

Christian Ethics Today

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

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Presidential Politics in the New South

Patrick Anderson, editor

I am a southerner -- born, bred, educated, and domiciled. I have been in many other places, both in this country and others, but my accent and worldview betray a deep southern bent. I was raised in a segregated world, educated in all-white schools, worshipped in all-white churches, ate in all-white restaurants, waited in all-white waiting rooms, drank at all-white fountains, swam in all-white public swimming pools, was policed by all-white police departments, and otherwise lived in a surreal world apart. The first African-American student matriculated at Furman University during my junior year there. I had a lot of catching up to do as a young adult.

I can remember seeing KKK cross burnings as I traveled throughout the south as a college student in the 1960s. As recently as 1986, as my family and I were moving to Louisiana to join the faculty at Louisiana State University, we drove past a cow field with smoldering crosses from the previous night's Klan rally in Tangipahoa Parish.

Today we live in what we call the "new south". Legal segregation has slipped into history. The Klan moved west to populate white supremacy

compounds where they feel safe from the black (and other) people they fear. In Mississippi, a black state trooper can write a speeding ticket for a white motorist.

But memories can be long. Fear is fear. In the states of the old Confederacy, race is at the heart of virtually every political issue. Whereas my childhood memories are

We southerners kid ourselves if we do not face up to the fact that much of the rhetoric and vitriol directed toward President Obama has racial overtones.

mostly of isolation from persons of different races, black folk have deep memories of violence and injustice and, for many, those memories are recent.

This presidential election political year centers in the south as this issue of *Christian Ethics Today* goes into the mail. We southerners kid

ourselves if we do not face up to the fact that much of the rhetoric and vitriol directed toward President Obama has racial overtones. The nonsensical attacks are not only a southern phenomenon to be sure. We remember that the birther issue has no more vehement spokesperson than the Yankee, Donald Trump. Loud politicians, and not a few loud southern pastors, depict Obama as "other," "non-patriotic," "Muslim," "not like us," "bent on destroying America." But my southern ears hear all of that rhetoric as racial in nature.

I see in President Obama a quintessential American man, a family man, a Christian, a devoted advocate of justice, a lover of this country, an educated person, a wise and knowledgeable man. I have not agreed with each and every action (or lack of action) he has taken as president, as I am sure is the same for you.

But when someone seeking to take his job or to otherwise unseat him does so by claiming that President Obama, my president, is un-American, anti-Christian, a foreigner... well, this southern boy wonders what in the world we have come to, and where in the world we are headed. ■

Your financial support of *Christian Ethics Today* is very important. We depend on gifts from our readers. As Bill Moyers said in our last issue: "Look upon these pages as you would a campfire around which we gather to share our life experiences -- the stories, ideals, and hopes unique to our understanding of faith. **Then imagine what we lose if the fire goes out.**" Please help us keep the fire burning.

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Our Politicians Are Money Launderers in the Trafficking of Power and Policy

By: Bill Moyers

Comments Delivered at the Public Citizen 40th Gala, October 20, 2011
Washington, DC

I am honored to share this occasion with you. No one beyond your collegial inner circle appreciates more than I do what you have stood for over these 40 years, or is more aware of the battles you have fought, the victories you have won, and the passion for democracy that still courses through your veins. The great progressive of a century ago, Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin – a Republican, by the way – believed that “Democracy is a life; and involves constant struggle.” Democracy has been your life for four decades now, and would have been even more imperiled today if you had not stayed the course.

I began my public journalism the same year you began your public advocacy, in 1971. Our paths often paralleled and sometimes crossed. Over these 40 years journalism for me has been a continuing course in adult education, and I came early on to consider the work you do as part of the curriculum – an open seminar on how government works – and for whom. Your muckraking investigations – into money and politics, corporate behavior, lobbying, regulatory oversight, public health and safety, openness in government, and consumer protection, among others – are models of accuracy and integrity. They drive home to journalists that while it is important to cover the news, it is more important to uncover the news. As one of my mentors said, “News is what people want to keep hidden; everything else is publicity.” And when a student asked the journalist and historian Richard Reeves for his definition of “real news”, he answered: “The

news you and I need to keep our freedoms.” You keep reminding us how crucial that news is to democracy. And when the watchdogs of the press have fallen silent, your vigilant growls have told us something’s up.

So I’m here as both citizen and journalist to thank you for all you have done, to salute you for keeping the faith, and to implore you to fight on during the crisis of hope that now grips our country. The great American experience in creating a different future together – this “voluntary union for the common good” – has been flummoxed by a growing sense of political impotence – what the historian Lawrence Goodwyn has described as a mass resignation of people who believe “the dogma of democracy” on a superficial public level but who no longer believe it privately. There has been, he says, a decline in what people think they have a political right to aspire to – a decline of individual self-respect on the part of millions of Americans.

You can understand why. We hold elections, knowing they are unlikely to produce the policies favored by the majority of Americans. We speak, we write, we advocate – and those in power turn deaf ears and blind eyes to our deepest aspirations. We petition, plead, and even pray – yet the earth that is our commons, which should be passed on in good condition to coming generations, continues to be despoiled. We invoke the strain in our national DNA that attests to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” as the produce of political equality – yet private wealth multiplies as public goods are beggared. And the property qualifications for federal office that the framers of the Constitution expressly feared as an unseemly “veneration for wealth” are now openly in force;

the common denominator of public office, even for our judges, is a common deference to cash.

So if belief in the “the dogma of democracy” seems only skin deep, there are reasons for it. During the prairie revolt that swept the Great Plains a century after the Constitution was ratified, the populist orator Mary Elizabeth Lease exclaimed: “Wall Street owns the country... Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags. The [political] parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us... Money rules.”

That was 1890. Those agrarian populists boiled over with anger that corporations, banks, and government were ganging up to deprive every day people of their livelihood.

She should see us now.

John Boehner calls on the bankers, holds out his cup, and offers them total obeisance from the House majority if only they fill it.

That’s now the norm, and they get away with it. GOP once again means Guardians of Privilege.

Barack Obama criticizes bankers as “fat cats”, then invites them to dine at a pricey New York restaurant where the tasting menu runs to \$195 a person.

That’s now the norm, and they get away with it. The President has raised more money from banks, hedge funds, and private equity managers than any Republican candidate, including Mitt Romney. Inch by inch he has conceded ground to them while espousing populist rhetoric that his very actions betray.

Let’s name this for what it is: hypocrisy made worse, the further perversion of democracy. Democratic deviancy defined further downward. Our politicians are little more than money launderers in the trafficking

of power and policy – fewer than six degrees of separation from the spirit and tactics of Tony Soprano.

Why New York's Zuccotti Park is filled with people is no mystery. Reporters keep scratching their heads and asking: "Why are you here?" But it's clear they are occupying Wall Street because Wall Street has occupied the country. And that's why in public places across the country workaday Americans are standing up in solidarity. Did you see the sign a woman was carrying at a fraternal march in Iowa the other day? It read: "I can't afford to buy a politician so I bought this sign."

We know what all this money buys. Americans have learned the hard way that when rich organizations and wealthy individuals shower Washington with millions in campaign contributions, they get what they want. They know that if you don't contribute to their campaigns or spend generously on lobbying,

...you pick up a disproportionate share of America's tax bill. You pay higher prices for a broad range of products from peanuts to prescriptions. You pay taxes that others in a similar situation have been excused from paying. You're compelled to abide by laws while others are granted immunity from them. You must pay debts that you incur while others do not. You're barred from writing off on your tax returns some of the money spent on necessities while others deduct the cost of their entertainment. You must run your business by one set of rules, while the government creates another set for your competitors... In contrast the fortunate few who contribute to the right politicians and hire the right lobbyists enjoy all the benefits of their special status. Make a bad business deal; the government bails them out. If they want to hire workers at below market wages, the government provides the means to do so. If they want more time to pay their debts, the government gives them an extension. If they want immunity from certain laws, the

government gives it. If they want to ignore rules their competition must comply with, the government gives it approval. If they want to kill legislation that is intended for the public, it gets killed.

I didn't crib that litany from Public Citizen's muckraking investigations over the years, although I could have. Nor did I lift it from *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx or Mao Tse-tung's *Little Red Book*. No, I was literally quoting *Time Magazine*, long a tribune of America's establishment media. From the bosom of mainstream media comes the bald, spare, and damning conclusion: We now have "government for the few at the

Did you see the sign a woman was carrying at a fraternal march in Iowa the other day? It read: "I can't afford to buy a politician so I bought this sign."

expense of the many."

But let me call another witness from the pro-business and capitalist-friendly press. In the middle of the last decade – four years before the Great Collapse of 2008 – the editors of *The Economist* warned:

A growing body of evidence suggests that the meritocratic ideal is in trouble in America. Income inequality is growing to levels not seen since the (first) Gilded Age. But social mobility is not increasing at anything like the same pace... Everywhere you look in modern America – in the Hollywood Hills or the canyons of Wall Street, in the Nashville recording studios or the clapboard houses of Cambridge, Massachusetts – you see elites mastering the art of perpetuating themselves. America is increasingly looking like imperial Britain, with dynastic ties proliferating, social circles interlocking, mechanisms of

social exclusion strengthening, and a gap widening between the people who make decisions and shape the culture and the vast majority of working stiffs.

Hear the editors of *The Economist*: "The United States is on its way to becoming a European-style class-based society."

Can you imagine what would happen if I had said that on PBS? Mitch McConnell and John Boehner would put Elmo and Big Bird under house arrest. Come to think of it, I did say it on PBS back when Karl Rove was president, and there was indeed hell to pay. You would have thought Che Guevara had run his motorcycle across the White House lawn. But I wasn't quoting from a radical or even liberal manifesto. I was quoting – to repeat – one of the business world's most respected journals. It is the editors of the *The Economist* who are warning us that "The United States is on its way to becoming a European-style class-based society."

And that was well before our financiers, drunk with greed and high on the illusions and conceits of *laissez faire* ("leave us alone") fundamentalism, and humored by rented politicians who do their bidding, brought America to the edge of the abyss and our middle class to its knees.

How could it be? How could this happen in the country whose framers spoke of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the same breath as political equality? Democracy wasn't meant to produce a class-ridden society. When that son of French aristocracy Alexander de Tocqueville traveled through the bustling young America of the 1830s, nothing struck him with greater force than "the equality of conditions." Tocqueville knew first-hand the vast divisions between the wealth and poverty of Europe, where kings and feudal lords took what they wanted and left peasants the crumbs. But Americans, he wrote,

"...seemed to be remarkably equal economically...Some were richer, some were poorer, but within a comparative narrow

band. Moreover, individuals had opportunities to better their economic circumstances over the course of a lifetime, and just about everyone [except of course slaves and Indians] seemed to be striving for that goal.”

Tocqueville looked closely, and said: “I easily perceive the enormous influence that this primary fact exercises on the workings of the society.”

And so it does. Evidence abounds that large inequalities undermine community life, reduces trust among citizens, and increases violence. In one major study from data collected over 30 years [by the epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in their book: *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*] the most consistent predictor of mental illness, infant mortality, educational achievements, teenage births, homicides, and incarceration, is economic inequality. And as Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow has written, “Vast inequalities of income weakens a society’s sense of mutual concern... The sense that we are all members of the social order is vital to the meaning of civilization.”

The historian Gordon Wood won the Pulitzer Prize for his book on *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*: If you haven’t read it, now’s the time. Wood says that our nation discovered its greatness “by creating a prosperous free society belonging to obscure people with their workaday concerns and their pecuniary pursuits of happiness.” This democracy, he said, changed the lives “of hitherto neglected and despised masses of common laboring people.”

Those words moved me when I read them. They moved me because Henry and Ruby Moyers were “common laboring people.” My father dropped out of the fourth grade and never returned to school because his family needed him to pick cotton to help make ends meet. Mother managed to finish the eighth grade before she followed him into the fields. They were tenant farmers when the Great Depression knocked them down and

almost out. The year I was born my father was making \$2 a day working on the highway to Oklahoma City. He never took home more than \$100 a week in his working life, and made that only when he joined the union in the last job he held. I was one of the poorest white kids in town, but in many respects I was the equal of my friend who was the daughter of the richest man in town. I went to good public schools, had use of a good public library, played sand-lot baseball in a good public park, and traveled far on good public roads with good public facilities to a good public university. Because these public goods were there for us, I never thought of myself as poor.

Evidence abounds that large inequalities undermine community life, reduces trust among citizens, and increases violence.

When I began to piece the story together years later, I came to realize that people like the Moyers had been included in the American deal: “We, the People” included us.

It’s heartbreaking to see what has become of that bargain. These days it’s every man for himself; may be the richest and most ruthless predators win!

How did this happen?

You know the story, because it begins the very same year that you began your public advocacy and I began my public journalism. 1971 was a seminal year.

On March 29 of that year, Ralph Nader bought ads in 13 publications and sent out letters asking people if they would invest their talents, skills, and yes, their lives, in working for the public interest. The seed sprouted swiftly that spring: By the end of May over 60,000 Americans responded, and Public Citizen was born.

But something else was also happening. Five months later, on August 23, 1971, a corporate lawyer named Lewis Powell – a board member of the death-dealing tobacco giant Philip Morris and a future Justice of the United States Supreme Court – sent a confidential memorandum to his friends at the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. We look back on it now as a call to arms for class war waged from the top down.

Let’s recall the context: Big Business was being forced to clean up its act. It was bad enough to corporate interests that Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal had sustained its momentum through Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. Suddenly this young lawyer named Ralph Nader arrived on the scene, arousing consumers with articles, speeches, and above all, an expose of the automobile industry, *Unsafe at Any Speed*. Young activists flocked to work with him on health, environmental, and economic concerns. Congress was moved to act. Even Republicans signed on. In 1970 President Richard Nixon put his signature on the National Environmental Policy Act and named a White House Council to promote environmental quality. A few months later millions of Americans turned out for Earth Day. Nixon then agreed to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Congress acted swiftly to pass tough new amendments to the Clean Air Act and the EPA announced the first air pollution standards. There were new regulations directed at lead paint and pesticides. Corporations were no longer getting away with murder.

And Lewis Powell was shocked – shocked! – at what he called “an attack on the American free enterprise system.” Not just from a few “extremists of the left,” he said, but also from “perfectly respectable elements of society,” including the media, politicians, and leading intellectuals. Fight back, and fight back hard, he urged his compatriots. Build a movement. Set speakers loose across the

country. Take on prominent institutions of public opinion – especially the universities, the media, and the courts. Keep television programs under “constant surveillance.” And above all, recognize that political power must be “assiduously (sic) cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination” and “without embarrassment.”

Powell imagined the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as a council of war. Since business executives had “little stomach for hard-nose contest with their critics” and “little skill in effective intellectual and philosophical debate,” they should create new think tanks, legal foundations, and front groups of every stripe. It would take years, but these groups could, he said, be aligned into a united front (that) would only come about through “careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and united organizations.”

You have to admit it was a brilliant strategy. Although Powell may not have seen it at the time, he was pointing America toward plutocracy, where political power is derived from the wealthy and controlled by the wealthy to protect their wealth. As the only countervailing power to private greed and power, democracy could no longer be tolerated.

While Nader’s recruitment of citizens to champion democracy was open for all to see – depended, in fact, on public participation – Powell’s memo was for certain eyes only, those with the means and will to answer his call to arms. The public wouldn’t learn of the memo until after Nixon appointed Powell to the Supreme Court and the enterprising reporter Jack Anderson obtained a copy, writing that it may have been the reason for Powell’s appointment.

By then his document had circulated widely in corporate

suites. Within two years the board of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce formed a task force of 40 business executives – from U.S. Steel, GE, GM, Phillips Petroleum, 3M, Amway, and ABC and CBS (two media companies, we should note). Their assignment was to coordinate the crusade, put Powell’s recommendations into effect, and push the corporate agenda. Powell had set in motion a revolt of the rich. As the historian Kim Phillips-Fein subsequently wrote, “Many who read the memo cited it afterward as inspiration for their political choices.”

Those choices came soon. The National Association of Manufacturers announced it was

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moving its main offices from New York to Washington. In 1971, only 175 firms had registered lobbyists in the capital; by 1982, nearly twenty-five hundred did. Corporate PACs increased from under 300 in 1976 to over twelve hundred by the middle of the 1980s. From Powell’s impetus came the Business Roundtable, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Manhattan Institute, Citizens for a Sound Economy (precursor to what we now know as Americans for Prosperity) and other organizations united in pushing back against political equality and shared prosperity.* They triggered an economic transformation that would in time touch every aspect of our lives.

Powell’s memo was delivered to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at its headquarters across from the White House on land that was formerly the home of Daniel Webster. That

couldn’t have been more appropriate. History was coming full circle at 1615 H Street. Webster is remembered largely as the most eloquent orator in America during his years as Senator from Massachusetts and Secretary of State under three presidents in the years leading up to the Civil War. He was also the leading spokesman for banking and industry nabobs who funded his extravagant tastes in wine, boats, and mistresses. Some of them came to his relief when he couldn’t cover his debts wholly from bribes or the sale of diplomatic posts for personal gain. Webster apparently regarded the merchants and bankers of Boston’s State Street Corporation – one of the country’s first financial holding companies – very much as George W. Bush regarded the high rollers he called “my base.” The great orator even sent a famous letter to financiers requesting retainers from them that he might better serve them. The historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wondered how the American people could follow Webster “through hell or high water when he would not lead unless someone made up a purse for him.”

No wonder the U.S. Chamber of Commerce feels right at home with the landmark designation of its headquarters. 1615 H Street now masterminds the laundering of multimillions of dollars raised from captains of industry and private wealth to finance – secretly – the political mercenaries who fight the class war in their behalf.

Even as the Chamber was doubling its membership and tripling its budget in response to Lewis Powell’s manifesto, the coalition got another powerful jolt of adrenalin from the wealthy right-winger who had served as Nixon’s secretary of the treasury, William Simon. His polemic entitled *A Time for Truth* argued that “funds generated by business” must “rush by multimillions” into conservative causes to uproot the institutions and “the heretical strategy” [his term] of the New Deal. He called on “men of action in the capitalist world” to

mount “a veritable crusade” against progressive America. *Business Week* magazine somberly explained that “...it will be a bitter pill for many Americans to swallow the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more.”

I’m not making this up.

And so it came to pass; came to pass despite your heroic efforts and those of other kindred citizens; came to pass because those “men of action in the capitalist world” were not content with their wealth just to buy more homes, more cars, more planes, more vacations and more gizmos than anyone else. They were determined to buy more democracy than anyone else. And they succeeded beyond their own expectations. After their 40-year “veritable crusade” against our institutions, laws and regulations – against the ideas, norms and beliefs that helped to create America’s iconic middle class – the Gilded Age is back with a vengeance.

You know these things, of course, because you’ve been up against that “veritable crusade” all these years. But if you want to see the story pulled together in one compelling narrative, read this – perhaps the best book on politics of the last two years: *Winner Take All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*. Two accomplished political scientists wrote it: Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson – the Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson of political science, who wanted to know how America had turned into a society starkly divided into winners and losers.

Mystified by what happened to the notion of “shared prosperity” that marked the years after World War II;

puzzled that over the last generation more and more wealth has gone to the rich and superrich, while middle-class and working people are left barely hanging on;

vexed that hedge-fund managers pulling down billions can pay a lower tax rate than their pedicurists, manicurists, cleaning ladies and chauffeurs;

curious as to why politicians keep

slashing taxes on the very rich even as they grow richer, and how corporations keep being handed huge tax breaks and subsidies even as they fire hundreds of thousands of workers;

troubled that the heart of the American Dream – upward mobility – seems to have stopped beating;

astounded that the United States now leads in the competition for the gold medal for inequality;

and **dumbfounded** that all this could happen in a democracy whose politicians are supposed to serve the greatest good for the greatest number, and must regularly face the judgment of citizens at the polls if they haven’t done so;

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson

Most of the wealth is concentrated at the top while the bottom grows larger and larger with everyone in between just barely getting by.

wanted to find out “how our economy stopped working to provide prosperity and security for the broad middle class.” They wanted to know: “Who dunnit?”

They found the culprit: “It’s the politics, stupid!” Tracing the clues back to that “unseen revolution” of the 1970s – the revolt triggered by Lewis Powell, fired up by William Simon, and fueled by rich corporations and wealthy individuals – they found that “Step by step and debate by debate America’s public officials have rewritten the rules of American politics and the American economy in ways that have benefitted the few at the expense of the many.”

There you have it: they bought off the gatekeepers, got inside, and gamed the system. And when the fix was in, they let loose the animal spirits, turning our economy into a feast for predators. And they won – as the rich and powerful got

richer and more powerful – they not only bought the government, they “saddled Americans with greater debt, tore new holes in the safety net, and imposed broad financial risks on workers, investors, and taxpayers.”

Until – write Hacker and Pierson – “The United States is looking more and more like the capitalist oligarchies of Brazil, Mexico, and Russia where most of the wealth is concentrated at the top while the bottom grows larger and larger with everyone in between just barely getting by.”

The revolt of the plutocrats has now been ratified by the Supreme Court in its notorious *Citizens United* decision last year. Rarely have so few imposed such damage on so many. When five pro-corporate conservative justices gave “artificial entities” the same rights of “free speech” as living, breathing human beings, they told our corporate sovereigns “the sky’s the limit” when it comes to their pouring money into political campaigns. The Roberts Court embodies the legacy of pro-corporate bias in justices determined to prevent democracy from acting as a brake on excessive greed and power in the private sector. Wealth acquired under capitalism is in and of itself no enemy of democracy, but wealth armed with political power – power to shake off opportunities for others to rise – is a proven danger. Thomas Jefferson had hoped that “we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and [to] bid defiance to the laws of our country.” James Madison feared that the “spirit of speculation” would lead to “a government operating by corrupt influence, substituting the motive of private interest in place of public duty.”

Jefferson and Madison didn’t live to see reactionary justices fulfill their worst fears. In 1886 a conservative court conferred the divine gift of life on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Never mind that the Fourteenth Amendment declaring that no person should be deprived

of “life, liberty or property without due process of law” was enacted to protect the rights of freed slaves. The Court decided to give the same rights of “personhood” to corporations that possessed neither a body to be kicked nor a soul to be damned. For over half a century the Court acted to protect the privileged. It gutted the Sherman Antitrust Act by finding a loophole for a sugar trust. It killed a New York state law limiting working hours. Likewise, a ban against child labor. It wiped out a law that set minimum wages for women. And so on: one decision after another aimed at laws promoting the general welfare.” The Roberts Court has picked up the mantle: Moneyed interests first, the public interest second, if at all.

The ink was hardly dry on the *Citizens United* decision when the U.S. Chamber of Commerce organized a covertly funded front and rained drones packed with cash into the 2010 campaigns. According to the Sunlight Foundation, corporate front groups spent \$126 million in the fall of 2010 while hiding the identities of the donors. Another corporate cover group – the American Action Network – spent over \$26 million of undisclosed corporate money in just six Senate races and 26 House elections. And Karl Rove’s groups – American Crossroads/Crossroads GPS – seized on *Citizens United* to raise and spend at least \$38 million that NBC News said came from “a small circle of extremely wealthy Wall Street hedge fund and private equity moguls” – all determined to water down financial reforms designed to prevent another collapse of the financial system. Jim Hightower has said it well: Today’s proponents of corporate plutocracy “have simply elevated money itself above votes, establishing cold, hard cash as the real coin of political power.”

No wonder so many Americans have felt that sense of political impotence that the historian Lawrence Goodwyn described as “the mass

resignation” of people who believe in the “dogma of democracy” on a superficial public level but whose hearts no longer burn with the conviction that they are part of the deal. Against such odds, discouragement comes easily.

But if the generations before us had given up, slaves would still be waiting on these tables, on Election Day women would still be turned away from the voting booths, and workers would still be committing a crime if they organized.

So once again: Take heart from the past and don’t ever count the people out. During the last quarter of the 19th century, the industrial revolution created extraordinary wealth at the top and excruciating misery at the bottom. Embattled citizens rose up. Into their hearts, wrote the progressive Kansas journalist William Allen White, “had come a sense that their civilization needed recasting, that their government had fallen into the hands of self-seekers, that a new relation should be established between the haves and have-nots.” Not content to wring their hands and cry “Woe is us” everyday citizens researched the issues, organized to educate their neighbors, held rallies, made speeches, petitioned and canvassed, marched and marched again. They ploughed the fields and planted the seeds – sometimes in bloody soil – that twentieth century leaders used to restore “the general welfare” as a pillar of American democracy. They laid down the now-endangered markers of a civilized society: legally ordained minimum wages, child labor laws, workmen’s safety and compensation laws, pure foods and safe drugs, Social Security, Medicare, and rules that promote competitive markets over monopolies and cartels. Remember: Democracy doesn’t begin at the top; it begins at the bottom, when flesh-and-blood human beings fight to rekindle the patriot’s dream.

The Patriot’s Dream? Arlo Guthrie, remember? He wrote could be the unofficial anthem of Zuccotti Park. Listen up:

*Living now here but for fortune
Placed by fate’s mysterious schemes
Who’d believe that we’re the ones
asked
To try to rekindle the patriot’s
dreams*

*Arise sweet destiny, time runs short
All of your patience has heard their
retort
Hear us now for alone we can’t seem
To try to rekindle the patriot’s
dreams*

*Can you hear the words being whis-
pered
All along the American stream
Tyrants freed the just are imprisoned
Try to rekindle the patriot’s dreams*

*Ah but perhaps too much is being
asked of too few
You and your children with nothing
to do
Hear us now for alone we can’t seem
To try to rekindle the patriot’s
dreams*

Who, in these cynical times, when democracy is on the ropes and the blows of great wealth pound and pound and pound again against America’s body politic – who would dream such a radical thing?

Look around.

*Thanks to Charlie Cray for a succinct analysis of the Powell memo and to Jim Hoggan for calling attention to it more recently. ■

Bill Moyers is a special friend of Christian Ethics Today, a “lifetime subscriber,” contributor, and supporter. He is well known as for his work on Public Television and other venues. His new hour long weekly show, called “Moyers & Company,” will focus on one-on-one interviews with people not often heard on television, “thinkers who can help us understand the chaos of this time.” This address is published here with his permission.

America the Exceptional

by Brian McLaren

What does it mean to be exceptional?

Most people have to worry about making enemies. You know, they're constantly freaked out that they might offend somebody or hurt somebody's precious feelings. But I don't worry about that. I'm exceptional. Other people in my family worry about everyone getting their fair share at the dinner table. They might really like mashed potatoes or lasagna, but they only take a normal small portion so that their sister or grandmother or cousin can have some too. But I don't worry about those sorts of things. After all, I'm exceptional. I take as much as I want.

When you're an exceptional nation, you want other nations to worry about your opinion of them. You don't really care what their opinion is of you. When you're a run-of-the-mill country, you'll be nervous about going against the United Nations or the Geneva Conventions or the International Criminal Court and such, but when you're an exceptional country, that sort of concern is beneath your dignity. You set expectations; you don't fulfill them. Of course, with exceptional status comes exceptional responsibility, so we have the sole responsibility to drop nuclear bombs on nations that cause problems for the world—unexceptional nations, that is, which means everybody else but us. It's a tough job, being exceptional, but somebody has to do it.

Between now and the elections in November, my guess is we're going to hear the term "American exceptionalism" echoing from the mountains to the prairies to the oceans white with foam; echoing ad nauseum. It's become a powerful political meme in recent years, popular but poorly defined. The history of the term aids and abets in its vagueness.

Thomas Jefferson repeatedly spoke

of the United States as a unique—or exceptional—historical phenomenon. As a democratic republic, it differed from Europe, and all the nations of the past. Since then, of course, scores of nations have followed our example in forming democratic republics, so what was exceptional in Jefferson's time has now, we might say, become the norm. Does that make us "the nation formerly known as exceptional," but now typical?

Alexis de Tocqueville, perhaps the best-loved (and certainly the most-quoted) Frenchman in U.S. history, also detailed certain features

The first historical record of the precise term "American exceptionalism" actually comes (this is embarrassing) from Joseph Stalin.

in which the U.S. was exceptional. But they're not exactly the attributes candidates are referring to today. For example, he said that Americans were so focused on making money that they didn't pay attention to "science, literature, and the arts" as Europeans did, yet somehow Americans had so far avoided "relapsing into barbarism." (He spoke before the era of TV shows such as *Married with Children* and *Jersey Shore*.) Our preoccupation with money even made Americans disregard religion, he said, except "from time to time," when we shoot "a transient and distracted glance to heaven." This money-focused turn of character, de Tocqueville concluded, made America exceptional—but not in an exemplary way.

The first historical record of the precise term "American exceptionalism" actually comes (this is embarrassing) from Joseph Stalin, who complained that American Communists thought themselves an exception to the normal rules of Marxist economic evolution. They were guilty, he said, of "the heresy of American exceptionalism."

Between de Tocqueville and Stalin, the idea of American exceptionalism became deeply associated with the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, the idea that God had chosen Americans, as God chose the ancient Israelites, for a special divine purpose on Earth. This belief was based on a passage in the Book of *Genesis*:

And the Lord said to Abraham, I will bless you and make your name great. I will make you a great nation and all nations will submit to your exceptional status. They will kow-tow to your interests, submit to your invasions, and defer to your economic policies. You will act unilaterally and lead, not cooperate with, unexceptional nations. You will use and abuse the alien and stranger among you as you please, for they are not my chosen people blessed by manifest destiny. And if other nations curse you by failing to acknowledge your exceptional status, you will smite them in my name. For I am the Lord who shows favoritism to whom he will, and you are my chosen people.

Oops! That is not *Genesis* 12—but it might as well have been, based on projects and attitudes promoted *via* the doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

In our lifetime, President Obama paid muted homage to the doctrine, saying he believed in it the same way "the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." Sarah Palin (not surprisingly) wasn't satisfied: "... which is

to say he doesn't believe in American exceptionalism at all. He seems to think it is just a kind of irrational prejudice in favor of our way of life. To me that is appalling."

What appalled Palin, apparently, was that President Obama failed to defend the "prejudice in favor of our way of life" as a rational one, which raises the question of what she means by "our way of life." I doubt she means what de Tocqueville meant or what Stalin meant.

In a September 2011 speech at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie seemed to agree with Palin—to a degree. He defined the term as meaning, "... we are different and, yes, better." But then he raised a warning: "Unfortunately, through our own domestic political conduct of late, we have failed to live up to our own tradition of exceptionalism. Today, our role and ability to effect change has been diminished because of our own problems and our inability to effectively deal with them ..."

He returned to the theme later in his speech: "Today, the biggest challenge we must meet is the one we present to ourselves. To not become a nation that places entitlement ahead of accomplishment. To not become a country that places comfortable lies ahead of difficult truths. To not become a people that thinks so little of ourselves that we demand no sacrifice from each other. We are a better people than that; and we must demand a better nation than that."

The question raised by Christie's words is, of course, "Of whom do we demand a better nation?" For many, the answer will be their party or their candidate. But the only realistic answer would be that we demand of ourselves the commitment to face the challenges Christie named—to put accomplishment ahead of entitlement (including the entitlements associated with being an exceptional nation), to face the difficult truths about ourselves, our past, and our future (including truths about the ways we have been negatively exceptional and not exceptional at all),

and to demand sacrifice of each other ... and so to be better people and a better nation.

It is one thing to strive to become a better nation—better than we have been in the past, and better than we are at this moment. It's a very different thing to assume we already are better than all other nations in all important ways. The former describes a vibrant and hopeful nation; the latter an arrogant and self-deceived one. And that difference should be in our minds each time we hear the term "American exceptionalism" echoing across the fruited plain.

In what ways do we want to be exceptional—not in the sense of being different for difference's sake, and certainly not in the sense of being granted exceptions to normal standards of decency, but in the sense of being

In what ways do we want to lead? Resource consumption and environmental irresponsibility? Wealth inequality, incarceration rates, and capital punishment?

exemplary? In what ways do we want to lead?

Would we like to lead in resource consumption and environmental irresponsibility? Would we like to lead in wealth inequality, incarceration rates, and capital punishment? Would we like to lead in political polarization and partisan brinksmanship? Would we like to lead in unmitigated unsustainability—whether in the realm of national debt, personal debt, or environmental degradation? Would we like to lead in our refusal to demand sacrifices of the rich while demanding sacrifices of the poor and middle class? Would we like to lead military expenditures, drone strikes, weapons sales, toppled regimes, and occupations?

Next to nobody really wants to be

exceptional in any of these ways.

At our best moments—whether we're Brits or Greeks or Argentines or Papua New Guineans or Americans—the kind of exceptionalism we really want is not arrogant superiority. What we want is to be a good and distinct people, the best possible version of ourselves, not merely fulfilling (and exploiting) some national myth of manifest destiny, but instead creating a national legacy for our children and grandchildren, a great nation among other great nations, through wisdom, justice, freedom, compassion, and action.

And that, I think, is the only kind of exceptionalism that is theologically justified.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the idea of being chosen or exceptional is highly problematic. It was used to justify horrific acts (see *Deuteronomy* 7:1-5). But even in the same disturbing passages that command behavior we would call genocidal, God goes out of God's way to remind the people that they were not chosen for their size or superiority, but for their smallness and weakness (*Deuteronomy* 7:6-7). God warns them not to "exalt themselves" in times of plenty. He commands them to remember that every blessing they will ever enjoy is a gift of God—not an attainment of their "power and the might of [their] own right hand" (8:12-18).

Even more striking, just as they are reminded that "the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples," they are further reminded that because God "loves the strangers ... You shall also love the strangers" (10:15-19).

And if the chosen people are tempted to presume upon their status, throughout *Deuteronomy* God solemnly promises them that their exceptionalism is conditional. If they don't fulfill the responsibilities (including caring for the poor—*Deuteronomy* 15) that go along with blessings they have received, their blessings will turn into curses (28:15 ff). The choice is theirs (30:11 ff).

So it turns out that President Obama had it right: People can feel exceptional without being exclusive about it, as the prophet Amos similarly affirms: “Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?” (9:7).

In the New Testament, Paul challenges the whole idea of seeking the first place. Don’t think more highly of yourselves than you should, he says, “but have sober judgment” (*Romans* 12:3). “Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves” (*Philippians* 2:2-3). It’s hard to imagine that on a bumper sticker: “We’re Not Number One!” Our example isn’t the emperor (or a contemporary poli-

tician) who claws his way to the top: It’s the Lord who serves his way to the bottom (2:5 ff). There is the paradoxical exceptionalism of the Kingdom of God, as Christ commanded: *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Chosen One came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (*Matthew* 20:25-28).

In an election year like this one, subtle choices are being made in addition to the obvious ones. We’re not only choosing who will next lead our nation; we’re also choosing what kind of nation our next president will lead: a nation more in the tradition of “the rulers of the Gentiles,” or one more in line with the way of Jesus. Mediocre

or excellent, arrogantly superior or humbly exemplary, exceptional in domination or exceptional in service, exceptionally regressive or exceptionally eager to “excel in doing good”—we are choosing not just whether or not to continue a historical tradition of “American exceptionalism,” but more important, what kind of exceptionalism is worth desiring in the America of the future. ■

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Legacy Of Liberty

By Joseph L. Conn

The Rev. John Leland has some advice for American voters: When you go to the polls, avoid candidates who wear their personal piety on their sleeves.

“Guard against those men who make a great noise about religion in choosing representatives,” observed Leland. “It is electioneering intrigue. If they knew the nature and worth of religion, they would not debauch it to such shameful purposes. If pure religion is the criterion to [decide upon] candidates, those who make a noise about it must be rejected; for their wrangle about it proves that they are void of it. Let honesty, talents and quick dispatch characterize the men of your choice.”

Leland’s wise counsel could have been delivered this year. In fact, it was part of an Independence Day oration he gave July 5, 1802, in Cheshire, Mass. Leland, a minister and staunch religious liberty advocate, held forth

that day on the importance of defending the Constitution.

“Be always jealous of your liberty, your rights,” he thundered. “Nip the first bud of intrusion on your Constitution.... Never promote men

The Baptist preacher insisted that religion is hurt more by government favor than it is by government oppression.

who seek after a state-established religion; it is spiritual tyranny the worst of despotism.”

In the pantheon of American heroes of religious liberty, Leland is often unjustly overlooked. He shouldn’t be. And since this year

marks the 250th anniversary of his birth, it’s an appropriate time to recall his contribution to freedom of conscience.

Born in Grafton, Mass., on May 14, 1754, Leland left the Congregationalism of his youth to become an itinerant Baptist preacher. After visiting Virginia in 1775, he and his wife Sally moved to that state, and he soon became a prominent figure in both religious and political life.

Leland served as a member of the Baptists’ “General Committee,” a group formed in 1784 to agitate for religious liberty. He and other dissenting clergy fought alongside James Madison and Thomas Jefferson in the battle to overturn Virginia’s established Anglican Church and ensure equal rights for all.

Leland believed that government interference with matters of faith corrupted religion and violated individual freedom. According to scholar Edwin

Gaustad, Leland declared that persecution, inquisition and martyrdom all derived from one single “rotten nest-egg, which is always hatching vipers: I mean the principle of intruding the laws of men into the Kingdom of Christ.”

The Baptist preacher insisted that religion is hurt more by government favor than it is by government oppression. Experience has informed us, he wrote, that “the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than persecutions ever did.”

Observed Leland, “Persecution, like a lion, tears the saints to death, but leaves Christianity pure; state establishment of religion, like a bear, hugs the saints but corrupts Christianity.”

Leland took these deeply held views into the political arena and helped win civil liberties we still enjoy today.

“The Baptists played a large part in securing religious freedom and the abolition of the State-Church in Virginia,” writes historian Anson Phelps Stokes in his *Church and State in the United States*, “and Leland was their most effective advocate.”

Thanks to the leadership of Enlightenment thinkers such as Madison and Jefferson and the grassroots organizing of devout believers such as Leland, Virginia in 1786 adopted Jefferson’s Statute for Religious Freedom. That monumental measure served as the guidestar for other states as they too adopted religious liberty, and it paved the way for the religious liberty guarantees in the U.S. Constitution.

Leland played an important role in securing the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was first submitted to the states in 1787, many in Virginia and other states criticized the absence of a Bill of Rights. Leland and other Baptists were particularly angry that this draft of the Constitution included no guarantee of religious freedom, and they joined the rising chorus of opposition.

In an Aug. 8, 1789, letter to President George Washington writ-

ten by Leland, the Baptists’ General Committee said its members feared that “liberty of conscience, dearer to us than property or life, was not sufficiently secured.”

Recognizing that the states might not ratify the proposed national charter unless these concerns were met, Madison assured Leland and his co-religionists that he would work to add a Bill of Rights if they would support ratification. The deal was accepted. Virginia ratified the Constitution, and Madison kept his promise. The First Amendment he helped craft forbids the government to make any law “respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

In 1791, Leland moved back to Massachusetts, where he continued his religious and political work.

***“Government,” he said,
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In a pamphlet called *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, he railed against government interference in religion.

“Government,” he said, “has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics. Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse, or loss of property, for his religious opinions.... [I]f his doctrine is false, it will be confuted, and if it is true, (though ever so novel,) let others credit it.”

A firm Democratic-Republican

in Federalist Massachusetts, Leland supported Jefferson’s candidacy for president in 1800. After his old ally was elected, the Baptist minister came up with a unique way to celebrate the occasion. On New Year’s Day, 1802, Leland showed up at the White House with a 1,325-pound wheel of cheese, the product of 900 cows. A placard that accompanied the tribute on its way down from Cheshire proclaimed it, “The Greatest Cheese in America for the Greatest Man in America!”

Jefferson was delighted with the Baptists’ gift, and fragments of the cheese were reportedly still being served at his table in 1804 (although one guest declared them “very far from good”).

The U.S. Constitution and the presidential policies of Jefferson and Madison protected religious freedom at the national level, but at that time, states remained free to impose restrictions. Leland continued to lobby for full religious freedom everywhere, attacking religious establishments in his own state as well as neighboring Connecticut.

In 1820 in his *Short Essays on Government*, Leland demanded church-state separation and equal rights for all.

“Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another,” he wrote. “The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence; whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians.”

Leland’s views finally prevailed. In 1831, the Massachusetts legislature approved the separation of church and state, and two years later it was overwhelmingly ratified by popular vote.

Leland died on Jan. 14, 1841. The epitaph on his tombstone, which he composed, reflects the passions of his life: “Here lies the body of John Leland, who labored 67 years to pro-

mote piety, and vindicate the civil and religious rights of all men.”

In *Revolution Within The Revolution*, church historian William R. Estep says, “The order of these phrases is significant, indicating that Leland considered himself first and foremost a minister of the gospel and only secondarily a political activist.”

Whatever his priorities, Leland was a relentless friend of liberty and a church-state separation purist. He opposed Sunday laws, all special privi-

leges for the clergy and any government aid to religion. He said Baptists did not want the “mischievous dagger” of government help. In 1788, he introduced a resolution at the Baptists’ General Committee meeting in Virginia denouncing slavery as “a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government” and urging the use of “every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land.”

Thus it is a shame that Leland’s

inspirational life and noble work are nearly unknown to the general public today. The Virginia Baptist Historical Society (which provided assistance with this article) still celebrates Leland, but few people outside progressive Baptist circles know about him. At a time when television preachers and misguided politicians rail against church-state separation and individual freedom, a bracing sermon from Leland is very much in order. ■

To Serve One’s Fellows

By James A Langley

To be or not to be, that is not the question;
To serve one’s fellows is the highest consideration,
Love for God the spring and safeguard of selfless service,
Across the generations the goal of the God-fearing,
Inspired by all in that Realm we trust we are nearing,
In service the Master calls us from exclusivity
To aid widows and orphans, and the least of humanity;
To live and gladly give, as ordained, in the common cause,
With compassion for all as neighbors made in God’s image,
Very sure that one day our Judge will bear the divine visage,
For this we were born, not to be served, but to serve others,
Not to be as islands, but living as sisters and brothers,
Wise legislatures will support, not hinder, such with their laws.

The Jews, Eschatology and Christian Zionism

By Tony Campolo

It's strange that some Christians can be anti-Semitic, given that they worship a Jew and that Judaism provides the foundation for their beliefs. Add to that the fact that all of Christ's disciples were Jews.

The Roman Catholic Church attempted to justify anti-Semitism by claiming that Jews were responsible for crucifying Jesus—when in reality He was sentenced to death by a Roman ruler and nailed to the cross by Roman soldiers. It only has been of late that the Roman Church has admitted the evil of blaming the Jews for the death of the Christian savior. It is amazing that it took the papacy so long to acknowledge this, considering that, according to their teachings, the first pope was Jewish.

The Protestant tradition has not fared any better when it comes to anti-Semitism. Reading through some of the things that Martin Luther wrote about Jews is enough to turn the stomach of any person who senses that Christ called his followers to live out love and justice. Nevertheless, Christians have no difficulty, in spite of their long history of anti-Semitism, in declaring the Jews to be "God's Chosen People." Adding to the ambivalent attitude of many Christians toward Jews is the very special place that the Jewish "land of promise" holds in Christian prophecy. The role that the Holy Land plays is crucial in the eschatology of many Christians and, consequently, has had profound effects as Christians have influenced our nation's policies in the Middle East.

In the First Place:

Perhaps the greatest influence upon our government's actions in the Holy Land, and specifically upon the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, comes from that segment of the fundamentalist Christian community that adheres to a particular theology invented by a nineteenth-century renegade Anglican priest in Plymouth, England, named John Nelson Darby. This particular theology

is called dispensationalism, and if you want to know more, a good brief history is Barbara Rossing's *The Rapture Exposed* (2004). Although Darby was a Johnny-come-lately to Protestant theological thinking, (i.e., there's no hint of dispensationalism is Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli or John Calvin) his intricate interpretation of Scripture has become so dominant among fundamentalist Christians that dispensationalism and fundamentalism have almost become synonymous within American Christianity.

Key to understanding the dispensationalists is recognizing their awareness that all the promises made to Israel by God have not been fulfilled. The Hebrew prophets had predicted that the Jews would one day come to live everlastingly in a land marked by social and economic well-being (Isaiah 65:17-25). Those of the Diaspora would be returned to the land promised to the seed of Abraham (Genesis 15:18), and all nations would look to Israel with hope for a better world. Only then, dispensationalists believe, would the second coming of Christ occur (see Craig C. Hill, *In God's Time*, 2002).

Most dispensationalists argue that prior to Christ's second coming, all non-Jews would have to vacate the Holy Land, and those who refuse to leave willingly would have to be driven out. A discussion I had with a prominent dispensationalist preacher during a radio interview highlighted the extremism that exists in the dispensationalist community. The preacher told me that if the Arab people who presently live in the Holy Land refuse to leave, they will have to be killed.

When I exclaimed that this would be nothing short of ethnic cleansing, he answered, without hesitation, "Well, wasn't ethnic cleansing what God ordered when the Jews invaded the Holy Land under Joshua?"

I tried to remind this radio preacher that the Arabs were also the seed of

Abraham via Ishmael and, according to his understanding of Genesis 15:18, they are just as entitled to live in the Holy Land as the Jews. Furthermore, I pointed out, the land promised to the seed of Abraham reaches from the Euphrates River to the Nile—which would mean wiping out Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. But nothing I said in any way swayed him from his horrific declarations.

Given this kind of thinking, it is easy to understand why dispensationalists provide the primary impetus for the growth of the Christian Zionist movement, which is much more of a threat to the implementation of President Bush's peace plan than even the most extremist Jewish Zionists.

For instance, when Ariel Sharon, a former prime minister of Israel, tried to clear out Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip in anticipation of the creation of a Palestinian state, dispensationalists were furious because they were convinced that Sharon was giving away land that God had ordained for the Jews. At one point, Pat Robertson, a rabid dispensationalist, actually suggested that the stroke Sharon suffered was God's judgment on him for withdrawing the settlements. In the future, dispensationalists will continue to throw up barriers to any attempt at a two-state solution to the struggles of the peoples living in Palestine.

The popularity of dispensationalism among fundamentalists can be traced to the early 1900s, when Oxford University Press published the Scofield Reference Study Bible. This particular version of the King James translation of the Bible provided footnotes at the bottom of each page that interpreted the Scriptures in accord with Darby's dispensationalist theology. Over the years, Scofield Reference Bibles have been sold to millions of Christians and have been used by countless fundamentalist preachers and Sunday school teachers as they preach and teach. dispensationalism has been taught in

scores of seminaries and Bible colleges, all during the 20th century and up to the present time. As of late, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins have made this same theology very popular among a huge segment of the Christian population via the publication of their immensely popular *Left Behind* books. To date, as many as 50 million copies of the books in this series—which incorporates dispensationalist theology into adventure novels—have been bought by Americans.

At first glance, Christian Zionists with their dispensationalist theology would appear to be the best friends that Jewish Zionists ever had. One of the most prominent among them, television evangelist John Hagee, has been especially friendly toward Israel. He has declared to his huge following over and over again that, according to the Bible, the Holy Land must belong to the Jews *exclusively* (John Hagee, *From Daniel to Doomsday*, 1999). To this end, he, along with another famous televangelist, Pat Robertson, has been a strong supporter of the State of Israel and has raised millions of dollars to finance the Jews of the Diaspora to return to the Holy Land. Some Jewish Zionists, however, are wary of the overtures of such dispensationalists because they know that these preachers claim that those Jews who do not accept Christ as their Messiah and Savior will ultimately be condemned to Hell.

In the Second Place:

A second perspective on Jews' right to occupy the Holy Land is an exact opposite of that which is held by dispensationalists. It is an eschatology that recognizes no special role for the Jews and the State of Israel. This is a view held by a variety of Christians in the Protestant community, along with most Roman Catholic thinkers, who believe that the only hope for the salvation of the Jewish people lies in their being incorporated into the Christian community by accepting Christ as their Messiah. They believe that only by trusting in the saving work of Christ, through His death and resurrection, can Jews inherit eternal life. Picking up on what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10 and 11, they declare that the Jews

have had their chance to be the special chosen people of God. Because they did not accept Christ as their Messiah, they have, in the Apostle Paul's words, been "cut off," and a "new branch"—the Church, (composed of peoples from all ethnic groups,) has been grafted into their place. The Church, they contend, is the new Israel. The Jews, they say, can be "saved," but only by becoming part of this new Israel.

Those who are of this persuasion say that there is no need any longer to define a specialness about the Jewish people, nor do they see any need for the Jews to occupy the Holy Land as a precondition to Christ's return.

In the Third Place:

There is still another perspective on Jews' place in the Holy Land espoused by many Christians, and especially many in the Calvinist tradition. These are Christians who affirm what has been called a "covenant theology." According to these Christians, God can be counted on to keep His word and uphold His covenants. They believe, therefore, that what God promised to the Jews will one day be delivered. Since God promised the Jews salvation in the covenants made with them in ancient days of Israel, these Christians believe that evangelizing the Jews is unnecessary (see Robert McAfee Brown, *Saying Yes and Saying No*, 1986). What God promised for the salvation of the Jews, they claim, still stands, and insofar as the Jews live out the prescriptions of the Torah and the Prophets according to their own religious tradition, God's salvation will be theirs.

Fourth, and Finally:

What is generally accepted among most Christians is that there is something *very* special about the Jews, and they feel indebted to them in that the Hebrew Scriptures are a major part of their Bible, and that it was from the Jews that their Savior came. Furthermore, most Christians believe that the Jews deserve a homeland after having endured the Holocaust and a long history of persecution through the centuries before it. To them it seems

that having a land that they can call their own is something that is due to the Jewish peoples. Add to this the antipathy that has grown up toward Muslims in general, and to Arab Muslims in particular, since September 11, (see Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, 2002) and it is easy to understand why Christians have overwhelmingly sided with the struggle of the Israelis to establish for themselves a homeland with secure borders.

Among most American Christians there is a commonly held belief that Israel is the main outpost of democracy in the Middle East and is a partner in standing against the religio-political forces of that region that threaten the wellbeing of the western world. The Jews, therefore, can count on support for the State of Israel from most Christians into the foreseeable future. Each and every candidate vying for the presidency of our country had better be declared as being pro-Israel if votes are to be gleaned, not only from the Jewish community, but also from the vastly larger Christian population. This does not mean that anti-Semitism has disappeared among Christians, but it does give evidence that most Christians in America see the survival of the State of Israel in their own self-interest. It remains to be seen as to whether, in the days that lie ahead, these same Christians might trade support of Israel for the huge supply of oil that Arab nations can make available to them. Jews have been betrayed before by those who claimed to be their friends. If I were Jewish, I would be a little nervous about this recent support that Christians provided for the State of Israel. ■

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A Possible Solution to the Israeli and Palestinian Conflict

By Dennis Sansom

There are many ways to characterize the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians—the three major wars, the two intifadas, the borders clashes, conflict over water, the political rights and lack of, etc. I was at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute of Jerusalem from the end of January to the beginning of May, 2011. Though the place and people are incredibly complex, I think a model of peace exists in Israel.

On March 23rd, I was returning on a bus with about 30 people from Tantur from two days at Mount Sinai in the Egyptian desert to the desert town of Mitzpe Ramon, Negev desert of southern Israel. About 30 miles from Ramon, Israeli soldiers stopped us with a roadblock with no explanation. After about an hour, we were released and made our way to Ramon. There we heard that missiles had been fired out of the Gaza Strip, most likely by Hamas, about 40 miles to the west, aimed for Israeli school buses.

The next day, we headed up to Jerusalem but were stopped again. A bomb had gone off at a bus stop near the Old City, killing a woman (a Scottish University student). After about two hours, they opened the roads, and we drove back through Jerusalem to Tantur.

The whole country was on edge. Thirteen days earlier, a family of five had been stabbed to death in the Jewish settlement of Itamar. Three were young children and the three-month old baby was decapitated. A nation-wide manhunt went out for Palestinian terrorists. Eventually two teenage boys from the nearby Palestinian village of Awarta, associated with the terrorist group Al-Asqa Martyrs, were arrested. They confessed, gloating of their accomplishments, vowing to do it again if ever released.

Most Israelis live in fear of another

intifada, and in fact, due to the changing political relationships with the Obama Administration, Turkey, and the European Union, the Israelis are more fearful than ever.

From our back door we look upon the infamous checkpoint 300, the entry from the old Hebron highway into Bethlehem. Over the four months at Tantur, I crossed the checkpoint probably two dozen times to go to various places and events in Bethlehem. One Friday morning, Beverly, my wife, asked me to walk with her into Bethlehem so that she could join a group at Bethlehem College discussing issues in English literacy. On my way back, I came by the 25-foot-tall cement wall, which imprisons Bethlehem into the West Bank.

As I neared the checkpoint, designed to resemble a prison house, I noticed 100s of men lined up to leave the West Bank for Jerusalem. I realized it was Friday, prayer time at the Al-Asqa Mosque. Israel allows a certain number of Palestinian Muslims to leave the West Bank to make the four-mile trek to the Haram al-Sharif (“The Noble Sanctuary”), where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is located; but to do so, they must have official papers issued by Israeli police. The line was long and slow. The men were anxious and pushy. I was the only Westerner in the line and, while I did not feel threatened, I felt I was definitely in their way. They were eager to get to the Mosque by the allotted prayer time, and the young Israeli guards at the four check points in the station deliberately, it seemed, made the process slow. Men were leaning on me and cutting in front of me, as I sensed their desire to move through and make it to the Mosque.

On March 31st, I made the journey to Hebron to visit the Shrines of Abraham and Sarah. Hebron is a vibrant Palestinian, Muslim city of

about 50,000 people with a Jewish settlement in its center. It was a moving pilgrimage to the shrines of the patriarchs and matriarchs, visiting both the synagogue, built on top of an impressive Herodian wall, and the mosque where the horrible massacre committed by an American Jew turned Zionist militant occurred in 1994. On the way back to Tantur, we stopped at the Tent of the Nations. It is a plot of land on a hilltop owned by the Palestinian, Christian family, the Nassers. They have legal documents of ownership dating back to 1916 when their grandfather bought it and registered it with the Turk, who occupied the territory at the time. It is surrounded by Jewish settlements, who want to take the Nassars’ land for more settlements. The Jewish settlers insist the land belongs to them, because God had given it to them when Abraham, 4000 years earlier, settled there, and they have tried every way possible, save killing the family, to force them off their land. The Nassar family refuses to leave, reduced to living in tents below the ground level, and their cause has become internationally known, and thousands of people yearly come there to work and camp to express solidarity with their plight against the settlers. The Nassars pledge nonviolence and use what donations are given to work through the legal process to secure their family land. But the nearby settlements keep encroaching.

Inger and Kjell Jonasson, who work for the Swedish Lutheran Church, aiding the World Council of Churches’ assistance to Palestinians in the West Bank told us about Palestinians they had known over the years who had died in their 50s due to heart-attacks, especially men who were fathers and husbands. These men had seen the Israelis build the wall in the middle of their family land, taking their heritage and liveli-

hood away from them. They were separated from family members and from their family cemeteries and, because they were considered threats to the Israelis, were not given papers to cross into Israel. The grief and humiliation became too much for them, and they suffered, some dying prematurely. The Palestinians want their land, their family inheritance.

These incidents illustrate the stress that permeates Israel and the West Bank. The Israelis want security and the Palestinians want their land back. Each knows beyond a shadow of doubt that they are right and just in their grievances and claims against the others. Because the Israelis think the land belongs to them and they feel under attack by the Hamas, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs, Hezbollah, etc., they restrict the movement and civil rights of the Palestinians. Because the Palestinians have lost three wars with the Israelis, and because their two intifada have actually made their plight worse with the Israelis, and because they have had their land taken from them and are continually losing more land to the new settlements, they are desperate to stop the expansion of the Israelis. One side uses the force and violence of the army to gain security, and the other side uses the threat of terrorist violence to avenge their losses and regain their land. They are at an impasse.

An Israeli security officer told us that the Israeli people are fearful of others and insecure about the future. We heard from a Palestinian that they are exhausted and weary; they do not know what to do.

Frankly, I think, in such a volatile situation, any political or military solution to this impasse will only make matters worse. The more Palestinians use violence to enact their aims, the more Israel will lock down the West Bank and, if need be, will siege the West Bank with tanks. The more Israel tries to drive out the Palestinians by enlarging existing settlements and starting new ones, the more they enrage the Palestinians and diminish their moral authority in the

eyes of the world.

One could say that Israel is a powder keg about to go off. Yet, I believe there is hope and that there is a model of peace to follow.

During Holy Week, we attended a Maundy Thursday worship service at the Sisters of Zion church, *Ecce Homo*, the place where Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus to death and the beginning of the 14 stations of the *Via Dolorosa*. Afterwards we were invited to eat dinner on the top floor of the building complex with the Sisters and a number of priests, who had come from around the world for Holy Week. It was a great evening of warm hospitality I walked onto the rooftop patio, and as I did I heard the muezzin from the Al-Aqsa mosque call

One side uses the force and violence of the army to gain security, and the other side uses the threat of terrorist violence to revenge their losses and regain their land.

Muslims to prayer. As I looked down the roof onto the road, I saw about six ultra-orthodox Jews, dressed in their unique clothing and hats hurrying down the road to make their way to the Western Wall to start their prayers before the sun set. I thought, "In no place but Jerusalem could this happen." I had just come from a liturgy remembering the great sacrifice of a Jew who died for the sins of the world and who is the messiah of Israel, hearing the distinctive call of the muezzin to the Muslim faithful to turn their lives devotedly to the God of all life, and seeing descendants of Eastern European Jewry who had survived the holocaust intent upon praying where Jews have prayed for thousands of years for their souls, for Jerusalem, the Holy City, and for the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age.

These three faiths and people live side-by-side in Jerusalem and for hundreds of years have worked out a complicated informal set of rules of coexistence and, sometimes, with a measure of mutual respect. It is common in Israel to see Palestinian Muslim and Palestinian Christians sharing Holy Days, and certain religious celebrations (like Advent and Christmas). They've been doing it together for 1300 years. It is common to see large Christian groups at the Western Wall singing hymns, praying out loud, and weeping. On Fridays, as thousands of Muslims pray at the Al-Aqsa mosque, the Israeli police and military provide traffic control.

Though there are profound differences among the three religions, in Jerusalem they have found a way to respect their religious activities enough to give each other room and regard to pursue what their scriptures and traditions determine. They have learned to live next to each other because each seeks God in their own way. They are creating a political reality of co-existence and, at times, mutual respect.

On Palm Sunday I joined thousands to walk from Bethphage to Jerusalem, reenacting Jesus' famous trip on the week before he was crucified. For the first time in years, the Western and Eastern calendars converged, and so Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and many other Christian groups from all over the world joined together to start the most holy of weeks in Christianity, people sang, prayed, laughed, meditated, hugged, danced, and wept for joy as we neared the famous Lions Gate, which opens onto the *Via Dolorosa*. The processional passed through two Muslim villages, and no mocking or slurs were heard from anyone. The Muslims seemed interested and quietly respectful of this unique Christian activity. The Muslims there for centuries had witnessed Christians come from all over the world to Jerusalem to worship.

However, not all religious activity in Jerusalem contributes to peaceful

coexistence. The Christians who come to Israel to support the Zionist principles of Israel are aggravating the political tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians, and they are insulting, contributing to the persecution of the Palestinian Christians, who are lumped together with the Palestinian Muslims by the Israelis. The Christian Zionists are extremely naïve about the political machinations and cruelty that occur in Israel under the banner of Zionism, activities that no Christian who follows Jesus' command to love the neighbor and the enemy should ever condone and advance.

Many of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank theologically justify their taking of Palestinian land, saying, "God gave us this land. You don't belong here. Only Jews belong in an undivided Israel." I believe the number one problem in Israel today is the presence and expansion of the Jewish Settlements in the West Bank.

After the Itarma massacre, Israel announced she would build 500 more units in the area. It is obvious that Israel intends not only to gain more security by building more settlements but also to discourage the Palestinians, Muslims and Christians alike so that they will leave the West Bank. Many Jewish Zionist groups have stated that they not only want to cleanse Israel of non-Jews, they want to cleanse Jerusalem of Muslims and Christians. This would set off immense, international conflicts, blighting Jerusalem as a holy city and crippling it from playing its vital interfaith and ecumenical role.

The Israeli government must not let Zionism control the city. Every religious Jewish organization should demand Israel not only stop increasing the number of settlements, but start returning the stolen land to the Palestinians.

And, of course, any mullah who during Friday prayers incites others to drive Israel into the sea, is a fool and sends others to their deaths. In light of Israel's history, they will destroy any concerted effort to use violence against them by the Palestinians, and the Mullahs' call to violence will only lead to more dead Palestinians and no return of their land. In fact, I think every Muslim group who wants to keep the Al-Aqsa mosque central to the worship life of Muslims should call for non-violent negotiations with Israel, working with other countries and the United Nations to secure Jerusalem and to keep it open for all Muslims.

It was wrong of the Palestinian President Abbas to say before the United Nations that he represents the land of the ascension of the Prophet Mohammed and the birth of Jesus and not to mention that the same land is the land of Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah the Jewish prophet. He willfully ignores the obvious fact that the Jewish Second Temple was in Jerusalem approximately 650 years before Mohammed and that Jews have been worshipping the God of Abraham in that very site since the time of King David. Abbas' comment was more political than religious, exacerbating the problem.

My conclusion is that Jerusalem

as a Holy City is the model for peace in Israel. Politics, calls to violence, land and water conflicts, the desire for revenge are the real causes of the tension in Israel. In Israel, political solutions usually entail and require violence or the threat of violence to work. I do not think they will find a political, military or terrorist agenda that will make the Israelis and Palestinians live peacefully with each other. They already live together peacefully, when they are at prayer and worship. Holy places draw people away from their local and temporary restrictions. Of course, they do not erase these problems, but they do show that when people are left to their best efforts to seek God, though others may not understand or agree with the content of the differing theologies, they tolerate and, on occasions, respect the sincerity and devotion of the others.

I do not have a final answer to the political problems in Israel. "There are no straight lines in Israel," as I was told there. I am confident that a disastrous war would break out if any group tried to impose a political solution upon everyone involved in Israel. My contention is that whatever Israel and Palestine decide about their many issues, they should focus on keeping Jerusalem holy, for it has shown that when differing people come in their own ways to seek God, a form of peaceful co-existence can happen. ■

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The Many Faces of the Good Samaritan—Most Wrong

By Amy-Jill Levine

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a favorite of both children and adults. The story is told in Luke 10:29–37: A man going from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked by robbers who strip him and beat him. A priest and a Levite pass by without helping him. But a Samaritan stops and cares for him, taking him to an inn where the Samaritan pays for his care (see article).

This column is about some appropriate lessons to be drawn from the parable, as well as some that are far-fetched, to say the least. For children, the parable can illustrate universal morals: We should help people who are hurt. It has also been used to warn kids: “Don’t walk by yourself on dangerous roads.” I once heard a sermon go that route.

For adults, the meaning is more profound. It is consistent with the Biblical mandate to love one’s neighbor as oneself, and it follows up on that mandate to insist that the love be manifest in action. It has also been used to instruct: Not only must we love our enemies, but also we should provide free medical services to foreign nationals. I heard a sermon go that route as well.

As interpretations about dangerous highways and universal health-care indicate, the parable means different things in different times and places and for different audiences. Appropriation of the text for new contexts is inevitable.

Hearing the parable as Jesus’ original audience heard it should also be part of the repository of meaning. But again, we find several contemporary interpretations that might surprise Jesus’ audience. Here are four common anachronisms heard today:

First is the view that the robbers would have been regarded as freedom-fighters, dispossessed peasants forced into debt by Roman and

Temple taxation and kept there by pressures from urbanization programs. The robbers are therefore sympathetic “social bandits,” Robin Hoods in *tzitzith*. Nonsense!

The Greek term that Luke uses is *lestes*, which means “robber,” not “freedom fighter,” as the violence of the perpetrators in the parable suggests. This same word appears in Jesus’ condemnation of the Temple: “You have made it a den of robbers [*lestes*]” (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). Paul uses it to describe the dangers he faced from “bandits” (2 Corinthians 11:26). Paul is not talking about the Merry Men.

Another foolish suggestion is that the victim—the Greek calls him “some guy” (*anthropos tis*)—deserved his fate. A few scholars propose that the victim is a tradesman who, because he consorts with all sorts of folks, is ritually unclean and therefore unsympathetic. Such conclusions not only stretch the text well beyond its words and its contexts, they also import a negative view of Torah and Jewish society unwarranted by any historical understanding. An injured man prompts sympathy, not *schadenfreude*.

A third interpretation sometimes heard is the related claim that the priest and the Levite avoid the victim because, should he be dead, or die while they attended him, they would become ritually unclean. Therefore, in avoiding the injured man, they are actually following Torah. Again, nonsense. Yes, priests are to avoid corpses (see Leviticus 21:1–3), save for those of immediate family members, but this law does not apply to Levites. Were the priest concerned about the purity required by his Temple duties, he might have hesitated; but this priest is not going up to Jerusalem, he is going down (*katabaino*) from it. Moreover, in Jewish law saving a life trumps all other laws. The Mishnah

(*Nazir* 7.1), the earliest compilation of rabbinic law, insists that even a high priest should attend a neglected corpse.

In the parable, the priest and Levite signal not a concern for ritual purity; rather, in good storytelling fashion, these first two figures anticipate the third: the hero. Jews in the first century (and today) typically are either priests or Levites or Israelites. Thus the expected third figure, the hero, would be an Israelite. The parable shocks us when the third figure is not an Israelite, but a Samaritan.

But numerous interpreters, missing the full import of the shock, describe the Samaritan as the outcast. This approach, while prompting compelling sermons, is the fourth anachronism. Samaritans were not outcasts at the time of Jesus; they were enemies.

In the chapter before the parable (Luke 9:51–56) Luke depicts Samaritans as refusing Jesus’ hospitality; the apostles James and John suggest retaliation: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). John 4:9 states, “Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.” The Jewish historian Josephus reports that during the governorship of Cumanus, Samaritans killed “a great many” Galilean pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem (*Antiquities* 20.118–136). The first-century Jewish person hearing this parable might well think: There is no such thing as a “good Samaritan.” But unless that acknowledgment is made, and help from the Samaritan is accepted, the person in the ditch will die.

The parable offers another vision, a vision of life rather than death. It evokes 2 Chronicles 28, which recounts how the prophet Oded convinced the Samaritans to aid their Judean captives. It insists that enemies can prove to be neighbors,

that compassion has no boundaries, and that judging people on the basis of their religion or ethnicity will leave us dying in a ditch. ■
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Righteous Derision in the Bible

By Richard L. Atkins

It is a brutish flaw in the human character that derives pleasure from causing the discomfiture of a defeated foe by taunting, jeering, and scoffing. The Germans have a special word for this base instinct – *schadenfreude*, which means malicious joy at someone's misfortune.

In ancient times, this alpha-wolf mentality was normal behavior. Even the gods had great fun causing and watching human misery. Capricious deities were understood to sit in their exalted places and take pleasure in playing devious games and in squashing humans like insects. Nowadays such behavior would be called unsportsmanlike but, in those times, might made right.

The Romans staged triumphal parades in which chained captives were dragged through the streets past jeering mobs and then thrown to wild beasts in the arena. Also, little more than half a century ago public executions by hanging in America were characterized by a carnival atmosphere as criminals were put to open shame, and sometimes their death was slow and torturous. And some professional executioners who afflicted the unfortunate victims actually enjoyed their work – just as cats will play with terrified mice and killer whales toss about baby seals.

Now, since the Bible is an ancient book, it is only natural that some of this unfeeling cruelty is found in its pages. Sad to say, the Hebrew Scriptures promoted savage belligerence as the Jews vaunted their “chosen race” superiority over everybody else. In the Bible, to get the last laugh was the divine reward for the favored few.

Consider as a prime example of this type of sentiment the words in this vengeful malediction:

O daughter of Babylon, you destroyer, happy shall he be who repays you for what you have done to us. Happy shall he be who takes your children and bashes them against a rock. (Psalm 137:8-9)

In Bible times it was felt that paradise would be more enjoyable if the righteous could look down from the battlements of heaven and observe wicked sinners roasting in the flames of hell. This is the sentiment of a well-known, beloved Psalm:

You set a table for me in full view of my enemies. You pour perfumed oil on my head. My cup is kept full and running over. (Psalm 23:5)

Here the favored and chosen one is, like Jacob's special son Joseph, pampered by the divine Host at a banquet table, while those who have been excluded see it all from a position of misery. The torment of the rejected ones is greater when they can see what they are being denied. And the pleasure of the saved soul is greater when he can witness the well-deserved agony of the vanquished. A paraphrase of the passage above may serve to illuminate this viewpoint more clearly:

You prepare a feast for me alone. My enemies in torment see me in bliss. You honor me alone with anointing oils and perfumes. (Special favor is shown to me as the honored guest.) My cup overflows (while my enemies stare with envy and parched tongues).

Righteous derision is voiced in one of the oldest passages in the Bible, the taunt against the Egyptians who were drowned in the sea.

I will sing to Yahweh, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider, He has thrown into the sea... The nations have heard. They tremble. Pangs have seized on the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed. Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab. All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them. Because of the greatness of Thy arm, they are as still as a stone until Thy people, O Yahweh, pass by... (Ex. 15:1b,14-16a)

The Book of Proverbs echoes this derisive attitude toward those who are ignorant or unrighteous.

Wisdom cries aloud... Because I have called and you refused to listen... I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when panic strikes you. (1:20a,26)
When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there are shouts of gladness. (11:10)
Yahweh has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble. (16:4)

When the Bible recounts the defeat or death of a scoundrel, the narrative is often spiced with gory, vindictive details in order to show that the extra punishment so richly deserved has been meted out. It is not enough for the vile character to be simply overthrown or executed; he must also be humiliated or tormented before his final consignment to the hottest part of hell.

Even so, the Canaanite general Sisera was not just defeated in battle by the Hebrews. He was also shamefully put to death by a Hebrew woman, having a common tent peg driven into his brain (Judges 4:21).

Likewise in the *Apocrypha*, the evil

general from Assyria, Holofernes, was tricked into getting drunk and then dishonored by having his head cut off by a Jewish female (Judith 13:6-10).

Nebuchadnezzar, the haughty king of Babylon, who had burned down the Temple of God, was driven mad, so that he went out into the field, lived in filth, and ate grass like an ox (Daniel 4:30-33).

Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah, was taken by the Assyrians and debased with hooks in his flesh and with chains of bronze (2 Chronicles 33:9-13).

Haman, the plotter of Jewish genocide, was humiliated by having to extol his hated Jewish rival while parading him on a royal stallion through the city streets. After this, the arch-villain constructed a gallows 75 feet high, on which he intended to hang this same odious Jew. Instead, the tables were turned on Haman and, as the ultimate disgrace, he was strung up on his own tall gibbet (Esther 7:9-10).

Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, not only hanged himself, but was disgraced after death by having his body burst open and then having it buried in a potter's field (Matthew 27:5-8, Acts 1:18-19).

King Herod Agrippa was so impious that he met an inglorious end by having his body infested with worms (Acts 12:21-23).

It was an ancient custom in social gatherings to brag on personal accomplishments and to put down others with taunting scorn. A hero was not modest in those days. He would embellish his exploits to mythical and magical extremes. Thus it is likely that strong men of old, like Gilgamesh, Samson, Hercules, Beowulf, and Lancelot, made up some of the super-human feats attributed to them.

In his banqueting hall a king would employ a bard to sing of his exploits and tell tales that would bring him lasting fame in the annals of his people. So, since Yahweh was looked upon as a heavenly king, it was inevitable that the Bible even attributed this kind of a nature to the Deity. Thus it was said

that God enjoyed bragging about God's mighty deeds and bringing derision upon God's enemies.

The kings of the earth assemble themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh... He who sits in the heavens laughs. Yahweh has them in derision. (Psalm 2:2a,4)

But Thou, O Yahweh, dost laugh at them. Thou dost hold all the nations in derision. (Psalm 59:8)
And as Yahweh took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so Yahweh will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. (Deuteronomy 28:63a)

"The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken," says Yahweh. Make him drunk, because he magnified himself against Yahweh, so that Moab will wallow in his vomit, and he too shall be held in derision... For every head is shaved and every beard cut off. Upon all the hands are gashes, and on the loins is sackcloth. On all the housetops of Moab and in the squares there is nothing but lamentation... "For I have broken Moab like a vessel for which no one cares," says Yahweh. How it is broken! How they wail! How Moab has turned his back in shame. So Moab has become a derision and a spectacle to all that are round about them. (Jeremiah 48:25-26,37-39)

Thus says the Lord Yahweh, "You shall... be laughed at and held in derision... you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow." (Ezekiel 23:32-33)

They turn to Baal. They are like a warped bow. Their princes shall fall by the sword, because of their insolence. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt. (Hosea 7:16)

Now, what is a Christian to do with all of these spiteful passages? Certainly, they must be attributed to the atmosphere of animosity that was a part of ancient society, when it seems to have been perfectly acceptable to laugh at a fallen foe and exult in self-righteous satisfaction.

This being the case, it is very fortunate that Jesus came "in the fullness of time" to correct this image of primitive savagery in the early pages of the Bible. And so, in stepping over from

the Old Testament to the New, one encounters an amazing transformation of the central teaching about attitudes toward outsiders and enemies. This new perspective is, in fact, a very radical turning away from arrogant hostility to sympathetic compassion. Accordingly, one Gospel theme plainly states that Jesus was often "moved with compassion." One example will suffice:

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touched him. (Mark 1:41)

In New Testament times, Jews hated Samaritans. So, Jesus dealt with this problem by telling the story of the good Samaritan – who saw the bruised and beaten Jew, his natural enemy, lying beside the roadway and had compassion on him. Thus, it follows that the essential temperament of a Christian is tender-hearted compassion. And this means that those persons who are overbearing, cruel, violent, and abusers of weak and fallen fellow human beings are farthest from the Kingdom of God. (It is a sad fact that some Christians are still living in the Old Testament, as though Jesus had never come.)

In the primitive Church, the early martyrs of the faith doubtless prayed for release from their torments, but it is unlikely that they would have also wished these agonies upon their persecutors. This would have been foreign to the spirit of Jesus, who preached compassion – even for enemies.

And that is why it seems to me that the Book of Revelation appears out of place among the Christian Scriptures. It has an Old Testament flavor which exhibits a spirit of gory retribution against the Roman persecutors of Christianity that is not in accord with the teachings of Jesus. And still today, too many Christians pay lip service to Jesus as their Lord and yet demonstrate by their cruel attitudes and actions that something else is on the throne of their hearts. For, can anyone imagine *Jesus* laughing at a fallen foe? ■

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Not Yet

By Karen Shaw

"I personally have no problem with women being leaders in our church, but the congregation isn't ready for it yet," one pastor explained.

Congregational change comes slowly. Church leaders need wisdom in choosing which changes to promote and the best time to implement those changes. However, it is too easy for a shepherd afraid of controversy to hide behind the flock rather than lead it. A church's lack of readiness to empower all of its members is not an excuse to do nothing. It is a call to action. To do nothing suggests that a leader may lack genuine interest in bringing women into leadership as full members of the Body of Christ.

There are a great many things that a church leader can do to prepare God's people to reach their full potential, even if they are not yet ready to make a major change. It may be "a journey of a thousand miles," but one can begin with a handful of these steps:

1. Pray. Only God can change people's hearts. Pray frequently and fervently, and listen to the voice of the Spirit as you pray.

2. Model integrity. Be honest with yourself about your own reservations. You cannot lead others in examining their fears and prejudices if you have not done so yourself.

3. Engage in careful, sound teaching of Bible interpretation. Start with the senior church leaders. Train them in general hermeneutical principles applied to unrelated texts and issues, and then gradually begin to help them to apply these principles to texts about women. Once the leadership understands the principles, they can support you as you teach the congregation.

4. Expose the congregation to ministries of gifted, godly women. There are plenty of examples in the Bible, church history, the contemporary world, and your own church

from which to draw.

5. Preach regularly on Bible passages about women. This conveys to the congregation that the whole church can learn from the lives and words of holy women.

6. Move women into roles from which they have been excluded for purely cultural reasons. Nothing in the Bible can be construed to prevent women from ushering, being treasurers, distributing communion, or being ordained and employed as evangelists. (However, a few desperate souls may try to invent some objection!)

7. Count the cost of not having women leaders. You might find it surprisingly high. I know many young women who won't return to a church where the only people on the platform are males. When wise women are muzzled and their gifts neglected due to gender discrimination, the whole church loses. Exclusion of women from leadership in one generation leads to lack of role models for women in the next.

8. Create opportunities for people on both sides to discuss their concerns openly in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Small groups, informal discussions over meals, and private conversations are far more effective than a public debate. One can open the conversation easily and constructively by asking people about their experiences of women in ministry or strong women, or even about their mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, etc.

9. Don't be surprised by vehement female opponents to the public ministry of women. Most evangelical women have been taught relentlessly that their worth is in fulfilling traditional roles. Of course they have grounds for alarm. Women who are used to having influence without responsibility and who gain their status in the community through their husbands' titles (such as some wives of elders and pastors) will be particularly

threatened. Housewives and female children's workers need to be reassured that they will not be despised, but honored for their valuable work.

10. Remind people on both sides that they are not dealing with just a controversial issue, but with real people. Kindness is not optional.

11. Firmly, lovingly, correct commonly held misbeliefs and prejudices. Myths abound, including the idea that Eve's sin was not asking her husband about eating the fruit, that the ordination of women leads inevitably to the sanctioning same sex marriage, that men will stop coming to a church with women in leadership, or that women are too emotionally unstable to be given senior responsibility.

12. Don't fall for the "many people will leave" trap. Occasionally it happens, but usually the "many people" are a small but very vocal minority.

13. Provide pastoral care and ministry alternatives for women who are hurt by the church's exclusive stance. Deal with their pain and frustration rather than ignoring it.

14. Keep reminding male leaders that their decisions will affect the whole church. If they would not want others to decide on their behalf without consultation, they need to hear women's opinions and not assume that men know best. Women consulted should include single, divorced and widowed women, not simply wives of the male decision-makers.

15. Identify women's gifts and callings, and give them whatever training and opportunities you can for appropriate ministries. Start small if you must, but start!

16. Prepare male leaders to work alongside women as equals. For some, this may be an entirely new and potentially threatening prospect. Teach solid theology, model respect, and make extra space for communica-

tion and problem solving.

17. Publically express your support for women in ministry. It is cowardly to be a fence-sitter because of fear of opposition. Taking a stand demands courage and integrity. But isn't this the sort of leader you want to be?

The journey that appears in

advance to be a thousand miles long might just turn out to be considerably shorter than that. You never know until you start walking. However long and difficult the journey to full inclusion of women may be, it is a worthy pilgrimage, heading as it does in the right direction. ■

This article was first published in CBE and is reprinted with permission. Karen Shaw is assistant professor of cross-cultural ministry at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Mansourieh Metn, Lebanon. She has lived in the Middle East for over 20 years, along with her husband and their two children.

Baptists and Human Rights at the United Nations

David F. D'Amico

Introduction

Human rights issues clamor for the attention of interested Christians around the world. The suffering minorities oppressed politically, economically, and religiously in many countries of the world – Myanmar, Egypt, Syria, Indonesia – to name a few, receive some media coverage in the United States.

Baptists have championed human rights, concentrating their efforts on religious freedom, from the days of Thomas Helwys against King James I in 1611, to the present.

On December 10, 1998, the UN commemorated the 50th anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) approved in Paris on that date in 1948. I was a participant of forums, conferences, and celebrations. It is appropriate as the 63rd anniversary is remembered on December 10, 2011, to survey some of the salient aspects of Baptist participation.

I. The organization of the United Nations

Leaders representing mainline Protestant denominations were active in the preliminary discussions leading to the creation of the UN. Forty-two non-governmental (NGO) international organizations were invited for the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944. Many were religious.

The ecumenical Protestant community organized in 1948 into the

World Council of Churches had strived in the interwar period for an international world organization. John Foster Dulles, a Presbyterian elder, and later secretary of state, became the principal adviser to the United States delegation in San Francisco in 1945. There were Lutheran, United Church of Christ, Methodists, Presbyterian and Baptists significantly involved in the deliberations of the conference leading to the formation of the United Nations.

Enlightened Baptist leaders participated actively in the proceedings. J. M. Dawson, the chairperson

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of the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Relations, now Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, narrated in his memoirs the sense of expectancy he experienced when he attended, in 1945, the organizational meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco. "To that meeting I carried a hundred thousand petitions from

Baptists, North and South, white and Negro, asking that the Charter to be adopted would include a guarantee of full religious liberty for every human being." [Dawson, *A Thousand Months to Remember*, p. 161].

Dawson later addressed the Baptist World Congress in Copenhagen in 1947 setting high hopes for the value of the UN in world affairs. "We hope also for the United Nations to inaugurate a new birth of religious freedom for the world." [1947 Baptist World Congress Minutes, p.71].

II. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Commission on Human Rights was established June 21, 1946, under the Economic and Social Council. Eleanor Roosevelt was chosen as chair. Dr. Charles Malik, from Lebanon, was the rapporteur. It met in three long sessions between 1946 and 1948. It drafted the UDHR which was adopted in Paris, December 10, 1948.

An eyewitness reported about the membership of the commission in its political and religious composition. "In half of the 18 countries comprising the Commission most of the population was Christian, in three it was Islamic, in one it was Hindu, and in five most of the people were officially regarded as atheist. . . . A BBC broadcast quipped about "eighteen politicians chosen to make a new draft of the Sermon on the Mount." [Howard Schomer, "All Human Beings," Gear-

-Global Education and Advocacy Resource,” June, 1998, p. 6.]

III. Baptists and human rights

The Baptist World Alliance, under the guidance of its Human Rights Commission, published a booklet, “Baptists and Human Rights,” written by James E. Wood, Jr. Under the auspices of Church World Service of the NCCUS the Program Ministry for International Justice and Human Rights, a task force on the UN, of which I was a chairperson for two years while serving as CBF representative to the UN, actively promoted human rights issues through seminars, conferences and other venues.

The task force, in cooperation with the American Bible Society, launched the republication of the booklet, “Life in All Its Fullness: The Word of God and Human Rights.” One million copies were printed on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR and distributed to interested churches and organiza-

tions, including the then Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, led at that time by James Dunn.

IV. President Jimmy Carter and human rights

President Carter is an active Baptist layperson and has shown publicly how his religious beliefs have shaped his public life. He observed: “America didn’t create human rights. Human rights created America. [Dan Ariail & Cheryl Hcekler-Feltz, *The Carpenter’s Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 72.]

One of greatest achievements of the Carter presidency was the Camp David Accord between Israel and Egypt in 1978. Since 1981, the Carter Center in Atlanta has been devoted to many initiatives. Among the many aspects of the work of the Center one, the Human Rights Program is directed by Karin Ryan, director, Human Rights Program. In 1994, the Human Rights Program formed the International Human Rights Council,

chaired by President Carter and comprised of 28 leaders from around the world.

Conclusion

As Baptists continue their efforts for religious liberty and human rights, we are the inheritors of peace and justice. Although human rights are a lofty ideal, individuals and nations are still struggling to measure up to the model of the Prince of Peace and to enforce all human rights for all peoples of the world. Baptists must pray, become informed, and earnestly attempt in their own spheres of influence to be God’s instruments for human rights.

Amid the uncertainties of the status of the political implementation of human rights, communities of all the world religions will continue to play a significant role in the 21st century. ■

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Tributes

He has shown you... what is good; and what does the Lord require of you?... to act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

A Very Average Man

By David Sapp

My father was an average man. He would have told you so himself. He had a middling job. He started college on the GI Bill, but never finished. The only time I remember his name appearing in the newspaper was in his obituary. He was your typical family man and conservative Southerner. Still, he would occasionally say peculiar things, things you wouldn’t quite expect from a man like him. They seemed to run against the thinking of the world around us, but not to worry. They never amounted to much.

I remember some of these sayings very well. One of them occurred on one a trip to the beach. The beach for us was Tybee Island, just a thirty min-

ute ride from our house in Savannah. Some of the best memories of my childhood happened there.

As soon as we would put our feet in the sand, Dad and I would run together across the beach and splash into the surf. We could hardly wait to get there. Mother, on the other hand, just sat in a beach chair while Dad and I played in the water. I could never understand her behavior at the beach. I still can’t.

When I was very small, Dad would hold me with my feet dangling in the breakers and let me feel their force. Later, he took me beyond the breakers, out into the big waves. Standing there in deeper water with Dad holding me under my arms, we would watch those

huge mountains of moving water, swelling high above our heads, and rolling inexorably toward us. When they were only a few feet away, they would draw my heart right into my throat. But Dad would hold me and the wave would lift me and then set me back down safely on the sand.

Coming and going from Tybee, I noticed the beach houses and envied the people who lived in them. Practically all of them were built behind the big sand dunes, and none of them faced the ocean. In fact, you couldn’t even see the water from the first floor of most of them. In those days, you see, it was considered dangerous to build a house fully exposed to the water.

I don't remember how old I was, but it occurred to me on one beach trip how frustrating it would be to live that close to the ocean and not be able to see it. So I asked my Dad a question that has now been answered by thousands of beach developers, "Dad, why don't people buy part of the beach and build their houses right out there on the water so that they have their own beach?"

Then came one of those peculiar sayings from a very average man: "God made the beach for everyone," he said. "It wouldn't be right for people to own the beach."

That is a prime example of the kind of statements he was always making. When I became "educated," I learned that statements like this must have been un-thought through for they were radical. For them to come from my conservative father must have been an indication that his mind was at least a little dull. After all, he voted conservatively. He shared the racial prejudices of his time and place. He was a rabid patriot, and spent 32 years in military service. He was just a simple man. No one expected him to think through his beliefs so as to make them consistent.

Another time I asked him about the War (the big one, WWII). "What would have happened if they had taken you prisoner, Dad?" I asked with boyish excitement.

"I would have been required to give them only name, rank, and serial number," he answered.

"But what if they tortured you, Dad? Would you still have given them only name, rank, and serial number?"

"I would have tried my best," Dad said.

"Well, why don't we torture them so we can find out their war plans?" My question was born of some TV show, I am sure.

"Oh," said Dad, "Americans don't torture people. We live by a higher

standard. That's what we are fighting to defend."

There it was again: That simple mind of his at work on problems that were obviously too much for him. Why, even I as a child saw could see it more clearly than he did. I was a little neo-con, much ahead of my time. Dad's kind of thinking had only led to the end of a war in which our enemies became our friends. Mine would later lead to unending wars with little countries in order to bottle up the hatred they felt for us and let it simmer.

He had odd ideas about taxes, too. You'll never believe what he thought about taxes. He actually believed that the graduated income tax was moral. The way he saw it, the rich (who did not need all they had made) had a

Every time the culture wants to swallow me in one of its waves, it's like he is there again, lifting me as the wave passes, and setting me back down on the sand.

moral obligation to pay a higher portion of their incomes to support our country than the poor (who needed every penny). Strangely, he saw "the fair tax" as the most unfair tax of all.

He's been dead 16 years now. His portrait does not hang in any offices (except mine), and his name will never be recorded in the annals of history. He never rose to greatness in the eyes of the world and he never accumulated any wealth. He was born on a small farm in Middle Georgia, and he was not raised to think too highly of himself, or to be self-servingly ambitious.

College was not even a word in

the vocabulary of the people with whom he grew up. His chief concern when he graduated from high school was to be sure that his four younger siblings had the same opportunity. So he left home at 19, joined Mr. Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, and stayed for six years. Most of his meager wages were sent home, and they did in fact keep his younger brothers and sisters in school.

Maybe it was these "make-work" programs of the Depression Era that so warped his thinking. He never studied economics very much, so he didn't know that programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps did not end the depression. He just knew that they kept hunger at bay for his family, and allowed his four siblings to finish high school and better contribute to the economic boom that came later.

The odd thing about his strange ideas was that they were subversive. They subverted my mind so that I have never been able to see everything the way the culture around me does. Every time the culture wants to swallow me in one of its waves, it's like he is there again, lifting me as the wave passes, and setting me back down on the sand.

I have often wondered what put these half-baked ideas into his head. Maybe it was the time in which he lived. Maybe it was the rural poverty in which he grew up. Maybe it was some liberal teacher who had infiltrated his one-roomed country school.

But I've always harbored another suspicion. Dad was a Christian. He was taught the faith from an early age, went to church every Sunday, read the Bible and tried to take it seriously. I've always wondered if maybe it was Jesus. ■

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My Time with Harry Emerson Fosdick

By Hardy Clemons

To look back now and realize how close I came to never really meeting Dr. Fosdick is astonishing. The academic catalogue at my former seminary mandated that a dissertation “must make an original contribution to the field in which it is written.” That seemed a daunting expectation to me. Who was I, in my twenties, to make such an effort?

After considerable struggle, I decided: How better to fulfill that task than to write on the theology of Harry Emerson Fosdick, the Father of Modern Preaching?¹ His stated goal was “to make a spiritual contribution to his generation?” He was a genius in diving deep into complex theology and coming up with clear insights and illustrations that laity would appreciate. Then he set forth challenges to live out faith in moral and ethical Christian behavior. He was truly a proclaimer of good news—a genuine preacher.

Fosdick drank deeply in college from the well of his professor, William Newton Clarke. Clarke taught the bright young student that faith is somewhat like astronomy: “The stars abide, but astronomies are constantly changing.” That’s what theology does, in biblical times, historical times, and now. Fosdick said of Clarke:

I didn’t swallow everything he said. He wouldn’t have allowed that. . . . But, He made essential religion live again for me, real and vital. . . . To use his own comparison, he was sure the stars were there, though we had to change our astronomy, and the flowers real, though botany might alter its explanations.²

My fascination with and admiration of Dr. Fosdick began early. As a child I had the good fortune to hear him preach when my father was completing a Master’s degree at Columbia University. We lived on Riverside Drive near the church and worshipped there often. I even got to shake the great man’s hand

in passing.

Later, in college I read *The Meaning of Prayer* and *On Being a Real Person* with great profit. These led me into some of his deeper works such as *A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (The Yale Lectures on Preaching in 1924), and his superior autobiography, *For The Living of These Days*.

Fosdick became a hero and model to me. His belief that we didn’t have to check our minds at the door when we came to church inspired and shaped my own ministry. All this gave me a personal passion about my work on the dissertation. Nevertheless, it was an almost overwhelming assignment to get it approved.

By his own admission Fosdick was neither a theologian nor an ethicist. Vocationally he was a scholarly, dynamic preacher and pastor of one of the most creative churches of that day. He was also a professor of practical theology at Union Theological Seminary across the street from the church.

When I shared my intended title, “The Key Theological Ideas of Harry Emerson Fosdick,” with my major professor, the venerable W. Boyd Hunt, he questioned its validity. “Fosdick is not a theologian,” Dr. Hunt said. “You must write on something or someone theological.”

“However,” I responded, “his preaching, teaching and ethics are based on a solid, well-thought-out theology which Fosdick has simply never systematized. He came to be recognized as one of the leading theological minds of our century³, and my major is systematic theology. Furthermore,” I said, “my colleague and friend, C. W. Brister, had written a dissertation a few years earlier in the same graduate school on the Ethics of Fosdick. Why wouldn’t one on his theology be as valid.”

“OK then,” Boyd asked, “what if you contact Dr. Fosdick and ask what he thinks?”

So I did. Soon a hand-written letter came back. In brief he said, “I am flattered by your idea, but I agree with your professor. I’m not a theologian.”

“But, you have lived and worked on the basis of a well thought out theology that seems to me to cry out to be systematized,” I responded. And I mailed him my five-page prospectus.

“OK,” Fosdick responded, “I see what you are saying; but it will cost you a lot of reading in strange places. I always intended to write about my theology more formally, but now at 86, I know I’ll never get it done. I’ll help you all I can, and my former secretary, Dorothy Noyes, is still at Riverside. I’m sure she will help.”

So, with the approval of Dr. Fosdick, Dr. Hunt and the graduate committee, I launched into reading all his published books plus hundreds of articles and letters. My wife and I spent two weeks in New York to interview him about his theology. We met with him several mornings at their condo in Bronxville, where both he and his wife, Florence, graciously received us. Ardelle recorded our conversations in shorthand.

Then we returned to either Riverside Church or the Union Library in the afternoons. Ardelle transcribed her work and I poured through file after file of unpublished sermons, articles and letters. I found letters ranging from prisoners on death row to the legendary Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was Fosdick’s student at Union in the 30’s. I devoured *Dear Mr. Brown: Letters to a Person Perplexed about Religion*, which Fosdick graciously sent me shortly after it was published in 1961, right in the middle of my research. This book is the closest Fosdick ever came toward articulating and organizing his theology.

Furthermore, I interviewed several of Fosdick’s colleagues and former students at Union. Scholars such as Robert Handy, President Henry Pitney Van Dusen, Robert McAfee Brown, John

Bennett, and preachers like George Buttrick, Robert J. McCracken and Ralph Sockman. They all gave generous time and made excellent comments—sharing all the while wonderful “Fosdick stories.”

An example: George Buttrick told me that one November some of the big steeple preachers in New York City were in a holding room, waiting to go to the platform for a Community Thanksgiving Worship, Ralph Sockman commented, “You know Harry, all of us are really fine preachers! But when it comes to kicking the bung hole out of the barrel and letting it gurgle, none of us is your peer.”⁴

I discovered a huge box in the stacks of Union library, that the library wasn’t aware of, crammed full of bundles of unpublished sermons and articles from Fosdick’s early days as pastor of First Baptist Church in Montclair, NJ. Often his Pastor’s columns in Montclair and Riverside were veritable theology lessons.

As I write this on October 5, 2011, it is 133 years after Fosdick’s birth and the 42nd anniversary of his death. Amazingly, his beloved wife pre-deceased him in 1963. Sometime later, I felt a spiritual nudge to call Dr. Fosdick and inquire as to how he was doing.

But, I wondered: Does someone like me really give “a pastoral call” to a legend like the “Father of Modern Preaching”? That may be a little much? But, when I called, he answered the phone himself, his voice still strong and resilient. He remembered us and the letter of condolence Ardelle and I had sent when Florence died. He was obviously surprised and touched by my call—and most gracious as always.

After we visited a bit, I ventured to ask, “What is it like for you sir to be in this sad, difficult passage of life?” His answer amazed and instructed me at a deep level. I have carried it with me like a treasure all these years. He said: “Hardy, this is the hardest thing I have ever done! I knew it would be hard, but never thought it would be THIS hard. Since I was “the heart patient,” we always

assumed I would go first. We had made all our plans accordingly. So I was both shocked and surprised when Florence preceded me. Then he repeated, “I never knew it would be this hard!” But then he said, “I had a thought the other day that has lifted my spirit a bit. The idea occurred that if I had died first, Florence would be going through what I am now. A comforting meaning amid my pain swept over me like billows: THIS is something I can do for Florence! I am sparing her from the sadness of being the marriage partner who is left.”

Fosdick was indeed, as his book challenges us to be, a real person. He was pilloried as a liberal, a modernist, and some even questioned whether he was a Christian. The word infidel was often used.

I asked him as our interviews were coming to an end if there were any advantages to being nearly 90 years old. “O yes,” he said quickly. “I was attacked from both sides—for being too liberal and too conservative. Many liberals and humanists thought I preached too much from the Bible and took it much too seriously. Also, I was Rockefeller’s pastor and people said I had sold out to his money. I was seen as a coward because I claimed to embrace the Bible’s inspiration and avoided the word inerrancy. But I have taken a sort of perverse pleasure in the fact that I have outlived almost all of my attackers.”

“Furthermore,” he said, “Several papers and dissertations such as yours and our friend Brister’s have been done about my thought. I imagined I would be remembered only as the author of the hymn *God of Grace and God of Glory*, but I take heart in the fact that some think my work will be considered relevant beyond my death.”

For myself I have indeed found him to still be most relevant. So, at the invitation of *Christian Ethics Today* I plan to offer at least one more article about what I have learned from this great believer and his theology, persona, preaching and teaching⁶

Finally, I asked Dr. Fosdick if he was willing to share his view of his own death. He replied, “I view it pretty much as I did being put to sleep recently when I had surgery. I really knew little about what they would do or what the outcome would be. Yet I entered peacefully because I said to myself, ‘I know my surgeon.’ With a view to my own death, I trust God even more.”

As I look back to the day I submitted my dissertation in 1965, I am startled to realize that nearly half a century has gone by. In the twilight of my own life, as I take the old hymn seriously and “count my many blessings,” few of them rank as high as my time with Dr. Fosdick and our discussions about his faith and ministry.

When I handed in the final draft, Dr. Hunt and I visited a while, and as we finished, he commented, “Hardy, you are one of the few students I have ever had that actually seemed sad that your paper is finished.” He was right! I enjoyed this experience immensely. It was rich, challenging, instructive and life changing. ■

Hardy Clemons is a Pastoral and Executive Coach who lives in San Antonio.

1 Clyde E. Fant, Jr. and William M. Pinson, Jr., *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*. Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1971.

2 Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days: An Autobiography*. P. 65.

3 Robert Moats Miller. *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet*, Oxford University Press, 1985. Dr. Miller made this assessment 16 years after Fosdick’s death writing from the perspective of an American historian.

4 Conversation with Dr. Buttrick in 1963, when he and I were on a Religious Emphasis week emphasis at Lamar Tech University in Beaumont, Texas.

6 The seven chapters in my paper are 1) The context of Fosdick’s theology, 2) God, 3) Christ, 4) the Bible, 5) Man, 6) Immortality and 7) my perspective of these key ideas.

Book Reviews

“Of making many books there is no end. . .” Ecclesiastes 12:12 NRSV

A PLACE FOR TRUTH: Leading Thinkers Explore Life’s Hardest Questions

Edited by Dallas Willard; IVP Books,
Downers Grove, Il. 2010

A review by Darold Morgan

Nearly 20 years ago Harvard University founded “The Veritas Forum”, a place “for the university world to explore the deepest questions of truth and life”. Here is a volume which includes some very notable and impressive presentations heard in this Forum at major universities all over the USA. Skillfully chosen and edited by Dallas Willard, a famous author in his own right and acknowledged as a major force in Christian philosophy, we have a result a book of exceptional value and relevance, touching on some of the major themes challenging the Christian intellect today.

In many volumes where multiple authors are represented, often there are some inconsequential chapters alongside those of exceptional value. But here is a book, frankly, of superb quality and perception on every page. The Christian ethicist, the pastor, the theological professor, the laity all face today a range of issues far beyond the basic biblical premises which in themselves mandate a lifelong pursuit of truth. But “the Veritas Forum” provocatively addresses the additional issues of faith and science, the New Atheism, the guidelines of truth, social justice, evolution, genetics, etc. These are unavoidable themes as Christians everywhere search for truth. Here is a book which for some may raise more questions than answers, but for many others here is Christian intellectualism and an honest pietism at its best. You will be ultimately strengthened in your

Christian faith if you read carefully this genuinely unique book. ■

JFK and the Unspeakable

By: James W. Douglass
(New York: Simon & Schuster

Touchstone, 2010)

Reviewed by Tom Duley

Writing in the tradition of the biblical *Book of Esther* (which famously never mentions the name of God) James W. Douglass has written a book of profound theological significance also with scant mention of the name of God. Douglass is certainly interested in who murdered President John F. Kennedy and how they accomplished it. However, his most valuable contribution is in helping us to understand why the 35th President of the United States was assassinated. It is the focus on why that gives the book its theological significance.

JFK and the Unspeakable is the story of why Kennedy was killed. Knowing why he was assassinated provides the means of understanding the events surrounding the assassination. That understanding is undeniably a spiritual one. In this reading of the events surrounding the assassination of JFK, as in the *Book of Esther*, the work of God is plainly evident although the name of God is missing. In fact, it could be said that God is the main character in the drama.

However, this is not a one-sided story. God is not the only spiritual reality involved in this drama. Evil is present as well. Douglass clearly recognizes not only the work of God in the story but also the work of evil; the work of the Unspeakable.

Most human beings believe that there is an Ultimate Reality which is more than us. This Ultimate Reality goes by many names ... God, Allah,

Jehovah, and Love to name a few. This Ultimate Reality is unseen yet real; never fully known yet universally experienced. It is that which is beyond us while at the same time being with us.

For most people God is more than us and bigger than us. But there is more to it than that. Most human beings feel such a deep attachment to that which is beyond us that we recognize God as our Creator; a Creator who is at work in the world to bring about transformation, redemption and peace. God is that Ultimate Reality which is beyond us yet among us calling us to live to our fullest human potential; a potential defined by love, mercy, and peace. The work of God in this story is transparent. It fills the story with hope.

In the year 1962, as the Soviet ships steamed toward Cuba, President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premiere Nikita Khrushchev looked into the dark abyss of nuclear destruction. Both men decided that nuclear destruction could not be allowed to happen. As a result the two men became partners not only in defusing the Cuban missile crisis but in seeking a lasting peace. Their partnership meant that a truly astounding turn toward the possibility of international transformation had occurred. This potential transformation held out the hope for peace as the organizing principle of international relations. It was an extraordinary moment; a moment of divine in-breaking into history. The transforming light of peace was flickering at the highest level of the planet’s two most powerful national security states.

But there is a dark side to that which is beyond us. Douglass draws on the insight of Trappist monk Thomas Merton at this point using the term “Unspeakable” which was coined by Merton. For Merton “the

unspeakable was ultimately a void, an emptiness of any meaning, an abyss of lies and deception” (p.382). The unspeakable is the darkness that swallows the possibilities of transformation, redemption, and peace. It prevents them from being realized fully formed in the world. The work of the unspeakable in this story is also transparent. It makes clear the challenges facing those who seek to live to their fullest human potential. It fills the story with caution.

As the Soviet ships steamed toward Cuba, Khrushchev’s and Kennedy’s generals and advisors looked into the same dark abyss of nuclear destruction and decided that unleashing nuclear weapons was the path to victory and domination. Their response made it clear that the unspeakable would have a powerful voice as events continued to unfold both during the Cuban missile crisis and afterwards. Ultimately their response would ensure that the organizing principle of international relations would remain focused on a militarism designed to maintain domination at all costs. These powerful forces quickly organized to snuff out the flickering light of peace.

Both the working of God and the working of the Unspeakable must be taken seriously in seeking to understand why Kennedy was assassinated. The relationships and interactions of the various actors within and beyond the American national security state provide the cast. The Cold War provides the stage on which the drama plays out. The events surrounding the assassination of JFK provide the context. The interplay between God, the Unspeakable and the humans involved provides the fuller understanding of what happened.

The human dilemma lies in this complicated web of relationships. *JFK and the Unspeakable* is a cautionary tale about the effects of militarism, power, and domination on the human spirit. It is also a hopeful story about what can be achieved when human beings look beyond the way things have always been to the

way things can be. It makes clear the disastrous consequences of masking the divine within us all. It also makes clear that light will shine when we embrace the divine within us all.

Jesus (and all great spiritual teachers) taught that living to our fullest humanity means living out of a value system that makes unconditional love for one another its centerpiece. According to Jesus, this is not only the highest expression of our humanity it is the essential character of God. When humans live out of this ethic of love we are being who we are created to be. We reflect the character of God who created us.

Jesus took great pains to impress this truth upon his followers and any others who were listening to him teach. He was so adamant about the truth of unconditional love that he insisted that it must extend to everyone, even to our enemies. His straightforward, uncomplicated teaching at this point is, “I say to you love your enemies.” (Matthew 5:44)

This love is not based upon sentiment or even good feelings toward the other person. This love is an act of the will based in a desire to live to the highest potential of our humanity by trusting God. This love wants the very best for all of our fellow human beings with whom we share this planet. There is no war with this love, no desire for domination, and certainly no destruction of millions of people in a nuclear holocaust.

For Jesus this is to be the organizing principle for all human relationships. Willful acts of loving others which lead to trust, peace, and a social order built around the common good. With human relationships built on this principle one can see the possibility of an end to many of the conditions which plague humanity including war, violence, retribution and hunger.

Unfortunately, we human beings live in a state of degraded humanity rather than full humanity. Living out of a degraded humanity means that self-interest becomes the organizing principle of human relationships.

Focusing on self-interest leads to suspicion, conflict, and a social order that rewards power and domination. We are plagued by the desire to achieve victory at all costs; to ensure that our perceived interests are met before (often instead of) those of any others; to dominate and subdue in the pursuit of fulfilling our self-interest.

When humans live out of this ethic based in self-interest the voice of the Unspeakable speaks powerfully. The voice of the Unspeakable calls for war, domination, retribution, victory at all costs. The mere fact that we have developed and possess nuclear weapons gives voice to the Unspeakable.

Douglass has done us a great service by weaving this story together in a way which takes both the working of God and the presence of the Unspeakable seriously. Clearly God was at work in bringing the unlikely of leaders together in a partnership that saved the planet from nuclear destruction. God was also at work as the partnership stayed together beyond the Cuban missile crisis to seek peace as the new international organizing principle.

Clearly too, the Unspeakable was at work in bringing together in the most predictable fashion the forces that were arrayed against both Kennedy and Khrushchev. These were the same forces that eventually murdered President Kennedy.

This is a story played out at the highest levels of power and danger. It is a unique story but it is not a new one. It is both an ancient and a modern story. There are many victims who have suffered because of their willingness to confront the Unspeakable. Their stories are told in every age, from Uriah the Hittite to John the Baptist to Jesus himself to Ita Ford, Maura Clark, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan.

We are all caught up in this story. There is no way to escape it. If we want to live out of another story, a story focused on love and peace as the organizing principle of human relationships, we must take on the

work of transformation. The work of transformation leads us to challenge the Unspeakable at every turn. To sit by and watch is not an option for those who seek to live to their fullest humanity.

The key to our work of transformation is found in Jesus' command to love our enemies. The path to peace must involve the willingness to form relationships with our enemies. We must speak with those to whom we have nothing to say. We must listen to those from whom we do not want to hear. We must be willing to take the risk of entering into a relationship with those who fear us; with those of whom we are afraid. We seek out these risky relationships because of our desire to seek the very best for our enemy; because of our desire to live to our fullest humanity as Jesus has taught us to do.

That is what JFK and Khrushchev did. They were pushed into it by the most disastrous situation humans have ever faced, but they did it. Rather than destroy the planet and its inhabitants, they started talking to one another. This was seen as a radical and dangerous turn of events by those who opposed them. From the standpoint of the Unspeakable you don't talk to your enemy. You find ways to destroy your enemy. The voice of God says, "Enter into relationships." The voice of the Unspeakable says, "Never."

The relationship established by JFK and Khrushchev was halting and at times disappointing but it eventually grew to a place of trust and hope. That these two enemies could enter into a relationship that eventually resulted in mutual trust is truly astounding. Such is the power of relationship, of recognizing our common humanity in another person even when that person is our enemy.

The profound hope of JFK and the Unspeakable is the transforming power of human relationships that are based on a concern for the other's well-being. The relationship forged between JFK and Khrushchev was based in just such a concern.

The transforming power of human relationships based on a concern for the other's well-being will defuse the power of the Unspeakable once and for all. President John F. Kennedy and Premiere Nikita Khrushchev thought that the potential reward was well worth the risk. The question for us is ... do we? ■

Tom Duley
Ordinary Time 2011

Overcoming Adolescence: Growing Beyond Childhood into Maturity

by Marion D. Aldridge
Reviewed by P. Randall Wright

A confessor stood in the sanctuary during the annual revival meeting enumerating his sins. As he confessed, members of the congregation responded, "Tell it, brother...tell it all!" The sins got a little more interesting. "Tell it all, brother! Tell it all!" Encouraged to tell it all, the repentant believer told a particularly vile and offensive sin. Further encouragement stopped when one congregant said, "Don't believe I'd have told that, Brother!"

As I read Marion Aldridge's confessional of his struggle from childhood to maturity, I wanted at times to say, "Don't believe I'd have told that, Brother!"

But he did. Marion shares honestly and earthily from his own struggles as he moved from adolescent behavior to adult awareness in his most helpful book. Don't read this book if you are shy or reticent about telling it all to a significant other, a counselor, a trusted friend, or the Holy One. There are places in *Overcoming Adolescence* when you will want to close the book and rush to find your loved one and confess your failure, your dishonesty, your ambivalence, or your need. Confession is risky, but it will move you toward the maturity Marion argues.

In his chapter "Out of Control," Marion confesses his addiction to words—his need to be the center of

attention by his articulate rendering of the current issue, the "hot" topic, the performance of the Clemson football player, or the culinary delights created by his favorite pastry chef. As his dear friend and one of the "Four Life Guides" to whom he dedicated his book, I readily acknowledge his need to be heard, and I equally acknowledge the value of deferring to his preachments, because they are consistently filled with wisdom, humor, and love. Deferring to another's addiction might not be the most therapeutic response, but I have deferred to and learned much from my friend, Marion.

In the matter of his wordsmithing in *Overcoming Adolescence*, I'm being co-dependent by encouraging his verbosity. I feed into his addiction to words when I say, "Preach on, Brother!" Marion has positively channeled his addiction into a volume that will confront, encourage, challenge, motivate, anger, clarify, inspire, and push readers toward maturity.

Let me also be honest to say that, at times, I felt as if I were sitting in on counseling sessions as Marion worked out his own stuff. Some pages remind me that Marion is a Baptist preacher, and it has been said that preachers sometimes have something to say, but other times they have to say something. However, even when I felt that Marion was having to say something to complete a thought or finish a chapter, he did, in fact, say something.

So, when you read his book, don't read it too quickly, because you might get bogged down in his depth and wisdom. Take your time. Read a certain chapter again. Dog-ear pages, and come back to them when you're ready to hear afresh the confrontation or wisdom contained in them. That's what I intend to do...when I muster the courage!

So, Marion, this is one of your four life guides speaking... "Tell it all, Brother!" "Ouch...don't believe I'd have told that!" "Dang, Marion, you done good with this book!" ■

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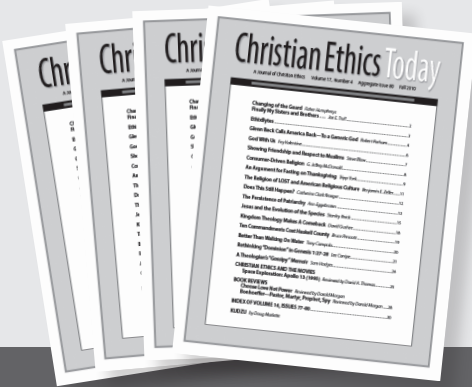
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—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

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