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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**

The Words of Our Mouths

By Patrick R. Anderson

I sat cross-legged at a roadside restaurant in Indonesia a few years ago with an ethnic Chinese Christian brother. His family had emigrated from China five generations earlier. He and his family were leaders in the local community and the local church, having accepted Christ many years ago. The food was excellent and we enjoyed a cool breeze and playful birds chirping around us.

But my new friend was distraught and on the brink of tears as he said to me, "I must move my wife and children away from here, but to where?" Churches in a nearby area had been burned recently and he was scared to death, fearing the safety of his family. The urgency of his anxiety this Friday was a fiery sermon from the local imam against all Christians, those infidels under the influence of evil Americans and the hated Chinese who defiled the true religion of Islam. The rhetoric was not new, but this day the imam was responding with extreme fervor to the words of Jerry Vines, a big time Southern Baptist preacher from Florida who had called Mohammed "a pedophile." Newspapers throughout the Islamic world had reported on Vines' slanders of the Prophet, and the tensions which already existed were exacerbated.

All of us who have been around big time Fundamentalist preachers understand the context of Jerry Vines' words. When he preached his bombastic denigrations of Islam, he was safely perched on a stage preaching to the faithful, the Southern Baptist preachers who gather each June to hear such words from the Fundamentalist former SBC presidents and wannabe SBC presidents who compete to see who can stir up the loudest applause, the most fervent shouts of "Amen!" They want to see who can bring the crowd to their feet to the sound of entertaining shouts like "Preach on!" and "Shake a bush!" and "Tell it! Tell it!" It is great theater. It is more like a pep rally than a worship service. Jerry was not engaging Islam in a serious way. He was not sharing thoughtful biblical reflections or attempting to express the Gospel or attract people to Christ. And far from being a courageous defender of the faith in the belly of the devil's lair, he was surrounded by fellow Fundamentalists. He was just strutting his stuff in front of his people.

We can turn on or turn off the Jerry Hagees and Jerry Vines and any number of small time preachers like Terry Jones.

But on this occasion, his words caused suffering and danger to followers of Jesus half a world away. The meal and the breeze and the chirping birds could not assuage the deep sorrow and shame I felt as my brother talked with me about how a preacher's words in America had affected his family and friends in Indonesia.

I thought of this recently as another Florida pastor, Terry Jones, a small-time preacher with a faithful following of about a dozen friends and family in Gainesville, burned a copy of the Koran. The result, again half a world away, was death, anger, hatred, and heightened danger for followers of Christ.

We do not pay much attention to the nonsense of Fundamentalist preachers in America. Such idiocy is just a small part of the cultural scene in diverse America. We can turn on or turn off the Jerry Hagees and Jerry Vines and any number of small time preachers like Terry Jones.

But I reflect on what I learned anew that day in Indonesia-- that all words have consequences. Words can inspire good and evil, love and hate, encouragement and discouragement, comfort and distress. Words spoken on behalf of Jesus, by followers of Jesus, must be carefully considered, prayerfully chosen, thoughtfully expressed.

There is a time and a place for fervor and passion in the Christian discourse. Jesus was known for using some pretty strong language, standing eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe with the Fundamentalists of His day, even calling them "snakes" and "children of your father the devil." He could do that. He was among the people He had discourse with. He could look at people and say, "Here I am!" He was the Word who became flesh and moved into the neighborhood. The Florida preachers hide behind bodyguards half a world away from the danger they engender for innocent, unsuspecting followers of Jesus they have never met.

Carolyn reminds me often, and inspires me with her example, to pray daily, "May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be pleasing in your sight, oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." We all should close our eyes frequently, and reflect on those words of the Psalmist. ■

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"Keystone Species" and the Mission Ecosystem

by Sam Harrell

I am privileged to live very close to one of the earth's great wonders, the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem. Spanning a chunk of eastern Tanzania, spilling over into western Kenya, this vast savannah region hosts one of the most bio-diverse regions on planet earth. If you are a fan of *National Geographic* or *The Nature Channel*, you have seen glimpses of the great Wildebeest migration that is reenacted each year, the awesome sight of 2 million ungulates in their incessant quest for green pasture.

I periodically visit the Mara where my work as a missionary includes development projects initiated together with Masai communities. The Masai inhabit most of the areas around the Mara and coexist with this ecosystem in a beautiful way. Also, I need a periodic dose of nature-wonder to keep things in proper perspective.

Each time I sit in my pickup on the edge of some hill overlooking this vast expanse, I am struck by the intricate web of life. From the dung beetle to the king of beasts, each of the thousands of species plays a particular role in maintaining this balance. While certain of these species might be more famous (the "big five" - elephant, rhino, lion, leopard, cape buffalo) or attractive (cheetah, lilac breasted roller, zebra), all have unique and important roles to play in the system as a whole.

If one species, particularly a "keystone" species, is threatened, the entire ecology of the system is compromised. The elephant and the wildebeest play keystone roles in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem. The elephant's voracious appetite consumes 300 pounds of vegetation per day, primarily browsed from tree limbs, bark, seed pods and the like. This opens up dense acacia woodland to create grasslands that serve as grazing and hunting areas for many other species. Large herds of wildebeest keep the grass low and fertile enough for many other grazing species to thrive. Where these thrive, the predators thrive and so on down the line, all the way to dung beetles and tiny insects.

What does any of this have to do with missions and missionaries? The ecosystem described above provides a useful metaphor for describing the effect of different kinds (species) of mission workers carrying out their work in the context of the divine habitat (*missio dei*). I find this metaphor provides a useful opportunity for critical reflection.

First, we begin with an affirmation of diversity. Indeed, it takes all types to make up a dynamic system. Generally, the more diverse the system, the healthier the system. Creativity and innovation are encouraged and embraced. Participant "species" are oriented toward the greater good, aware that they are indeed a small part of a much greater whole. The diverse system remains healthy and life-giving. My contention is that diversity is a greater signal of overall health than any single particular element of a given system.

The mission enterprise has become much more diverse in my lifetime. Much has changed and, indeed, continues to change. The world is smaller, the mission traffic has begun to go both ways, and the global church has become energized. The northern, western hegemony has been appropriately challenged and ameliorated. Nevertheless, people of faith continue to exercise their God-given mandate to be salt and light, engaging with others of all kinds and callings to be a blessing and a neighbor to people everywhere.

Second, the healthy system has its "keystone species." The counterpart to the elephant, described in the ecosystem outlined above, is the "career missionary." This is not a perfect analogy however, because the term, "career" can now mean as little as four years, barely enough time for sufficient language and culture acquisition, the absolute minimum basis for most sustainable cross-cultural engagement. And, the term "missionary," has become ambiguous and overused. The word has been applied to any Christian who travels to work overseas for whatever reason or duration, whether to proselytize or do community development or both.

I would posit that long-term, inculturated agents of gospel transformation are the "keystone species" in the mission eco-system. Long-term in that sufficient time is devoted to listening, learning, suffering, struggling, and communicating so as to understand and be understood deeply; inculturated, meaning beyond simple translation and contextualization to a level that embraces a deeper knowing that springs from within the root culture or ground of meaning rather than a simple overlay from an alternative world view; gospel transformation meaning a resulting reorientation and actualization of abundant life that accompanies an encounter with truth as a result of a commitment to follow after the example of Jesus. Such "agents," could be church planters, community developers, doctors, teachers, and a great deal more. They could be of local or foreign origin and from many different cultural backgrounds and exposure. A general assumption is that they are "sent" to work outside of their culture of origin.

As the elephants do their job of opening up dense woodland to the formation of grasslands, the other keystone species, the wildebeest, is able to thrive and increase. These eventually far outnumber the elephant and become a much more significant indicator of the efficacy of the ecosystem.

Likewise, the initial missionary efforts clear the way for the growth of the other "species" who then maintain, nurture, expand and direct the work in question, urging the keystone species to search out new horizons.

Beyond "keystone" species, there are those who are able to contribute their essential skill for a brief period or in a less paradigmatic fashion. These "species" contribute greatly to the system by filling unique roles, providing needed diversity of experience and perspective, impacting the system in very positive ways. They are known by many names – short term professionals, volunteers, interns and the like. I think of the multitude of zebra, topi and impala that are interspersed among the wildebeest, essential in their own right, each grazing or browsing on different layers of pasture, providing the diversity that causes ecosystems to thrive.

Also present are "migratory species," usually non-indigenous, appearing for short periods of time on their way to somewhere else. Their impact is less essential, however the ecosystem provides them with an essential venue for nourishment and is indeed a part of a much larger global/cosmic whole. Service learning, educational or immersion programs and properly conceived and executed "mission trips" come to mind. These cater more specifically to the growth and expansion of the "migrant" participants than they do to the welfare or essential functioning of the endemic species and system. Nevertheless, where they are oriented toward education, genuine discovery, spiritual formation, mutuality and sharing, they do more good than harm.

Unfortunately, a number of invasive species threaten ecosystems globally. These are characterized by their pervasive parasitic nature, thriving at the expense of the system as a whole, taking but not giving, or by their particular inability to coexist with the more natural local order. Such species occur in microbial, plant and animal life. They lack "accountability," multiplying unchecked and smothering without regard to the beauty and fragility of the system they consume. Devil's weed and verroa mite are some examples among many others. Ill-conceived, arrogant evangelistic exploits often proffered sensationally through television media are one such systemic equivalent. The "big hair" prosperity gospel beamed via satellite to the slums of Kibera in Nairobi has devastating effect.

Popping in and out briefly uninvited, not staying long enough to get more than a sensational perspective or to reinforce stereotypes, and with no particular commitment other than to satiate a voyeuristic appetite or to be seen by the uninformed to be doing good.

"Mission tourism" also comes to mind. Popping in and out briefly uninvited, not staying long enough to get more than a sensational perspective or to reinforce stereotypes, and with no particular commitment other than to satiate a voyeuristic appetite or to be seen by the uninformed to be doing good. "Mission as business" also suffers mixed motives. It would seem preferable to drop the term "mission" altogether from these last two entities allowing each to exist happily and with more integrity in their own right. Certainly good Christian people can be involved in both tourism and business without the need to (mis)use the term "mission" as some form of sanctifying adjective.

So has this description merely been an attempt to stratify and appraise the various levels of mission engagement? Well, sort of. What I'm not trying to do is to ascribe intrinsic value to participants at whichever "level." Is a teacher "better" than a nurse? Absolutely not, each chosen vocation has unique and essential value. If the missional church movement has taught us one thing, it is that the work of the Kingdom of God on earth is the work of all who follow after Christ. It is not to be left to a few "professionals" selected by the ecclesial order.

What is strongly being suggested is that for the health of the "ecosystem" as a whole, focus and purpose in the context of diversity need to be maintained in order to avoid collapse. Further, I believe "keystone" species have a unique and enabling role in creating this focus and maintaining this diversity.

The "keystone species" in this day and age are persons who find themselves in the midst of a call to live out their lives in service to others in a land or culture other than that of their birth. What separates these from the many who make brief faith sharing forays abroad is that they are more substantially equipped and committed to live among, learn from and work with the people they serve.

For several reasons, such practitioners are becoming an endangered species. This is a cause for alarm. It is a threat to the entire mission ecosystem. ■

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The Curse of Patriarchy

By Ross Coggins, missionary, pastor, professor, and author of the hymn "Send Me, Oh Lord, Send Me!"

If you could affect a single change that would most effectively enhance peace and prosperity on this planet, what would it be? I submit that a strong case can be made that the achievement of gender equality offers the brightest pathway to substantive social, political, and economic security in today's world. The obstacle to achieving this goal, simply stated, is patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined as a social system where men are dominant over women in power, status and wealth, and in which descent is reckoned in the male line. It is no exaggeration to say that patriarchy is a near-dominant global reality.

This conclusion is not based on causal assumptions. The author has spent 13 years living among Muslim populations and worked as a U.S. Agency for International Development representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture. The posting in Rome provided unique cross-cultural experience with a range of multinational colleagues.

Few would deny that the large majority of the world's population lives under patriarchal rule. The degree to which it dominates varies, of course, between economically advanced western cultures and those societies in which fundamentalist religious beliefs prevail.

Few would deny that the large majority of the world's population lives under patriarchal rule.

In the U.S. press, references to current gender issues are generally limited to such issues as unequal pay for women or gay rights. This is a far cry from the daily suppression of women's rights in major populations of the world. In those demographics encompassing fundamentalist religions, multiple restrictions on daily conduct are observed. Some notable religious restrictions relating to women include prohibition of marriage without patriarchal permission, denial of the right to vote, dress restrictions including total body coverage, requirement that females walk behind male companions, gender bias in education, segregated worship and, in isolated instances, honor killings for rape of the female victim.

Challenges to patriarchal dominance in these societies are pathetically weak, no match for accepted scriptural injunctions establishing the subordination of females. Classroom preference for boys and sexual harassment of girls further penalize female students.

There are notable efforts to reverse patriarchal dominance. In America, the first woman to be named bishop in the Episcopalian church caused fairly modest furor. The issue of equal pay for women gave rise to the passage of the Lilly Ledbetter bill in response to egregious salary differentiation suffered by a working woman. Even in Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah has established within a walled-off enclave a university where men and women can study together in academic freedom.

It would be gratifying to see such positive developments as portents of significant anti-patriarchal change. That could be the prospect in modestly prosperous societies enjoying religious toleration. Others must endure the sheer weight of male-dictated, ever present, all-encompassing reality of patriarchy. ■

ETHIXBYTE:

"Guns kill people. I'm not opposed to the Second Amendment. I'm not opposed to hunters. I don't understand why we have to sell magazines with 33 bullets. If it takes you 33 bullets to kill a deer, you're not a sportsman. And armor-piercing bullets – the last time I saw a deer with a bulletproof vest was a long time ago. Guns are one of the biggest killers in the country, and it's an easy problem to solve if we had the courage to do so." ■

New York City Mayor ***Michael Bloomberg,*** *Time,* February 28, *2011*

"Preaching on Ethics in the Local Church"

By George A. Mason

The title I have been assigned for this address is "Preaching on Ethics in the Local Church." So I suppose the first thing I ought to say to you is that I don't believe you ought to preach on ethics in the local church. I mean that to be provocative, of course. I don't mean you shouldn't ever preach on a something that has ethical content, because then you wouldn't be able to preach on anything, since everything has ethical content. I don't mean, of course, that you should preach unethically, although I do believe there's a lot of that going around these days. I mean the subject of preaching is not ethics per se; it's the gospel. We preach the good news of Jesus Christ, and when we do it will touch on so many sore spots and funny bones in personal, social, political, economic, environmental, aesthetic and even athletic life that just preaching the gospel itself will be an ethical act.

The problems, you see, in deciding that you are going to preach now and again on ethics is that it tends to 1) turn your preaching into nothing but moralizing—which gets the cart of doing good in front of the horse of grace that draws the cart along; or 2) that in the name of having a prophetic ministry you fail to have a priestly one—that is, you get all up in arms about the threat of nuclear arms, say, that you have no arms to comfort those who feel bombarded by life already; or 3) you end up trivializing the Christian faith by making it seem that it fits somewhere on the op-ed pages or somewhere on cable TV between Glen Beck and Keith Olbermann.

So with those caveats in mind, let's look at what might be some faithful and profitable approaches to preaching the ethical gospel in the local church.

First, as a preacher, strive more to be a faithful pastor than a lone prophet. Now, I have been misunderstood on this more than once, so let me be clear. I don't believe any of the biblical prophets who called Israel or the church to faithfulness stood up in their third-grade class and said, *What I really want to be when I grow up is a prophet.* And they certainly didn't start out every speech they made by saying, *I have a prophetic ministry*—by which they meant that people ought to take them seriously because they have courage to tell it like it is whether anyone likes it or not. No, they seem to have had a burden of truth in their bellies that they couldn't hold in. They were most of them reluctant to take on the role. And most of them were only proven to be real prophets long after their lifetimes.

My point is this: Our job in preaching is to proclaim the gospel as best we can--not to build our resumes for being prophets in our times. If what we say proves prophetic, fine and good; but the goal is to do as Frederick Buechner reminds us in his wonderful book "Telling the Truth," that the bereft Edgar did at the close of Shakespeare's King Lear. After all the lives wrecked by lies and bodies lying dead on the stage, he declares: *The weight of these sad times we must obey; speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.*

Our duty as preachers is to speak what we feel in our bones is true, with a view toward building up the body of Christ, the Church. Which leads to the next thing: The context of our preaching is the congregation. When we preach, we are preaching to a people gathered. We are not preaching primarily to Congress or to City Hall. We are not preaching to people anywhere else beside in the pews in front of us. We hope and pray that our preaching will help to shape public life. We are not sectarians or isolationists. But we are trying to build communities of faith shaped by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And if we do that, we will have a larger effect on the wider world.

And that's because the church itself is an ethical community. As Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon never tire of reminding us, the church *is* a social ethic more than it *has* a social ethic. That is to say, when we are preaching about ethics in the church, that preaching begins by getting our own houses in order.

For example, if we get it in our heads that we should tell politicians that every American has the right to health insurance, but we are saving money in our budgets by hiring only part-time employees in order to avoid our responsibility to provide health insurance, we are hypocrites not prophets. We have only the moral authority to speak to others in the measure in which we are holding ourselves accountable at the same time.

Similarly, if we say we favor adoption over abortion but then create such a climate in our congregation that a young woman who gets pregnant feels she has to hide her pregnancy lest she be shamed or ostracized by the community, how is that consistent with the gospel?

We want to uphold high moral standards in the church. That's a good thing. But let me ask you, what comes first, the demand that we be holy or the grace of God's acceptance? Most of the time we seem to convey the idea that sin is the problem to which grace is the answer. But the covenant of God's gracious acceptance of Israel—and of all the world through Jesus Christ—is what makes the demand for holiness possible. We are included by God's inscrutable mercy, not by our impressive merits.

Which also means that God doesn't hold us accountable for our sin; God holds us accountable for our forgiveness. God has reconciled the world unto God's self in Christ Jesus—*has* (aorist tense of completed action)! God is not waiting to reconcile us if only we are willing and sufficiently worthy. But having been so reconciled, we are now called to live as forgiven people. We are given grace not only to be made right with God, but also to live rightly as a result. That's what being accountable for our forgiveness means. It's why Jesus told the parable of the man who was forgiven a great debt and then immediately failed to forgive another a smaller debt to him. Only then was the man judged, because of what he failed to do with his forgiveness.

Any call we make to ethical living in our preaching must be accompanied by a declaration of God's grace that makes it possible. We can sober up—not by our own willpower, but by the God who wills to empower us by the Holy Spirit. We can love our enemies and refuse to strike back at those who hurt us, not by trying hard to be nice, but by allowing the resurrected Christ to live through us. This is why Paul could say, *I have been crucified with Christ, so it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.*

Next, when we preach the gospel, we are not drawing a distinction between a personal gospel and a social gospel. This is a longstanding error in American Christianity, and the choosing of true religion being primarily an inside matter or outside is perennial and cuts both left and right.

As to choosing the personal, literary critic Harold Bloom has declared that American religion is and always has been essentially Gnostic in character. The liberal version of this stems to New England transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who so believed that true piety was a matter of spirit and not matter that he gave up administering the Lord's Supper and then gave up taking it. Emerson, Thoreau, and others like them were mostly on the right side of things like the abolitionist movement, but you can hardly make the case that their position followed straight from their theology of pure religion being a thing of the soul and not the body.

Likewise, on the conservative personalist side, the evangelical mind might be characterized by the preaching of George Whitefield, the legendary evangelist of the First Great Awakening. He defined the kingdom of God as the rule of God over the human heart and that alone. In a sermon on Romans 14:7, which reads: *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*, he went on to say that "the kingdom of God in the text [is] signifying the inward work of grace, that kingdom which the Lord Jesus Christ sets up in the hearts of all that are truly brought home to God …."

The problem with this is not that it's so much wrong so much as it is only partially right. The kingdom of God is an inward and outward reality both. It has to do with our relationship to God, AND our relationship to other people AND to all creation. Righteousness is not merely, as Whitefield would have it, Christ's imputed work into our hearts; it is God's justice that works its way into every relationship of life. God's peace, likewise, is not simply a feeling of contentment that comes from having accepted Jesus into our hearts; it is God's comprehensive peace—that is, God's shalom—that makes the world a home fit for God. And the joy of the Holy Spirit is more than a happiness your heart can't contain; it is a chorus of angels who celebrate the redemption of all creation through Jesus Christ.

This is why Archbishop Desmond Tutu could say: *I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned with the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread.*

The fact that Jesus said of himself, *I am the bread of life*, does not mean we are to neglect the bread that keeps people alive in favor of the bread of eternal life. Both are important. And that means we can never choose one over the other and get the full sense of the meaning.

As to those who choose the social definition of the faith alone, some on the left would make the gospel nothing but a humanitarian aid project or a mission to overturn all oppression politics and would thereby miss the personal transformation that is possible by the power of God's Spirit. Yes, God wants to heal the human community and God is using the church to be the vanguard of that coming kingdom; but it's not enough to have everyone know they have an equal place at the Table; they need to know it's the Lord's Table. It's not just bread and wine we share, but the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Likewise, if all the conservative Christian political activists were to succeed in passing laws that would make our country over into something more like a theocracy than a democracy, what then? They will only have worked on the outside, not on the inside of people's hearts.

We need a both/and, not an either/or when it comes to seeing the gospel in personal and social terms.

But there's a more subtle matter of balance to consider. We have a tendency to lean heavily toward personal ethics or social ethics, even if we think they should both be included. On the one side are those who preach about personal ethical behavior and what they mean by that is almost always sexual. It may extend to the family—being a good husband or wife, being a good father or mother. But holiness is comprised of not having sex before you're married, not having sex outside of marriage, and only marrying someone of the opposite sex.

There's a movement among some churches nowadays to take church discipline more seriously again. Good in theory, suspect in practice. See, when you hear of churches holding people accountable for their behavior, it's almost always sex that is at issue. Somebody is having an affair and the church is "lovingly" trying to bring the marriage back together. Or so goes the reasoning. If it works out that that

is so, all good. But often, what happens is something that is hardly beside the point: What happens is that by doing so, the church gets to portray itself as a church that takes the Bible seriously. One church I know of even says of itself, *We do church; others only play church.*

Right. Well, here are my two questions: First, after you've gotten through making people's private lives public for the sake of being able to prove that you are taking the Bible seriously, how will these people recover within the church? They may have their marriages restored, but because of the public nature of the discipline, will they ever recover enough in the church to be able to hold their heads up high again, let alone serve again? We need to be careful that we are not making an example out of people for the sake of publicity, which, in the end means sacrificing the couple's reputation on the altar of the church's reputation.

We had a difficult situation develop recently at our church in which one of our staff ministers came home to find that his wife had left him for a man she reconnected with on Facebook after 25 years. She stayed gone for four months and then came to her senses and returned. She was able to return, because her husband kept his heart open to her, and because the church made it clear that she could start over again if she returned. She did. And I am happy to say that she has become active again in the church, and is finding her way. They are doing well, in counseling, learning to build a new relationship. The hardest part, she is finding out, is forgiving herself. But one woman came to me after her return and thought we should have let the minister go. I asked her why, and she said, what will people think of our church? And I said that maybe that we really take this forgiveness thing seriously. And then it dawned on her that she could tell people that we practice what we preach about the gospel. Exactly.

The second question I have, though, is this: Is anyone ever brought before the church for participation in corrupt systems in business or schools or government, say, that violate our sense of just and fair treatment? Something tells me that as long as someone is a good family man and a tither, you'll never hear about how the money is made or how people are treated on the job. This is duplicitous at best. The OT prophets were relentless about how the widows and orphans were treated, and whether the poor could get the same justice as the rich.

We need to be consistent, but we also need to show some sense of proportion. *If we were following Jesus around today, why do we think his priorities would be so much different than they were in his days on earth?* When he overturned the moneychangers' tables in the temple, he was preaching ethics in the local church, so to speak. And the point of that act was not that they were doing business in the temple precincts, but that they were exploiting the poor and thus acting unjustly in the name and service of God.

On the other side are those who seem to think that as long as you are right on public policy, what you do in your private life isn't anybody's business. But the very essence of hypocrisy is in this cleft between person and persona—the person we really are and the one we want others to think we are. What good is it to advocate for children if we neglect our own at home? How can we demand that the government be responsible in managing its resources if we ourselves are driven by a consumer lifestyle and live with crippling debt?

I would like to end with two practical suggestions that might help preaching on ethics in the local church over time. First, be careful with topical preaching on ethical issues. Sermons are not white papers on abortion or homosexuality or health care or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or prayer in public schools. When people come to church, they are entitled to hear the good news of Jesus Christ from someone deeply acquainted with that subject. Along the way in expounding upon the gospel, there will be many opportunities to speak to ethical issues that the gospel touches on. But the gospel ought to be front and center, not something to tack on at invitation time after opining on some ethical subject.

And that leads to the second thing: Discipline yourself to preach a wide range of biblical texts and not just the same favorites that you feel comfortable in handling. An extreme example of this would be taking with equal seriously John 3:16 and Matthew 25:40 (*Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me.*) Or maybe make sure you are balancing your preaching of the gospel, epistles, and Old Testament texts. This will help you avoid being too Pauline or too Johannine, which may make you too asinine if you're not careful. One way to do that is to follow the lectionary, which over a three-year period will expose you to many texts that you might not otherwise preach on if you were doing the passage picking. The canon is a rich collection of voices that join together to give us a broad and deep perspective on the saving work of God in the world.

We'll let Paul have the last word from his charge to young Timothy: *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching* (2 Tim. 4:1-2) ■

This paper was presented at the Currie-Strickland Lectures at Howard Payne University on 15 March 2011. George A. Mason is pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, TX.

Important Considerations Regarding Homosexuality: Why Churches Should Welcome and Affirm Christian GLBTs

By Bruce Lowe, Ret. SBC pastor

"It terrified me to think that God made me just to hate me and send me to hell." This was the response of a teenager hearing his pastor tell the congregation that the Bible says God hates homosexuals and will send them to hell. He knew he was gay; he didn't want to be, but that was the way God had made him. But God hates him? God will send him to hell for something he has no control over? Is this the kind of God we worship? Or was the pastor exhibiting very faulty Bible interpretation? The Bible says or implies so many times that "whosoever" believes will have eternal life that we cannot discard that assurance. So whatever the Bible says or doesn't say about LGBTs, that is, Gays-Lesbians-Bisexuals-Transgendered, they may not necessarily be going to hell. But sadly isn't this pastor's belief accepted by many without any thought toward responsible interpretation?

I am 96 and shall not see the time when Christian GLBTs are welcomed and affirmed by our churches, but I do believe many of you reading this will. Until then, these special people will continue to suffer (at the ignorant hands of society and the ignorant/sinful hands of the church), many will never go to a church to hear the saving gospel preached, and our churches will continue to be deprived of their talents. Lord, open the eyes of your people, and hasten the day.

I discuss below what I consider to be six very important truths about homosexuality that have been generally overlooked.

1. There is really nothing in the Bible about homosexuality or homosexual people *per se.*

My eyes were first opened to this truth when I read theology professor Elizabeth Stuart: "…it is misleading to give the impression that the biblical authors talked about homosexuality at all, since the concept and reality of homosexuality…is barely a century old."[1] And theologian Walter Wink writes, "The idea (homosexuality) was not available in (the bible writer's) world."[2]

If there is something the writer could not have known, could not have had in his mind, we can eliminate that as a possible meaning. If I suggested that a Bible writer talked about electricity, you would say "preposterous" (or something worse). Electricity existed from the beginning of the world, but it would not be discovered for many centuries after the Bible writers lived. No Bible writer could have had it in his mind, could have said anything about it.

> *I am 96 and shall not see the time when Christian GLBTs are welcomed and affirmed by our churches, but I do believe many of you reading this will.*

In the same way, the concept of homosexuality was unknown for centuries after the Bible writers lived. It was not until the 19th century that the word "homosexual" was used for the first time[3]. That being the case, the Bible writers could not have written about homosexual people or anything they did.

References to same-gender sex in the Bible are about heterosexual people – condemnations of heterosexual lust.The Bible speaks in several places of same-sex practices, sex which was widely practiced by people who unquestionably were heterosexual[4] but who held women in low and often despised esteem which was normal in the culture.[5]

Also, it was common for a man who had a grudge against another man to subdue the begrudged, to rape him, thus reducing him to the place of a woman.[6] When an army conquered another army the conquering army degraded all their captives by raping them. "Gang rape (was) an extreme means to disgrace one's enemies… to reduce one to a woman's role…the ultimate means of subjugation and domination."[7] Sex was incidental; heterosexual men were raping other heterosexual men to degrade them and show domination over them.

In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, married men with families often kept male lovers, often young boys from the lower classes for whom they provided needed food, clothing, and education. "The Greeks regarded it impossible for a man to have a deep, all-encompassing relationship with a woman. This was possible only between two men".[8] Women were uneducated and virtual slaves to their responsibilities as mothers and housekeepers and cooks. Historians tell us that men had debates "about which sex was preferable (sex with another man or sex with a woman) as erotic focus. Bible writers condemned these forms of same-gender heterosexual sex, the only kind they knew. Homosexual people, *per se*, were not known.

2. Sexual orientation (heterosexual and homosexual) is innate and unchangeable; it is not a choice.

The concept of a homosexual nature first appeared in print in Europe in 1860 and in the United States in 1889. Freud, in the early 20th century accepted homosexuality as natural and considered it unchangeable.[9] Theologian Helmut Thielicke recog-

nized in his work, *The Ethics of Sex*, written some 50 years ago, that at least some gay men and lesbian women have "constitutional homosexuality"; he says we must "accept the fact that it is "incurable," and therefore, "our attitude toward (it) *changes*." (his italics)[10]

In 1998 the American Psychological Association concluded, "There is no scientific evidence that reparative or conversion therapy is effective in changing a person's sexual orientation. There is, however, evidence that this type of therapy can be destructive."[11] The National Cancer Institute reports on a study finding that "[b]eing gay is not simply a choice or purely a decision. People have no control over the genes they inherit and there is no way to change them."[12]

Other evidence that homosexuality is unchangeable includes: (a) ten thousand suicides each year of homosexual youth, unable to change and unwilling to face life with that orientation which includes the ostracism of society and the condemnation of the church; (b) the large numbers of homosexuals who go to psychotherapists desperately wanting to change their orientation, and the disappointing failure of the psychotherapy to help after hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars have been spent; (c) the millions of homosexual people who live "in the closet," not wanting anyone to learn of their orientation because of a homophobic society and church.

One lesbian, accused of choosing her orientation, said, "I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy." A gay man said, "No homosexual ever lived who didn't wish he could change." A friend said to me, "My brother hates God because God made him gay."

How can anyone believe that GLBTs (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites) choose their orientation?

3. Homosexual people are often highly gifted.

Sigmund Freud found homosexual persons to be "of high intellectual and ethical development" and "as characterized by special development of their social instinctual impulses and by their devotion to the interests of the community."[13]

Psychologist Mark Friedman found that the gay and lesbian subjects he tested were superior to their heterosexual counter parts in such psychological qualities as autonomy, spontaneity, orientation toward the present, and increased sensitivity to the value of the person.[14] Thielicke found that the homosexual "is frequently gifted with a remarkable heightened sense of empathy."[15]

The eminent psychologist Jung gives five very positive aspects of the homosexual male: 1) a great capacity for friendship, an astonishing tenderness between men; 2) a heightened aesthetic sense; 3) supremely gifted as a teachers; 4) strong feelings for history, conservative in the best sense while cherishing the values of the past; and 5) endowed with a wealth of religious feelings, helping to bring the *ecclesia spiritualis* into reality, and a spiritual receptivity which makes him responsive to revelation.[16]

While those who are gay and lesbian make up probably 4%-6% of the population, a study of the biographies of 1,004 eminent people found 11% of them to be homosexual or bisexual, with certain categories higher: 24% of poets, 21% of fiction writers, and 15% of artists and musicians.[17]

Surely, we ought to look on the gay man or lesbian woman as potentially a very special person, made that way by God, one we could find joy in associating with, and especially a benefit and blessing to our churches.

4. Many churches and pastors are sinning greatly against homosexual people.

"Kill a Queer for Christ"

This cleverly alliterative bumper sticker is sad, even unbelievable, and so very real.

The thinking shown in the bumper sticker and the position of so many churches and their pastors abets the crimes against gay men and lesbian women. Peter Gomes, Professor of Christian Morals at Harvard, says, "The combination of ignorance and prejudice under the guise of morality makes the religious community, and its abuse of scripture in this regard, itself morally culpable."[18] He relates this:

In preparing for her novel *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*, based upon the true story of a young gay man tossed from a bridge to his death by a group of young gay-bashers, author Bette Greene interviewed more than four hundred young men in jail for various forms of gay-bashing. Few of the men, she noted, showed any remorse for their crimes. Few saw anything morally wrong with their crimes, and more than a few of them told her that they were justified in their opinions and in their actions by the religious traditions from which they came. Homosexuality was wrong and against the Bible. One of those interviewed told her that the pastor of his church had said that homosexuals represented Satan and the Devil. The implication of his logic was clear: Who could possibly do wrong in destroying Satan and any of his works? The legitimization of violence against homosexuals and Jews and women and blacks, as we have seen, comes from the view that the Bible stigmatizes these people, thereby making them fair game. If the Bible expresses such a prejudice, then it certainly cannot be wrong to act on that prejudice. This is the argument every anti-Semite and racist has used with demonstrably devastating consequences, as our social history all too vividly shows.[19]

At the funeral of Matt Shepard, the young gay man tied to a fence and beaten to death in Kansas a preacher from Kansas and his followers from several states marched with placards reading, "God Hates Fags" and "Fag Matt in Hell." It is some consolation to know that the people of the town put themselves between the marchers and the family, and when the marchers began to cry out their messages, the people sang loudly "Amazing Grace."

When a straight man became a Christian, his gay friend asked, "Now that you are a Christian, will you still love me?" Such a woeful question! Jesus' love *included*; our lack of love *excludes*.

Theologian John Cobb tells of Ignacio Castuera, Latin American Liberation Theology leader, saying "that if he (Castuera) were to be true to liberation theology, he must be especially concerned for those who are *most* oppressed in our society. He had come to the conclusion that these are gay people." Then Cobb comments: "Some may question whether GLBTs are the most oppressed in our society. There is serious competition for that spot. But it is clear that whereas in most other oppressions the church has given at least some support to the oppressed, in this case the church has been the leader in the oppression."[20]

Sagacious Will Campbell has observed that many denominations have apologized to blacks for the way they were once treated. Brother Will prophesied that one day we will apologize to gays and lesbians for the way we are treating them.

5. No sex act has morality in itself.

When the Bible talks about "good" or "evil" acts, it is talking about the people behind the acts. We cannot say the Bible condemns the act, in itself, of sex between two men or two women. The same act may be loving conjugal sex or rape. God does not judge the act itself but the hearts of the people involved. So God is not interested in the same-gender sex *act* itself. God's judgment is on the hearts of those involved. Homosexual sex can be as loving as heterosexual sex and so just as moral in God's sight.

It is unfortunate that homophobics seem always to think of perverted sex when they think of homosexuals. To them, a "homosexual act" is sex, though every homosexual performs a thousand acts every day that have nothing to do with sex. Heterosexual sex may be loving or it may be lustful. The same is true with homosexual sex. When sex – heterosexual or homosexual – is out of love, it must have a godlike quality, for God is love.

6. The trend in our society and in our churches is toward affirmation of homosexuals.

As the truths set forth above become known, Americans are beginning to look differently at homosexuals. A letter to the editor of *Baptists Today* (January 2010) was undoubtedly correct when the writer said: "Whether the church likes it or not, the American culture is on its way to full acceptance of homosexuals."

More and more church leaders are welcoming and affirming gay and lesbian Christians as they see the depth of spirituality so many of them show. One denomination has elevated a gay minister to the position of Bishop. I know of gay and lesbian Baptists whose spirituality and qualities of leadership have brought them to ordination as deacons. I know a lesbian who grew up Southern Baptist, felt the call to preach and graduated from an SBC seminary. Knowing her chances of pastoring an SBC church as a woman and a lesbian were nil, she went to officials of the Disciples denomination. They told her that her being lesbian was unimportant, they would ordain her and see that she got a church. She is pastor of a Christian (Disciples of Christ) church in one of our southern U.S. cities.

Wikipedia lists 20 denominations (out of 33) that welcome and affirm GLBTs. Some mainline denominations have long done so, e.g. United Church of Christ, Episcopal Church (United States), Evangelical Lutherans. At its General Assembly in the summer of 2010 the Presbyterian Church, USA, voted (for the fourth time) to ordain homosexual deacons, elders and clergy. The Episcopal Church has elevated two homosexual ministers (one gay, one lesbian) to the office of Archbishop. At least 11 denominations have organizations working within them that support gays and lesbians.

Again, I am 96 years old and shall not see the time when Christian GLBTs are welcomed and affirmed by all of our churches, especially in the Southern Baptist Convention, but I do believe many of you reading this will. Lord, open the eyes of your people, and hasten the day. ■

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[1]"Dancing in the Spirit" in Timothy Bradshaw, Ed., *The Way Forward?* 81

[2] "Homosexuality and the Bible" in Wink, Ed., *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, 36

[3]In a pamphlet by Karl-Maria Kentbeny expressing opposition to German sodomy laws. He believed some people were naturally attracted erotically to members of the same sex, and that all sodomy or same gender sex was not "mere wickedness", the common belief at the time.

[4]We do not know when true homosexuals first came into civilization.

[5]We see this degradation of women in Lot's offering his two virgin daughters to the mob of Sodom for the mob to do with them whatever it wanted to do. We see it in the daily prayer of Every pious male Jew in Bible times: "Blessed be God, for he did not make me a woman."

[6]Could the very wording in Leviticus, "do not lie with a male as with a woman," refer to this practice of making a man to be a woman?

[7]Martti Nissnen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 48

[8]Ibid. p.64

[9]From Ellen Herman, *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Homosexuality*, 33

[10]Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*, 283-4

[11]APA News Release No. 98-56, December 14, 1998

[12]Reported in *New York Times*, October 18, 2000

[13]Quoted in David L. Balch, Ed., *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture, 140*

[14]*Psychology Today*, Vol. 8, No. 10 (March 1973), 27-33

[15]Thielicke, 227f

[16]C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works*, vol. 9, pt. 1, 58-59

[17]David Myers "Sexual Orientation and Science" in LeDayne McLeese Polanski and Millard Eiland, Eds, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, 172

[18]Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book*, 147

[19]Ibid., 146

[20]John Cobb, Jr., "Being Christian about Homosexuality" in Walter Wink, Ed., *Homosexuality and the Christian Faith*, 90

Wisconsin: Poster Child for Christian Political Ethics and Christian Community Gone Sour

by James Rapp

Dietrich Bonheoffer makes the point that the Gospel enters the world on its own terms, not as the guest of any political system.

. . . the freedom of the church is not where it has possibilities, but only where the Gospel really and in its own power makes room for itself on earth, even and precisely when no such possibilities are offered to it. The essential freedom of the church is not a gift of the world to the church, but the freedom of the Word of God itself to gain a hearing.[1]

The Evangelical community encourages its members to seek positions of public trust and authority. However, the Church itself must remain free. It cannot perform its prophetic role if it is captive to partisan politics. The Church must answer, not to party or political office but to God who has positioned it to provide its members with prophetic protection and guidance as they live and work in a fallen world. When the Church fails to serve those functions, its "King Davids" are left to struggle with the temptations of power with no "Nathan" to keep them on the path of moral or ethical rectitude.

Defining the problem

Politics is about nothing at all if it is not about ethics. Electioneering, policy formation, legislation, implementation, and constituent services – every step is paved with ethical imperatives, often ethical dilemmas. Good governance exists only when politicians are held to high ethical standards by the public, and by themselves. Politicians who make an open profession of faith in Christ – especially those who implicitly or explicitly make their faith a reason for people to vote for them – must be unflinching in their dedication to ethical behavior. Not that they never fail in its execution; everyone does. However, they must quickly and honestly respond to their failures with sincere and appropriate remedies. Further, Christian politicians need their church communities to shine an objective, honest light upon their conduct, serving as prophetic voices to alert them when they violate ethical standards of behavior.

Though there is an ethical dimension to all public policy, there is frequent disagreement, even within the Christian community, regarding what is or is not ethically acceptable. So, in the United States, we have developed the political expedients of discussion, compromise, and ultimately majority vote to decide competing visions of right and wrong. While it is often said that morality can't be legislated, that is exactly what is done in a democratic system. Thus morality under one party's administration may become immorality (or at the least, illegality) under the next.

Therefore it is crucial that the discussions, compromises, and voting that shape public policy be the work of men and women of high ethical character who are public spirited servants, not opportunistic, party-driven ideologues, willing to sacrifice principle for victory.

Purpose of the Essay

This essay asserts three standards of ethical behavior as the basis for judging any politician's fitness for office. The first standard requires commitment to telling *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, with lapses or errors quickly admitted and corrected when brought to light. Second, the politician must be *fair*, consistently holding himself to the same standard he or she requires of others. Third, the politician must have *integrity*, reflecting the same ethical values in public and private life. For Christian politicians these are not just qualifiers for public office, but *primary marks* of their professed faith in Christ. It is imperative that Christian politicians and public servants adhere to these standards since their actions inevitably reflect, for good or ill, upon their church, their fellow believers, and their Lord.

A case study from Wisconsin

The election of Governor Scott Walker, in November 2010, and his subsequent conduct in office, provides an instructive case study in Christian political ethics gone sour. The rest of this essay applies the standards set out above to Governor Walker's election campaign and his first two months in office.

Walker, a self-proclaimed evangelical Christian, son of a Baptist minister, member of a non-denominational evangelical church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, burst into office with a plethora of budgetary, legislative, and administrative initiatives. Many had not previously been mentioned in his campaign speeches, and nearly all were destined to disturb his opponents and dismay even a number of his supporters. It is not productive in this essay to discuss the ethical dimensions of Governor Walker's proposals although each has ethical implications. What is pertinent to this essay is the governor's conduct leading up to his election and in the weeks since the election as his plan was hotly debated and eventually passed into law. *Has he been truthful, fair, and displayed integrity?*

The Prime Ethic: Truthfulness

We will start by examining Governor Walker's honesty in his political ads and in his statements after the election.

It quickly became clear that Governor Walker's Christian ethic did not impel him to create political ads more honest than those of his non-Christian opponents. His approved ads, paid for out of his campaign funds, suffered from the same unethical manipulation of images and facts that plague most political ads these days: innuendo, half-truths, complete falsehoods, photo-shopped images, sinister musical underscores, and accusatory messages delivered in dark tones by deep-voiced professional actors. *Hardly a testimony to a high Christian ethic of truthfulness*.

But of equal concern, 10 statements of fact in his campaign ads were scrutinized by the impartial fact-checking organization, *Politifact.com*.[2] The resulting rulings were: one true, three half true, four barely true, and two false. Let us look at that in another way. Ten percent of the time candidate Walker told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Ninety percent of the time he told something less than the whole truth. Sixty percent of the time what he presented as true was judged less than half true. *And, 20 percent of the time, his statements were judged flatly untrue*. The issue for a Christian candidate with that kind of record has to be, how does my carelessness with the truth reflect upon the faith I profess to hold?

Politifact.com also rated 26 of Governor Walker's statements of fact since taking office, most relating to the debate surrounding his controversial "Budget Repair Bill" which stripped public employees of nearly all their bargaining rights.[3] The resulting rulings were: four true, three mostly true, two half true, six barely true, 10 false, and one pants on fire. Again let's look at those results as percentages. Fifteen percent of the time Governor Walker was telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Eighty-five percent of the time he was presenting something less than the whole truth. *Forty-two percent of the time he was not telling the truth at all*. Walker's record of truthfulness in office is abysmally worse than it was as candidate – a sad commentary on his ethics and blight on his faith claims.

The Golden Ethic: Fairness

The Golden Rule has been variously rendered by those who value it and those who mock it. Jesus said, "As you would have others do unto you, so ought you to do unto them." Confucius' version was, "Do not do to others that which we do not want them to do to us." Some jokers make it say, "Do to others what they did to you." Or, more cynically, "Do unto others before they get the chance to do it to you." But the Greek philosopher, Thales, best captures the advice that politicians, particularly Christians, should heed, "Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing."

While it is often said that morality can't be legislated, that is exactly what is done in a democratic system.

Let's look. The Governor has *blamed* the previous two administrations for "kicking the [budget deficit] can down the road" through borrowing to close a budget gap each biennium. He vowed he would not do so. But his "Budget Repair Bill" proposed just that – refinancing over $100 million in debt, stretching the payments out, increasing the interest paid. *So much for the Golden Ethic*.

Governor Walker complained that his predecessor and the previous legislature passed their budget repair bill "in the middle of the night" with no public input or opportunity for opponents to amend it. In fact, that is what happened with his own actions. Shame, shame, shame! But Governor Walker, ignoring the Golden Ethic, attempted to pass his "Budget Repair Bill" through the Senate without allowing Democrats to debate the bill or offer amendments to it, triggering the infamous "Escape of the Wisconsin 14" to safe havens in Illinois, leaving the Senate one person short of the 20-person quorum needed to pass an appropriations bill, thus blocking passage for three weeks. When the bill finally came up for debate in the Assembly it was brought to a vote through a contested parliamentary maneuver, *in the middle of the night*, so quickly that many Democrats, and a handful of Republicans, failed to get their votes registered in the *17 seconds* allowed for voting. The Assembly quickly adjourned amid a chorus of shocked Democrats chanting "Shame! Shame! Shame!" Governor Walker did not decry the Assembly's *middle of the night* action, or insist that they rescind the action and do it again, in full daylight, under legitimate rules. *Another vote against the Golden Ethic*.

Senate Democrats asked Governor Walker to remove the "union busting" measures from his "Budget Repair Bill" so they could be debated separately. (In Wisconsin, budget bills must deal only with revenue and appropriations and require a quorum of 20 senators to be present for voting.) The governor insisted that the repeal of union bargaining rights was an essential element of his budget and thus was inseparable from his fiscal policy. He declared that he would not compromise on that issue. He further argued that delay in passing the bill would force the layoff of 1500 state workers and cause the state to miss a deadline for "kicking the can down the road," a.k.a. refinancing the state's $100 million debt. But suddenly, after a three-week standoff, in a feat of political gymnastics difficult to explain, the governor decided that the portions of the bill that dealt with union rights *were not* essentially monetary and therefore, by removing revenue and appropriation items from his "Budget Repair Bill," it could be passed by the Republican senate without the 20-member quorum. The irony of a "Budget Repair Bill" with no monetary implications requiring the Constitutional quorum somehow slipped right by the governor and

his advisors. So, with only Republican senators present, a re-worked, non-monetary "Budget Repair Bill" was passed, stripping away nearly all union rights for state workers. Meanwhile, the monetary provisions of the original "Budget Repair Bill" *never got passed*. The Legislature adjourned, leaving the current budget $100 million out of balance, using the governor's own estimate, and showing that the governor really had one goal in his "Budget Repair Bill" – elimination of union bargaining rights. The ethical and moral acrobatics performed by the governor to achieve his desired goal is truly dismaying. *Ethic the Governor ignored: "Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing."*

The Rock Bottom Ethic: Integrity

A Christian politician should be the same person in private that he is in public. We don't often get to see or hear our politicians in their private moments, speaking to their friends, family, and advisors. But Governor Walker was the unfortunate victim of a ruse. A blogger, Ian Murphy, posing as David Koch, a wealthy financier of Republican and Tea Party campaigns, and a heavy contributor to Governor Walker's election in 2010, managed to get through to the Governor and spent 20 minutes drawing out of him information he had not told the public and which the public would never have known if the *faux* conversation with Murphy/David Koch had not revealed it.[4]

The call lasted almost twenty minutes, consisting of 3418 words spoken, 3362 (94.1%) of them, the governor's. One commentator humorously declared that the governor was "as chatty as a middle school girl on a sleepover." For nearly 19 of the 20 minutes the Governor regaled his supposed benefactor with information about the budget crisis. *Question: How many ordinary Wisconsin citizens could have gotten one minute of the governor's time that day?*

More important than the time the governor gave to an imagined powerful, rich, *non-constituent* benefactor, is what the Governor said that differed from his public declarations.

First, it is important to note that the governor claimed, on several occasions, that no one should have been surprised at the content of his "Budget Repair Bill" because he had clearly stated his objectives during the campaign for governor. (No amount of searching has turned up any mention by Walker, before the release of the "Budget Repair Bill, of stripping unions of their rights, nor has the governor provided any evidence that he had mentioned it.) Tellingly, in his conversation with the *faux* Donald Koch he boasted that his attack on the unions was inspired by Ronald Reagan's breaking of the Air Traffic Controller's Union. Walker described his last cabinet meeting before rolling out his "Budget Repair Bill" as a party at his home, after his trip to the Super Bowl.[5] In his words, it was "kind of the last hurrah before we dropped the bomb." His "Budget Repair Bill" would not have landed like a "bomb" if he had clearly described its contents in advance. *Ethical principle: Say one thing, do another*.

> *The ethical and moral acrobatics performed by the governor to achieve his desired goal is truly dismaying.*

Further, Governor Walker revealed to his *faux* friend a deception he and his Republican colleagues were assessing to lure the Democrats back from Illinois by "putting out an appeal to the Democrat leader that I would be willing to sit down and talk to him . . . but only if all 14 of them come back and *sit down in the state Assembly*." (Emphasis added.) The catch: The deception, would be that once they "sat down" they would have given Republicans the quorum needed to pass his bill. He had no intention of negotiating with the Democrats. "Hell," he said, "I'll talk to them. If they want to yell at me for an hour, you know, I'm used to that, I can deal with that. But I'm not negotiating." *Ethical principal: The end justifies the means*.

At one point in the conversation the *faux* Mr. Koch suggested "planting some troublemakers" among the protesters at the Capitol. Walker admitted, "We thought about that." The reason given for rejecting that strategy was not that it violated ethical standards, or might be illegal. Rather, he said, "My only fear would be is if there was a ruckus caused is that that would scare the public into thinking maybe the governor has gotta settle to avoid all these problems." *Ethical principle: Expediency takes precedent over rectitude*.

Expanding the field of responsibility

This sad litany of ethical lapses reveals a carelessness in one who makes a public point of his evangelical connections. But it raises another question: Where were the spiritual advisors who, in an ideal Christian community, would have provided correction when they saw the governor straying from a strict ethical pathway?

Governor Walker has at least three strong connections to Christian community that are publicly known. He is a member of a non-denominational evangelical church in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Additionally, the Walkers host a bi-monthly Bible study in their home. Finally, the Walkers seek and receive spiritual support from the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a Wisconsin/N. Michigan Pentecostal denomination. It is relevant to ask why none of these spiritual connections resulted in prophetic guidance for the governor. It could be that such was offered and rejected by him. It is more likely that those in a position to alert the governor to ethical breaches in his conduct were too awed by their connection to him, or too afraid of offending him, or too committed to his political agenda to act in any prophetic way.

The author of this essay has a 50-year connection to the Pentecostal denomination mentioned above. He contacted the COO of the Pentecostal denomination, pointing out the governor's need for ethical guidance. Similarly, he contacted the pastor of Governor Walker's church. There was no reply at all from Walker's pastor. The Pentecostal COO sent a brusque, one sentence reply, with no salutation or closing, "I have been in touch with the Walkers and they have my full support!!!!!" In a response to a follow-up e-mail, he explained his perspective:

Thank you. [No formal salutation or closing] *There are many people who have had to carry the financial burden far too long while others seemly* [sic] *feel our society owes them. The Walkers are just people who do seek God for wisdom. Because some don't agree with them for selfish reasons does in no way mean they are insensitive or wrong. We as believers will not be intimidated by those who do not agree. It is time we obey the law and support those who have been elected and give them a chance to prove themselves. After all the majority elected them.*[6] *If we are faithful with our tithes, God will take care of the church. I have sent an email to all our pastors asking them to pray concerning this matter.*

It is important for this discussion to reiterate that differences of opinion on the ethical correctness of particular policies are difficult to moderate, and this essay does not attempt to do that. But the *manner* in which such policies are arrived at and administered is of crucial importance to the witness of the Christian politician promoting them. The Pentecostal COO attempted to defend the ethical propriety of Walker's budget proposal but ignored the methods he was using in fighting for his objectives.

Conclusion

This case study reveals: 1) the treacherous milieu in which all politicians work, in which there is constant temptation to sacrifice rectitude on the altar of expediency, 2) that Christian politicians – and no assumption is being made that Governor Walker's profession of faith in Christ is less than sincere – face the same temptations as non-Christians, but the stakes are higher, with implications for the Christian faith in general, and their local Church and church family in particular, and 3) that Christian leaders failed to be the spiritual protectors of a vulnerable Christian politician, for one reason or another refusing to step into the prophetic role that their calling required them to play. ■

> *Where were the spiritual advisors who, in an ideal Christian community, would have provided correction when they saw the governor straying from a strict ethical pathway?*

[1]Bonhoeffer, "Protestantism without Reformation," in *No rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes . . . from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, vol. 1, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York, 1965), 104-05.

[2]http://www.politifact.com/wisconsin/elections/2010/governor/

[3]http://www.politifact.com/personalities/scott-walker/ Note: the numbers used are those posted as of March 20, 2010. The numbers at this site could conceivably change since it is a composite of all the Governor's ratings at a given time.

[4]http://millermps.wordpress.com/2011/02/23/walker-conversation-transcripts-multiple-ethics-and-labor-law-violations-being-investigated/ Note: this web site provides a transcript of the conversation between Murphy and Walker as well as a link to an audio recording of the conversation.

[5]The expenses for the Governor and his family to attend the Super Bowl were reported to have been paid from campaign funds (http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/news/115314934.html). The state ethics board signed off on his use of campaign funds and Walker explained that he would be campaigning at the event, and also representing Wisconsin business interests. (What does representing Wisconsin business have to do with spending campaign funds?) While his explanation may satisfy his supporters, it rings a bit hollow with those who expect campaign contributions to be used for political campaigning, not providing expensive vacations for the candidate and his family.

[6]At the time this note was written, recall efforts had begun for 16 Wisconsin Senators (eight Republicans and eight Democrats) and plans to recall Governor Walker in early 2012 were under way. The COO seems to be making the argument that those recalls would subvert the will of those who elected Governor Walker and his fellow Republicans. But it should be noted that Governor Walker was elected to his previous post as Milwaukee County Supervisor in a *recall election* which removed his predecessor. *"Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing."*

James Rapp is a retired high school history teacher and former small church pastor. He lives in Eau Claire, WI and can be found at his *blog, The Cottage on the Moor*

Dear Readers:

Many of us have enjoyed *Christian Ethics Today* ever since Foy Valentine first dreamed up the idea of publishing the journal. He set a very high standard for excellence and for addressing relevant issues. Foy promised to send the journal free to anyone who would read it, and he also promised to continue publication "as long as energy and finances permit."

Foy published the journal for eight years before he turned over the reins to Joe Trull who ably produced the journal for the next ten years. Joe expanded the readership of the journal, including the addition of many of you, and broadened the scope of the contributing authors. He continued the tradition of excellence and timeliness.

Now it is my turn, and I take this assignment very seriously. I will do my best to continue the tradition of soliciting and selecting the very best articles to equip laypersons, educators, and ministers to address the moral and ethical issues of importance to us all.

We will continue to send the journal free to anyone who will read it. Today that includes almost 6000 persons, including you. We have added many seminary and divinity school students in America, and recently we have added a number of English-speaking European and Mid-Eastern students, professors and ministers.

All of this has been made possible by the gifts of many of you. If you are able to do so, a contribution now, halfway through the year, would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for reading *Christian Ethics Today*, for referring others to us, and for helping pay the bills.

Cordially,

Patrick R Anderson

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Counting the Days

By Brett Younger

When I was in the seventh grade a white-suited evangelist guaranteed that Jesus would be back in less than five years. Every 13-year-old boy at church that night had the same thought: "I will never get to have sex."

Another evangelist is making the news frightening teenage boys. Rev. Harold Camping, president of the Family Radio Christian network, is predicting that the rapture will take place on May 21. He says that approximately 3 percent of the world's population will be taken into heaven. Doesn't that seem low? You and I may not be making the trip.

The May 21 guarantee has been displayed on buses, benches and billboards. Five Family Radio RVs covered with reflective lettering are traveling around the country declaring that Judgment Day is less than two weeks after Mother's Day.

The prophetic proof that May 21 is the day to end all days is rock solid. According to Camping, the number five equals "atonement," the number 10 equals "completeness" and the number 17 equals "heaven." Pay attention or you may get lost. Christ died on the cross on April 1, 33 A.D. The time between April 1, 33, and April 1, 2011, is 1,978 years.

Are you still with us? If 1,978 is multiplied by 365.2422 days (the number of days in a solar year, not to be confused with the lunar year) the result is 722,449. The time between April 1 and May 21 is 51 days. Don't get too far ahead. 51 added to 722,449 is 722,500. Five times 10 times 172 (atonement times completeness times heaven) squared also equals 722,500.

Aren't you embarrassed that you didn't think of this? Camping concludes that 5x10x17 is telling us a "story from the time Christ made payment for our sins until we're completely saved."

As if that's not enough proof -- and what kind of heretic would need more evidence? -- May 21, 2011, is 7,000 years to the day since the first raindrops fell to start Noah's flood. How could it be more obvious? The logic is indisputable.

Rev. Camping is not just making stuff up. He is a successful self-published author -- *Time Has an End* (2005), *We Are Almost There!* (2008), *The End of the World is Almost Here!* (2009), and *God Gives Another Infallible Proof that Assures the Rapture Will Occur May 21, 2011* (2009). Camping writes, "I know it's absolutely true, because the Bible is always absolutely true." How could anyone argue with that?

If you are reading this, Rev. Camping was wrong....this time. editor

Some doubters condescendingly note that Jesus said that no one would know when the end is near. Cynics also love to point out that in his 1992 book 1994? Camping predicted that the end would come on Sept. 4, 1994. He later correctly pointed out that he had made a mathematical error -- enough said.

Admittedly there's a history of failed predictions that could be considered embarrassing. At the year 1000 a flurry of prophetic forecasts led many Christians to expect Jesus soon. William Miller predicted the Second Coming would take place in 1843. His followers, the Seventh Day Adventists, have adjusted their schedule. Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, predicted the apocalypse would be in 1914. They also have postponed the end of the world.

The best selling religious book of the 1970s was Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth.* The author predicted that Jesus would return within a few years. The profits from the book paid for a mansion that took three years to build. As the year 2000 approached people began finding references to Y2K in the Book of Revelation. *The Left Behind* series made huge money even though the kid from *Growing Pains* starred in the movie version.

While many so-called Christian scholars are claiming that Camping is similarly mistaken, let's not be too hasty. What if the good reverend is right? If Harold's calculations are correct, won't you feel goofy if you ignore him? I have decided not to take chances.

Just in case May 21 is the end, I'm not going to be watching my cholesterol on May 20. I won't be mowing my lawn, cleaning my refrigerator or doing the laundry. My doctor has been after me to get a colonoscopy. I have scheduled it for June.

What would it hurt to treat May 20 like a holy day? Pray. Read a psalm. Read a poem. Sing. Dance. Give something away. Listen to the people you love. Tell them how much they mean to you. Forgive old grudges. Encourage worried 13-year-old boys that everything will be fine -- no matter what.

There's something to be said for living every day as if it were your last, because some day you'll be right. And if God shows up, how great will that be? ■

Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at McAfee School of Theology.
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A Tribute To Cathie

By Joe E. Trull, Denton, TX former editor of Christian Ethics Today

Looking back over a half-century of adult years on earth, I am indebted to so many people. Among them are a dozen or so who have profoundly changed my life. One of them is Catherine Clark Kroeger, a mentor, a model, and a saint of the first order.

At first I addressed her as "Dr. Kroeger," although I soon learned that for all who knew her, she preferred "Cathie."

She was a Presbyterian pastor's wife, a foster mother, a classical Greek and New Testament scholar, a seminary teacher, a prolific writer, and the founder of *Christians for Biblical Equality* (CBE); but the full list of her accomplishments (most of them after midlife) would require not paragraphs, but pages.

Somehow I missed the news of her sudden departure last February 14; an April letter from CBE brought the news, which caused me to pause. I dropped the letter and suddenly felt a mixture of grief and gratitude, as I thanked God for a life that blessed so many.

I first met Cathie during my early years of teaching Christian ethics at New Orleans Baptist Seminary, when the Evangelical Theological Society met on our campus. As I browsed the display area, I discovered two groups supporting opposing viewpoints on the role of men and women in church and society. Leaders in both circles were well-known evangelicals who based their beliefs on the biblical revelation and who were able to discuss their convictions with candor and mutual respect.[1]

At one table sat Dr. Catherine Kroeger, founder and first president of CBE-- "an organization of Christians who believe the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women or all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups."[2]

Across the hall was another table promoting the *Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (CBMW), formed in 1987 (in response to CBE) for the purpose of "studying and setting forth biblical teachings on the relationship of men and women, especially in the home and church."[3]

A warm and engaging lady, Cathie could disarm the most hostile of opponents with her sweet spirit and extensive knowledge. At midlife, she earned a PhD at the University of Minnesota in the classics—the study of the Greek language, the literature, and the Graeco-Roman culture of the first century.

Cathie could disarm the most hostile of opponents with her sweet spirit and extensive knowledge.

Then, through her research, writing, and speaking, she expanded our knowledge of the New Testament world and gender issues, especially in relation to faulty hermeneutics on female equality.

In article after article, Cathie revealed new understandings and insights that challenged long-held assumptions and built a solid foundation for a biblically-based egalitarian understanding of male and female roles and relationships. Evangelical scholars and leaders, too numerous to mention, joined her company and formed the nucleus of this new organization she founded named *Christians for Biblical Equality.*

Among her seminal writings, the one I consider her greatest achievement was her classic book in 1992, *I Suffer Not a Woman (*coauthored with her husband), addressing the knotty issue of the apostle Paul's view of women as discussed in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.[4] That is the main reason why, in 2002, when my wife Audra and I were developing a book on the gender debate among Southern Baptists,[5] we knew Cathie was the ideal author for the chapter on Paul's view of women. However, the book was designed *for* Baptists to be written *by* Baptists! Cathie was a Presbyterian and a Presbyterian minister's wife at that.

I decided to call her anyway. She immediately responded, "Oh, I attend the Baptist church here on the Cape and have spoken there often!" Problem resolved. In fact, among all the good chapters in our book, almost everyone agrees Cathie's is the best.

In recent years, after turning over the leadership of CBE to younger disciples, Cathy has, from her home at Cape Cod, focused on the issue of domestic abuse, founding PASCH (Peace and Safety in the Christian Home), producing a newsletter, a book,[6] and ministering personally to abused women.[7]

The recent letter I alluded to earlier was from Mimi Haddad, the capable president of CBE International, who has filled Cathy's shoes admirably.[8] It contained a story from one of Cathy's friends that epitomizes the personality and character of this lady:

"I first met Cathie in June 2010 when she came to the UK for a conference I was organizing. At the age of 84, she walked off an overnight trans-Atlantic flight and skipped through the airport, insisting on pushing her own luggage cart. I left her in her hotel after she assured me she would be fine sorting herself out. When I saw her the next day, she informed me that she had spent her time looking at the Roman ruins and had found lots of exciting stuff to take home to her students.

"At the conference, she spoke with authority and knowledge for an hour. (The stage manager tried to offer her a chair, but she refused it). She had such a wealth of knowledge about the Bible, history, and life. She was almost like a walking, talking encyclopedia, concordance, and Greek and Latin translator all in one.

"The day after the conference we were in the car with my children, Megan (7) and Joshua (5). By the end of the journey she had taught them two songs, which they still sing, and told them the story of Joshua and the battle of Jericho. Not only was this story technically and contextually correct, but also told from the point of view of the Israelite children who were walking around the wall. Megan and Joshua were enthralled, and still remember it.

"When I told my children today that Catherine had died, Joshua looked very sad and said, 'She won't be able to tell us any more stories!' But Megan smiled and said, 'Yes, but she's going to live longer than the stars!'"

The prophet Daniel expressed it this way: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (12:3)." Thank you Cathie, for shining on us. We are better and brighter because of you. ■

Her greatest achievement was her classic book in 1992, I Suffer Not a Woman (coauthored with her husband), addressing the knotty issue of the apostle Paul's view of women.

[1]In contrast to the debate among Southern Baptists over this issue arising in relation to a new *Baptist Faith and Message* statement adopted by the SBC in 2000. Interestingly, the CBMW is now housed at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

[2]*Christians for Biblical Equality* is located at 122 West Franklin Ave, Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451 and *cbeinternational.org* , and publishes a scholarly journal, *Priscilla Papers,* and *Mutuality,* a magazine of inspiration and information. I strongly recommend the organization and their publications. To learn more about CBE see www.cbeinternational.org

[3]At their first meeting leaders in this group developed *The Danvers Statement*, a declaration and rationale of their traditionalist position. also found in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991).

[4]Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Women: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 In Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

[5]Audra and Joe Trull, *Putting Women in their Place: The Baptist Debate Over Female Equality* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003

[6]*Women, Abuse, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), co-edited with James Beck.

[7]A few months ago Cathy called me for information to assist an abused wife, who had also been abused publically before her Baptist church in New England—Cathy was ministering to her in her home.

[8]CBE has established The Cathie Kroeger Leadership Fund, which will help equip the next generation of egalitarian leaders. Contributions may be sent to the address in endnote 2 above.

The Church of Facebook

(continued from page 31)

outs and flash mobs. Why not use it to expose the Sermon on the Mount, without the use of a preacher or pews?

Actually, Jesse Rice uses much more than a computer to pack his book with lessons in everything from engineering (the Millennium Bridge in London), social science (Harry Frederick Harlow's 1950's study of rhesus monkeys) to evangelism. Rice paints the background of historical events to give readers much more than his mere conclusions, but sharing the intricacies of the virtual world as a tool of the Gospel.

Challenging your church to use their lives for Christ is not new; inspiring them to use their online lives effectively for Christ is the new goal. This book can help. ■

ETHIXBYTE:

I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned with the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread." Desmond Tutu

Hell's Bell

Martin E. Marty

Americans may have thought that cracks in the façade and framework of evangelicalism would show up most visibly when serious evangelicals argued whether Sarah Palin or Mike Huckabee would be the better presidential candidate. But now we have a chance to see that other divisive issues among evangelicals beg for attention. When one of these, a theological argument, no less, makes its way to the New York Times and other papers plus many blogs, it's time to pay attention. Bystanders who think they have nothing at stake in the non-political arguments, and who have never heard of Pastor Bob Bell of Grand Rapids, Michigan, or his critic, neo-Calvinist John Piper, may stand by in fascination, but they are likely to be reached this time. The topic? Hell, and a punishing God's use thereof.

Bell, featured in the Times story, is a star of the emergent middle among evangelicals. He is seen by his enemies as baiting those to his right by writing too kindly about God and the billions of mortals destined for hell, and they insist that softness has to stop. Pastor Bell is soon to publish *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. His publisher and others have tantalized the public with clips from the book, but the critics did not need to have read it and do not need to know more than that Bell is not so sure that a God of love will condemn those billions who never heard of Jesus Christ, or those millions who have heard but did not recognize him as their Savior, in order for them to fire up their own condemnations of Bell.

The Michigan pastor-author is not alone; Bell's hell is paralleled in treatments of a whole wing of evangelicals. Some of this group "out" themselves, while others are in a kind of purgatory of inference that they are not quite orthodox on the subject. What this second wing keeps pondering and sometimes proclaiming is that there are ways to witness to the fact that God is holy and just, other than saying that he takes delight in punishing those ignorant of the stakes or those who are players of other salvation games. It is one thing to agree with sophisticated evangelical theologians and their artful articulators who semi-dodge the issue by saying that no one is ever sent to hell and suggesting that she or he chooses to go there.

He is seen by his enemies as baiting those to his right by writing too kindly about God and the billions of mortals destined for hell, and they insist that softness has to stop.

Publics, including those serious about the Bible, doctrine, and church tradition, have not found ways to accept the teaching which they cannot square with witness to the God of love, so Bell and company would witness positively to them. Formal theologians in the evangelical camp are bemused by the consistent polls in which only a small percent of the clergy are ready to affirm and preach doctrines and threats of hell and the large percent of their followers who are not. They know of the gap, and feel they must close it. Otherwise orthodoxy will disappear and relativism or universalism will win. The evangelical parents whose teenage "good kid" son who has not made a formal profession of faith in Christ and thus will be condemned to hell if he dies, need better reasoning than the dogmatic professors of hell give them.

Otherwise this latest fissure in evangelicalism will grow, and arguments will distract preachers of hell from their tasks and opportunities to win people from its brink, thus swelling its population in the interest of saying the right thing about this form of a holy and just God's mode of everlasting punishment. Why are they writing editorials and condemnations and attending conferences on hell when they could be out on the street corners, passing tracts and witnessing to hell—and divine love? Bell asks for answers. ■

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Martin E. Marty's biography, current projects, publications, and contact information can be found at www.illuminos.com. This article is reprinted with permission from Sightings, a publication of the Martin E. Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion and the University of Chicago Divinity School.

The Terror of Depression

by Phil Lineberger

There is an overwhelming sense of loss. John Petty is gone. He will not walk through these doors anymore. He will not preach from this Bible anymore. He will not baptize in that baptistry anymore. John Petty is gone. He is gone physically but he is still here.

When Jesus' disciples came to the tomb to look for his body they were told, "He is not here. He has gone on ahead." John has gone on ahead but he is still here. He's here in his wife, Kelly and in his children, Davis and Mara. He is here in his Mom, and his siblings, and his friends and this church. His life and influence will live until we also are gone and together again. This is the HOPE of the Christian faith.

The persistent question in everyone's mind is "WHY IS JOHN GONE?" We can't answer all the whys. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:12, that NOW we see but a poor reflection… NOW we know in part.

But the part we can know is that John was suffering from the terror of depression. Depression has been called a "time defying sadness". Depression speaks a language of its own known only to the depressed. Depression speaks the language of:

- Persistent sadness, anxiety and emptiness
- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness
- Loss of pleasure or interest in once-enjoyable activities
- Loss of appetite and weight loss, or overeating and weight gain
- Restlessness and irritability
- Insomnia, early morning awakening, or oversleeping.

Depression is both ancient and universal. Psychiatrists tell us that depression is the most common emotional problem in America today. It has risen to epidemic proportions. Currently some nineteen million Americans suffer from chronic depression. Depression is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and abroad for people over five years of age.

Depression may be the biggest killer on the earth. It claims more years than war, cancer, and AIDS put together. About twenty-eight million Americans, one in three, are on SSRIs, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors- the class of drugs to which Prozac belongs). Depression is not a willful fault, nor is it a sin. Some may ask, "Why did John choose this?" He didn't. The choice was being forced upon him by a mind overwhelmed with darkness.

Depression is not a willful fault, nor is it a sin. It is a signal that something is wrong. We need help and we need hope. It is not a disgrace. Some of the world's most sensitive people have been susceptible to depression. People like Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Abraham Lincoln, and Winston Churchill suffered from it. Churchill called his depression "the black dog."

Depression speaks a language of its own known only to the depressed.

Men of faith like J.B. Phillips of New Testament translation fame as well as great preachers like Harry Emerson Fosdick and Charles Haddon Spurgeon suffered depression. Spurgeon, who struggled with depression to the point that he had to take off two to three months a year to deal with it, in 1866 told his congregation of his struggle: "I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go through." He explained that during these depressions, "Every mental and spiritual labor… had to be carried on under protest of spirit."

Depression knows no educational, cultural, or financial boundaries. Depression causes people to lose pleasure from daily life.

From the Scriptures we find that leaders like Moses, Elijah, Job, and Jeremiah suffered from depression, often to the point of wanting to die. I Kings 19:3-4, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord,. he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.." Job cried out, "For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

Psalm 91:6, "the plague that destroys at noonday", called by some the noonday demon. The noonday is when the sun is at its height, shining brightly. Noonday is a figure of speech depicting life at its best, when things seem to be going well. This is when the plague, depression, darkness, descends on the mind of the individual. It's when one cannot see clearly in the mirror or through the window.

In his book, *The Noonday Demon*, Andrew Solomon writes, "Depression is the flaw in love. When depression comes it degrades one's self and ultimately eclipses the capacity to give or receive affection. It is the aloneness within us made visible, and it destroys not only connection to others but also the ability to be peacefully alone with oneself. If good spirits, some love themselves and some love others and

some love work and some love God: any of these passions can furnish that vital sense of purpose that is the opposite of depression. In depression, the meaninglessness of every enterprise and every emotion, the meaningless of life itself, becomes self-evident. The only feeling left in this loveless state is insignificance!

Depression is emotional pain that forces itself on us against our will. Grief is depression in proportion to circumstance; depression is grief out of proportion to circumstance. It is tumbleweed distress that thrives on thin air; growing despite its detachment form nourishing earth.

It takes time for a rusting framed building to collapse, but the rust is ceaselessly powdering the solid, thinning it, eviscerating it. The collapse, no matter how abrupt it may feel, is the cumulative consequence of decay. It is a long time from the first rain to the point when rust has eaten through an iron girder.

It is not pleasant to experience decay, to find oneself exposed to the ravages of an almost daily rain, and to know that one is turning into something feeble, that more and more of you will blow off with the first strong wind, making you less and less. Some people accumulate more emotional rust than others. Depression starts out insipid, fogs the days into a dull color, weakens ordinary actions until their clear shapes are obscured by the effort they require, and leaves you tired, bored and self-obsessed.

Major depression is both a birth and a death. It is both the new presence of something and the total disappearance of something. This depression grows like a vine on a great oak tree sucking the life out of the tree.

Every second of being alive hurt. The first thing that goes in major depression is happiness. You cannot gain pleasure from anything. That's the cardinal symptom of major depression. But soon other emotions follow happiness into oblivion; sadness as you have known it, the sadness that seemed to have led you here; your sense of humor; your belief in and capacity for love. Your mind is leached until you seem dim-witted even to yourself. Eventually, you are simply absent from yourself."

Sometimes those close to people who are in depression expect them to get themselves together. There is little room for moping. After all they are accomplished at so many other things, why can't they conquer this thing. Family members and friends often don't want to be close to measureless pain.

"For now we see through a glass, darkly." We don't know how dark the darkness is for someone suffering from depression. Through the darkened glass they can't see the light of life or the love of others. They can only feel the pain caused by the darkness of despair in their own mind. The darkness visible to them is not visible to us. "But then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (KVJ- I Corinthians 13:12)

Only those who have suffered from depression can know the pressures and problems John endured.

Tragedy always leaves unanswered questions in our minds. None of us are exempt from the troubles of life. All of us are left with unanswered questions when these troubles come. Even people of faith who have the promises of God that all will be okay in the world to come cannot help experiencing anguish in this one; Christ himself was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. The Apostle Paul faced many troubles and unanswered questions. This is one reason he wrote I Corinthians 13:12. He uses the word "now" twice and the word "then" twice.

The word glass could also be translated as in the NIV, mirror. Mirrors in Paul's day were just a piece of polished metal. At best a mirror could give a distorted and obscure reflection. Paul was pointing out the limited vision we have in this life contrasted with the clear vision we will have in the life to come. He points out the limited knowledge we have in this life compared to the full knowledge we will have in the life to come.

When a tragedy like this happens, the first question that comes to us is "Why?" We can see no reason for it and we are overwhelmed by the mystery of it. Jesus himself asked this question on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

In this tragedy it seems as if God had forsaken John. John had given his life and energies to serving God. Why had God forsaken him? Why had God not taken away this darkness and despair? But God had not forsaken John. God was going through this tragic hour with John. God was where we could not be- He was in and with John during this tragic moment of death.

Only those who have suffered from depression can know the pressures and problems John endured. We don't know how many times he came to this precipice and walked away. We don't know how many battles he fought successfully before he lost this one.

Life puts more pressure on some than others.

Today we remember the good person that John was and all the good things he did with his life. These will not be blotted out nor forgotten by this one final tragic act. ■

Portions of a memorial sermon preached February 15, 2011, by Phil Lineberger, Senior Pastor of Sugar Land Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas in memory of John Petty, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Kerrville, Texas

On Befriending Your Own Death

By Bob Mulkey

In 1994, Henri Nouwen wrote a short book on dying and caring called ***Our Greatest Gift.*** Nouwen wrote it, he said, to befriend his own death and to help others befriend theirs. What he meant by "befriend" was overcoming fear and finding freedom to accept his own death as an inevitable part of his life. At the age of 62 he wrote, "The ten, twenty, or thirty years left to me will fly by quickly.

Gradually, my body will lose its strength, my mind its flexibility; I will lose family and friends; I will become less relevant to society and be forgotten by most; I will have to depend increasingly on the help of others; and, in the end, I will have to let go of everything and be carried into the completely unknown. Am I willing to make that journey? Am I willing to let go of whatever power I have left, to unclench my fists and trust in the grace hidden in complete powerlessness?"

Either we have already asked ourselves that question or will do so if we live long enough. What can help us to gracefully submit to aging and dying? Nouwen's answer is that a deep inner knowledge that we are God's children will keep death from having the power to take away our freedom. In the Bible, Paul expressed the experience of freedom this way: "I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power. . . will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:38,39).

So the first task in preparing ourselves for death is claiming the freedom of being dependent on God as His children. How do we know we are God's children? The promise of scripture is that God's Spirit will touch our spirits and confirm who we really are (Romans 8:15). Nouwen told a story to help us think of death in a new way:

"I think these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face. Don't you think that's exciting?"

Twins are talking to each other in the womb. The sister says to the brother, "I believe there is life after birth." Her brother protests, "No, this is all there is. It is dark and cozy here. Let's just cling to the cord that feeds us." The little girl insists, "There must be something more than this dark place. There must be a place with light and freedom to move." Her twin brother is not convinced. The sister says, "I'm afraid you won't believe this, either, but I think there is a mother." Her brother becomes furious. "A mother!" he shouts. "I have never seen a mother and neither have you." The sister is silenced by her brother's response till finally she says, "Don't you feel these squeezes once in a while? They're sometimes unpleasant and painful." "Yes," her brother says. "Well," she says, "I think these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face to face. Don't you think that's exciting?"

Henri Nouwen died unexpectedly in 1996 at the age of 64. He now has experienced what he called "the painful but blessed passage that will bring us face-to-face with God." ■

Christians: Fight Like Heaven

(continued from page 25)

have received from the hand of God and ensured by the Bill of Rights, take **responsibility** for exercising them wisely in a way that does not interfere with someone else's rights and then **respect** (not just tolerate, but respect) those who think differently and behave differently from how we do.

Here, too, lack of respect abounds. I can think of no better example than that of the Westboro Baptist Church and the Phelps family of a complete disregard for respect and civility and their rhetorical terrorism at a funeral of a fallen soldier. And standing up for their right to speak (of they did and said; but I respected their right to do it and say it.

This idea of telling the truth in love and fostering respect for our brothers and sisters can be summed up best by the Golden Rule, also in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 7:12) It has such broad appeal and resonates even with non-believers. It is fundamentally fair and commonly courteous no matter how you slice it. I have often spoken of a Golden Rule of religious liberty. It goes like this: I must not ask government to promote my religion, if I don't want government to promote someone else's religion; I must not allow government to harm someone else's religion, if I don't want government to harm my religion. I think is idea can be broadened beyond the vertical dynamic of church-state relations to address horizontal dimension of how we treat one another in our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our culture.

So what is it going to be? *E pluribus unum* or *e pluribus pluribus*? And shall we fight like Hell or like Heaven? It's up to us to show our culture a better way. Speak the truth, speak it in love and respect the rights of our fellow human beings. ■

J. Brent Walker is the Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs

Christians: Fight Like Heaven!

By J. Brent Walker

America – now populated by more than 310 million souls – is an astonishingly diverse country. From the very beginning, people have come from all over the world to live in this amazing parcel of real estate in North America. I want to talk some this morning about what it means to be an American, how we can learn to live together in the midst of our plush religious pluralism, and how we as Christians can set the example. First a little political science and then some theology.

The name of our country is a good place to start. The **United** States of America. This means at least that we come from 50 different states, but we are all unified in some sense of the word under the banner of America. The national motto says a lot – much like a mission statement. Our motto for two centuries has been *e pluribus unum*. From many, one. Despite all of our *pluribus* there is supposed to be a *unum* that holds us together. Our other national motto (since the 1950's) is a religious one: "In God **We** Trust." The "we" are supposed to find some semblance of unity in a common notion of the deity.

But, at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, we seem to have a lot more *pluribus* than *unum*. And we trust in many different gods, with 14 percent of the population saying they trust in no god at all. Yes, we seem to be deeply divided in our cultural attitudes, our understanding of religion and its proper place in the public sphere, and what it means to be American.

But let's put this into perspective. There has never really been a "golden era" of American unity — no *Pax Americana*, no national love-in — except here and there. [[Maybe the first eight years of our existence under leadership of George Washington, maybe the so called "Era of Good Feeling" during the Monroe Administration, perhaps during times of war when international events have forced us to stand together at our nation's shores. But, other than that,]] there have always been things for us to fight about, and we American have done a good job of it.

I want us to think some today about several big ideas of American democracy that we have a hard time coming together on.

We seem to be deeply divided in our cultural attitudes, our understanding of religion and its proper place in the public sphere, and what it means to be American.

The first one has to do with the desirable relationship between the federal government and the states. In fact, this was one of the major stumbling blocks at our nation's founding. We needed a stronger, more unified central government. But many, who had chafed under the British monarchy, were suspicious of too much governmental power at the top. This tension between the sovereignty of the states and the extent of the delegation of some of their powers to the federal government has informed our history at every turn. Almost any issue you can name has a federalism aspect to it, including the current health care litigation.

Another big question that continues to puzzle us is how in a democracy do we square the will of the majority with the rights of the minority? How do we resolve the tension between the fundamentally majoritarian Constitution with an essentially counter-majoritarian Bill of Rights? Although most of our elections and policy decisions are made by a majority vote, the rights listed in the Bill of Rights, as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has reminded us, have been withdrawn from the "vicissitudes of political controversy" and "depend on the outcome of no elections." Here cries of judicial activism often accompany attempts on part of courts to apply the Bill of Rights and charges of arrogance can be heard when decisions in the political branches seem to go against the will of the majority in order to ensure the rights of the minority.

The final big issue or tension I want to mention is the one between the two clauses of the First Amendment ensuring religious liberty – No Establishment and Free Exercise. Under these two clauses, government is not supposed to try to help religion or attempt to hurt religion, but leave it alone and be neutral toward religion allowing people to practice their religion, or not, as they choose with minimal interference. But when does the government stop protecting religion and start promoting religion? We will always disagree on where we draw these lines. These twin pillars of our constitutional architecture – No Establishment and Free Exercise – are there to protect religious freedom for all by upholding the wall of separation between church and state. But that great divide has always more resembled a chain link fence or a strand or two of barbed wire, than the Great Wall of China.

Yes, we will continue to disagree about these big issues that go to the very heart of our governmental system and political culture as Americans. If we had time we could catalogue a number of *specific* issues and political contests that every student of history is aware of.

It's OK to debate and to fight with words and nonviolent action; that's how a vital democracy operates. The real issue is **how** we are going to debate and fight. It may be too much to expect all American citizens to live up to the highest plane here, but I don't think it is too much to expect Christians and other people of faith to do so. We have an obligation to model how to conduct ourselves when tending to the affairs of our country — although we are sometimes the worst offenders!

Let me offer three ideas about how we can do this: some do's and don'ts if you please. What better place to look than the Sermon on the Mount to find marching orders?

First, we need to watch what we say. In Matt. 5:33-37, dealing with swearing an oath, Jesus is not engaging in a hair splitting debate about whether we should, like the Quakers, refuse to take an oath in court or, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, refuse to pledge allegiance to the flag. No, he's talking about weightier matters, like speaking plainly, directly and telling the truth. Yes is yes, and no is no; nothing more nothing less. Without neglecting proper attention to nuances and life's complexities, Jesus is teaching us to say what we mean and mean what we say. He doesn't want us to lie boldly nor does he want us to lie with shades of qualification and gloss. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no.

How many examples of this do we find in our public discourse today. Agree or disagree with President Obama and his policies, he is not a Marxist or even a socialist, was born in the United States of America **after** Hawaii became the 50th state and, the biggest lie of all, he is not a Muslim. He is a member of the United Church of Christ. And he's not in favor of imposing Sharia law in the U.S.

Recently, Rep. Peter King, in connection with his committee's hearings on "radicalization" of American Muslims, continued to assert that "80-85 percent of mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists," and that the mainstream of American Islam has not given "sufficient cooperation" to those fighting terrorism. To the contrary, empirical studies demonstrate that mosque attendance is closely associated with moderation and American values, and Leroy Baca, Los Angeles County sheriff, testified at the hearing that American Muslims play an indispensable role in law enforcement efforts to rein in terrorism.

As Christians we can debate our political opponents, but we cannot with clear conscience and with clean hands lie or even shade the truth.

As Christians we can debate our political opponents, but we cannot with clear conscience and with clean hands lie or even shade the truth. We are all entitled to our own opinions, but not to our own "facts."

Second, we must not only tell the truth, but we tell the truth in love. There's nothing wrong with speaking out forcefully; sometimes unvarnished honesty requires us to ruffle some feathers now and then. Truth with the bark on it. For goodness sakes, Jesus said some pretty hard-hitting things. But if we take seriously Jesus' teaching about loving in Matt. 5:43-45, what we say has to be bathed in love for the neighbor and enemy. It means at least giving them the right to be wrong and the freedom, within the bounds of the law, to pursue their conscience.

One of the biggest issues over the past 18 months has been the Muslim issue. Islamophobia is alive and well. It is going to get worse as we approach the 10th anniversary this year of 9/11. The loving act is to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Muslim brothers and sisters, while encouraging government to resist terrorism of all genres. We must not allow the terrible acts of a handful of terrorists poison our understanding of Islam and our treatment of Muslims across the board. The shooting and acts of violence in Tennessee, Kentucky and California are unconscionable; opposition to the development of the Park51project in Lower Manhattan is more understandable. But the community center is not to be built on ground zero. It is two blocks away and not even within sight. Local authorities from the city to the state have OK'ed the project even apart from religious freedom issues. Every indication is that Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf is a voice for reason and ecumenism.

Let me ask you this, how far would be far enough? Where do you draw the line? How about within blocks of the White House? Would that work? Let me read you President Eisenhower's remarks at the 1957 opening of the Islamic Center on Massachusetts Avenue, less than half a mile from the White House:

> I should like to assure you, my… friends, that under the American Constitution, under American tradition, and in American hearts, this [Islamic] Center, this place of worship, is just a welcome as could be a similar edifice of any other religion. Indeed, America would fight her whole strength for your right to have here your own worship center according to your own conscience. This concept is…a part of America, and without that concept we would be something else than what we are.

Yes, this is pre 9-11 but, again**,** the horrendous acts of a few should not prompt us to deny the full fledge religious freedom to the rest.

We don't lie about our political opponents, we love our neighbors and enemies and, **third**, we respect the rights of others to disagree with us and take responsibility for defending their right to be "wrong." In Matt. 5:21-22, Jesus condemns not only physical violence, but also angry and insulting words.

For almost quarter century now, we have talked about the three R's of civic life: rights, responsibility and respect. Briefly stated, it means that we should all exercise and enjoy the **rights** that we

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Faith Seeking Understanding: A Critique of Cone's Black Liberation Theology

by James Ellis III

Introduction

James H. Cone is a brilliant scholar and theologian. Without doubt his articulation of "black theology" has offered an invaluable, unique perspective of empowerment to black Christians. Nevertheless, all of Christendom has benefited from his work . Cone's critical analyses of white Christianity in America and its explicit, systemic oppression of blacks and other ethnic/racial minorities has played an essential role in contributing to the expansion of other self-affirming Christian theologies such as Latina women ("mujerista"), black women ("womanist"), and feminist liberation.[1] His work speaks truth to power on issues that should be of concern to all Christians. Along with colleagues Dwight N. Hopkins and others, Cone has put legitimate scholarly flesh on arguments against exclusivist notions that Christianity is best articulated by those in power.

Cone's work, as well as that of other contextual liberation theologians, often disturbs the collective conscious of white Christianity. In fact, that is much of its aim, or at least is an unashamed byproduct. The accuracy and appropriateness of Cone's theological claims will be debated for many years to come, and along the way there is an inevitable need to agree to disagree on certain points. But our cue must be taken from Ephesians 4:5, "one faith, one Lord, one baptism."

As a young, black minister and aspiring theologian of sorts, I intimately identify with the struggle of being black in America, not to mention being both black and Christian. Therefore, recognizing oppression, sympathizing with and caring for "the least of these" defines my dialogical journey. Jesus' admonition to be salt and light to an unseasoned, dark world undergirds much of Cone's work. At its core liberation theology is about dismantling top-down institutional structure and erecting a bottom-up paradigm of faith and learning. Black liberation theology in particular seeks to offer "a profound critique of white theology that does not yet recognize its whiteness."[2]

While I appreciate Cone's theology I also think that like any theological construct it has its shortcomings. We need honest analyses of both the pros and cons of Cone's theology. Therefore, it is my intention in this space to articulate Cone's black theology as related to whiteness, as well as reflect on some strengths and weaknesses of his viewpoints.

Black Theology According to James H. Cone

In the book of Amos we read of Yahweh's indictment of Israel for its arrogant presupposition that their relationship with God was exclusive and unconditional, that they could do whatever they wanted to whomever they wanted because they were the chosen people of God. There are echoes of that reality in the ledgers of American history. America may see itself as "the land of the free and the home of the brave" but it is also a land where ingrained, longstanding oppression has reigned supreme (and still does) similar to Amos' day. It is a land where top-down tyranny has been orchestrated mainly by white, powerful and oftentimes Christian men with severely distorted views of God and the Bible.[3]

James H. Cone has gone on the offensive and developed a theology that pushes back against those theological foundations. Theology has historically centered on white males interpreting Scripture from the ivory towers of academia, a position that racial, social, and economic privilege provided and that was maintained through tyranny. Cone's black theology then seeks to subjugate that disturbing reality, in essence to provide a correction to the wrongs that have been enacted on blacks by so-called Christian and white theologians. Cone's critique certainly has merit, as we see in these comments:

> When I think about my vocation, I go back to my childhood years in Bearden, Arkansas—a rural community of approximately 1,200 people. I do not remember Bearden for nostalgic reasons. In fact, I seldom return there in person, because of persistent racial tensions in my relations to the whites and lingering ambivalence in my feelings toward the blacks. I am not and do not wish to be Bearden's favorite son.[4]

Cone's theology stems from his formative experiences growing-up as a black man in Arkansas during the height of Jim Crow segregation, being subjected to the oppressive regime of white superiority, which permeated all facets of life. In this line of thinking blacks were inherently, irredeemably less than whites. This significantly influenced Cone's perspective as did his experience as a Ph.D. student during the 1960s at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and Northwestern University. According to Cone, "Christianity was seen as the white man's religion…I wanted to say: 'No! The Christian Gospel is not the white man's religion. It is a religion of liberation, a religion that says God created all people to be free.' But I realized that for black people to be free, they must first love their blackness."[5]

"The task of Black Theology then", as Cone articulates in his essay *A Black Theology of Liberation,* "is to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed black people—so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression."[6]

For Cone, Christianity must primarily be about the business of liberation, offering practical good news for the oppressed rather than undergirding the oppressor's euphoric state of Jubilee.[7] Like the Spanish proverb says, "I don't want the cheese, I just want to get out of the trap." Cone stresses that without liberation at its core Christianity can never be anything more than yet another symbol of white supremacy and exploitation.[8] This, of course, would render Jesus' message of unconditional love and salvific emancipation to *all* who humble themselves under him as a mere farce, making the Bible a sacred text that enslaves instead of liberates.

As far as Cone is concerned Jesus was black. "He *is* black because he *was* a Jew. The affirmation of the Black Christ can be understood when the significance of his past Jewishness is related dialectically to the significance of his present blackness."[9] Cone of course is arguing for an ontological affirmation of Jesus' blackness rather than an anthropological one. His thesis, as articulated in *God of the Oppressed* and other work, is that because Jesus identified with the oppressed and black people are, one might say, the poster-children for oppression in America—or as Cone articulates, Jesus' "elected poor in America"— then Jesus must be black. This is to say that Jesus' allegiance must almost exclusively be with black people by sheer virtue of their low social position.

The words of German liberation theologian Dorothee Sölle no doubt ring true for Cone: "In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner—there is no other option."[10] Cone views black theology as having arisen out of the basic human need for significance and worth. His theology is about black people affirming their blackness and their allegiance to Christ, as well as Christ's inherent allegiance with them in their oppression and persecution.[11] His perspective is that,

> White theologians' attitude toward black people in particular and the oppressed generally is hardly different from that of oppressors in any society. It is particularly similar to the religious leaders' attitude towards Jesus in first-century Palestine when he freely associated with the poor and outcasts and declared that the Kingdom of God is for those called "sinners" and not for priests and theologians or any of the self-designated righteous people.[12]

Cone is unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian, as goes the provocative motto of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. For Cone, the cross can only be properly understood through the lynching tree, as it relates to Jesus being a distinctly black messiah. Jesus was from an agrarian ghetto called Nazareth, and was unjustly prosecuted and executed by the oppressive Roman regime on behalf of the biased commentary of its religious (Jewish) elite. Jesus' efforts to uplift the poor and call oppressors to repentance and judgment were met with fear, fear at what his messianic revolution might mean for their privileged power structure. Blacks in America, Cone argues, are representative of a contemporary parallelism. Had Jesus been alive during Cone's lifetime Cone is thoroughly convinced that he would have been black, and with his rebellious, anti-establishment rhetoric in mind it is highly likely that he would have lynched during the turbulent Civil Rights era.

Cons to Cone's Black Theology

As indebted to him as I am for his distinct point of view, I do not believe that Cone's theology is the most appropriate means of articulating Jesus' incarnation to one's cultural context, particularly that black Christianity. No group has a monopoly on oppression. My contention with Cone's construct is that in the right hands it can quite easily transform into an *us* versus *them* theological boxing match, with blacks being *us* and whites being *them*. I concede, generally speaking, that a certain parallelism rings true between the lynchings of blacks and Jesus' crucifixion, yet I am unwilling to go as far with it as he does. In my estimation, it is not helpful to lift up blacks as the most oppressed of all of America's oppressed people. According to Cone, "No people are more religious than blacks. We are a spiritual people. We faithfully attend churches and other religious services, giving reverence and love to the One who called us into being...How long is it going to take for black people to get justice in America?"[13] It is precisely these and other statements that, for me, fail to promote constructive dialogue in the rich tapestry of faith, leading us into reconciliatory transformation with one another. Non-black Christians are also religiously faithful and yet oppressed in America as well. We all must give voice to the voiceless and fight for justice, but for the Christian that must be on behalf of all people, not only those who represent their particular race or ethnicity. Black people's oppressors are not white people, but rather *any* people who aim to enslave and exploit. Though he denounces exclusivist rhetoric that promotes a one-sided, racist agenda, in some ways Cone has perhaps been guilty of doing just that.

In *God of the Oppressed* Cone writes, "Christ's blackness is both literal and symbolic…The least in America are literally and symbolically present in black people."[14] Not so according to psalmist who reminds us, all were born in sin, shaped in iniquity. No matter our social position, Christ died for us insomuch as all. We are all one in Christ. Desmond Tutu seems to echo similar concern for Cone's black theology in this vain: "I worry, however, about some of Cone's exclusiveness—that, for instance, only the oppressed can form a genuine Christian *koinonia*."[15]

According to Cone, "The grounding of Christian ethics in the oppressed community means that the oppressor cannot decide what Christian behavior is."[16] I appreciate his critique, but it presupposes righteousness on the oppressed, which begs questions about who decides the qualifications for those descriptors—"oppressed" and "oppressor." What then does this mean for the non-oppressive white Christian; that he/she is incapable of responsibly representing Christ because of the inherited social privilege that their skin color provides or that doing so outside

of an ultra liberal theology is somehow less valuable before the Lord? What does it mean for the black Christian whose racialized social position renders him or her oppressed, but whose lifestyle and behavior nonetheless classifies them as an oppressor just the same? Are we to neglect that within all oppressed communities there exist those who also oppress? Furthermore, what do non-black minority Christians make of all of this? With Cone's grounding ethic of minority community, how are they to relate to the diverse cornucopia of fellow Christians that they encounter? Cone's black theology rests on a very slippery slope.

In recent years some scholars have challenged Cone's claims.[17] His ostensible aggression toward white America simply doesn't work for many Christians, black or white. In his work *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality* Michael Battle compares Cone's outlook on "black theology" with that of Desmond Tutu. Battle asserts that, for him, Cone "has a weak ecclesiology because in many ways his necessary Black Church continues to promulgate profane structures of racism."[18] Battle goes on to say:

> Tutu cannot abide by Cone's exclusivist rhetoric in which God's image is black or white…The difference between Tutu and Cone's theological approaches is that for Cone, blackness simultaneously symbolizes oppression and liberation in the Black Church, whereas for Tutu black identity represents the *imago Dei* in which God redeems white identity.[19]

If in fact theology is faith seeking understanding then we must continue to critique not only our theological premises, but also how we communicate them. Being proactive, with a strong sense of Christian love affirmed through the *imago Dei,* we are fully capable of developing theologies that affirm the experiences of racial and socioeconomic minorities that do not alienate Christians from other backgrounds.

Pros to Cone's Theology

Like many in his generation, the Civil Rights era served as Cones' catalyst in critiquing the hypocrisy of his faith in the arena of race relations. He sees God as requiring orthodoxy and orthopraxy from believers in order to holistically represent divine truth, indeed to be *the church,* the hands and feet of Jesus. This is a perspective that we desperately need to spread more in the church today, especially within American Christianity.

Among black Christians today it could be argued that "The American Dream" as defined by the dominant culture has now become the goal of life for many while the motto on the path of achievement is "by any means necessary." Sadly, all too often the church is simply a microcosm of the larger American culture. Nevertheless, the decidedly ethno-cultural "Christian" and "African American" or "black" values of faith, freedom and family that helped spur our divinely sanctioned emancipation in many ways have been abandoned. A good aspect of Cone's theology is its view that Christian life is to be one of counter-cultural empowerment and liberation, not celebration of dominant dysfunction. This is especially important in the church today due of the escalating popularity of the prosperity gospel which contends that God's children are to be financially prosperous.[20] This heresy contends that living a materialistically abundant life is the *way* of Jesus. It is what Cornel West described as "Constantinian Christianity."[21] This challenge to the successes of the Civil Rights movement[22] is clearly something that Cone is aware of and that he intends his theology to speak truth to:

> There are pimps in religion as there are on the streets in the black community. Far too many black preachers are more concerned about their personal interests than they are about the liberation of black people from white political oppression. Far too many church people are more concerned about erecting a new church building than they are about building a new black community so that all black children will, have a more humane place in which to live.[23]

According to Cone, "Black churches seem content with preaching sermons and singing songs about freedom, but few of them have made an institutional commitment to organize church life and work for the creation of freedom."[24] I agree, yet Cone's black theology, and all of its self-affirmation, has still struggled mightily for integration into many black churches. [25] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya found this to be true in a study that they conducted, which is elaborated on in *The Black Church in the African American Experience.* It showed that seminary-educated black clergy have been significantly impacted by black liberation theology, yet they only represent a minority of black pastors given their level of academic training.[26] Thus, most black pastors have not been exposed to or trained in the work of Cone and his liberationist colleagues.

An associate professor of sociology at the University of North Texas, George Yancey, like Tutu, provides a redemptive framework for black-white Christian relations that is helpful. He expounds on this in *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility:*

> In my attempt to find a Christian solution for racism, I am developing what I call a *mutual responsibility* model for racial reconciliation. It is a concept that takes seriously the Christian teaching of human depravity. Unlike the colorblindness and Anglo-conformity models, the mutual responsibility model does not ignore the historic and contemporary damage done to people of color by the majority. Unlike the multicultural and white responsibility models, it does not absolve minorities of responsibility.[27]

One's identity in Christ should be above classifications like race. Again, this doesn't allow us to simply ignore unjust power structures and exploitative practices by those who profess to be Christians. It does, however, point to the theological truth that believers ought to have Christ in common, at the very least, even while wrestling to respect and unite over their differences.

Conclusion

Cone's theology can be helpful when viewed properly, as *a* means not *the* means of interpretive self-actualization in the black Christian context, and even more generally. In his address to the Pan-African Conference in London, England in 1903 W.E.B. DuBois lamented that, "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."[28] Cone's black theology represents the inherent truth in DuBois' prophetic statement. What really upsets Cone is "the appalling silence of white theologians on racism in the United States and the modern world." [29]

Cone seeks to hold white Christians and theologians accountable for their many atrocities committed against blacks under the guise of biblical orthodoxy. I agree with him that, "To create an antiracist theology, White theologians must engage the histories, cultures and theologies of people of color. It is not enough to condemn racism. The voices of people of color must be found in your theology."[30] This is a valid concern and deserves to be heard.

With that said, however, blacks are no more pious, righteous, or *spiritual* than anyone else, nor are we a monolithic group devoid of deep diversity of opinion and experience. We sin. We oppress. We exploit. When given the opportunity just like anyone else we will selfishly embrace oppression. Therefore, while I sincerely appreciate its intention, a theology like Cone's is problematic for me because in some ways it promotes cultural elitism with him seeing his way as the *only* way to salvation for white America, which flies in the face of Scripture.

Sin is an equal opportunity employer, forever corrupting the hearts, minds, and souls of us all in the same ways. I do not feel that my faith gives me the latitude to force white America to see things my way, as if I always have the most informed perspective because I am a minority. Surely being white in America means being systematically exposed to institutional graces and opportunities that one has not necessarily earned, but it also means at times being unfairly viewed by others as the root cause of everything bad; a position that is as immature as it is inaccurate. For Christians especially, white cannot be synonymous with evil nor black with good, or vice-versa. That sort of rhetoric has no place in the kingdom of God. Satan can show up in a black body as readily as a white one. Devoid of consecration before God we are all tasty fodder for Satan's bidding.

Black people, let alone black Christians are not a monolithic group who embrace the same so-called "black" ideologies. Much like the rest of America, we are a cosmopolitan mix of people with different traditions, interests, and tolerances. According to Yancey, "With the mutual responsibility model, we look to Christian faith to overcome the effects of human depravity in race relations. We work to develop racial relationship based on our reconciliation with God."[31] Christianity offers hope to *all* people and in our theological pursuits we must seek to never sway from that foundation of vulnerability and sacrificial love, indeed because Christ is risen. ■

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All referenced footnotes are available in the online version of this paper available at www.christianethicstoday.com

ETHIXBYTES:

"It's the easiest thing in the world to know God's will. You just wait and see what happens, and that's it." ■ **Meyer**

"Security is so tight here (in Washington, D.C.) that if Jesus himself returned in all his glory, he wouldn't get very far (since he's of Middle Eastern descent). His legions of angels – with lyre and harp – would have to wait around in the parking lot until officials finally released him, after realizing he has a Hispanic name." ■ **Ed Spivey, Jr.** in *A Hamster is Missing in Washington, D.C.*

"Ten thousand river commissions with the mines of the world at their back, cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, 'Go here," or "Go there," and make it obey...{We} might as well bully the comets in their courses and undertake to make them behave, as try to bully the Mississippi into right and reasonable conduct." ■ **Mark Twain**

Book Reviews

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

"WHAT WOULD BONHOEFFER SAY?"

by Al Staggs, Parson's Porch Books, Cleveland, Tennessee, 2011

A review by Darold Morgan

For years across the nation in churches, colleges, and conferences Al Staggs has performed his original one-man play, "The Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer" (and of course, a number of others as well). Add to this, Staggs' talent in poetry and you have a man whose dynamic contribution to a penetrating Christian overview of genuine proportions. What he has done in this small paperback volume is to call very strong attention to Bonhoeffer's words as applied to contemporary church settings and problems. These brief chapters are hard-hitting and will ruffle many a Baptist feather in their ethical bluntness.

His pattern is simple: a brief quotation from Bonhoeffer's writings as it pertains to some of the most pressing ethical problems of our day. Then comes Staggs' unequivocal application of these words to the specific area of concern, buttressed with timely quotations from strong sources such as Elie Wiesel, Robert McAfee Brown, Clarence Jordan, Rauschenbusch, Oscar Romo, and others. Mingled with these applications are some very powerful poetical lines from Staggs as well as observations from his personal pilgrimage which constitute some deep insights of his own struggles with these issues.

Staggs combines Bonheoffer's words with such current dilemmas as worldwide poverty, the increasing disparity of wealth, the critical problems of politics (particularly related to the religious right), the environmental issues, the imbalances in church finances, the peculiar messages from television evangelists. Involved also is the ongoing issue of Bonhoeffer's involvement with Hitler's Germany and the hypocrisy of the German Church during these unspeakable days of suffering. Staggs also mandates a fresh look at the Holocaust in the light of a nascent anti-Semitism. These are weighty issues with strong ethical challenges in all directions.

So what we have is a wild ride of reading in this small book which forces us to face once again ethical issues which are strangely and strongly contemporary despite the passage of time and history. It is a book well worth reading. You will be moved by Staggs' style. His poetry is well worth the price involved. Be prepared to be either offended by some of his applications or challenged to rethink yours! ■

"Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*"

by Martin E. Marty Princeton University, 2011

A Review by Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, Cape Town

Martin Marty's biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's widely acclaimed Letters and Papers from Prison is riveting. It was difficult to put it down. Under Marty's assured direction we are led on a fascinating journey from a Nazi prison cell to the then-East and West Germany, the rest of Europe, the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia to learn how this book meant so many and such different things to its varied audiences. We come away from Marty's opus thankful and exhilarated: deeply thankful that Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law Bethge preserved these 'letters and papers,' and exhilarated to discover yet again how God's deep reverence for our creaturely autonomy and integrity allows for such different apprehensions of the eruption of the divine. We are therefore enormously indebted to Marty for this biography. ■

The Space Between Church and Not Church: A Sacramental Vision for the Healing of our Planet

By Caroline Fairless

Hamilton Books, 2011

Reviewed by Clark Reichert, Pastor of Cedar Key United Methodist Church

When our American society thinks about the living world that surrounds them it is invariably in human-centric terms. We are rapacious users of the creation for wealth, recreation, even as a source of personal validation. At our best, persons may identify themselves as faithful stewards of the natural world. They may engage in helpful and beneficial activities like picking up trash along the roadside or cleaning up the beach. They might recycle, construct compost heaps, even drive a super-high-mileage car but even the kindliest of gestures proffered to our suffering ecosystems are merely that, gestures.

Ms. Fairless poses an argument that the entire way that we view our world is destructive and will ultimately lead to the abuse of the natural order even for persons with the best of intentions. The supposition that we humans are one thing and the natural world is something else has led us to understand creation as an object that is valuable relative to its usefulness to humanity.

The creation and the circular relationships therein are important unto themselves, not as resources. Humanity must recognize its place within this order, not apart from it, if we are to recover our right and righteous place within it. This is the "biocentric" view espoused by Fairless, that humans are not consumers or benefactors of the created order but are an interdependent part of it.

Unfortunately, Western culture carries much baggage that would deny this truth. Our systems tend towards hierarchy rather than co-dependence, everything from our interpersonal relationships to our governing bodies to our religious doctrine. Before we can begin to repair our orientation toward the created order we must first deconstruct the oppressive one that we are heir to.

The heritage of the church can help. Although Biblical language and thought is undeniably part of the system that oppresses the natural order (Genesis 1:28), forms of Christianity can be recovered that give expression to mutuality and codependence that, in truth, define all of the communities of the earth. Myth, sacrament, sacred ritual, and recognition of mystery are the tools. All of these become the voice of a "deep knowing," an innate sense of the connection between humankind and all of the good creation that bears the image of the creator. Although the church has assumed possession of sacrament and sacred ritual and has prescribed their forms and seasons, they belong to all who desire to experience the divine in our midst and to participate in the divine life.

If this smacks a bit of Pelagianism it is by design. For Fairless, the encounter with the divine is not a matter of external revelation but a matter of recovery of that relationship which has always existed but was forgotten. This position is the key to our ability to turn our relationship with the environment around. We must invest in the idea that we are part of a community of the earth with animate and inanimate members, each having sacred worth. Loving the world is not an exercise of one who sits above the natural order and dispenses management and conservation but one who loves the creation "from within" the system, as part of the system.

Fairless is right. The way that Western Civilization tends to treat the environment is cold and calculating. Our conservation efforts are geared toward maintaining the natural world as a storehouse of goods for our later use. We raise huge sums of money to save "glamour" species while ignoring the less showy but more important creatures that are facing extinction every day. There must be a fundamental change in persons' outlook that they may discard this terrible narcissism and begin to view the world and our place in it rightly and lovingly.

The book is well written. The subject matter is timely and vital. Ms. Fairless uses an impressive repertoire of devotional sources ranging from early Christian writings to modern poetry to Sufi mysticism. Indeed, the book read like a devotional book with the chapters broken up into smaller essays. This was not helpful to me. It encouraged me to put the book down frequently, which I did. My maleness got in the way, too. There is so much good science that reinforces the arguments that Ms. Fairless advanced, it would have been nice to hear some instead of all the sentimentality.

I am disappointed that Ms. Fairless could not find a place in her vision of the healing of the planet for the church beyond the appropriation of its forms. I feel that she threw the baby out with the bathwater. Ancient Christianity was not necessarily hierarchical in its earliest forms but exercised collaborative leadership and mutuality, some of the very fixes that the author calls for. Although the biblical witness has a strong strain of human dominance over the created order, there is also that of the restored and sanctified creation under the rule of God (Rev. 21:22f). Maybe it is me that is overly sentimental. ■

The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community

By Jesse Rice David C. Cook Publishers, 2009

Reviewed by Aubrey Ducker, layperson at College Park Baptist Church, Orlando FL

We live online today. Who we are depends largely on where we meet. If you and I meet at my office, I am an attorney. If we meet at church, I am an outspoken missionary supporting Baptist. If we meet at my son's school, I am an energetic volunteer in the concession stand. But, if we meet on *Facebook*, then I am a charming, intellectually stimulating, adventurer who sees every sunrise or sunset as beauty and seldom fails to brighten your day. Of course many things online are not as they seem. People and businesses routinely exaggerate their activities and importance online. *Amazon.com* years ago proved brick and mortar stores are unnecessary to establish a retail giant.

The Church of Facebook explores the use of online tools to connect not only to friends, but as a means of reaching out to the unevangelized or unchurched. The emphasis is not simply "How can churches use the Internet or World Wide Web to advance the cause of Christ?"; but more importantly, how does your online persona reflect Christ, or repel non-Christians?

Being on *Facebook* for several years, I have gotten many critically important messages that might have taken days to spread to larger populations: "Jeremy got hit by a softball at the church game Saturday and is in a coma at the Hospital, please Pray!"; "I'll be in town this weekend, who wants to go to the game?"; "See you Sunday; don't forget the Upward Luncheon."

Recently I received the following message: "Be Careful on here! I just blocked a friend request from a Wiccan!" My "friend" went on to describe his concerns. Unfortunately, one of his other "friends" who identifies as a 2nd Degree Wiccan, was somewhat offended. The posts in response ran the gamut from "How will they hear", to "OMG the Devil is running rampant." I only wish I were making this one up.

If your church wants to reach anyone under 45, read…no STUDY… this book. The powerful insights into online marketing as well as electronic manipulation of message will open up an internet world of free advertising and more importantly, witness. Our children and grandchildren use Facebook to plan parties, dates, hang-

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

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- 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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