It is also true that the earliest Christians were embedded in the vast Roman Empire. They exhibited strikingly little national loyalty to that Empire. That was undoubtedly in part because they were regularly finding themselves being thrown to the lions in Roman coliseums. This does not engender much loyalty. But more deeply, this lack of what we might call patriotism was because they were loyal to Jesus and to his international body, the church.

So Christians were among the very

first people who transcended kin, family, tribe, and nation to envision themselves as part of a global community. Christians were among the first internationalists. They were aware that all over the world at any given moment were fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. They were taught a loyalty to these religious kin that at least balanced and more often far transcended their loyalty to their city, region, or nation.

This has also laid the foundation for a broader global concern in Christianity. Christians learned to care not just about their religious kin all over the world, but about the world itself. This was God's world, God is the creator of all, God loves every human being, and the church is charged with "going into all the world to preach the gospel to every nation."

Christians have often been seen as suspect because of this international loyalty. The more intensely a nation was focused on itself, the more Christian internationalism and concern for people all over the world has been seen as a threat. A great and terrible example occurred in Nazi Germany, which was an ultranationalistic community. Anyone who expressed any concern about what happened to people outside the nation was seen as potentially traitorous. But Christians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood that Christians cannot bend the knee before a nation that would demand that kind of loyalty.

The Difference Christ Makes

So here we have the last of our three great clashes that we will consider in these three lectures:

a. To the extent that Americans are

overly focused on national loyalty and its symbols, Christian faith stands in tension with this tendency because of our primary loyalty to Christ, his global church, and the whole world. Our Christian internationalism and global concern should be stronger than our patriotism and national concern. This is my controversial claim.

b. To the extent that some Christians have simply identified the United States with biblical Israel and transfer all that holy loyalty onto America, they are guilty of a significant and damaging theological error that totally misses the New Testament and undermines any kind of healthy theology of the church.

c. To the extent that Americans are overly focused just on personal dreams, goals, and ambitions so that they have no interest in any transcendent loyalty, Christian faith also stands in tension with this pattern. Our loyalty to Jesus Christ, his church, and the whole world makes us care about issues far transcending our personal lives, dreams, worries, and ambitions. The constraints on our patriotism or national loyalty do not arise because we care so little about the world beyond the self, but because we care so much about that world—all of it. We fit our national loyalty into a broader Christian framework which refines and disciplines it. That's the difference Christ makes.

I promised that each time I would try to offer some specific practical suggestions. So let me conclude with such an effort one last time:

1. Check your heart to be sure that your interests extend far beyond your personal dreams and interests to include both what happens in the United States

and what happens in the world beyond.

2. Visit and serve alongside Christians in other parts of the world. Many mission experiences give this opportunity. Stay in touch with these new friends and with events in their part of the world. Pray for them and with them just like you would friends here. Stay in dialogue with them about events both in their nation and yours.

3. Never identify biblical Israel with the United States. Recognize that this is the nation God has given you to live in and serve in Christ's name, but avoid making that nation any kind of idolatry.

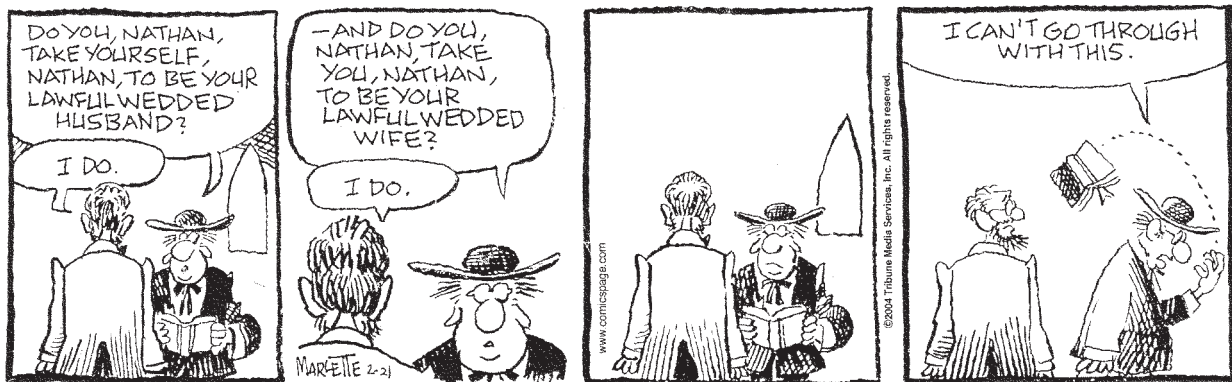
4. Think hard about whether fighting and killing and dying for your nation fits with your primary loyalty to Jesus Christ.

5. Read world news, especially about the world's most impoverished areas, and ask God to grow your heart to pray for, care about, give to, and serve in, one or another of those areas.

6. Care about this particular nation too, not by uncritically embracing everything that happens here, but by being the kind of Christian citizen who exemplifies our nation's best values, such as freedom, equality, the rule of law, and hospitality to the needy stranger.

I am challenging you to be both more and less patriotic than almost everyone you may have ever met. More patriotic—because you love this nation in the name of Christ and want everyone here to flourish. Less patriotic—because your horizon of vision extends far beyond this nation to every nation, and to the church in every nation.

This will be the way our culture will come to believe in the difference Christ makes.



The Story of One Undocumented Family

By Miguel De La Torre, Professor Ilif School of Theology, Denver, CO

Jose was a simple man who worked with his hands. He built things. He tried to make a living as a carpenter, but times were hard and taxes were high.

Regardless of the foreign military occupation of his homeland, there simply was no time for him to become involved with any of those revolutionary groups doing maneuvers and hiding in the wilderness.

He just worked hard, barely keeping food on the table for his rapidly growing family. Although a newlywed for fewer than nine months, his wife, Maria, had already given birth to his first child, a healthy boy.

On this particular night, Jose was scared. He ran through the sleeping town, silently making his way toward his makeshift home, praying and hoping that he wasn't too late. He had to save his family from certain death.

He burst into his shack and went straight to the sleeping mats on the dirt floor. "Despierta mi amor. Wake up, my love," Jose told his wife as he gently shook her. "A messenger just warned me that la milicia will be coming for us. I fear we will disappear! Apurate. Hurry up. We must leave this moment for a safer land, far from the reaches of this brutal dictatorship."

There was no time to pack any belongings or personal mementos, nor was there time to say goodbye to friends and family. In the middle of the night, literally a few steps before the National Guard, Jose took his small family into el exilio, the exile.

They would come to a foreign country, wearing only the clothes on their backs. Even though they could not speak the language, nor understand the strange customs and idiosyncrasies of the dominant culture, at least they were physically safe. Salvation for this poor family was found south of the border.

More than 2,000 years ago, this family arrived in Egypt as political refugees, fleeing the tyrannical regime of Herod. Almost 50 years ago, my own father came home to his wife, my mother, with similar news. Because of his involvement with the former political regime, he was now a fugitive of the newly installed government. If caught, he would face certain death. They gathered me—their 6-month-old son—and headed north, arriving in this country literally with only the clothes on their backs. Like Jesus, I, too, was a political refugee.

The story of God's people is the story of aliens. All the patriarchs of Genesis were aliens. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph are the stories of aliens trying to survive among a people who are not theirs in a land that they cannot claim.

If they were living today, we would probably call them *undocumented immigrants*, or the more pejorative term, *illegal aliens*. The people who will come to be called Jews were formed in the foreign land of Egypt.

They become a nation while traversing the desert, having no land to claim as their own. They will experience exile in a far off place called Babylon and disenfranchisement on their own terrain due to military occupation by foreign empires (that is, Rome). Is it any wonder that the second most common phrase throughout the biblical text exhorts the reader to take care of the alien among you, along with the widows and orphans?

Throughout the biblical text we are reminded of God's concern for the alien and the strangers who reside among us. Aliens and strangers in the Bible are those who have been victimized, oppressed, or enslaved by others, those who are vulnerable because of lack of family connections or support, and those whose nationality or religion

differs from the dominant culture.

In the exodus story, God told the Israelites to welcome the stranger because "you were once aliens in the land of Egypt." In Ruth, a Moabite woman "clings to" her mother-in-law, Naomi, to provide her security in old age even though she could have returned to her own people. The Good Samaritan in Luke does not leave the alien on the side of the road—or build walls to avoid seeing his injuries. He takes social and economic risks to attend to the alien's needs.

We are challenged again and again to welcome the alien in our midst.

For those who claim to be Christians, responsibility toward aliens is so paramount that God incarnated Godself as an alien. The radicalness of the incarnation is not so much that the Creator of the universe became a frail human, but rather that God chose to become an alien, fleeing the oppressive consequences of the empire of the time.

In so doing, Jesus willingly assumed the role of the ultra-disenfranchised. More than 2,000 years ago, the holy family arrived in Egypt as political refugees, migrants fleeing the tyrannical regime of Herod. Jesus too was an undocumented alien, a victim of circumstances beyond his comprehension or control.

Jesus understands what it means to be seen as inferior because he was from a culture different from the dominant one. I have no doubt that Jesus wept as a child for the same reasons many aliens weep today. Those of us who are or have been undocumented aliens discover a savior who knows our fears and frustrations.

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Gulf Catastrophe—An Uneasy Evangelical Conscience

By Russell D. Moore, Dean The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I've left my hometown lots of times. But never like this.

I cried every day for almost a year in the aftermath of a hurricane that almost wiped my hometown off the map. But I've never left like this, wondering if I'll ever see it again, if my children's children will ever know what Biloxi, MS, was.

A massive rupture in the Ocean's floor is gushing oil into the Gulf of Mexico, with plumes of petroleum great enough to threaten to destroy the sea-life there for my lifetime, if not forever. Everything is endangered, from the seafood and tourism industries to the crabs and seagulls on the beach to the churches.

This is more than a threat to my hometown and neighboring communities. It is a threat to national security. This is, as one magazine put it recently, Katrina meets Chernobyl.

I left Biloxi changed.

Someone described Roe vs. Wade as the "Pearl Harbor" of the evangelical pro-life conscience. Before that date of infamy, foreign policy isolationism seemed to be a legitimate American option. The "America First" committees and some of the most influential figures in the United States Congress argued that Hitler's war was none of our concern. We should tend to ourselves, and we could deal with whomever won in Europe and the Pacific.

After Pearl Harbor, the shortsightedness and utopianism of isolationism was seen for what it was after Roe, what seemed to be a "Catholic issue" now pierced through the consciences of evangelical Protestants who realized they'd not only been naïve, they'd also missed a key aspect of Christian thought and mission.

For too long, we evangelical Christians have maintained an uneasy ecological conscience. I include myself in this indictment.

We've had an inadequate view of human sin.

Because we believe in free markets, we've acted as though this means we should trust corporations to protect the natural resources and habitats. But a laissez-faire view of government regulation of corporations is akin to the youth minister who lets the teenage girl and boy sleep in the same sleeping bag at church camp because he "believes in young people."

The Scripture gives us a vision of human sin that means there ought to be limits to every claim to sovereignty, whether from church, state, business or labor. A commitment to the free market doesn't mean unfettered license any more than a commitment to free speech means hardcore pornography ought to be broadcast in prime-time by your local network TV affiliate.

Caesar's sword is there, by God's authority, to restrain those who would harm others (Rom 13). When government fails or refuses to protect its own people, whether from nuclear attack or from toxic waste spewing into our life-giving waters, the government has failed.

We've seen the issue of so-called "environmental protection" as someone else's issue.

In our era, the abortion issue is the transcendent moral issue of the day (as segregation was in the last generation, and lynching and slavery before that). Too often, however, we've been willing not simply to vote for candidates who will protect unborn human life (as we ought to), but to also in the process adopt their worldviews on every other issue.

Moreover, we've seen some of the theological and ideological fringes in the environmentalist movement, fringes that enabled us to see them as not "with us," and, frankly, to enable us to make fun of the entire question

as a silly enterprise. But perhaps the void is being filled by leftists and liberals and wannabe liberal evangelicals simply because those who ought to know better are off doing something else.

Working with our secular progressive neighbors on saving the Gulf no more compromises the evangelical witness than our working with feminists to combat pornography or with Latter-day Saints to protect marriage.

We've had an inadequate view of human life and culture.

As social conservatives, we understand human communities are formed by traditions and by mores, by the bond between the generations. Culture is a compact reaching back to the dead and forward to the unborn. Liberalism wants to dissolve those traditions, and make every generation create itself anew, not conservatism.

Every human culture is formed in a tie with the natural environment. When the natural environment is used up, unsustainable for future generations, cultures die. When Gulfs are dead, when mountaintops are removed, when forests are razed with nothing left in their place, when deer populations disappear, cultures die too.

What's left in the place of these cultures and traditions is an individualism, that is defined simply by the appetites for sex, violence and piling up stuff. That certainly isn't Christian.

Finally, we've compromised our love.

A previous generation of evangelicals had to ask the question, "Is the fetus my neighbor?"

As I've seen the people I love, who led me to Christ, literally heaving in tears, I've wondered how many other communities have faced death like this, while I ignored even the chance to pray. The protection of the creation

(continued on page 21)

John Calvin, Roger Williams, and the Pledge of Allegiance

By Charles Kiker, American Baptist Minister (ret.) Tulia, TX.

As we once again draw near to the celebration of July 4th, I am reminded of three spiritual/intellectual encounters I had last year: with John Calvin, Roger Williams, and the Pledge of Allegiance.

I encountered Calvin in a guest editorial by Frank Bellizzi in the Amarillo Globe News: *Happy 500th Birthday, John Calvin*. Bellizzi quotes with approval E.G. Leonard's chapter title "Calvin: The Founder of a Civilization." To be sure Calvin had a formative influence on Western Civilization, for good and for ill. I would hardly credit him as the founder of a civilization.

Bellizzi acknowledges criticism of Calvin's role in the execution of heretics. He is apparently referring to the execution of Michael Servetus by burning at the stake, with Calvin's tacit approval. Bellizzi defends Calvin on the basis that execution of heretics was common practice among religious leaders of his day. So it was. The early Luther encouraged cordial relations with the Jews, in the hopes of converting them. When conversion failed he turned on them with a viciousness that foreshadowed the holocaust.

So Calvin only participated in the spirit of his age. I'm willing to cut him a little slack for that. But I'm not willing to sweep those horrors under the rug and make Calvin a spiritual icon. Religious leaders should rise above the spirit of their age. The Apostle Paul admonishes us, "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God... what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2, NRSV).

Let's skip forward almost a century to Roger Williams (1603-1683). I have long been an admirer of Roger Williams. I met him anew by means of a guest editorial in the New York Times for Sunday, July 5, 2009: *A Plantation*

to be Proud Of, by Sara Vowell. Ms. Vowell wanted to guard Rhode Island's official name, "State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations," from any move to change the name simply to "State of Rhode Island."

She could hardly write about Rhode Island without including Roger Williams. Williams started out in the Church of England, became a Puritan, and fled to Massachusetts to avoid persecution. But on these shores he found religious intolerance which he could not tolerate. He insisted that civil government could not dictate to spiritual conscience, and for his conscience was banished from Massachusetts. He came to what is now Rhode Island and purchased land from the Native Americans. He dealt fairly with Native Americans, learned their language, and treated them as real people. He built a home, which he called Providence. He founded the First Baptist Church in America in Providence, Rhode Island. Williams did not long remain a Baptist. "God is too large to be housed under one roof," he is reported to have said. Williams remained on friendly terms with Baptists, but became simply a seeker, always seeking but never finding the City of God on earth.

Ms. Vowell incomprehensibly calls Williams, a stalwart for freedom of conscience, a "man with the narrowest of minds." Perhaps she means that he was extremely narrow minded in his focus on freedom of conscience. Moderation in the pursuit of religious liberty was no virtue for Roger Williams.

John Calvin was extravagantly called the founder of a civilization. It is no exaggeration to call Roger Williams the father of Religious Liberty in America. John Calvin participated wholeheartedly in the spirit of his age. In numerous ways Roger Williams rose above that same spirit.

Just before reading the articles

concerning Calvin and Williams, I received one of those much forwarded e-mails urging its recipients to continue the chain. This one had to do with the Pledge of Allegiance. I was urged to enlarge the chain and resist removal of the phrase "under God" from the pledge. I instinctively resist forwarding these kinds of messages, especially when my compliance or lack thereof is used as a yardstick to measure my spiritual standing. My instinct in this particular case was that the message is motivated more by politics than by religion. And that saying "under God" does not make it so.

Our pledge was written by a Christian socialist in 1892, without the "under God" phrase. Congress officially added the phrase in 1954, at the height of the McCarthy communist witch hunts. The phrase was deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court in 2004, so there is no real threat of its removal. But pledging allegiance to any earthly power gives me pause. As a Christian, my final allegiance cannot be to any of the kingdoms of this world.

So we're back to John Calvin, Roger Williams, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Calvin was quick to align himself with civic powers. Roger Williams used the "wall of separation" phrase more than a century before Thomas Jefferson. If John Calvin were a twentieth century American, I think he would wholeheartedly pledge his allegiance with or without the phrase, "under God." Roger Williams, on the other hand, would be very suspicious of that kind of pledge.

I'll take my stand more with Williams than with Calvin.

Resurgent Calvinism Among Baptists—What Does It Mean?

By Fisher Humphreys, Birmingham, AL

Last year was the 500th anniversary of the birth of the man who gave us Calvinism. The word refers to the vision of the Christian faith of John Calvin, a 16th-century Protestant reformer.

Calvin thought that, before creating the universe, God decreed that human beings would fall into sin; God then chose which ones God would save (“the elect”) and which ones would remain lost (“the reprobate”). God decided the destinies of the elect and the reprobate sovereignly, without reference to God’s knowledge of how they would respond to the gospel.

Some Christians think that Calvinism is a matter of degree, but in fact, in the sense just described, you either are a Calvinist or you aren’t. If you think that in eternity God sovereignly predestined some people for salvation and not others, then you are a Calvinist; if you do not think this, you are not a Calvinist.

Some people assume that the difference between Calvinists and other Christians is that Calvinists emphasize God’s sovereignty while non-Calvinists emphasize human freedom. However, this is not accurate. Non-Calvinists emphasize both divine sovereignty and human freedom; they just do not believe that the way that God exercised divine sovereignty was to make a decision to save some while passing over others.

The first Baptists opposed Calvinism, but soon Calvinism entered Baptist life and flourished. For more than two centuries, most of the best-known Baptist leaders were Calvinists. Eventually, however, Calvinism began to fade from Baptist life, and for more than a century now most Baptists have not been Calvinists.

Today, however Calvinism is experiencing a resurgence among Baptists in the South and elsewhere. An organization of Southern Baptist Calvinists called Founders Ministries [[http://](http://www.founders.org/)

www.founders.org/] is dedicated to this endeavor, and some—but not all—of the six Southern Baptist Convention-supported seminaries actively promote Calvinism.

No one knows exactly how many Baptists are Calvinists. A recent survey found that 10% of pastors in the SBC are Calvinists. My guess is that this figure is high. In my home state more than 3,100 churches are affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention, but barely 1% of them (33 churches) are listed as “Founders-Friendly Churches” on the group’s website (accessed March 2010).

Still, Calvinism is making a comeback. What are the implications of that? There is good news and bad news.

Calvinism has made massive contributions to Christian theology. Resurgent Calvinism may help restore a sense of the value of theology to sectors of Baptist life where that sense is weak. One of the great temptations all human beings face is narcissism. Calvinism is effective at helping people turn their attention away from themselves and toward God. And Calvinists have a long record of taking worship seriously. This could prove helpful to Baptist churches, many of which have become so focused on helping people that they need to place more emphasis on worshipping God.

On the bad-news side of the equation, though, most significant conflicts dividing Alabama Baptist churches today involve disputes over Calvinism, and presumably this is true in other states as well. Usually (but not always) this takes the form of a congregation becoming distressed when it discovers that its pastor is a Calvinist. Some congregations have dismissed their Calvinistic pastors; in other congregations numerous members have left upon discovering their pastor’s Calvinism.

Moreover, many Baptists worry that resurgent Calvinism will undercut our

commitment to evangelism and missions. They reason that if God has predestined who will and won’t be saved, our efforts to evangelize do not really make any difference—the elect will be saved whether or not we evangelize, and the others will not. Behind this reasoning lies an assumption that what motivates us to engage in missions and evangelism by the idea that their efforts can make a difference about how many persons are saved.

Obviously, Calvinists don’t believe that such human effort can make a difference in who God chooses to save. However, they have other motives for doing evangelism. They evangelize because Christ commanded it, because it brings glory to God, and because they enjoy doing it. The Calvinistic Baptists I know are committed to evangelism and missions. Still, unless they are able to replace the motive they take away (“we can make a difference!”) with other motives, resurgent Calvinists could undermine Baptists’ evangelism and missions.

We Baptists, Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike, are brothers and sisters in Christ. We likely will continue to disagree about whether God predestined some for salvation and passed over others, so we need to treat each other with what the New Testament calls “forbearance.” We who are not Calvinists have a special responsibility to emphasize God’s love for the entire world; then we can follow that up with our conviction that since God loves everyone, God would not have predestined some to be lost.

Fisher Humphreys retired in 2008 after 38 years of teaching theology to ministerial students in various Baptist schools. A version of this article was published earlier by Associated Baptist Press.

Equivocation and the Ten Words

By R. Hal Ritter, Jr., Waco, TX

The Ten Commandments, as given to Moses, are divided into two parts: the first four commands (Ex 20:4-11) establish the relationship the people are to have with Yahweh; the second six commands (Ex 20:12-17) establish the relationship the people are to have with one another.

This pattern of relationship with God and relationships with others is the pattern followed in Jesus' love commandment (Mt 22:34-40). In this passage, an expert in the Hebrew law asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus answers that the love of God (Yahweh) is both the first and the greatest commandment, but the second commandment (to love your neighbor as yourself) is equally important, for "All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments" (v. 40, RSV).

What Christians generally refer to as the "Ten Commandments," the Jews refer to as the "Ten Words." In their original form, these ten statements were very short—terse commands without any further explanation:

- No gods but Me.
- No idols.
- No misuse of God's name.
- Keep the Sabbath.
- Respect father and mother.
- No killing.
- No adultery.
- No stealing.
- No false accusations.
- No coveting.

Some Hebrew scholars hypothesize that the original number of ten was chosen so the fingers of the hand could be used by the Children of Israel for remembering them.

The Ten Words are in the form of what is called *apodictic law*. It is law that is self evident, beyond refuting and absolute. So apodictic law is a universal absolute, and it is not related to any particular real or hypothesized historical situation, but it is intended

to apply at all times to all circumstances. The counter part to apodictic law is casuistry: *casuistic law*, or case law. It is law that develops around various hypothetical, but nonetheless real, possibilities and cases, and it generally follows the form of *if, then*—"If this happens, then this is the consequence."

The Hebrew Bible, as we have it today, contains a total of 613 *mitvot*, or commandments. (The Hebrew text never refers to the Ten Words as the Ten Commandments.) These ten commands are like ten categories of absolutes for thinking about God and others. All 613 of the *mitvot* fit into one of the ten categories. So then, the Ten Words are apodictic law, while the 613 other *mitvot* are casuistic law. They are case law based on, "If this happens, then this is how the Law applies in the circumstance."

The last command, "No Coveting," is the only one which focuses on intentionality. In other words, coveting someone else or what someone else has leads to idolatry, killing, adultery, stealing and falsely accusing. It is similar to 1 John 3:15 in the New Testament: "Whoever hates a brother or sister is already a murderer," or Jesus' comment that anyone who lusts after another person has already committed adultery in one's own heart (Mt 5:28).

A person's intentions are often difficult to assess, and acting or deciding to act with pure motives and intentions is oftentimes self deceiving. Saint Augustine, in one of his famous Latin turns of phrase, says every act, regardless of the Christian's intention, is *incurvatus in se*, curled back on oneself. In other words, because all human life is corrupted and infected by sin, therefore, there are no pure motives and every decision has within it some self interest. It is like the tail of a scorpion, curled back toward the agent, as a reminder of the danger of deceiving

oneself into feeling some self righteousness for one's actions. This complexity of intentions emerges in the final of the Ten Words—No Coveting. If many people do not identify coveting as one of the primary commands, then possibly it is because it is not behaviorally oriented, such as No Stealing, No Killing or No Adultery. Being an intention of the heart, coveting is perceived as being less significant and less egregious, because it is less obvious. This kind of minimizing or dismissing of severity is indicative of how covetousness, as well as other intentions of the heart, is hidden in self-deception.

In philosophical discourse, two words are used for statements regarding their truthfulness. First is the word, *univocal*. Univocal means, literally, *uni* (one) plus *vocal* (voice). It is intended to mean a statement that is clearly stated and cannot be explained away or misunderstood. It means one thing and one only. A related word is the word, "unique," one of a kind, like no other. Jesus says we are to speak univocally when he says, "Let your 'Yes' mean Yes, and your 'No' mean No. Anything more than this comes from evil" (Mt 5:37).

The second word used for truthfulness in discourse is *equivocal*. Equivocal means, literally, *equi* (equal) plus *vocal* (voice). A thing cannot be equal to itself, so equality requires at least two of something, in order for there to be a comparison. This value is equal to that value. However, equivocation means that even if the two statements "appear" to be equal, they are not. The statements may not be literally false, but they may be evading an unpleasant truth. To "equivocate," means not to speak directly and clearly, but to try to say something another way, generally for the purpose of misleading the listener: "No, I am not saying something different. All I am trying to say is. . . ." In other words, as the

saying goes, “The more you talk and explain, the guiltier you look.”

Sometimes, instead of univocal, the word “unequivocal” is used, in order to imply certainty. But equivocation is generally for intentional ambiguity. It is similar to saying “Yes” and “No” at the same time, in order, supposedly, to clarify what is being said. The apostle Paul wrote, “Was I vacillating (equivocating) about what I wanted to do? As God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. The son of God, Jesus Christ, is always Yes. All the promises of God find their Yes in Christ” (1 Cor 1:17-20).

We have established that the Ten Words are apodictic law—absolutes for all times and circumstances. In this regard, we can claim that they are “univocal.” They are unique and literal, to be taken as they are. In the observation of human behavior, particularly Christian behavior, it seems that many Christians seem to approach the Ten Words more like eight of them are apodictic and univocal, while two of them are casuistic and equivocal.

While No Killing and No Adultery are given as apodictic (*mitvot*), it seems that many religious people have parsed them so carefully, that the two words sometimes lose all meaning. It is interesting that the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, claimed that there are two basic instincts that drive the human race: violence and sex (killing and adultery). The command of No Killing seems fairly straightforward. As is sometimes observed, the Hebrew word translated as “kill,” can also be translated as “murder.” This

seemingly benign wordplay allows for all kinds of hermeneutic mischief.

For example, as the United States’ justice system continues to execute criminals, the system is, after all, not murdering, but only carrying out deserved killing—rhetorically camouflaged as “capital punishment.” When the United States goes to war, it is not murdering the enemy, but it is killing the enemy. When a homeowner attacks an intruder, the owner is not committing murder by killing the intruder. And on and on the casuistry of No Killing goes. As Christian people, do we affirm the command, No Killing, as a univocal absolute, or do we equivocate for our own self-deceiving needs and purposes?

In the early church, the principle of No Killing, and even no assault of any kind, was a basic principle and taken very seriously. Jesus told his followers to “bless those who curse you” and “turn the other cheek” when you are assaulted (Lk 6: 28-29). The early Christians refused to serve in the military, because to do so they had to pledge allegiance to Caesar and to kill people for the sake of Caesar’s kingdom. In the United States today we pledge allegiance to the flag of our kingdom and not to an individual, the President. Rhetorically, such a pledge of loyalty makes killing for the flag of the kingdom more acceptable than killing for the President.

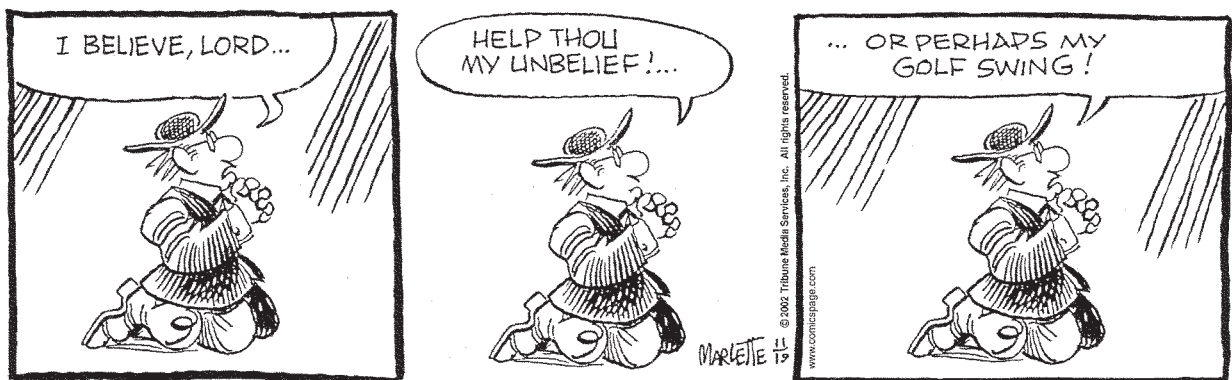
Perhaps the greatest equivocation for No Killing in Christian history is Saint Augustine’s just war theory. In the fifth century C.E., Augustine of Hippo—a city in north Africa that is now in the country of Algeria, built

his theory on the work of the first century B.C.E. Greek philosopher Cicero. Since Augustine, many Christians now accept his theory as the only way to think about war. Augustine establishes certain principles that must be met for a war to be considered as just, or justified.

For example, when the United States invaded Iraq, numerous Christian leaders claimed that the war fully met all of the Augustinian criteria for a just war. Just War, when a nation can “justify” itself, seems to be a long way from No Killing and turn the other cheek if someone attacks you. It is an equivocation. It claims that No Killing does not really mean No Killing of any kind, ever, under any and all circumstances.

Like No Killing, No Adultery is another apodictic statement that seems fairly straightforward. It is a univocal statement. However, the equivocators have long been quick to point out that adultery is, technically, between one person and another person, at least one of whom must be married for the term to apply. Others point out that it says nothing about two people, both of whom are single. And others claim it only refers to intercourse, but not other forms of sexual pleasure. Such equivocating was enjoined by President Bill Clinton in his affair with Monica Lewinsky: “I did not have sex with that woman, Monica Lewinsky.” Parsing his words carefully, he was defining sex as only meaning intercourse.

In 1964, Joseph Fletcher wrote a book titled, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. It is from this book and its



title that the terms “situation ethics” and “new morality” entered the general public discourse. Fletcher argued that the “situation” of any ethical decision becomes part of the decision-making process, including sexual decision-making. In addition to using the word situation, today’s discourse also uses the phrase, “contextual variables.”

As a pastoral counselor, I have spoken to singles that are divorced who claim that the expectation of celibacy in post-divorce singleness is just not facing the reality of the “situation.” Once they have enjoyed the freedom of sexual pleasure within the bounds of marriage, it is unrealistic to expect the emotions and desires to just be cut off when the divorce is final.

I have even had counseling clients who, while going through divorce or even after the divorce is final but given the opportunity of place and privacy, will still have intercourse together. Somehow, the desire for closeness and intimacy empowers them to put aside the angry and hurt feelings of the divorce for a moment of sexual pleasure. Some of them regret the encounter at a later time, but some do not. Somehow, the familiarity with one another’s bodies makes it an easier decision than finding and developing another relationship with another person. In addition, the familiarity often keeps it from feeling like adultery: “No. I was always faithful during the marriage, and he/she is still the only one I have had sex with.”

And then there are the numerous Christians who have affairs and claim, “No one is getting hurt. My spouse does not know, so it’s no big deal.” Some will claim that the affair is actually improving their relationship at home with their spouse. If asked, they may acknowledge that it is adultery and then quickly claim that the “situation” at home is too difficult to expect otherwise. I also hear it from spouses of soldiers who are off at war, often justifying their behavior with a comment such as, “He/she’s probably doing the same thing over there.” I have had Christians for counseling who tell me that they have prayed

together with the person with whom they are having the affair, and they feel that God has brought the two of them together. Do they plan to divorce their spouse and marry the affair person? No, but the question only indicates that I, as the counselor, do not understand the “situation.”

It is what is sometimes called emotional-ethical decision making. In 1977, Debby Boone recorded a hit song titled, “You Light Up My Life.” The last line of the song says, “It can’t be wrong, If it feels so right, ‘Cause you, you light up my life.” In other words, if it feels right, it must be the right thing to do. Many people seem to make their ethical decisions based on whether it “feels right.” However, some Christians are quick to point out, particularly regarding sexual ethics, just because it “feels” like the right thing to do, does not mean it is the right thing to do.

There are various clergy today who have affairs with congregants. Some of them apologize and believe the congregation should forgive and forget, or they move on to another congregation and repeat the same behavior. The television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, apologized and cried and wept for forgiveness, and he is still on the television raising money.

These various responses are equivocations—attempts to justify the unjustifiable. The claim is that No Adultery does not really mean No Adultery of any kind, ever, under any and all circumstances. And it is similar to those who claim that No Killing does not really mean No Killing of any kind, ever, under any and all circumstances.

The existential psychologist Rollo May says, following Sigmund Freud’s logic, love-making and fighting are very similar neurologically in the physical body, because both reflect intimacy. We speak of sexual intimacy and love-making as the desire for closeness. In fighting, May says, we are pushing back against the threat of intimacy. To engage in the physical contact of a fight with another person is an intimate encounter, and the body’s various systems engage in the same neurologi-

cal and physiological responses that are initiated in love making. By fighting, the person thinks that all intimacy is being avoided.

Spouse/partner violence in the United States and around the world is predominately by male partners. In many of these cases, the perpetrators claim over and over again how much they love their spouse. The violence creates a kind of false intimacy because the perpetrator is so frightened of genuine intimacy with their partner.

And so we have become a Christian faith of equivocators, situation deciders. We claim, absolutely, that killing is wrong. But then, we claim the murderer has “forfeited” the right to live, and, therefore, must die—by killing. We claim absolutely that adultery is wrong. But then, we make all kinds of excuses and exceptions for why the univocal, apodictic absolute does not apply to all circumstances.

In our various equivocations, we validate Saint Augustine’s dictum that in claiming our pure, godly, motives, we *incurvatus in se*—we deceive ourselves.

“And this is the judgment, that light has come into the world, and people love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19).

“This is the message we have heard from Jesus and proclaim to you, that God is light and in God is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with God while we walk in darkness, *we are liars* and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light as God is the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus God’s son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But, if we say we have not sinned, we make *God a liar*, and God’s word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:5-10).

Do we live univocally or equivocally? Are the Ten Word apodictic for us? Or are they “ten suggestions” for those times when the situation seems to fit our self deceiving intentions?

Jesus On Trial In Texas

Q & A with Mark Osler, Professor, Baylor Law School Waco, TX

What if Jesus were sentenced under Texas death-penalty laws? Would he still be executed? That question has led Baylor Law School professor Mark Osler to stage the trial of Christ under the rules of Texas law for a Waco congregation.

The death penalty opponent and sentencing guidelines expert summarized his thoughts in a book published last year, *Jesus on Death Row: The Trial of Jesus and American Capital Punishment*.

Q. You staged the trial of Christ under the laws of Texas at a Baptist church in Waco as an untenured professor. What surprised you most about how that played out?

A. Among many surprises, one of the most striking was the willingness of people in the congregation to consider this very old question in a new light. Many, if not most, had not thought about the modern death penalty in the context of Christ's execution, but once that idea was presented, even those who had participated in capital murder juries (there were two in that congregation) eagerly engaged in the exercise. This is consistent with what I have seen generally in talking about the book—people of faith who may disagree with me have been uniformly warm and receptive to genuine and heartfelt discussion, largely because it is a debate in which we begin with a common set of beliefs about the source of all knowledge.

Q. Given that there is generally a lack of discussion on this issue in Texas, then, do you see people of faith as possibly playing a major role? Should this discussion be taking place in more faith communities?

A. When we talk about our society choosing to kill our own citizens, we are talking about a moral issue, and people of faith so often lead the way in those discussions. In fact, people

of faith have already done so, especially within the Catholic Church; I am struck by how important this issue is to many Catholics and humbled by the sincerity with which they wrestle with these questions.

Q. In your book, you say that the “troubling account of Jesus as a criminal defendant should be part of the discussion” about the death penalty. Why? Ancient law and a death sentence carried out within hours doesn't really equate to our deliberative and slow process for executing heinous murderers, does it?

A. Part of my own spiritual journey with writing this book was finding that, in many ways, Christ's experience does equate with our own process and its problems. For example, one constant in the Gospel accounts is the mob of people calling for death who seem to follow Jesus at each step. This mob influences the political actors, Pontius Pilate and Herod, as they decline to stop the execution, wrong as it is.

Too often, the flaws in our own process (especially in Texas) are the result of having it all driven by an elected district attorney, an elected district court judge, an elected Court of Criminal Appeals, and an elected governor (considering clemency), all of whom know sparing the life of a capital defendant is likely to turn the anger of the population against them, regardless of the real problems in a case.

Q. Yes, but pilate refused to pardon a holy man, a preacher. Texas officials are asked to show mercy to murderers. Does making this comparison risk offending some Christians?

A. The risk is there. Jesus was unimaginably good, and the murderers are unimaginably bad. Still, Jesus taught us that when we visit those in

prison, we visit him. He expressly compared himself to those in Huntsville, and without the caveat of identifying only the innocent prisoners. If I compare Jesus to prisoners, I do so at his invitation, and without the pretense that I am talking about the innocent or honorable. So often, Christ taught us things that defy our own impulses, and this is one of them for me. Yet, despite my own inner resistance, I feel called to defer to Christ.

Q. Do you believe Jesus—and by extension God, his father—wanted his followers to oppose the death penalty?

A. I do believe that. I discern God's will largely through the Bible, and I believe that God wrote the story that Jesus lived out on Earth. That means that God chose the roles Jesus played for a reason, to teach us and show us what is important. Doesn't it matter, then, that God chose Jesus to be a capital defendant? Just as I believe that God intended great meaning in having Jesus be born in a manger and sought out by wise men, I think that God also crafted the story of Jesus' death. That part of the Gospels shows us how wrong we can be when we, as a society, choose to take a life. Is the fundamental nature of man so different now than it was in Jesus time?

This article was adapted from an extended Q & A transcript of an interview with Professor Mark Osler by a Dallas Morning News reporter and can be read at dallasnews.com/deathpenaltyblog.

Waterboarding—the Sequel

By Dr. Barbara S. Worden, Professor, Houston Graduate School of Theology.

Insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result each time. Albert Einstein
Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. George Santayana

Dr. Kurt Gray of the social psychology department at Harvard recently completed a research study in which subjects listened to simulated torture and were questioned later about their attitudes to it. As the torture intensified, individuals tended to conclude more strongly that the ones being tortured were guilty. As this is multiplied on a large scale, postulates Gray, states and political systems have their attitudes similarly corrupted. He came to some surprising conclusions: “Gray says the experiment suggests that governments that initially advocate torture—or passively allow it—will see it as more justifiable, and thus are more likely to advocate for its use in the future.”

He explains: “You can see the feedback cycle. If torturers see their victim’s pain as a sign of guilt, then the approach seems effective and it makes sense to torture more people. In reality, though, the pain that torture causes just changes *our perception* of the victim, not our knowledge of the facts of the case.” What happens to the presumption of innocence guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution is obvious.

Torture is not only morally wrong by the standards of the constitution and Christian ethics, it also fails, as it always has failed whether in the Inquisition or in the modern war against terror, in its goal of producing reliable information, especially where time is an issue. The fact that something can be both morally and ethically wrong for Christians and also impractical and ineffective is a truth that should be remembered in an age when Christian ethics have increasing-

ly been swallowed in moral relativity and the belief that whatever seems to work is right.

In an article, published in the *Washington Post*, Richard Mezo, a former navy flight crew member, describes the waterboarding he endured as part of his training for possible capture by Chinese Communists. “Waterboarding is real drowning that simulates death. It’s an experience our country should not subject people to.”

What is water torture cum waterboarding like? The modern description by Mr. Mezo, free as it is of historical exaggeration, is sufficiently graphic. After being forcibly slammed down on a flat surface, my face was covered by a “blindfold” that was “heavy and completely covered my face. As the two men held me down, one on each side, someone began pouring water onto the blindfold. And suddenly I was drowning. The water streamed into my nose and then into my mouth when I gasped for breath. I couldn’t stop it. All I could breathe was water, and it was terrifying. I think I began to lose consciousness. I felt my lungs begin to fill with burning liquid . . . Cutting off my finger would have been preferable. . . . But drowning is another matter.”¹

The original waterboarding, along with other tortures used by the Inquisitions of the medieval and early modern period, were not only substantial failures in uncovering actual subversive activities by “heretics;” they in fact created two largely nonexistent organized heresies, the Free Spirit and the organized Witchcraft scare. These alone were responsible by conservative estimates for almost 20,000 executions the majority of which were women. By comparison, the modern fear of nonexistent enriched uranium stores and “weapons of mass destruction” seem like a small shabby accomplishment. At least Mr. Mezo knew, unlike

victims of the Inquisition or the U.S. Military, that his captors wouldn’t kill him.

Like the tortures used by the Inquisition which the Church turned over to the secular powers, the U.S. Government has turned the torture of prisoners over to nations whose judicial systems lack the legal protections for the accused; or they are sent to secret military prisons with non-commissioned officers so that the central government and the upper ranks of the military could keep their records clean, claiming “we don’t do that.” Both the Inquisition and the modern War on Terror have featured removal of the usual protections for the accused provided by the secular legal system. In the Inquisition this included change of the judge’s role to one closer to that of prosecutor, and the elimination of a provision for defense advocacy and knowledge of witnesses against the accused. The modern use of torture during the War on Terror also uses secret courts, warrantless wiretaps, and dramatically weakened assumption of innocence of the accused.

Most vital in the misleading process of creating non-existent crimes is the use of leading questions by torturers. Judges and prosecutors in the middle-ages, like their modern military equivalents, began with specific presuppositions about the nature of the crimes and the guilt of the accused they were examining.

Why then should waterboarding be abolished?

1. It is ineffectual. The main reason this torture does not work or provide usable information, is that human beings suffering unendurably will say anything to make the pain stop. As the great eighteenth-century literary critic and public intellectual Samuel Johnson stated, “Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind

wonderfully.” Knowing he will be tortured and actually being tortured similarly concentrates the mind of the victim, concentrates it on what the torturers want to hear, so the victim can say it and stop the pain at least temporarily.

How this occurs can be seen in the following account of the torture of Elvira da Campo in the book *Sacred Pain*, an account of the religious use of torture during the Inquisition. “Told to tell in detail what she had done, she replied, ‘I have already told you the truth.’ Then she screamed and said, ‘Tell me what you want for I don’t know what to say.’ She was told to say what she had done, for she was tortured because she had not done so, and another turn of the cord was ordered. She cried, ‘Loosen me, Senores and tell me [what] I have to say: I do not know what I have done. O Lord have mercy on me, a sinner!’”

Former Army CID agent Willie J. Rowell, who has 36 years of experience in intelligence gathering, puts it more succinctly, “They’ll tell you what you want to hear, truth or no truth. You can flog me until I tell you what I know you want me to say. You don’t get right information.” Nicolas Eymerie, a fourteenth century French inquisitor assigned to investigate the Waldensian heresy could have told him that six hundred years ago; he states that his experience of evidence gained by “*torture est trompeuse et inefficace*” [torture is deceptive and ineffective].

The US government can’t even claim credit for inventing new advanced technological means of inflicting pain. The Inquisition used waterboarding. Torture by burning bare flesh has its modern equivalent in the use of electricity, and the medieval strappado has its modern equivalent in the delightful custom of chaining or handcuffing the prisoner’s limbs to jail bars or other stationary objects in such a way that the victim’s body is agonizingly stretched beyond its capacity.

2. Torture quickly stops being about getting information and becomes

more about serving the power needs of the torturer. Inquisition officials used their powers to force the accused into illicit sexual relationships, to avenge themselves against personal and political enemies and to enrich themselves monetarily from confiscations, bribes and fines.

A former Marine assigned to Guantanamo Bay told Seymour Hersh that prisoners there were often hooded and driven around the compound not to get information, but for the purpose of “just having a little fun—playing mind control.”² In *Torture and Truth*, a collection of reports and documents related to the use of torture at both Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghirab, it is reported that American guards and their supervising officers used torture of prisoners as pure entertainment or a means of self medication against boredom, tension and feelings of helplessness.

3. Finally, torture distorts the principles and foundations of the legal and justice systems to a degree that is not only morally repugnant, but makes true justice impossible. On January 22, 2010, the Obama administration stated that around 50 prisoners will be “retained indefinitely” at Guantanamo Bay because information obtained under torture is so unreliable that it is impossible to determine whether these prisoners can safely be released. One can forget about presumption of innocence of the accused. The whole complex illogic of this situation on the part of the U.S. military runs like this: We violated the very foundations of American justice by torturing prisoners to gain information about nonexistent means of mass destruction, but we have found that the information we gained by doing this is so inaccurate that we literally can’t tell the guilty from the innocent and have to put ourselves in more danger by maintaining the tortured in perpetual imprisonment, encouraging still more terrorists to commit more outrages, partially in protest of our abuse of justice.

In order to save themselves from the judgment that they were violating

the essentials of the message of Jesus Christ, both Spanish and medieval Inquisitions specifically developed methods of torture like waterboarding and the strappado that would save the church from the accusation of shedding blood. Another evasion by the Inquisition involved “relaxing to the secular arm” for punishment of persons suspected of heresy so the church could keep its cassocks clean.³

Seymour Hersh clearly outlines the way in which officials of the Bush administration chopped logic and redefined words in order to evade both the U.S. Constitution and the Geneva Convention. A memo from Jay S. Bybee, head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel written to White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales, redefines torture as follows: “Certain acts may be cruel, inhuman, or degrading, but still not produce pain and suffering of the requisite intensity to fall within [a legal] proscription against torture. . . . We conclude that for an act to constitute torture . . . it must inflict pain that is difficult to endure. Physical pain amounting to torture must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death.”

Two honored military heroes, Gen. Colin Powell and Sen. John McCain, have provided sound advice. The latter is the only U.S. Senator who has ever been tortured. He knew what torture is when he tried to attach a proviso making torture illegal to a September 2005 defense appropriations bill. As early as January 26, 2002, then Secretary of State General Colin Powell stated clearly and emphatically in a memo to then White House Council Alberto Gonzales that the U.S. should place great importance on *not* violating the Geneva Convention in its treatment of prisoners.

Ali Soufan, a former FBI interrogator at Guantanamo Bay, told a Canadian radio station that torture doesn’t work in the stereotypical ticking bomb scenario because it simply takes too long, anywhere up to a dozen

sessions before the prisoner gives any information at all, and he or she usually gives so much false information that it is impossible to tell false from true.

What does work? In the case of one of Osama bin Laden's chief lieutenants, diabetic cookies. Sweets helped both parties, the terrorist and the interrogator, see each other as decent human beings.⁴

Oreos anyone?

- 1 Torture experiment described in Dan Morrell, "The Power of Torture," *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2010, 9-10. See also kurtgray@fas.harvard.edu/~kurtgray. Mezo, Richard E., "Why it was Called 'Water Torture,'" *The Washington Post*, February 8, 2008, online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/08/AR2008020803156.html>, accessed January 24, 2010.
- 2 Use of torture at Guantanamo and Abu Ghirab: Hersh, Seymour M., *Chain of Command*, Danner, Mark, *Torture and Truth*, New York Review of Books, 2004, 18, 34, 68, 238, 336-44. Stevens, Miles, *Oath Betrayed* (New York: Random House, 2006), 14-18, 132, 160-8
- 3 Information on the Inquisition from the following: Baege, Michael and Richard Light, *The Inquisition* (New York: Viking, 1999), 72-3; O'Brien, Joan A., *The Inquisition* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 44-7.
- 4 Chris V. Thompson, "FBI interrogator says cookies more effective than torture," *Digital Journal*, online at www.digitaljournal.com/article/273350, accessed February 9, 2010.

Gulf Catastrophe—An Uneasy Evangelical Conscience

(continued from page 12)

isn't just about seagulls and turtles and dolphins. That would be enough to prompt us to action, since God's glory is in seagulls and turtles and dolphins (Gen 6-9; Is 65).

Pollution kills people. Pollution dislocates families. Pollution defiles the icon of God's Trinitarian joy, the creation of his theater (Ps 19; Rom 1).

Will people believe us when we speak about the One who brings life and that abundantly, when they see that we don't care about that which kills and destroys? Will they hear us when we quote John 3:16 to them when, in the face of the loss of their lives, we shrug our shoulders and say, "Who is my neighbor?"

I left Biloxi with tears in my eyes. I'll be back whether the next time I see this place it's a thriving seacoast community again or whether it's an oil-drenched crime scene. But I pray I'll never be the same.

This column first appeared as a longer version on the author's web site, [Moore to the Point](#). The author, a former student of the editor, graciously gave permission for us to print his article and added, "I am grateful to this day for your challenging and thought-provoking ethics classes at NOBTS."

God Sent Me

(continued from page 23)

two books: *Gentle Mercies, Stories of Faith in Faded Blue Jeans* and *The Lost Saddle*.^{*2}

Dr Foy Valentine, founding editor of *Christian Ethics Today*, said of my writing: 'Here is stardust in boots and blue jeans. From the overflow of a richly eventful life, Hal's writing is profoundly human—wise, warm, tender, earthly, insightful, honest, gloriously authentic, and deeply spiritual.'

After practicing law for thirty years, I retired.

That's my story.

Helen, I've been here in this hospital for fifteen days. I've never seen you. I've never heard your name. You have come to my bedside the night before I'm to be discharged. Why?"

She looked me in the eyes, tears filled her eyes, "God sent me."

She left the room.

God always speaks.

1 Not her real name.

2 To order these books contact Hal Haralson at 5225 Threadgill St., Austin, TX 78723-4548.

Are Theological Schools Ethical Communities?

By William Brackney, Professor, Acadia Divinity School, Nova Scotia

Theological schools, especially Baptist seminaries, should be living ethical communities. Not only should all Baptist seminaries have required courses in Christian ethics, but seminaries should give evidence at every level of practicing ethical behavior.

What exactly does it mean to be a practicing ethical community? One can take a cue from the school of character ethics. Certain traits are valued and undergird all decisions and behavior.

These include: equality of persons; freedom of conscience; voluntary assent to confessional statements; democratic decision-making; shared governance; healthy collegial interaction; transparency in administration; pastoral concern within the community; protection of human rights; the practice of grace and civility; and an overall allegiance to the lordship of Christ. The Christian ethicist understands that all of these characteristics have their root in Scripture.

The ethical dimension asks different questions than the classic disciplines in seminary curricula. Biblical scholars probe with analytical tools the content and meaning of texts; theologians and historians synthesize ideas into propositions and interpretations.

Ethics is different even from pastoral care methodologically; these colleagues seek to understand behaviors and prescribe therapies and means of achieving wholeness. In contrast, the Christian ethicist is asking, "As a Christian, informed by Scripture, endowed by the spirit of Christ, how do I conduct myself? What is the right pathway?"

If the seminary is a model community in which students observe, critique, and imitate ethical behavior for ministry in the churches, and

some degree of social transformation, it is imperative that the theological school be a beacon of ethical praxis. Moral behavior is observed and critiqued constantly in the larger community and is often out of sync with ethical expectations, that is, with well-thought principles or systems of action that portray biblical norms or Christ-like images. Often, Baptists, being a "people of the Book," fall back into strict rule-ethics and this produces not-so-subtle examples of insensitive ethical coercion.

Many Baptist seminaries forego teaching Christian ethics in the basic degree programs, for fear of being accused of taking controversial positions that might be unpopular with the constituency. Or they are unfamiliar with how a Christian ethicist works.

This denies the seminary student—and the faculty—the opportunity to practice making decisions or to cultivate an "uneasy conscience," to use Roger Crook's phrase. An uneasy conscience is not moral relativism, but a continual revisiting of data and issues to make certain one's positions are valid. It's a dynamic process, a continual learning experience.

Baptists provide a unique blend of factors in their ethical quest, many assets of which pertain to trust, freedom, partnership, human rights and the lordship of Christ. Ironically, some Baptist theological educators and boards of trustees seem more inclined toward an Episcopal style of administration, a presbyterial form of governance and an exclusively rule-based ethics. If this is the character of the theological seminary, there is little wonder what kind of leadership devolves to the congregations.

Rightly understood, Baptist-sensitive ethics derives from Scripture, a personal relationship with Christ, a sense of acting within a community

(that is, congregation) and within an evangelical tradition. In understanding the application of the teachings of Jesus to ethics, one finds a blend of rules (the Commandments), principles ("Love your neighbor") and character formation ("Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus").

Baptists, as believer-priests, must enjoy the liberty of the Spirit's working in individual lives. This leads inevitably to freedom of conscience, toleration of other's positions and collegiality in working together.

The theological school community, like the monastery of old, can provide a unique laboratory to create a Christian community. In this community those responsible for teaching ethics have an important role to play. He or she continually raises questions and possible alternatives. An ethicist reflects on texts and offers comments from his or her expertise. By the nature of the task, ethicists bring to bear a wide range of evidence and learning to inform teaching and praxis. An ethicist works hand in glove with biblical scholars, theologians and historians. Hopefully, those in other disciplines have a high regard for the integrative discipline of ethics.

In an era characterized by an information explosion, new questions, new and daunting technologies, a proliferation of possible moral alternatives and throngs of second-career students with "life experience," theological educators would do well to reinforce the role of ethics in their learning communities. Baptists in particular.

This article was originally published in www.EthicsDaily.com (12/08/09) and is reprinted with permission.

God Sent Me

By Hal Haralson, Austin, TX

Note: The author has been a regular contributor to CET since its beginning in 1995. Recent illnesses have limited Hal's work these last few years—we are pleased to print his latest article.

I lay on my bed in the hospital. I had been there fifteen days this year. On April 12, I celebrated my 75th birthday in Room 213 of St. David's Hospital in Austin, TX.

Judy, my wife of 53 years, smuggled a plate of Bar-B-Q sausage in for our evening meal. David and Annette (our son and daughter-in-law) brought a cake, and with grandsons Hayden and Holden, we celebrated my birthday.

The last three days in March I lay in my own bed—no energy—only getting up to eat or go to the bathroom. At 3:00 a.m. Judy woke me: "Let's get you dressed, you aren't getting any better. I'm taking you to the emergency room.

I remember someone saying, "We want to do a CAT scan." Then, "We want to keep Hal overnight."

The next day the doctor said I needed to be in rehab for a few days. St. David's rehab was full. No beds.

I was sent to another hospital. The doctor there ordered an MRI. The report came back showing I had had a stroke at some point in the past.

"I'm afraid we will have to keep you longer than we thought," the doctor said.

"How long?"

"We don't know. That will depend on how well you respond to therapy." The next day the therapy began.

I had my own physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, and therapist in the heated pool.

The schedule was hectic every day. Then, three times during the night: blood pressure, temperature, and listen to my chest. The night before I was to go home a beautiful, African American woman came to my room. Her nametag said, "Helen."¹

"Hal, I want to talk to you." She knelt by my bed, "Please tell me your story."

"You mean all of it?"

"Yes."

I began: "The first eighteen years of my life were spent on a four hundred acre farm, eight and a half miles north of the small West Texas town of Loraine. We drove down a dirt road twice every Sunday to attend services at the First Baptist Church.

When I was sixteen years old, I felt God's call to the ministry. The church at Loraine ordained me. I enrolled in Hardin-Simmons University in 1953 and graduated in 1957 after four years studying for the ministry. For the next ten years I was a minister, a pastor of several churches.

The first one was as an Army private in the Military Police Corps while stationed at White Sands Proving Grounds, New Mexico. As a mission of First Baptist Church, Las Cruces, nine people were meeting in an Oddfellow's Hall. Eighteen months later we had a newly constructed building and were averaging two hundred in attendance every Sunday.

I was discharged from the Army and moved to Abilene where I became Associate Pastor at the First Baptist Church.

After a year in the seminary I experienced my first serious bout with depression. I lay in bed for days. My doctor told Judy (who was six months pregnant) she should take our four-year-old daughter, Jill, and spend Christmas with her parents in Littlefield, Texas.

Monday morning, December 16, 1962, I woke up with no one in the house but me. There is nothing worse than being depressed unless it is being depressed when there's no one around to be impressed with how depressed you are.

I turned on all the gas jets in the

house and went back to bed. The gas exploded!

The Fire Department put out the fire and took me to San Antonio State Hospital where I was admitted.

Failed suicide attempt.

The state hospital would be my home for the next three months. I woke up in a padded cell. There were padded walls, ceiling and bars on the door.

The next day the shock treatments began. I was strapped to a gurney. The electrodes were placed to my temples. The shock began. They were terrifying. Each day for sixteen days—but it worked. I was pulled out of the depression.

I met with my psychiatrist. He said to me, 'Hal, your diagnosis is bi-polar illness. You will have it for the rest of your life. I am putting you on a drug called Lithium and strongly recommend that you leave the ministry.'

I stayed on Lithium for the next thirty years. I wrote the church in Loraine, 'I am leaving the ministry... I want you to revoke my ordination.'

They wrote back, 'We don't know what to do. We've never done that before.'

My reply, 'You are Baptist, vote on it.'

They did.

I found a job. I became partner with two doctors, handling all their personal businesses and operating a thirty-five-bed hospital and clinic.

After two years I sold my business interest to them and I took the payout over the next thirty-six months it would take me to finish law school.

We moved to Austin. I was thirty-three years of age with a wife and three children. I entered the University of Texas School of Law, graduating at age thirty-seven.

I hung out a shingle and practiced law for thirty years. I've written

(continued on page 21)

Christian Ethics and the Movies

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

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

War

The Hurt Locker, The Messenger, Brothers, Green Zone, and Avatar (2009)

During the past year, four movies about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan all received high praise from the critics, but they were all considered box office flops.

The Hurt Locker was the most honored movie of the year. It was nominated for nine Oscars and won six, including best film, best director, and best screenplay, plus three others for technical achievements. It won many awards from other major industry groups. It is a low budget movie with little known actors. At this writing, it has barely earned back its relatively modest production expenses.

The Messenger was honored by the Oscars with nominations for Best Supporting Actor (Woody Harrelson), and for best screenplay, but did not win. The movie lost money. Another current war movie, *Brothers*, was ignored by the Oscars, but it was recognized by some lesser awards shows. Also a low budget entry, *Brothers* made a decent profit.

Green Zone was a big budget film starring super-star Matt Damon, and directed by Paul Greenglass, who is an A-List director (no box office figures have been listed). Damon and Greenglass previously teamed up on the highly successful action movies, *The Bourne Supremacy* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*, which together grossed over \$250 million. These numbers signify a qualitative difference between *Green Zone* and the other war movies mentioned, in that it was designed first as a mass appeal action picture for the adolescent male demographic,

which is the box office "sweet spot," whereas the other three are designated as more serious adult dramas about the realities of the wars in which the U. S. has been engaged for almost a decade. Just by being a realistic war movie, apparently, *Green Zone* could not sell many tickets despite its high production values otherwise.

Social significance of these war movies. First, it must be noted that Hollywood has progressed in its willingness to treat war movies as serious social statements *during* the war itself. Reflecting back on the most powerful Vietnam War movies that were produced, including *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *The Deer Hunter*, they represented a sea change in the tone and treatment of war by Hollywood. Prior to the Vietnam War, Hollywood's older war movies featured stars like John Wayne, Gregory Peck, and Charlton Heston as larger than life heroes in WWII movies. They all valorized America, demonized "Japs" and "Krauts," and glorified war itself. War as such became synonymous with patriotism, fueled by the idea that WWII was "the good war."

The realistic, more critical Vietnam War films mentioned were not made and released until that war had already been over for several years. They contributed to later negative attitudes towards our Vietnam policy, but they had no effect on public attitudes during the war itself.

In contrast, today's war movies, *Brothers*, *The Messenger*, *Hurt Locker* and *Green Zone*, have mostly been small movies that only needed a year or two from storyboard to national distribution, so that they have been distributed while the war is still ongoing. Consequently, to the extent that they have been able to attract audiences, they have contributed to the public dialogue about the war in a way that they might possibly influence policy.

What are the major themes of these current war movies? Taken together, these four movies might be regarded as a suite of inter-related themes—though I am not suggesting in any way that the various producers coordinated them to accomplish an overall plan. Rather, in the case of these movies, art mirrors real life. *Brothers* tells the story of two brothers, one who served as a captain in the US Marines with multiple combat tours, and the other who stayed behind. The Marine was captured and presumed dead on his latest tour of duty, but eventually was freed and returned home, suffering from the terrible effects of being tortured as a prisoner, and from guilt over the atrocities he was forced to commit while a captive. *Brothers* is a powerful depiction of the combat post-traumatic stress (PTSD) suffered by our veterans, and its devastating impact upon their families when they return. *The Messenger* is not a combat-oriented movie, but rather, a story about the Army officers who are assigned to deliver the official notification of combat deaths to the families of the victims. The movie, thus, focuses more on the grieving families than on the combat troops who died in the wars.

Hurt Locker, the best of the group, is an action story about an elite bomb squad serving in the streets of Baghdad. The epigram at the beginning of the movie is a quote that states that "War is addictive." This bomb squad is almost purely defensive. Their job is to locate and disarm the Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) planted by insurgents in the roadways and elsewhere as booby traps.

Taken together, then, these three movies may be seen as an argument that, for instance, psychological wounds can be as significant as physical wounds. And, although U. S. casualties of these wars are low relative to

previous wars, there is still pain and suffering in the families of the troops who were killed. *The Hurt Locker* raises the question, what is being gained by continuing these wars, and exposing our troops to continuing jeopardy, now that they are primarily defensive holding actions by an occupation army?

The fourth movie in this selected set of titles, *Green Zone*, is set in 2003. It focuses on the issue of why we went to war in the first place, to find the supposed caches of “weapons of mass destruction” which Saddam Hussein was alleged to be hiding. No such weapons were found. The movie suggests that our nation’s decision makers knew in advance that their WMD intelligence was unreliable; but it represented their best available warrant for taking the U. S. into a war that was actually initiated for other reasons that could not be admitted. In other words, without the WMD argument to begin with, would Congress have authorized the war in Iraq?

Hence, *Green Zone* is a commentary on the shaky if not false justification for pursuing the Iraq war from its very outset.

These are not the only socially significant war movies about Iraq and Afghanistan. A couple of years ago, *Stop-Loss* (reviewed in this journal) was about the military’s practice of involuntarily extending enlistments and sending our troops back for multiple re-deployments, a sort of de facto draft by stealth. *Rendition* was about how the U. S. sends suspected terrorists to other nations for “enhanced interrogation,” i. e., torture. *Lions for Lambs* was about the disconnect in how the war was being promoted by the media as a cheerleader for the aggressive, “preemptive” U. S. policy, vs. the realities of the bad intelligence on the ground used as the basis for sending our troops into combat. *In the Valley of Elah* was also about PTSD, aggravated by official neglect, stonewalling, and cover-ups. And *The Kingdom*, the only one of the other recent war movies in this paragraph to make a profit, was a generic action film set in an unnamed

Mid-East country. It was primarily an entertainment, not a social critique of the war.

Controversies. Most of these war films, including the Vietnam War movies, were made without the cooperation of official U. S. defense and military agencies because they were perceived, accurately, to be critical of U. S. policies. Some politicians, predictably, levied the charge that movies that criticize the war are unpatriotic and even harmful to our war efforts. For instance, *The Hurt Locker* has been criticized as being an unrealistic distortion of the motives and competency of our troops in the field, in particular, the reckless disregard for safety rules by an undisciplined squad leader, a “loose cannon,” addicted to the daily thrill of risking his and his team’s lives, for the adrenaline rush. The dramatic engine that drives the plot of *Hurt Locker*, like *Platoon* two generations ago, is based on a military unit which has two leaders, one of whom is a by-the-book professional role model, the other a rogue leader who is a bad example. As a plot device, a story about two competing characters, one of whom embodies unorthodox, usually dangerous values, has been used in many different film genres besides war movies.

Ethical Issues. Are these movies unpatriotic? Public debates over the wars seem to have quieted since the 2008 presidential election. Pres. Obama ran on a platform of closing Gitmo, ending the war in Iraq, and shifting our military attention to Afghanistan. Now, a year into his administration, progress has been made towards all three of those goals, though there has been little reduction in our Iraq commitment, and Gitmo has still not been closed.

These are complex issues that have apparently been put onto the back burner by the 2009-’10 year-long pre-occupation with health care reform. Congress and the administration seem to be on the same page regarding the war, and the public has little interest in rehashing old issues that have seemingly been laid to rest. Yet the wars continue. While important adjust-

ments have been made, some underlying issues remain unresolved. Having invested so much in those wars already, the U. S. has too much at stake in the whole Central Asia region to just pull out; but the nature of the conflict guarantees that there can be no true military solution without huge parallel investments in trade and diplomacy. As long as the military can operate with an all volunteer force, and the U. S. is not suffering casualties deemed too great to bear, we seem to be embedded in the current situation indefinitely.

There is a reason why movies, critical of our nation’s policy and conduct of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to be made, despite their dismal economic prospects. They are arguments for examining the war’s basis, strategies, and conduct, and not just mindless teenage-demographic blockbusters. If the big issues are beyond debate, there still remain numerous subsidiary questions that need to be addressed. For instance, it could be argued that these movies have contributed to the VA’s decision to provide treatment and counseling for psychological casualties as a response to the public’s raised consciousness about combat PTSD.

No single movie can be said to have been a compelling knock-out argument. In the aggregate, over time, as the wars drag on, expanding into a decade and longer through serial “surges,” without demonstrable successful results, movies such as these can erode public support for the wars, and possibly lead to other policy changes. These movies do not argue for precipitate withdrawal, but they are graphic evidence that pursuing military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the exclusion of other measures, including trade and diplomacy, is not without its own high costs to the U. S.

Can viewers watch these movies without feeling manipulated by ideologies? From my perspective, *Hurt Locker* in particular, and the rest of these movies in general, are not detrimental to our troops in the field. Not all of our military forces serve because they are committed to U. S.

policies. Heroes are known to fight and die for their buddies, not necessarily to further whatever shifting political aims the politicians claim this month. Honest movie depictions of PTSD victims, and of grieving families on the home front contrast with the pro-war stances put out by hawkish TV pundits on cable news shows, and their paid military consultants/defense lobbyists.

There are true patriots on both sides of these issues. As Woody Harrelson remarked in an interview on the *Today* show, although his progressive politics are no secret, playing his part as the Army officer charged with delivering bad news in *The Messenger* led him to have a whole new appreciation for the sacrifices that have been made by our troops, and more sympathy for their families who also suffer greatly from their losses.

How about *Avatar*? A final footnote: *Avatar*, James Cameron's 3-D blockbuster, is also a war movie. It is a two-and-a-half hour long Sci-Fi war movie. In this fantasy, the U. S. wages interplanetary war as the clear aggressor against a peaceful planet, in order to colonize and exploit their natural resources. There's more

than a subtle historical comparison with America's genocidal conquest of Native Americans to tame and claim the wild West. To continue the analogy, in *Avatar*, the cowboys represent the bad guys. In the end, led by a disabled and disaffected U. S. veteran who becomes an "avatar," the out-gunned local defenders, riding horses and using bows and arrows, defeat the full armed might of the Americans, who, presumably, are driven back to their desolate homeland on Earth for good.

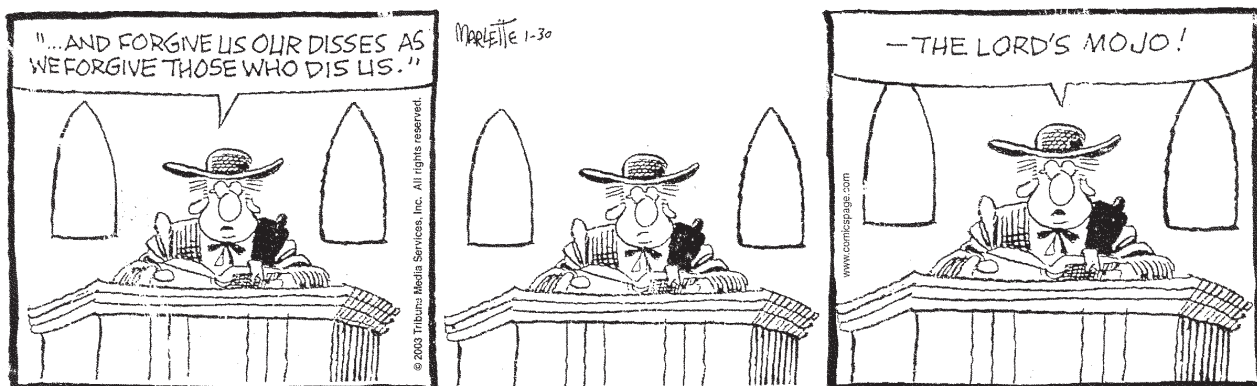
The noisy, computer-generated action in *Avatar* is non-stop, and very violent. It took over twelve years to produce, and estimates are that it cost nearly \$250 million. It is the most expensive movie ever made. At present, worldwide box office receipts are approaching \$1 billion, making it also the most profitable movie ever made. In terms of paying customers in theater seats, *Avatar* has outperformed all of the serious war movies that are discussed here by a ratio of at least 5-1. DVD sales and cable TV rebroadcasts are not included in these estimates, but they will only multiply the disparity in viewership, hence in receipts, especially among the young.

It has a PG-13 rating. As an animated film, it is marketed as a benign family film. Like *Transformers* before it, *Avatar* is practically an infomercial for the militaristic mindset.

Given this cash bonanza, Hollywood is gearing up to produce many more 3-D films on a massive scale. Plus, the new 3-D technology that made *Avatar* possible will soon trickle down into everyone's home entertainment systems, not to mention innovative new educational, political, and even religious applications. This development must be counted as a collateral benefit of *Avatar*, irrespective of its pro-war dramatic content. The standard overhead projector is about to become as obsolete as the typewriter.

Avatar is a great movie; with amazing technical effects; but so far, I have not read any mainstream criticisms of its pro-war themes that are so patently aimed at huge juvenile and teen audiences worldwide.

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Book Reviews

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

A Capsule History of Baptists

Bruce T. Gourley
Atlanta: Baptist History & Heritage Society, 2010.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan
Richardson, TX

One doesn't read far into this brief paperback about Baptist history until the heartbeat of these pages looms large and unforgettable—the Baptist word is *Freedom!*

What a wonderful way to characterize this major theme of Baptist history from the very outset of Baptist life. And of course, this theme becomes the hope and prayer for Baptist life today. The motifs are plain and unadorned: freedom of conscience, freedom emanating from separation of church and state, the freedom of congregational autonomy, the great freedom of soul competency and the freedom of an individual to choose baptism

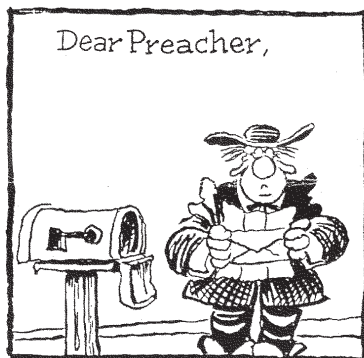
by immersion. This book is brief, but it is one of the best introductions to Baptist history in recent years because of this central theme....Freedom!

The author traces how a tiny English sect in London, beginning over four hundred years ago, emerges in the twenty-first century as a major religious movement numbering around the world in the tens of millions of believers with these themes of biblical and historical freedoms. There are names that need never to be forgotten who discovered these basic truths—Thomas Helwys, John Smyth, Roger Williams, Issac Backus, John Leland, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice—just to mention a few of these early leaders and movers. Baptists today need urgently to know the stories of those who suffered for freedom's sake and for Baptists truths. The author touches briefly on many other names in later generations who have been strong leaders in Baptist life literally around the world with a major

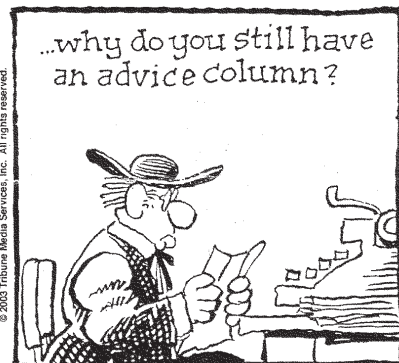
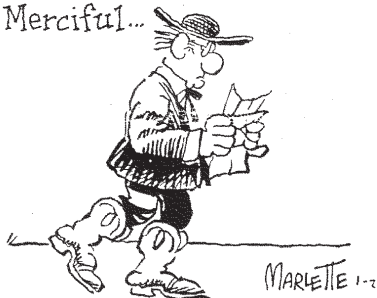
lesson about the need today of men and women whose leadership is desperately needed in these peculiar times for Baptists everywhere.

This book brings to light once again the old debates about Calvinism and Arminianism in Baptist church life as we discover the vigor of John Calvin's ideas is anything but dead and buried. We sense with gratitude the astonishing growth of Baptists and the influence of missionary and evangelistic convictions as primary reasons for this. The author touches on the impact of the American Civil War, the abolition movement and its influence on the African American Baptist strength in the United States and the theological battles emerging from the influence of German rationalism. What an array of cultural and historical challenges Baptists have faced over these four centuries.

Gourley writes perceptively about the current struggles of Baptists in America, savagely divided by the issues



If God is Just and Merciful...



of fundamentalism. This is one of the major strengths of his book. He puts in a historical setting the issues of biblical inerrancy, premillennial dispensationalism, the growing role of women in church leadership, the expanding problem of abortion, and the difficult challenges of the gay and lesbian world. Small wonder why there are such cultural shifts of an unbelievable magnitude in our times! The old Southern Baptist Convention has moved to a degree of creedalism with the Baptist Faith and Message becoming a mandatory guide, rather than the historic Baptist theme of biblical freedom. This is a minefield, but this author has done Baptists everywhere a service in helping us not only to understand where we are, but also in encouraging us to get back to the basic Baptist strength of our historical freedoms!

Tending to Eden

Scott C. Sabin
Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010, \$18.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan

Richardson, TX

Whether or not we agree about the seriousness of the debate regarding environmental issues today (and indeed this is an area that is growing with increasing complexities), here is a powerful brief paperback that is well worth reading. One's

attention is guaranteed as the author shares initially through his experiences graphic insight into life in Haiti before the 2010 earthquake, life in a land of extreme poverty related to the sad abuse of the forests and land. This hopelessness connected with deforestation and an exhausted soil, now impacted by the massive earthquake, has glimpses of hope connected to the organization this author directs, "Plants with Purpose."

This is a non-profit Christian environmental organization that works in seven countries, Haiti being one of the seven. Story after story follows in this book illustrating Christian compassion wisely at work combining theology with ecology. The author presents a balanced and vitally necessary case for Christian stewardship of the only world we have. And he does it in a way that makes for genuinely fascinating reading!

A key element in the book is one that should be beyond debate: "The Bible encourages us to be stewards of God's creation." By ministering to poverty's environmental roots, a problem increasingly world-wide in scope, one can find in the Bible not only the guidance to the theological underpinnings but the divine strength and insights to help with practicality and effectiveness required by these growing demands.

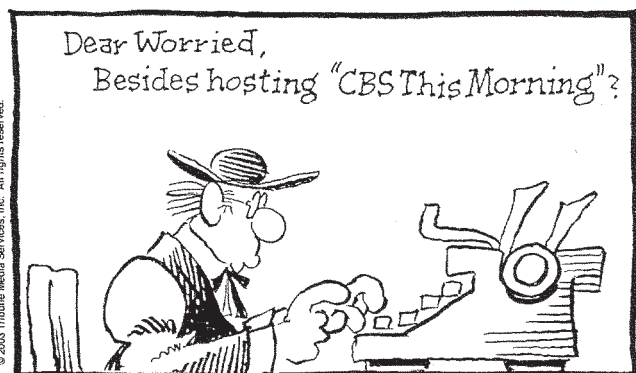
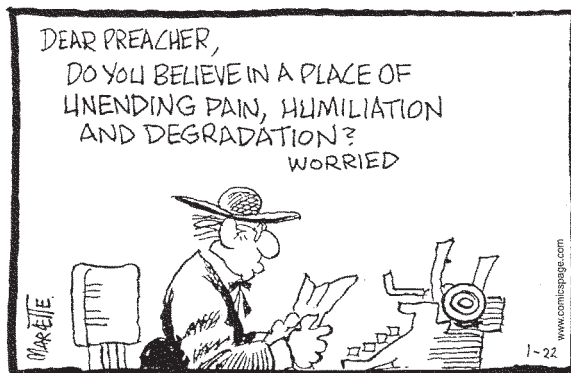
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Rebecca Skloot
New York: Crown Publishers, 2010, \$26.

Reviewed by Monty M. Self

Little Rock, AR.

Most people do not know her name. She contributed more to the study of cellular biology and genetics than any other individual in the 20th century. She helped develop medications for polio, cervical cancer, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's disease. She was key in developing *in vitro* fertilization, cloning, and the study of the human genome. A few know her by the false name Helen Lane, but almost all cellular biologist and geneticist know about her contributions. Rebecca Skloot attempts to change this in her new book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. The biography is the story of how a 30 year-old African American woman made an amazing contribution to science when her cancer cells were harvested and later became the first immortal human cells line, commonly known as HeLa. Skloot does more than recount the story of Henrietta's cancer and HeLa's contribution to science. Skloot attempts to give a voice to Henrietta by telling the story of her life, the lives of her family, and documents how the HeLa cells have changed the world.



In 1950, Henrietta noticed that she had a mass inside her abdomen. Growing up as a poor tobacco farmer, she waited as long as she could and then sought help at John Hopkins University hospitals. There she was diagnosed with cervical cancer. During the treatment a sample of her tissue was removed so that George Gey could attempt to culture her cells. Unfortunately, the cancer was extremely aggressive and eventually metastasized all over her body. After a painful battle, Henrietta died of cancer in 1951, but the sample of her cells inherited the vigor and aggression of the cancer from where they were taken.

These cells were different. These cells reproduced in great number, doubling almost every 24 hours. In Henrietta's cancer cells, Gey had not only made history, but had found an unlimited supply of human cells which could be used for research. Because they were so productive and strong, they quickly were shipped to other labs throughout the United States and later the world. Scientists were now able to study human cells over time. Henrietta's cells have become essential for the modern researcher. Companies have come into being in order to supply labs with the cells and medium for culturing them. Countless new drugs and therapies have been developed from the study of these cells.

Few areas of biological study have not been impacted by the study of HeLa. It is impossible to calculate the profits or potential profits which have been derived from the HeLa line.

Like many great stories of scientific advancement, Henrietta and HeLa are not without controversy. Many would have thought that HeLa's success and contributions would make the Lacks family proud. Unfortunately, they did not know about HeLa until 20 years after Henrietta's death. They were never told. Henrietta's cells were originally removed and later cultured at John Hopkins, but no informed consent was ever given. Henrietta's children had no idea that the HeLa cells were being grown all over the world. While the failure to share the success of the HeLa line is tragic, it is criminal that countless numbers of scientists have made individual fortunes while Henrietta's decedents live in poverty. Ironically, some of her children cannot afford the medication which HeLa helped to develop.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks is an exciting story, written in such a way that the reader cannot put the book down. It is compelling for more than just the story. Skloot forces the reader to come face to face with the sociological and ethical implications of the Lack's story. In addition to the social dynamics of racism and poverty, Henrietta's story brings to

mind ethical questions of consent and autonomy. It forces the reader to ask, "Who owns discarded human tissue." While Henrietta's tissues were taken for the purpose of discovering if they could be cultured, it still begs the question. Who owns them? What morally can be done with them and who gets compensated if there is a profit?

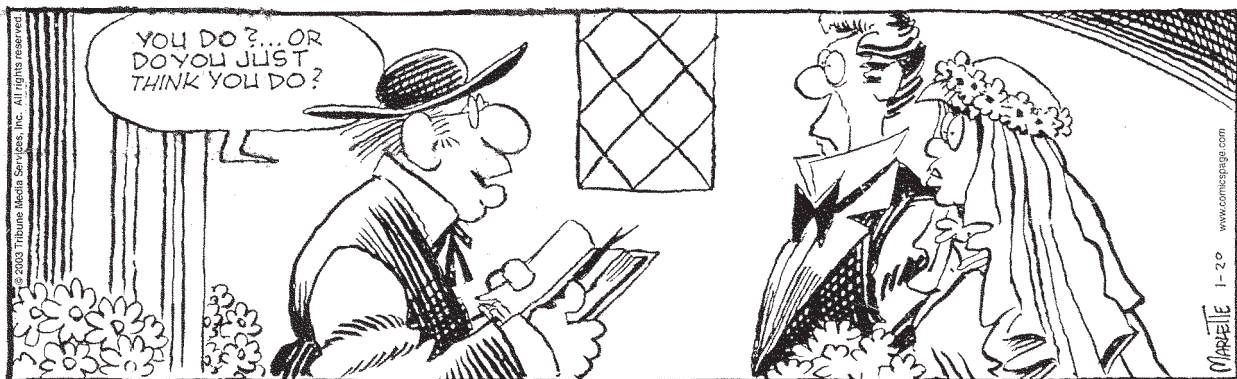
Breaking through the Stained Glass Ceiling

Maureen E. Fiedler, ed.
Seabury Books, New York, 2010

Reviewed by Audra Trull

Women are taking leadership roles in the secular world as well as in the religious world, and they will continue to make contributions in the field of theology, the study of sacred texts, interfaith relations, religious media, and in religious movements for justice, peace, and equality. The editor states four reasons for female leadership in these fields:

1. Women's secular leadership roles are establishing new parameters for the possible. Many women have been prime ministers, presidents, or equivalents. In the United States, we have a woman as Speaker of the House and had a female running for President. This entire trend toward female secular leadership makes it more "thinkable" that women can become religious



leaders. A female bishop no longer looks like an impossible dream.

2. With women's rising successes in the secular world, the theological and scriptural arguments barring women from religious leadership roles sound archaic and out of touch with reality.

3. Women are not only finding their theological voice, they are developing new attitudes believing that they can preach and lead, and they can do it as well as men.

4. Finally, we live in an age of mass, democratized communication. The news that women are leaders and the theologies that underlie this are everywhere. Feminist theology is not only in books, but at conferences, in the media, and on the Internet.

The book's eight chapters deal with a variety of subjects concerning women in religious leadership roles. The chapters that will be of most interest to the reader are:

Chapter One dealing with women

as denominational or organizational leaders highlights many denominational women leaders—Episcopal, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian (USA), Islamic, Hindu, etc.

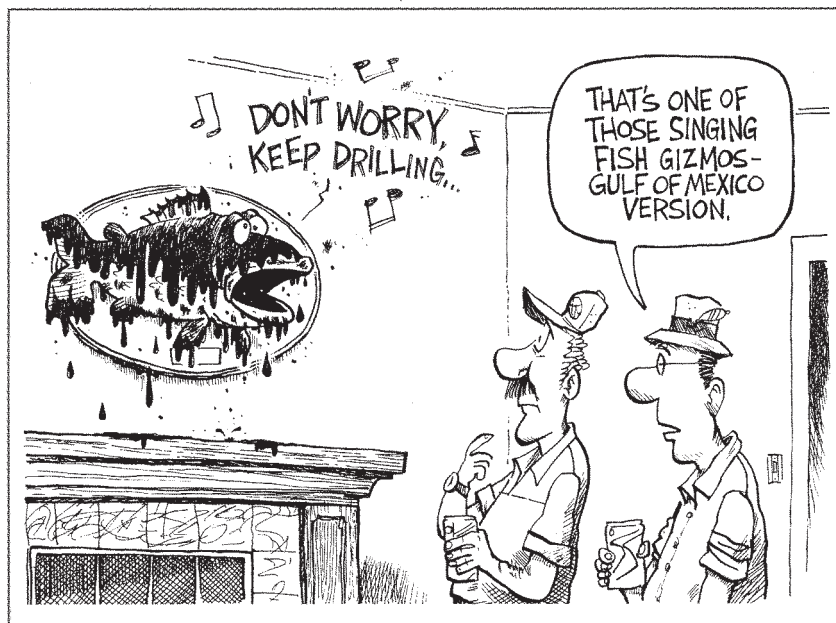
Chapter Two: Women Leaders in Theological and Scriptural Scholarship deals with women in academic roles, those who publish widely and hold prestigious chairs at various theological schools. These female leaders also provide insights into the beliefs they support—Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and others.

Chapter Three: Women in Feminist Theology portrays traditional teaching through the "lens" of women's experiences, offering new and sometimes startling insights. These scholars discuss traditions of equality and justice that women had not obtained until recently. A most

interesting interview was with Dr. Rena Pederson, author of *The Lost Apostle: Searching for the Truth About Junia*.

Chapter Six includes interviews with women leaders active in social justice, peace, and ecology. Most of these leaders were influenced by Catherine Mumford Booth, one of the founders of the Salvation Army, Coretta King, who was active in her own right in movements for racial and economic justice, and Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement advocating for peace and hospitality to the poor.

This book should be of great interest to women who need encouragement in their roles in religious life and to those persons interested in gender equality. The book also provides insight into the role of women in non-Christian religions and thought.



What Is Real?

By Bob Schieffer, ABC News

A child's question once asked of me,
"If I can't see it can it be?
I see my toy—I know it's there,
I feel my arm, I touch my hair.

These are things I know to be,
But what of things I cannot see?
What of the wind—where does it go?
Are there other things to know?"

Oh yes my dear, and soon you will find
They are locked inside the heart and mind.
Sweet love's desire, a mother's prayer,
More real than all we see out there.

More real than sun, and moon, and rain,
At first much harder to explain.
The only thing that I can say,
I say it now in just this way.

What is real and what is not—
Love is real, the rest is not.

Who's Conservative?

By Richard D. Kahoe, Woodward, OK

You might call me conservative, if you will;
I hold to things and values from the past.
In Grandma's Baptist faith I worship still,
And wear my suits as long as they can last.

Biodiversity, I think, has served us well;
I wish to keep the ozone overhead;
I pray to God my children's air not smell,
And keep the hydrocarbons from our bread.

But now so-called "conservatives" I hear
Traduce the greenhouse threat and ozone holes,
Disparage spotted owl and grizzly bear,
Malign the wetlands act and gun controls.

I will my children's children yet to live—
Don't call those reckless knaves "conservative!"

PROFILES IN PROJECTION

How Americans view President Obama:

	Republican	Democrat	Independent
He is a socialist	67%	14%	42%
He wants to take Americans' guns away	61	17	39
He is a Muslim	57	15	29
He wants to turn America over to one-world government	51	12	28
He was not born in the U.S.	45	8	24
He may be the Antichrist	24	6	13

Harris Poll taken in March

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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