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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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**KUDZU** by Doug Marlette

# Pope Francis and The Joy of the Gospel

By Walter B. Shurden

Amazon gives it five stars! I think it may be the most important religious book of 2013, but I did not see it make any of the “Best Religious Books of 2013” lists.

It is *The Joy of the Gospel: EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, written by Pope Francis I. With this, his first *Apostolic Exhortation* delivered on November 24, 2013, Francis I, like John XXIII a half century before him, threw open the windows to let some fresh air into the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants and all religionists and non-religionists would profit from inhaling some of this invigorating air.

Shortly after being elected the 266th Pope, the former Jorge Mario Bergoglio jested with the Cardinals, “May God forgive you for what you have done.” If *The Joy of the Gospel* is a signpost of where he wants to take the Catholic Church, the Cardinals will need no forgiveness.

This warm, joyful, biblical, pastoral, relevant, prophetic, and, at times, personal statement has been egregiously mischaracterized by the public media and pundits such as Rush Limbaugh. This is not a document whose primary purpose is to assail Wall Street. However, with its comprehensive description of evangelization, it certainly does not give unregulated free market capitalism a pass. One certainly understands why it gives extreme conservatives theological and economic reflux. But contrary to what you may have heard or read regarding the document, you need to hear Francis clearly say that “this Exhortation is not a social document.”<sup>1</sup> Surely he must have known that some would interpret it precisely as a “social” document, and he obviously did not care. He did not care because he deeply believes that the “social” is a vital part of Christian evangelization.

Francis’ intent could not be more clear or upfront: “In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy [of the gospel], while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”<sup>2</sup> This “Exhortation” from this happy Pope is about the “joy of the gospel.” It is about the “joy of the gospel” that provides the motivation for evangelism, for missions, and for outreach to all people, especially to the poor. It is about the primacy and joy of grace that precedes what Francis calls *evangelization*. This is primarily a work of missiology. Do not listen to anyone who tells you differently.

The document has an introduc-

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## *This “Exhortation” from this happy Pope is about the “joy of the gospel.”*

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tion and five chapters. Chapter 1 of this missionary essay is entitled *The Church’s Missionary Transformation*, chapter 2 is *Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment*, chapter 3, a chapter on preaching from one who is not an exceptional preacher, is *The Proclamation of the Gospel*, and Chapter 4 is *The Social Dimension of Evangelization*. Chapter 4 is the chapter that has drawn the most criticism, and one suspects that it is the only chapter that the most virulent critics have read, caring little for the central theological theme of Pope Francis. Chapter 5, containing a Pentecostal echo, is entitled “*Spirit-Filled Evangelizers*.”

To whom did Francis address this Exhortation? Part of the long and awkward title identifies his audience: *To the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated*

*Persons, and the Lay Faithful*. Surely his primary target was the entire Church he leads. And while being cautious about reading non-Catholic biases into the words of Francis, I thought Francis had some rather specific Catholic targets in mind. One of those targets appeared to be those bishops and priests who would deny the Eucharist to politicians and leaders whose opinions on social issues, such as abortion, differed with their own. Francis said, “The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak . . . Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.”<sup>3</sup>

But I suspect that he had a much wider audience in mind than the Catholic Church alone. His genuine ecumenical embrace is reflected in paragraph 201 where he voices his “trust” in “all Christians” to accept his renewed call to “spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, [and] the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty.” While he certainly did not direct this *Exhortation* explicitly toward “followers of non-Christian religions,” Muslims, and all “non-Christians,”<sup>4</sup> Francis doubtless will be pleased if these groups peek over his shoulder and sense his openness. Moreover, one cannot doubt that Francis would be especially pleased if heads of state and world governmental leaders would heed his words on the social dimensions of the gospel. Again, however, Francis is primarily issuing a wide-ranging spiritual call for Christians to evangelize, and this includes the transformation of structures as well as persons.

**The primary theme: the joy of the Gospel:** But what does Francis actually say in the document? He repeats many of the themes that the public media have picked up and spread abroad about him, especially his concern for the poor and the lowly. But here you learn that his concern for the poor, his motivation for lifting the lowly, comes deeply from his faith. Writing this essay as a pastoral theologian, not a social welfare worker, Francis has one overarching and general theme in this particular document. It is a theme that the media has not discerned. This theme, as stated above, is that **IT IS JOY, THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL, THAT CREATES A MISSIONARY AND EVANGELIZING CHURCH.** Where there is no joy, where spiritual ardor has evaporated, there is no reaching out by the church.<sup>5</sup>

Because “there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,”<sup>6</sup> Francis invites all Christians, with some Baptist sounding language, “to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.”<sup>7</sup> When we encounter or have a renewed encounter with God’s love, “we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.” And “here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”<sup>8</sup>

Again, because “the joy of the gospel” is the source of authentic fulfillment, “an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral.”<sup>9</sup> In the pages of his *Exhortation* Francis will not let go of the idea that the joy of evangelizing is coupled with our personal encounter with the Holy. “The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: ‘It was about four o’clock in the afternoon’ (Jn 1:39).”<sup>10</sup>

With a single sentence, Francis

unintentionally dismisses all the slick techniques and clever strategies in evangelism textbooks that have come from Christian publishers. He says, “. . . anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”<sup>11</sup> To be sure, this proclamation is not simply a word we speak. “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep.’”<sup>12</sup>

While the overarching theme is abundantly clear, one cannot help but notice recurring secondary themes. There are many subthemes one can identify. Here are four that caught my attention.

**Inclusion, Not Exclusion:** This Pope has open arms, and he wants a Church with open doors. Speaking

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of his invitation to “all Christians” to a renewed personal encounter with Christ, Francis says, “No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, ‘since no one is excluded from the joy of the Lord.’”<sup>13</sup> Reflecting on the mission of the Church, Francis says, “. . . it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear,” because “The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.”<sup>14</sup>

While the positive theme of inclusivity is affirmed in many ways, the more negative theme of exclusivity is soundly rejected throughout the document. I came away from my reading believing that Francis was strongly suggesting that the Church find room

for tenderness and openness to the most marginalized among us.

**Decentralization and theological humility within the Catholic Church:** Because he is conscious of “the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’ in the Church,” Francis does not believe that “the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world.” “It is not advisable,” he says, “for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory.”<sup>15</sup> “Excessive centralization,” he repeats, “rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”<sup>16</sup>

Along with decentralization, Francis calls for the Church to rediscover some theological humility. He speaks often of the need for the church itself to be evangelized. “The Church is herself a missionary disciple; she needs to grow in her interpretation of the revealed word and in her understanding of truth.” The social sciences, philosophy, theology and pastoral practice “can enable the Church to grow.” He acknowledges that the call for theological growth and openness will cause consternation among some. He says, “For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion.” And then he adds, “But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel.”<sup>17</sup>

**Obsession with Secondary Issues:**

In one of the most intriguing sections of his *Exhortation*, Francis calls the Church back to “the heart of the Gospel.” When the Church puts “all things in a missionary key,” secondary aspects of the “Church’s moral teaching” must be kept “secondary.” Reaching back to the Second Vatican Council, he argues that there exists a “hierarchy of truths,” varying in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith. “This holds true,” he says, “as much for the dogmas of

faith as for the whole corpus of the Church's teaching, including her moral teaching."

Francis never identifies the "secondary" issues or the lesser truths within the hierarchy of truths. But a Protestant cannot but wonder, surely Catholics as well, that the Pope may be speaking of homosexuality, abortion, and other hot-button moral issues. Whatever specifics he has in mind, he calls for the church to preach the gospel with "a fitting sense of proportion." If a parish priest speaks within a year about temperance far more than justice or charity, an imbalance results. "The same thing happens," Francis said, "when we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God's word."

So what is the heart of the Gospel? It is "the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ." "Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others." All other virtues are in the service of our response to God's love. If this invitation to God's love "does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church's moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options."<sup>18</sup>

**The poor:** Francis chose his papal name with deliberation and intent. He himself has a "hierarchy" of ethical concerns, and at the top of those concerns are the poor and the eco-

nomically disenfranchised. "I want a Church which is poor and for the poor," he exclaims.<sup>19</sup>

A privatized gospel truncates the gospel. While earlier in the statement Francis calls for a highly personal and joyous individual faith, in chapter four he warns "that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God."<sup>20</sup> An authentic faith, he contends, is never comfortable or completely personal, but is always involved in "a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it."<sup>21</sup> Because the task of Christian evangelization demands the "integral promotion of each human being," "it is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven."<sup>22</sup>

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*It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven.*

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Christian evangelization entails "working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty."<sup>23</sup> And this work on behalf of the poor is theologically rooted; it does not originate in culture, sociology, politics or philosophy. "It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few."<sup>24</sup> Drenching his concern for the poor in biblical

precedents, Francis reminds that the key criterion of authentic ministry as suggested by the apostles to Paul was concern for the poor (Gal 2:10).

While theologically based, solidarity with the poor for Pope Francis has significant economic implications. Society in general is sickened and weakened by poverty. Welfare projects are temporary fixes. "As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems. Inequality is the root of social ills."<sup>25</sup>

Some of the "secondary" themes within the "Exhortation" are unapologetically Catholic. After all, this is a Catholic Pope writing. A concern for the unborn, the centrality of the Eucharist, a disdain for consumerism and individualism, and the limited role of women are all here. Regarding the latter, one senses a strong support for women. I got the impression--and it is only an impression--that if the Catholic environment were but a bit more open, this Pope would push for far more freedom for women within the Church. One hopes that Francis himself will push on this issue.

While a Catholic document from a Catholic Pope, this is a statement from which all Christians can receive inspiration and courage. Its ethical concerns, among others, will challenge all of us. Pray for long life for this Pope. ■

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Footnotes and bibliography for articles in this issue can be found on the web version located at [www.christianethicstoday.com](http://www.christianethicstoday.com)

# Is The National Association of Evangelicals Wandering in the Darkness?

By Charles Redfern

It seems the regal gentleman has fallen off his horse. He now stumbles through brambles and thickets in the dimming light, far behind the other riders.

Such is the quandary of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and many of its 40 member denominations and 45,000 churches. Their acquiescence is palpable while evidence mounts like a NASCAR pile-up: Last September, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a 2,000-page report warning of accelerated warming rates, with 95 percent odds favoring human culpability;<sup>1</sup> global 2013 carbon emissions likely reached 36 billion tons, a new record;<sup>2</sup> ninety experts say the IPCC previously underestimated probable sea level increases (in other words, the allegedly alarmist organization was timid);<sup>3</sup> a geoscientist team predicts mid-century Atlantic City flood levels surmounting “the natural disaster that was Superstorm Sandy;”<sup>4</sup> British scientists viewed satellite and other data and found that the oft-cited global warming “slowdown” is probably illusory. (In simple terms, no thermometers were planted at key warming spots, which made for inaccurate overall readings.)<sup>5</sup> The careening didn’t abate in January: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimated that 2013 tied with 2003 as the fourth warmest year since record-keeping began in 1880.<sup>6</sup> The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), using different models, said last year tied with 2009 and 2006 for seventh place.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, it was hot last year – polar vortexes notwithstanding.

Then there was the catastrophic roar of one of history’s most power-

ful typhoons.<sup>8</sup> Remember Katharine Hayhoe’s cautions in her long post-Sandy tweet: Climate change does not multiply storms but exacerbates them, and there is no way to determine if it spurred one given event.<sup>9</sup> But also consider the words of climatologist Michael Mann: “When a baseball player suddenly doubles the number of home runs he has been hitting through his career or season, and he is discovered to have been taking steroids that season, we don’t have to—nor could we ever hope to—prove that any one of those

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*Yet the noble NAE, refuses to join all other branches of Christianity in naming the name.*

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record season home runs was caused by the steroids. It is the wrong question. The right question is, were the steroids responsible for a good number of those home runs collectively? And the answer is yes.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet the noble NAE, which has epitomized dignity and aplomb since its 1942 launch, hedges its bets and refuses to join all other branches of Christianity in naming the name. It overlooked last year’s September petition of almost 2100 signatures urging its board “to affirm publicly the reality of human-induced climate change and endorse the responsibility of individuals, churches, and the federal government to act to reduce carbon emissions and protect our natural heritage for our children and grandchildren.”<sup>11</sup> The directors met in October and said nothing, prompting Richard Cizik, who

spearheaded the drive, to write in an e-mail exchange: “The NAE has ignored our petition, but we plan to continue a variety of means to hold the organization accountable.”<sup>12</sup> My stabs at obtaining an explanation via phone and e-mail were met with no response.

It’s all so eerie, so surreal. The intellectually muscular NAE, supposedly founded to re-assert orthodoxy as well as cultural engagement, wavers like the on-the-one-hand-on-the-other-hand theological liberals it chides. It’s lost its way. The mannerly rider’s britches are ripped; his vest is frayed. The evening’s chill bears down and the dignified prophet shrivels into a haggling negotiator, resembling the delegates at the November UN climate talks in Warsaw, Poland, who dickered while Philippine bodies swelled in the rubble. The world was underwhelmed. “Warsaw climate conference produces little agreement,” said a Washington Post headline; “UN talks limp towards 2015 climate deal,” said Reuters. “Warsaw climate change talks end on a blurry note,” said Politico, with Andrew Restuccia describing frustrated participants dumbfounded by “a lack of urgency, particularly given scientific reports that paint an increasingly dire picture of a warming planet.”<sup>13</sup>

The times call for Churchillian decisiveness and polite but principled stands shaped after Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, not Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement or the isolationism of the pre-World War II America First Committee.

## **Leadership and pressure**

The NAE’s silence disappoints partly because it once vied for the lead. Its 2004 framework for social engagement, entitled “For The Health of the Nation,” delineated seven vital

arenas: religious freedom, family life and children, the sanctity of life, caring for the poverty-stricken and helpless, human rights, peacemaking, and creation care. One eventual outcome was Dorothy Borse's 56-page pamphlet, *"Loving The Least of These: Addressing A Changing Environment,"* which stresses that "environmental change" strikes the poor most severely.<sup>14</sup> Cizik, once its vice-president of government affairs, spurred seismic shifts that would free the movement from reactionary captivity.

Push-back arose, of course. James Dobson bullied and tried to get Cizik fired. Then-president Ted Haggard was unimpressed. "The last time I checked," he told Dobson, "you weren't in charge of the NAE."<sup>15</sup> A muted approach came early in 2006 from the so-called "Interfaith Stewardship Alliance," since renamed the "Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation." The signatories – among whom were the distinguished Charles Colson along with a who's-who in the Religious Right, including Dobson, John Hagee, James Kennedy, and Richard Land – said they've "appreciated the bold stance that the (NAE) has taken on controversial issues like embracing a culture of life, protecting traditional marriage and family, promoting abstinence as AIDS prevention, and many others." But they requested it lay off climate change as it was "not a consensus issue." An official stance should be filtered through official channels, and "individual NAE members or staff should not give the impression that they are speaking on behalf of the entire membership, so as not to usurp the credibility and good reputation of the NAE." Then came the twist: "We respectfully ask that the NAE carefully consider all policy issues in which it might engage in the light of promoting unity among the Christian community and glory to God."

The irony is that NAE officials were "bold" when advocating their positions, but potentially divisive ("... in the light of promoting unity

...") on climate change. Invoking "unity" often knocks the debate off the merits. Suddenly, a thousand eggshells rattle across the floor, freezing us in our tracks lest we break our delicate bonds. Don't even dare ask about *your own* position's potential divisiveness. Have you pondered our possible disunity with Christianity's other legitimate branches?

It worked. The NAE blinked. Haggard answered in late January by defending the organization's pro-environment stance but demurring on climate change, assuring all that his executive committee "directs the NAE staff to stand by and not exceed in any fashion our approved and adopted statements concerning the environment contained within the Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility." Catch a glimpse of American evangelicalism's blind spot

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*Do the Scriptures rally to free enterprise? And pro-creation statements ring hollow without identifying its destructive agents. Imagine federal authorities banning the mention of cigarettes while promoting cancer-free living.*

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toward the end: "I believe there are pro-environment, pro-free market, pro-business answers to the environmental questions facing our community."

Do the Scriptures rally to free enterprise? Cultural standards were now mixed into a back-to-the-Bible organization, a charge evangelicals often levy against theological liberals. And pro-creation statements ring hollow without identifying its destructive agents. Imagine federal authorities banning the mention of cigarettes while promoting cancer-free living.

## **Change and the return of the wise man**

The year 2006 proved pivotal. In February, 86 evangelical leaders – including pastors, 39 Christian college presidents, and not a few current NAE board members – signed the "Evangelical Climate Initiative," which asserted the reality of human-induced global warming, saying it imperiled national security and the poverty-stricken. "Love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reason for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action. Christians must care about climate change because we are called to love our neighbors."<sup>16</sup> In May, one of the last credible denial hold-outs, Gregg Easterbrook, cried uncle in the *New York Times*: "Based on the data I'm now switching sides on global warming, from skeptic to convert."<sup>17</sup> In November, Haggard resigned in the wake of a sexual scandal.

Former NAE President Leith Anderson was recalled to the helm and brought his steady hand. The evangelical world breathed a sigh of relief. "There's an enormous trust that people have with (Anderson), and that allows him to lead," said Jo Anne Lyon, general superintendent of the Wesleyan church. The Minnesota mega-church pastor brought administrative efficiency and showed he was no right-wing poster boy. He opposed the death penalty, supported immigration reform, and signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative. A Religion News Service profile said he "continues to press the issue of justice for the poor in the developing world, working hard behind the scenes to craft an official NAE statement on climate change." His political moderation and partisan neutrality did not help one of his church regulars and presidential hopeful Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty.<sup>18</sup> Anderson's pastoral style seemed the right prescription for a stunned organization laboring under

a recent leadership scandal – and it fit with the NAE’s gentlemanly and lady-like ethos.

### **When being nice is not enough**

But a consensus-at-all-costs approach has its weaknesses. Witness a 2008 *Christianity Today* interview immediately after Cizik’s resignation. (He stepped down after an enigmatic answer to a National Public Radio query about civil unions for homosexuals, for which he later apologized.) Anderson said NAE officials should speak for the association, not for themselves. When asked about Cizik’s climate change advocacy, he replied: “For the Health of the Nation’ does state that creation care is one of our priorities. It does not state in that document that we have a specific position, because we don’t, on global warming or emissions. So he (Cizik) has spoken as an individual on that. However, to most of our constituents, marriage and related moral issues are of greater importance and significance than specific stances on the climate.”<sup>19</sup>

The question hovers: But is it right? Does the Bible prioritize family moralities over others? Did you not sign a statement underscoring the moral imperative entailed in climate change? Post-interview quarterbacking is easy (and let’s shout “take two” on Cizik’s NPR conversation), but we’re left with that vague “opportunity lost” feeling. Reel back the tape. Say this: “The NAE has no formal position on climate change, but Richard was educating us and I’m on record as agreeing with him. I hope the education process can go on.”

A risky reply, to be sure. No doubt some would have screamed for Anderson’s professional head so they could line it up on Cizik’s platter, but aren’t mega-church pastors writing books on “courageous leadership?” Did NAE heroes like Luther, Calvin, and Wesley – or founding President Harold Ockenga – poll their constituents? Haven’t evangelicals always claimed that truth trumps popularity? Otherwise, Ockenga would have fawned before Henry Emerson

Fosdick and Carl Henry would never have written *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Perhaps the NAE ails with a malady posing as a vaccine -- conflict avoidance in the guise of conflict resolution. Many in its institutions and churches offer courses in communication and negotiation in an attempt to quell their internecine battles. Such efforts are laudable, but they can lead to unintended consequences. Argument (the process of defending a viewpoint by marshalling facts in a quest for the truth) is deemed intrinsically bad.

Hear the rattling eggshells. Suddenly, we’re nomads in the labyrinth of passive aggressiveness, choked by stilted “I statements” and confined by the tyranny of the sensitive – and, for the sake of “unity,” absurdities attain equal status with actualities. Representatives from the

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Flat Earth Society and the American Astronomical Society sit at the same table – and Luther withdraws his 95 Theses because he did not “validate” the bishop’s feelings. Meanwhile, bullies see concessions as weaknesses: The Flat Earth-ers pound the table, yield nothing, display offense when the astronomers show photographs of a round planet, and demand a wider audience.

The sad fact is that enemy-centered, antagonistic parties do not play for win-win resolution. They grab olive branches and use them as whips in their battle for all-out victory. Sample climate-change denier Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. While dazed Philippine survivors picked through debris, he inaccurately

blogged on November 13th: “Much of the worst hysteria about apocalyptic Global Warming has cooled, especially after more than 15 years of no global temperature increases, evincing at least that climate computer models are less than infallible.”<sup>20</sup> He then skipped past warnings from President Reagan’s Secretary of State, George Schultz,<sup>21</sup> The World Bank,<sup>22</sup> the US commander of the Pacific Fleet,<sup>23</sup> a dozen retired admirals and generals,<sup>24</sup> two hundred evangelical scientists,<sup>25</sup> the Christian Reformed Church (an NAE member),<sup>26</sup> and the many leaders who signed Evangelical Climate Initiative, and declared: “Some of the most committed believers in the theory that human activity is uniquely fueling a disastrous increase in temperature are on the Religious Left.” He singled-out former Chicago Theological Seminary President Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “who’s ordained in the ultra liberal United Church of Christ” and who “faulted Global Warming skeptics for the murderous typhoon in the Philippines.” She allegedly displays “unwavering faith in apocalyptic global warming” and “strict adherence to climate fundamentalism.” His last line evokes Greek mythology’s earth goddess: “But zealots like Thistlethwaite will not likely forsake the solace of Gaia’s temple, from which they’ll continue to issue thunderbolts against the heretics who dare to doubt.”

Congrats on the promotion to Mount Olympus, Dr. Thistlewaite. Make yourself at home. We could dismiss Tooley’s incivility as bluster from the fringe but for this: The IRD has bended the NAE ear before. Jerald Walsh, the organization’s vice president of operations from 1997 to 2009, sat on the NAE board and tried to muffle Cizik just after Haggard’s resignation. It seems IRD personnel see no irony in raising their pitch while trying to silence their perceived enemies.

All of this highlights a danger for Anderson and the NAE. They may be sealing themselves in a clan-

nish cultural cul-de-sac, perhaps isolating themselves from their own tribe. The world's evangelicals embrace the imperative of addressing human-induced climate change: The Lausanne Movement teamed up with the World Evangelical Alliance in 2012 and rendered Thislethwaite docile: "We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be solved in our generation ..." We're devastating nature with "violence," and, "We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbors and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to 'urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.'"<sup>27</sup> American organizations including the Evangelical Environmental Network, the Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, and the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good – along with denominations such as the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Covenant Church, and the Wesleyans – each have statements on their web sites. And then there are the Catholics and Eastern Orthodox,

never mind mainline Protestants.

See the tragedy in a possible future. The NAE, founded partly to break evangelicals out of their fundamentalist shells so they'd engage the surrounding culture, fades into irrelevance while struggling to preserve a unity on the fringe.

Such would be a sad fate.

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*Society's ills – greed, materialism, cheap grace, pleasure at the price of responsibility – interlock here, at human-induced climate change.*

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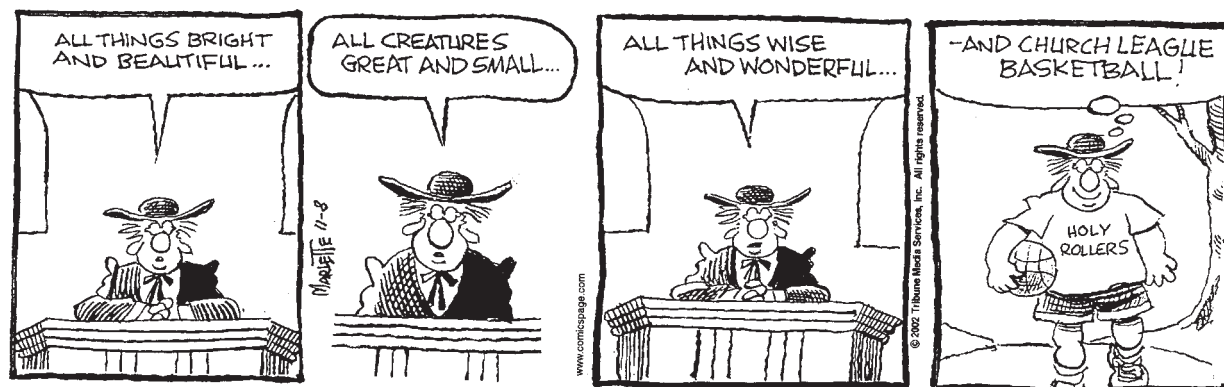
Perhaps Anderson and his board can remember a statement signed by dozens of well-known evangelical leaders after Cizik's resignation. Many were grieved, but they incited none of Tooley's bluster: "The NAE exercises a powerful leadership role in the family of American

Evangelicals even in churches that are not part of an NAE member denomination." They requested that the organization maintain "a broad Christian moral agenda – rooted in the Gospel and relevant to the full range of moral challenges facing us in the 21st century."

Those graceful words – written in anguish but with sympathy – remain salient. Many will turn a deaf ear to the NAE unless it soon grapples with this century's starkest challenge. Society's ills – greed, materialism, cheap grace, pleasure at the price of responsibility – interlock here, at human-induced climate change.

Fortunately, it is not too late. The steed awaits, ready for the gentleman to mount once more. He can race up to the rest of the riders and, once again, lead the chase with his usual grace and courage. ■

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# From Proposition 8 to Amendment One: Black Baptists, Same-Sex Marriage and Visions of the Beloved Community

By Aaron Douglas Weaver

On November 4, 2008, history was made as Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. More than 69 million voters cast their ballots for the junior senator from Illinois. The same day that witnessed the election of the nation's first African-American President, voters in California passed the "California Marriage Protection Act," popularly known as "Proposition 8," which added a section to the California Constitution eliminating the legal right of same-sex couples to marry. Pollsters and pundits immediately interpreted exit polls to conclude that African-American opposition to same-sex marriage combined with high African-American voter turnout sealed the passage of the controversial Proposition 8.<sup>1</sup> The General Election Exit Poll showed that 70 percent of African-American voters backed Proposition 8 while candidate Obama, an opponent of Proposition 8, received the support of 94 percent of African-American voters in the Golden State.<sup>2</sup>

The media backlash against African-Americans was immediate and forceful. Newspaper headlines placed blame for the passage of Proposition 8 squarely on the shoulders of black voters. The front-page headline of the *Washington Times* read: "Blacks, Hispanics nixed gay marriage; Loyalists defied Obama" and the *Los Angeles Times* reported that black voters "played a crucial role in the outcome [of Proposition 8]."<sup>3</sup> Even political satirist and comedian Jon Stewart of *The Daily Show* weighed in with a segment on his television show declaring that African-American celebrations of Barack Obama's victory amounted to, "Free at last, free at last — whoa,

whoa [referring to an image of two men holding hands] — where are you two going?"<sup>4</sup>

The passage of Proposition 8 in California put a bright national spotlight on the conservative attitudes of African-Americans toward homosexuality and gay rights. An examination of the attitudes of African-American Baptists toward gay rights and same-sex marriage, reveals that while most Black Baptist leaders (traditionalists) have been steadfastly opposed to same-sex marriage, a small but growing minority

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*A small but growing minority of dissenters have publicly challenged the anti-gay rights orthodoxy in Black Baptist life.*

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of dissenters have publicly challenged the anti-gay rights orthodoxy in Black Baptist life. Additionally, these traditionalists and dissenters have referenced the Civil Rights Movement and invoked the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in their sermons and other arguments dealing with gay rights. In doing so, these two groups in Black Baptist life have adopted different understandings of Dr. King's vision of a beloved community, a vision described by theologian Charles Marshall as "the realization of divine love in lived social relation."<sup>5</sup> Concepts central to Black Baptist identity and the identity of the larger Black Church such as biblical authority and liberty of conscience help explain the existence of these differing understandings.

With foundational values like free-

dom, justice and equality — rooted in an incarnational theology — the Black Church has often, according to African-American scholars Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald Hopson, served as the "vanguard for social change." However, as Douglas and Hopson note, the Black Church can also be a "stubborn antagonist" social change.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps no issue reveals the Black Church's complex relationship with these foundational values than gay rights. Sociologist Elijah Ward explains that the responses of the majority of African-American congregations and denominations toward homosexuality and gay rights generally range from "verbalized hostility toward homosexuals to, at best, silence on the issue."<sup>7</sup> Black theologian Horace Griffin echoes this sentiment, pointing out that black congregations have "entered the dialogue on homosexuality in grudgingly or in reactionary ways."<sup>8</sup>

Opposition to gay rights has been expressed in Black Baptist life at both the institutional and individual levels with Black Baptist denominations generally employing a strategy of silence. While not reluctant to speak out on the subject of many moral issues in American society, no major African-American Baptist group has taken an official position on gay rights. During the presidency of George W. Bush, conservative activists attempted to woo African-Americans to the Republican Party by appealing to their high level of opposition to same-sex marriage. Responding to this intentional targeting of black voters, Rev. Jesse Jackson, speaking before a 2005 joint gathering of Black Baptists, asked the audience how many ministers had fielded requests to perform same-sex weddings. After a moment of silence,

Jackson declared, “Then how did that get in the middle of our agenda!”<sup>9</sup>

This institutional strategy of silence has not been adopted at the individual level. Many visible and influential Black Baptist pastors have not hesitated to speak out against homosexuality and oppose gay rights and the “love the sinner, hate the sin” theological perspective has been reflected in the rhetoric of some pastors. This perspective can be seen in a 2007 statement issued by the Memphis Baptist Ministerial Association, an organization of African-American Baptist pastors, denouncing legislation to expand the definition of a “hate crime” to include crimes targeting persons on the basis of sexual orientation. The association called on Christians to distinguish between homosexuals and homosexuality because “God loves the homosexual but hates homosexuality.”<sup>10</sup>

Two years earlier, a group of mostly Black Baptist pastors issued a 10-point “Christian Family Manifesto” which offered “love, mercy, grace and truth to those involved in a homosexual lifestyle” and urged gays and lesbians to “receive God’s forgiveness and seek fellowship, restoration and counseling in a Bible believing local church.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the shrill rhetoric and condemnation of some Black Baptist traditionalists has drowned out these more civil expressions of love and mercy toward gays and lesbians.

Many Black Baptist leaders have made clear through countless public remarks that their struggle for civil rights should not be compared with the fight for gay rights. In the midst of the effort to legalize same-sex marriage in the District of Columbia, Rev. Anthony Evans, a D.C. Baptist pastor and president of the National Black Church Initiative, said, “We did not march, die, struggle and donate so that two men or two women could have raw sex with one another.”<sup>12</sup> Writing a column in the aftermath of Proposition 8, Rev. Rolen Womack of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reaffirmed that same-sex

marriage is not a civil rights issue. Womack asserted that African-Americans “look at the faces of the same-sex marriage demonstrators... and cannot connect this to the Civil Rights Movement.”<sup>13</sup>

Black pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention have also expressed outrage at the characterization of gay rights activism as an extension of the Civil Rights movement. Advocating for the passage of a federal constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage at a gathering in 2004 of Southern Baptist pastors, Rev. E.W. McCall exclaimed, “To place homosexuality’s sin rights movement on the same platform as the struggle of African-Americans for civil rights is appalling.”<sup>14</sup> Rev. Fred Luter — the current SBC president and the first African-American to hold that position — told the same gathering

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*“We did not march, die, struggle and donate so that two men or two women could have raw sex with one another.” Rev. Anthony Evans*

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of pastors: “Gays have all the rights in the world to live as free citizens. We didn’t. I think it’s being insensitive to what we have gone through as African-Americans to compare what they’re going through to the civil rights struggle.”<sup>15</sup>

No black Southern Baptist pastor has received more media attention for his opposition to gay rights than Rev. Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas. In 2004, McKissic put together a coalition of black pastors to oppose same-sex marriage. Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary just days prior to the 2004 presidential election, McKissic told the mostly white crowd: “When homosexuals have spent over 200 years in slavery, when homosexuals have been legally

defined as three-fifths human, when homosexuals have been denied the right to vote and own property because they are homosexuals, then we can begin a discussion of the parallels between the civil rights and gay rights movements.”<sup>16</sup>

McKissic described equating gay rights and civil rights as “insulting, offensive and racist.” He elaborated, “Civil rights are rooted in moral authority. Gay rights are rooted in a lack of moral restraint. Civil rights are rooted in constitutional authority. Gay rights are rooted in civil anarchy.” McKissic concluded his fiery sermon by emphasizing that the Civil Rights Movement was birthed in the Black Church while the gay rights movement was “birthed in the closet and it should stay there.”<sup>17</sup>

While this heated rhetoric and catchy, but hostile one-liners has characterized the responses of some Black Baptist pastors, others have advanced more civil arguments against gay rights. For example, Rev. Gerald Durley, then pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, argued shortly after the passage of Proposition 8 that voting rights, housing rights and transportation rights are “sanctioned by God.” According to Durley, African-Americans have struggled for those particular rights solely because they are “ordained” by God. Therefore, Durley contended that Christians should not spend energy advocating for a legal right such as same-sex marriage not ordained or sanctioned by God.<sup>18</sup>

Rev. Clenard H. Childress, pastor of New Calvary Baptist Church in Montclair, New Jersey, made a similar Bible-based argument against gay rights in the aftermath of the Proposition 8 vote. Childress strongly disputed the claim that homophobia is widespread among African-Americans. Black opposition to gay rights does not indicate the presence of homophobia, according to Childress. Rather, in his view, this opposition is merely proof that African-Americans are generally

“Christ-centric” and desire to faithfully follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Like many Black Baptists, Durley and Childress believe that following the teachings of Christ must involve opposing same-sex marriage.<sup>19</sup>

Durley’s appeal to the teachings of Christ as revealed in the Bible demonstrates the important and central role of biblical authority among Black Baptists and in the Black Church. Black theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues that the Bible serves as the “cornerstone” for opposition to homosexuality and gay rights in the African-American community. “By invoking biblical authority [African-Americans] place a sacred canopy, a divine sanction, over their views toward gay and lesbian people,” according to Douglas.<sup>20</sup>

Despite strong opposition to gay rights among many Black Baptist leaders, there exists a small but growing minority of Black Baptist dissenters who have loudly championed equal legal rights for gays and lesbians, including the right to marry. This group of Black Baptist dissenters is comprised primarily of elite, well-known and well-respected leaders including civil rights icons and megachurch pastors. Most notable among these dissenters is the widow of Dr. King.

Throughout the decade prior to her death in 2006, Coretta Scott King established herself as a committed advocate for gays and lesbians. In 1998, King identified homophobia as a vicious form of bigotry and compared it with racism and anti-Semitism.<sup>21</sup> In another speech, King reminded her audience that gays and lesbians were involved in many of the campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>22</sup> Just days before the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her husband’s assassination, King issued an appeal “to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream to make room at the table of brother and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people.” According to her, Dr. King’s popular refrain, “Injustice

anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” was certainly applicable to the struggles of sexual minorities.<sup>23</sup> King explained that she had always felt that “homophobic attitudes and policies were unjust and unworthy of a free society and must be opposed by all Americans who believe in a democracy.”<sup>24</sup>

Like Coretta Scott King, United States Congressman John Lewis — a veteran civil rights leader, former Baptist seminarian and member of Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church — has been a faithful proponent of gay rights for many years. In a 2009 interview, Lewis provided his rationale for supporting gay rights and same-sex marriage: “It doesn’t matter if someone is gay or straight or whether someone believes in a different philosophy or different religion. We’re one people, we’re one family,

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*“There is not any room in American society for discrimination based on sexual orientation... discrimination is discrimination and we have to speak up and speak out against discrimination.”*

*Rep. John Lewis*

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and we’re one house. There is not any room in American society for discrimination based on sexual orientation...discrimination is discrimination and we have to speak up and speak out against discrimination.”<sup>25</sup>

In his support of gay rights, Lewis has frequently cited the words of Dr. King. When speaking specifically about same-sex marriage, Lewis has recalled Dr. King’s famous dictum that individuals, not races, fall in love and get married. Lewis has used this quote to draw an explicit comparison between current legal bans on same-sex marriage and legal bans which

existed for most of the twentieth century on interracial marriage. Not surprisingly then, Lewis has sharply disagreed with those who believe it is outrageous and offensive to make a connection between the gay rights movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Instead, Lewis sees a real and clear connection between the two anti-discrimination movements.<sup>26</sup>

Julian Bond, the former chairman of the NAACP, is another prominent Black Baptist dissenter on gay rights. While still chairman, Bond testified in late 2009 before the New Jersey Senate Judiciary Committee in support of legislation to allow same-sex marriage. He told the committee that like race, sexual orientation is not a preference: It’s immutable, unchangeable and the Constitution protects us all from discrimination.<sup>27</sup> Citing Coretta Scott King’s comparison of homophobia with racism, Bond emphasized that “Black people, of all people, should not oppose equality.”

In his testimony, Bond specifically addressed religious opposition to same-sex marriage. Like those who opposed interracial marriage in earlier decades, opponents of same-sex marriage also “invoke God’s plan,” Bond noted. Reflecting on the fact that faith communities in the United States now believe interracial marriage to be compatible with “God’s plan,” Bond observed: “Well, God seems to have made room in his plan for interracial marriage. He will no doubt do the same for same-sex marriage. ...Black Christians have always discarded scriptures that damned us in the name of religion, like the curse of Ham in Genesis or support for slavery in Ephesians. We should just as easily and just as eagerly discard those which marginalize others.”<sup>28</sup>

While Black Baptist dissenters like John Lewis have been elected time and time again to serve predominantly African-American congressional districts, very few Black Baptist pastors have come out in favor of gay rights. Perhaps the most noteworthy dissenting-preacher is the

Rev. Dr. Frederick Haynes, who has served as the senior pastor of Dallas' 12,000-member Friendship-West Baptist Church since 1983.

At a 2009 summit on homophobia, Haynes offered his public support for gay rights. In a stirring sermon, Hayes spoke of a "dream come true" in the election of Barack Obama. Haynes noted that the inauguration of Obama as president came on January 20, just one day after the annual national commemoration of the "Drum-Major for Justice," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "You can't have January 20 unless you appreciate the 19<sup>th</sup>," said Haynes. He recalled that the joy he experienced in witnessing "the great victory of Barack Obama" began to disappear with the passage of Proposition 8 in Haynes' home-state of California. He explained that it "blew [his] mind" that "the same persons who voted for Barack Obama in the name of faith and ethnic pride also voted in a real sense as cohorts, as allies of injustice in the state of California." Haynes continued, "How can you stand up in church on Sunday, praising God, celebrating the goodness of God, who gave birth to an Amos, and yet your love ethic, your sense of justice does not embrace all of humanity." The Dallas pastor concluded the sermon, rebuking his fellow African-Americans for failing to carry "the love ethic of Jesus Christ to the polls."<sup>29</sup>

Following the passage of Proposition 8, Rev. Brad Braxton, an ordained Baptist minister and then-senior pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York City, issued a call to action on behalf of gay rights. Braxton stated: "I call upon all people of good will to work together to craft public policies and foster communal practices that will usher in the Beloved Community of which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke, in which all God's children can have their life-giving, loving covenant affirmed."<sup>30</sup>

Braxton also lobbied on behalf of the legalization of same-sex mar-

riage in New York state. Noting that his Christian convictions were the driving force behind his support for same-sex marriage, Braxton wrote in *The Huffington Post*: "Our support for marriage equality is motivated by our religious commitments, not in spite of them. Our Christian faith teaches us the uncompromising, unconditional love of God for all people. Bound together by that love we are all deserving of dignity, equality and justice."<sup>31</sup>

Braxton believes that there exists no real conflict between same-sex marriage and religious freedom. In fact, he contends that religious freedom is endangered in states where same-sex marriage is prohibited and stresses that the denial of marriage to same-sex couples infringes upon their religious freedom since "no one Christian position about marriage"

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*I know in my sanctified soul that he did not take a bullet for same-sex marriage."*

*Bernice King*

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exists due to the theologically diverse nature of the Christian tradition.<sup>32</sup>

During the 2008 presidential campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama made a campaign stop at Dr. King's former church, Ebenezer Baptist in Atlanta to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Speaking before a packed sanctuary, Obama reminded the crowd that historically African-Americans had been at the "receiving end of man's inhumanity to man." However, Obama noted, "If we're honest with ourselves, we'll acknowledge that our own community has not always been true to King's vision of a Beloved Community." In an introspective moment, Obama added, "We have scorned our gay brothers and sisters instead of embracing them."<sup>33</sup>

Is Obama correct? Have African-Americans failed to live up to Dr. King's vision of a Beloved

Community? Or have African-Americans been operating from different understandings of Dr. King's vision of a Beloved Community — a vision grounded in a Christian theology affirming that "God is on the side of truth and love and justice" and where the nonviolent quest for freedom, justice and equality always ends with the formation of "a new relationship...between the oppressed and the oppressor."<sup>34</sup> I argue the latter.

These disparate understandings of what Dr. King means by a "Beloved Community" are best represented in the view of Dr. King's wife, Coretta Scott King, and his youngest daughter, Bernice King. While Mrs. King understood her husband's dream of a Beloved Community to include justice and equal rights for gays and lesbians, Bernice King, formerly an elder at Atlanta's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, has been an outspoken opponent of gay rights. On December 11, 2004, Bernice King led an estimated 25,000 people in a march in downtown Atlanta in support of the Federal Marriage Amendment to ban same-sex marriage.<sup>35</sup> King once remarked about her father's assassination: "I know in my sanctified soul that he did not take a bullet for same-sex marriage."<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, Bernice King has embraced a different understanding of her father's vision that her late mother. She and other Black Baptist traditionalists cling to a vision of the Beloved Community that sees no connection between gay rights and civil rights. It is a vision in which same-sex marriage is, without a doubt, not a civil right. Why? Because the Bible tells them so.

According to pastors such as Rev. Durley, a civil right is that which God explicitly ordains. The Black Baptist gay rights opponents or traditionalists cited here believe strongly that when it comes to gay rights issues there is indeed a direct route from the Bible to the ballot box. Scripture and specifically the teachings of Jesus about marriage compel these Black Baptists to stand firm against same-sex marriage in the political arena.

Meanwhile, Black Baptist dissenters embrace a vision of the Beloved Community that sees the movement for gay rights and “marriage equality” to be one of many extensions of the Civil Rights Movement. As John Lewis suggested, a connection must be drawn between the Civil Rights Movement and others movements fighting legal discrimination. Emphasizing community and conscience, these dissenters reject arguments based on specific Bible verses used to justify opposition to equal legal rights for gays and lesbians.

For dissenters, the Beloved Community is a vision in which rights are expanded not restricted. Consequently, legal prohibitions on same-sex marriage are viewed as a major impediment to the realization of the Beloved Community. In this vision of the Beloved Community, dissenters contend that the free-

dom found in Christ or liberty of conscience — informed by the love ethic of Jesus — necessitates dogged, unwavering support for gay rights.

The contentious debate over gay

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*This vision of the Beloved Community, necessitates dogged, unwavering support for gay rights.*

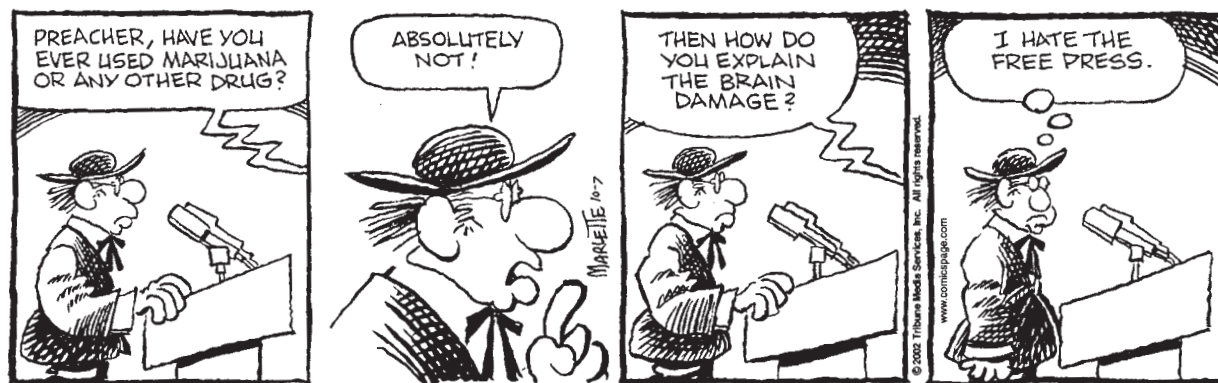
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rights and same-sex marriage will inevitably continue in the foreseeable future. Recent developments such as the passage of Amendment One in North Carolina banning legal recognition of any same-sex union and President Obama’s endorsement of the legal right of same-sex couples to marry prove that the debates will not cease. These developments, especially

the coalitions of African-American clergy who campaigned against Amendment One, have revealed that Black Baptist dissenters remain a minority but a quickly growing minority. With the NAACP’s recent vote to support “marriage equality” and a national poll showing that a record-high 59 percent of African-Americans support giving same-sex couples the right to marry, up from 41 percent, Black Baptists and the larger Black Church will continue to consider and perhaps reconsider their particular vision of the Beloved Community and whether it can transcend differences in sexual orientation alongside racial differences.<sup>37</sup> ■

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Footnotes and bibliography for articles in this issue can be found on the web version located at [www.christianethicstoday.com](http://www.christianethicstoday.com)



# The Re-Assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Wendell Griffen

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would have been 85 years old on January 15, 2014. His assassination on April 4, 1968, silenced his voice and robbed the world of his presence. In the aftermath of Dr. King's death, the issues of militarism, racism, and materialism—the triplets he identified as the cause of so much suffering in the United States and across the world—have not been conquered. Instead, they remain dominant, if not dominating, factors for suffering around the world.

A year to the day before he was assassinated Dr. King publicly defined the war in Vietnam as a civil rights issue on April 4, 1967 in an address titled *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence* to a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam at Riverside Church in New York City. Dr. King uttered the following prescient statement in that address:

*The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality we will find ourselves organizing clergy-and laymen-concerned committees for the next generation.... In 1957 a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. ... I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered. A true revolution of values*

*will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.*

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**We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society.** Martin Luther King Jr.

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*A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say: "This is not just."... A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped*

*and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.<sup>2</sup>*

Public reaction to King's words was swift and hostile. A number of editorial writers attacked him for connecting Vietnam to the civil rights movement. The *New York Times* issued an editorial claiming that King had damaged the peace movement as well as the civil rights movement. *Life* magazine assailed the speech as "demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi." The *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African-American publication, charged King with "tragically misleading" black people. And at the White House, President Lyndon Johnson was quoted as saying, "What is that god-damned nigger preacher doing to me? We gave him the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we gave him the Voting Rights Act of 1965, we gave him the War on Poverty. What more does he want?"<sup>3</sup>

King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee exactly one year after he delivered the speech. Nine years after his death Dr. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by another Baptist from Georgia, President Jimmy Carter. A federal holiday has been established to honor his birthday. His statue has

been placed in Washington, DC. Numerous cities and towns have renamed major traffic arteries for him in the United States, and he is revered throughout the world as one of the most prophetic souls of the 20th century, if not the modern era. When he took the oath of office to begin his second term, President Barack Obama placed his hand on a Bible that belonged to Dr. King and alluded to him during his inaugural address.

Yet the veneration of Dr. King has not included any significant or serious effort by U.S. policymakers, social commentators, and moral leaders to embrace the “radical revolution of values” King called for in *A Time to Break Silence*. The “giant triplets” of racism, militarism, and materialism have not been confronted. The U.S. currently devotes more of its budget on national defense and homeland security than on educating children, fighting disease, feeding the hungry, and alleviating poverty.

We may never learn the true financial cost of the tragic exercise in military adventurism known as the war in Iraq. As the 10th anniversary of the war in Iraq approached, Reuters reported on a study by a team of academicians which tallied the cost of the war at \$1.7 trillion, a figure that did not include \$490 billion owed to Iraqi war veterans. The study projected that expenses related to the war in Iraq could grow to more than \$6 trillion over the next four decades.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that U.S. leaders are venerating King’s memory they have callously rejected his call for the United States to use its wealth and prestige to lead the world in a radical revolution of values that rejects war as the preferred means of resolving differences. President Barack Obama could not have been guided by the vision of the Baptist preacher whose Bible he used for his second inauguration. Had that been the case, Mr. Obama would not have tried to recruit U.S. global allies and members in Congress for launching military strikes against Syria in 2013.

The same spirit of militarism that

produced the tragedy that King denounced concerning Vietnam led to the travesty of Iraq. Although President Obama could not persuade U.S. officials and global allies to embrace a military response to Syria the way President George W. Bush did concerning Iraq, U.S. militarism continues to cast an ominous cloud over the world and hinder efforts to address glaring problems at home.

Jonathan Tran’s 2012 essay in *Christian Ethics Today* about the war policies of the Obama administration reminds us that President Obama has articulated what Tran described “a theology of war.”<sup>5</sup> It is more than sadly ironic that the first African-American to hold the office of president of the United States currently oversees a policy of killing American citizens by using armed drones. The same militarism that King criti-

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### *The “giant triplets” of racism, militarism, and materialism have not been confronted.*

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cized is also evident in the virulent response by President Obama and other U.S. leaders to the disclosures by Edward Snowden that the U.S. has been engaged in wholesale spying on American citizens and others throughout the world—including the leaders of nations considered its allies.

Forty-four years after Dr. King was murdered by a gunman, the nation witnessed the massacre of 20 children and six adult staff members of Sandy Hook Elementary School in New Town, Connecticut by a gunman who had already killed his mother and later killed himself. The militarism that drives U.S. global policy seems to have turned on our own children. The response to the Sandy Hook massacre has not been, however, to confront the giant of militarism. Firearm manufacturers and their lobbyists, like defense contractors and their lobbyists, now hold more influence than ever before.

Sadly, devotion to corporate profit-

making continues to hamstring efforts to make our society and the world safe. Thus, militarism has joined forces with materialism so much that American schools run the serious risk of becoming fortresses. We seem unable to recognize the moral and ethical contradiction of singing *Let There Be Peace on Earth* while we are arming school teachers and cheering people who openly brandish handguns.

The moral and ethical disconnect between the rhetoric used to venerate Dr. King and the persistence of entrenched racism in American life continues to afflict us. Policymakers refuse to acknowledge the plain truth that the “law and order,” and “war on drugs” mantra used by every U.S. president since Lyndon Johnson has actually produced the mass incarceration of millions of people who are disproportionately persons of color. The oppressive law enforcement policies that gave rise to civil unrest during Dr. King’s lifetime still operate against people who are black and brown. Five years after President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder became the first black persons to hold their respective offices, racial profiling is as much a reality as it was when Dr. King was assassinated. Insensitivity to the insidious nature of racism that characterized American thought when Dr. King was killed has not changed. Trayvon Martin,<sup>6</sup> Oscar Grant,<sup>7</sup> and Amadou Diallo,<sup>8</sup> like Martin Luther King, Jr., were black men shot to death by people who claimed the moral and legal right to take their lives. These and other less-notorious examples show that Americans clearly have not become more informed or responsive to racial injustice since Dr. King died.

Simply put, we have not confronted or corralled the giant triplets of militarism, materialism, and racism. The sad truth is that political, commercial, and even religious leaders have become skilled at bestowing platitudes on Dr. King’s life and ministry while actively and deliberately disregarding his warnings. These leaders play on (pimp) Dr. King’s moral authority at every oppor-

tunity. However, they question the relevancy of his teachings and warnings for our time.

Such contradictory behavior amounts to a re-assassination of Dr. King. Martin Luther King, Jr. is being re-murdered by drone warfare, NSA surveillance, and the half-truths and outright falsehoods uttered by policymakers who defend those actions. Dr. King is re-murdered by fiscal policies that promote the corporate interests of investment bankers over the lives and fortunes of workers, homeowners, retirees, and needy people. King's dedication to attack and eliminate the causes of systemic poverty is currently being re-assassinated by policies that widen the glaring income inequality between the super-wealthy and the poor. And King's righteous indignation against injustice is murdered by proponents of the so-called "prosperity gospel" and those who use religion as a weapon against people who are homosexuals, poor, immigrants, women, or otherwise vulnerable.

When one honestly assesses the

mood and conduct of American leaders and the public at large since Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, it becomes clear that we have not chosen to embrace the "radical revolution of values" Dr. King articulated.

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*It is more than sadly ironic that the first African-American to hold the office of president of the United States currently oversees a policy of killing American citizens by using armed drones.*

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We have not weakened the giant triplets of racism, militarism, and materialism. We have nourished them. Religious leaders such as the Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr. who have followed Dr. King's model of prophetic criticism have been rejected and condemned in much the

same way President Johnson responded to Dr. King.

Now, more than ever, the evidence shows that Dr. King was correct. "America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities..." Sadly, we seem unable to realize that by rejecting his call to reorder our values and priorities we not only "re-assassinate" King. By rejecting his values while pretending to venerate King as our greatest prophet we are destroying ourselves and run the risk of permanently forfeiting any moral authority as agents for peace, justice, and truth in the world. Sooner or later, those who feed a death wish find a way to destroy themselves. ■

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# Don't Mess with Texas: (Sexual Predators Beware!)

By Rita Hoyt Jenkins

Sexual predators should think long and hard, as well as count the costs, before choosing to make Texas home. "Don't Mess with Texas," a registered trademark of the Texas Department of Transportation, is recognized widely as the no-nonsense attitude Texans have about keeping the highways litter free, but this slogan may just as easily describe the position Texas laws exert against sexual misconduct against children and adults. The strong-armed approach, taken by the state, instituted laws to designate sexual abuse as a criminal offense. One of the more aggressive states, it stands firmly on the issue of protecting children and vulnerable adults from injury at the hands of sexual predators. This paper concentrates primarily on the impact of Texas laws on members of the clergy; notwithstanding, the state administers the laws impartially and comprehensively, regardless of the profession.

Committing an act of sexual assault in Texas occurs if the person intentionally or knowingly engages in sexual activity without the consent of the other person or intentionally or knowingly engages in any sexual contact or activity with a child.<sup>1</sup> A "child" means a person younger than 17 years old who is not the spouse of the person.<sup>2</sup> For a member of the clergy, "without consent" includes causing the other person to submit or participate by exploiting the other person's emotional dependency on the clergyman in his professional character as spiritual adviser.<sup>3</sup> Federal guidelines established by the United States Equal Employment Commission (EEOC) define sexual harassment as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.<sup>4</sup> Sexual conduct is unwelcome whenever the person subjected to it considers it unwelcome. These guidelines set the standard for appropriate conduct in the workplace.<sup>5</sup>

Secrecy shrouds sexual abuse in children. Many times sexual predators inflict fear to prevent children from sharing the horrors they experience. These fears may manifest in several ways: depression, drug abuse, self-degradation, inability to trust and love, guilt, alcoholism, and thoughts or attempts of suicide.<sup>6</sup> The horrors of the abuse cause a rippling effect. The incidents devastate the innocence of the child, which may cause physiological, emotional, and spiritual problems well into adult life. Others never overcome the problems relating to their abuse. Unfortunately, some even commit suicide because they are unable to

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*Everyone affected by the sexual abuse of children is a victim except the child molester.*

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reconcile the contradiction of the act of violence perpetrated by "men or women of the cloth" to a God who would allow them to cause such pain. Everyone affected by the sexual abuse of children is a victim except the child molester. The victim spiral extends to include the family of the accused or convicted clergy. Marriages dissolve and leave in their stead the broken lives of wives, children, and other family members. The church receives a mark of contempt that damages weaker Christians and causes some to abandon the faith and never return. The disappointment they experience overflows into developing a lack of trust and confidence in authority figures. Like the effects of any sin, sexual sins cause death, not necessarily physical. The alarming realization is that the majority of sexual predators fail to see and acknowledge the harm they cause to the bodies and psyche of victims in the

aftermath of their acts of violence.

Sexual abuse is a second-degree felony in the state of Texas warranting prosecution, and if convicted, punishment by stiff prison sentences. Throughout the state, district attorneys investigate and prosecute sexual abuse claims at the expense of the state. Prosecutors need only discover apparent facts through inquiry that would lead them to believe that an accused person had committed a crime to support the filing of charges; however, proof beyond a reasonable doubt is required for a conviction.<sup>7</sup>

Convicted sex abusers must register as sex offenders with a national registry. The U. S. Department of Justice maintains a website, <http://www.nsopr.gov/>, which provides information on sex offenders by state, leaving limited space for offenders to hide. This registry is important to parents of children because the recidivism rate in sexual predators is high. Most sexual offenders repeat the offense again if given the opportunity. The actions of sex abusers should receive continuous scrutiny because of the nature of the crime and the potential for repeat. A repetitive cycle of sin continues because the sexually abused, in turn, become sexual abusers themselves. Other punishments by the law include the loss of basic constitutional rights, such as being able to vote, post bail, or hold public office.<sup>8</sup> The completion of a jail sentence does not reinstate these rights.

A convicted sexual predator is at risk of the "double whammy" effect in the state of Texas. The consequences for a sexual predator do not stop with conviction by a jury that leads to imprisonment, but also includes the possibility of the victim filing a civil suit. Any evidence discovered and cited in a criminal case by the prosecutor is admissible evidence in a civil liability suit. The burden of proof in civil cases is less than in criminal cases.<sup>9</sup> In order to prevail, the attorney must prove only

by preponderance of the evidence, rather than beyond a reasonable doubt, that the sexual offender committed the alleged acts of child abuse.<sup>10</sup>

Psalm 127:3 declares that children are a gift of the LORD. They are precious in the eyes of God and should be loved, nurtured, and protected. The psalmist also says that a man is blessed when he has many children. God loved men so much that He called them His children; “children of God.” Children have a special place in the kingdom. Matthew records that unless men become as little children they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Chapter 18:6 in Matthew declares that anyone who causes a child, who believes in Christ, to stumble, should have a millstone tied around his neck and drowned in the sea. The sacred trust given to adults by God to preserve the sanctity of children resonates in the laws of the state of Texas. These laws vigorously support keeping children safe from abuse and neglect and support pursuing those who decide to do otherwise by causing them harm.

People living in Texas who believe that sexual misconduct does not concern them need to reconsider their decision. All persons are required to report child abuse or neglect according to Texas law. Non-reporters of child abuse and neglect become culpable under the law for their failure to report. “In approximately 18 states and Puerto Rico, any person who suspects child abuse or neglect is required to report. Of these 18 states, sixteen states and Puerto Rico specify certain professionals who must report but also require all persons to report suspected abuse or neglect, regardless of profession.”<sup>11</sup>

Texas falls within the list of states that itemizes certain professionals to report but also requires all persons to report. Recently charged with three counts of failure to report child abuse Mr. Gasparello, the Sharpstown High School principal, faces a Class A misdemeanor, which carries a maximum punishment of one year in jail.<sup>12</sup> He allegedly did not report to law enforce-

ment or Child Protective Services, sexual abuse complaints by a 17-year-old male student and a 16-year-old female student within the required forty-eight hours.<sup>13</sup>

Texas disallows the use of the clergy-penitent privilege as grounds for failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect. All residents of Texas must report child abuse. No one is exempt, including information received through privileged communication.<sup>14</sup> Authorities require reporting of any privileged communications and confessions that members of clergy hear relating to sexual misconduct against a child.<sup>15</sup> Mandatory reporting guidelines leave little space for a sexual predator to operate without being exposed, but many times small cracks of opportunity exists in churches. The church culture perception that all men are sinners forgiven by God should not

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preempt prudence in employee and volunteer screening and accountability. The upside of the law is that reporters of child abuse receive confidentiality of identity unless waived in writing by the reporter.<sup>16</sup>

Many times clergy enter into precarious predicaments when they attempt to minister to the needs of their parishioners, especially in the counseling area. “More sexual sin involving pastors has been committed in the context of counseling than in any other setting.”<sup>17</sup> Clergy should remain above reproach by establishing strict guidelines to alleviate vulnerable situations. Private closed-door meetings with the opposite sex are inadvisable. Referring parishioners who need long-term counseling to specialized professionals is prudent and wise. Any hints

of sexual advancement from parishioners should cancel any counseling agreements. Clergy should attempt to live holy lives without the appearance of improprieties. The law does not distinguish between a clergy who carelessly or negligently becomes involved with a parishioner and a “predator clergy” who intentionally and actively preys on the sexual vulnerabilities of their flock.<sup>18</sup>

The fact is that an act of sexual abuse occurred at the hand of a person of trust, power, and authority regardless of the circumstances. The seemingly innocent action of a single minister dating a single member of the church can result in allegations of sexual abuse.<sup>19</sup> A single minister dating in the church constitutes reckless behavior and is imprudent because situations that appear consensual at the onset can backfire and cause problems because of the position of trust ascribed to clergy. The pastor or spiritual leader holds a position of trust and authority that can exert influence over the parishioner’s will to act pragmatically.

False accusations are as damaging as allegations leading to convictions. The path is equally destructive and the fallout indistinguishable from those leading to convictions. Allegations of sexual abuse against any clergy members cause irreparable harm to the character of the individual, governing authority, and the ministry of the church, even if unsubstantiated. As devastating as child abuse is to the individual child, the damage of false accusations incurred by the minister, ministry, and the church trails close behind. The consequences extend beyond criminal penalties because the person also suffers social disdain.<sup>20</sup> The ripple effect of allegations of sexual abuse contributes to divorce, bankruptcy, loss of employment, and friendships.

These effects disrupt the lives of everyone involved, including families and relationships. The clergy member’s reputation is marred, his position of trust and honor topple, resulting in loss of membership, and loss in finances to support what might have been a

vibrant ministry. Failure of the ministry causes harm to the parishioners, but there is comparable harm to the testimony of the whole of Christendom. All acknowledge that Christians are sinners saved by grace, but the world sees hypocrisy in the ranks of people who represent Christ. Future employment opportunities become difficult to impossible for accused sex offenders because of the stigma of not knowing definitively if the person were guilty or simply got away with the alleged crime. False accusations are as feathers released in the wind, unrecoverable. Who can determine where the wind blew them? The question of guilt or innocence remains in the minds of people after the dust settles.

In several states, such as Georgia and Kentucky, sexual abuse victims received large settlements through civil actions, but the prosecution of the clergy predators never occurred. A case in Kentucky alleged that a Catholic bishop molested three former altar boys. The bishop denied the allegations but the claim would eventually be resolved as part of a \$25 million settlement. The bishop was not prosecuted.<sup>21</sup> The state of Texas closes this loophole by imposing criminal penalties on sexual abuse.

One can view the tenacious attitude of the state of Texas for justice against sexual predators by looking at the Warren S. Jeffs case. Mr. Jeffs, the leader of a polygamous sect of The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) fought extradition from Utah to West Texas to stand trial on charges of bigamy and sexual assault for two years.<sup>22</sup> In the end, Texas won and he lost his bid to stay in Utah. Mr. Jeffs later received a sentence of life in prison plus twenty years for sexually assaulting two girls he claimed were his “spiritual wives.”<sup>23</sup> Texas did not stop with his conviction, but zealously prosecuted his polygamist bishop who married him to a twelve-year-old girl.<sup>24</sup> The bishop received a ten-year prison sentence.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to the case tried against Rudolph Kos in Dallas, Texas, many law enforcement agencies discounted

and overlooked atrocities committed by clergy and litigation was virtually unheard of. This case broke the trend, resulting in the filing of numerous suits and the changing of mindsets regarding legal actions against the church. The case against Catholic priest Rudolph Kos received the largest clergy abuse verdict in history in 1998. “The jurors had found for the plaintiffs and awarded actual and punitive damages of \$119.6 million to be shared by about a dozen victims, an amount sufficient to bankrupt the Diocese of Dallas.”<sup>26</sup> The final award was substantially less, but everyone received a clear message regarding the liability of churches. Monetary settlements paid by the Catholic Church from 1998 to 2003 for Texas totaled \$31 million, higher than any other state.<sup>27</sup>

The sentiments of a large number of people at the time believed that clergy

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### *Sexual predators gamble and risk losing freedom, assets, and reputation by choosing to live in Texas.*

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should pay for the harm they caused innocent children and that the statute of limitations should not hinder them from recovering financially for their emotional and psychological scars. After Dallas, things spiraled downward for the Catholic Church as they lost other cases filed against them. Sexual abuse cases have cost the Catholic Church in the United States alone over a billion dollars over a ten year period.<sup>28</sup> These significant payouts began with the Dallas, Texas verdict. Prior to then, recompenses were negligible.

Victims of sexual assault derive a benefit from the state handling the investigations because they do not have to expend funds for attorneys, private detective, and other investigative type expenses. The findings gathered from investigations in criminal cases can be used in future civil actions against the sexual predators. Civil suits filed against convicted sexual offenders in

Texas potentially assure a loss of personal and corporate assets. These suits filed against clergy usually link them as an employee to an employer, who negligently failed to supervise them. Recent court findings show that employers incur liability for the behavior of managers and workers and legislatures created new penalties for sexual harassment.<sup>29</sup> This shifted some of the assignment of responsibility away from the clergy to their employers for potential recovery. Victims seek recovery from personal assets, as well as the assets of churches or denominations that regulate the activities of the accused clergy. They became aware of the potential for larger payouts by going to the governing bodies. “Although acts of sexual misconduct are committed by people – individual, not denominations or churches – it is usually the denomination or church that victims turn to for recompense.”<sup>30</sup> Insurance companies rarely payout in these scenarios; consequently losses hit the pockets at the ministry level.

The plight of clergy sexual predators in Texas is a “lose, lose” situation. Sexual predators gamble and risk losing freedom, assets, and reputation by choosing to live in Texas. Potential losses originate from accusations and proceed through to civil actions. Unproven allegations result in loss of reputation leaving the looming question of innocence or guilt of the accused, as well as disruption in family relations. Allegations leading to conviction result in loss of liberty, constitutional rights, reputation, and disruption of family and relationships. Successful civil suits include loss of personal and church ministry assets and further erode reputation. Therefore, if clergy members have pedophilic tendencies, sexual abuse inclinations, or are convicted sexual offenders, they should keep moving because Texas is not a friendly place for them. The careless, unintentional clergy, ensnared in a sexual abuse claim, should establish and follow policies and procedures to protect vulnerabilities long before any claims arise. The laws of the state do not view them dif-

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# Public Schools Are Not Religion-free Zones

By J. Brent Walker

For the past 50 years, much of our church-state jurisprudence has been informed by how we treat religion in the public schools. Simply put, our effort always has been to say “yes” to voluntary expressions of religion by students; but, at the same time, say “no” to official, school-sponsored religious exercises. Although we continue sometimes to struggle to find the appropriate balance, we have made dramatic improvements. The start of a new school year provides an opportunity to review the many ways religion can properly be exercised, studied and otherwise included on public school campuses in ways that naturally arise in our very religious--and religiously diverse--country, while keeping school officials out of the business of promoting a particular religion or even religion in general. Here are reminders of a few ways this can be done.

*Students may pray--alone or in a group, silently or even out loud--as long as it is voluntary, nondisruptive and respectful of the rights of other students not to participate.* This would include vocal prayer events before classes start and silent prayers after math tests begin.

*Students may form and lead religious clubs* in secondary schools if other non-curriculum related groups are allowed. Outside adults may not lead or regularly attend club meetings, and teachers may be present only to monitor the meetings.

*Students may display and communicate religious messages--on their*

clothing and orally--in the same way other messages are allowed. Generally, they may wear religious garb, such as yarmulkes and head scarves, as well. *Students may distribute religious material and literature*, under the same rules as other material may be distributed. This right is subject to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions, such as requiring material to be placed on a table rather than being handed out.

*Students may speak to and even try to persuade other students on religious topics*, including inviting them to participate in religious services and events. But, such speech and invitations cannot be allowed to turn into religious harassment. A “no thanks” must end the conversation.

*Students are allowed to include religious themes and ideas in their school-work and homework assignments*, as long as those religious references are germane to the assignment.

*Students may be taught about religion where the topic naturally arises in the curriculum.* The teaching should be academic, not devotional, and have an expressed educational goal in mind. In other words, schools may expose students to religious views but may not impose any particular view.

*A religious holiday may serve as an occasion to teach about that particular religion, but it is not to be celebrated as a religious event.* Along the same lines, religious music may be played or sung and sacred artwork observed and appreciated as long as there is an educational goal in mind.

*Students may (and sometimes must)*

*be excused from lessons that are objectionable based on religious convictions* if the school does not have a sufficiently compelling interest in requiring all students to attend and participate. *Teachers and other school personnel may meet with one another for Bible study, prayer and other religious discussions*, as long as such gatherings are voluntary and outside the classroom (in the teachers’ lounge, for example) during lunch breaks or other free time.

These are just a few of the many ways in which it is abundantly clear that God has not been kicked out of the public schools. But let’s not abuse our freedom. We always need to be mindful of the importance of modeling good behavior and responsible citizenship. This includes not insisting upon governmental help, like using a school-controlled microphone to pray or to proselytize. It also means allowing students to participate in school-sponsored activities without being subjected to other students’ religion, even when it is arguably personal student speech. As is the case in many other contexts, what we have the right to do is not always the right thing to do. Please visit the Baptist Joint Committee website at [www.BJConline.org](http://www.BJConline.org) for more information on religion in the public schools. ■

*J. Brent Walker is the Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Freedom. This article originally appeared in the September 2013 Report from the Capital and is reprinted here with permission.*

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ferently from the intentional sexual predators. Knowledgeable consultants are available to help ministries reduce exposure to sexual predator claims. The stakes are too high to leave to

chance. “Don’t mess with Texas.” ■

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*She is the mother of two grown children: a daughter and a son who also reside in Houston, Texas.*

# Marriage and Contraception Will Dominate Religious Headlines in 2014

By Nathan C. Walker

On the domestic front, there are two obvious frontrunners for the religion headlines likely to predominate in 2014. Both involve imminent decisions by the US Supreme Court: same-sex marriage and insurance-covered contraception.

With regard to same-sex marriage, “equal protection” will likely be the catch phrase. A significant number of lower courts are preparing to examine the constitutionality of Defense-of-Marriage-Act (DOMA) laws in several state governments. To the country’s surprise, Utah is 2014’s leader for this trend.

On December 20, 2013, federal district judge, Robert J. Shelby, held that Utah’s DOMA law violates the equal protection guaranteed by the due process clauses in the US Constitution’s 14th amendment. By the time Shelby issued his ruling, nine additional state courts, along with the District of Columbia, had issued similar decisions. Utah has since successfully convinced the US Supreme Court to block temporarily Shelby’s ruling until the high court definitively determines whether state governments, not the federal government, have the right to establish a definition of legal marriage.

Meanwhile, reporters have been writing about the surprise absence of Mormon outrage. After Mitt Romney became the Republican nominee for president in the 2013 election, the Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) stopped organizing protests and lobbying against marriage equality.

What does this shift say about Utah, where 58% of the state’s population are LDS, a once national force in helping to define legal marriage as a union between one man and one woman? In 2004, 69% of Utah’s Mormons believed that same-sex rela-

tionships should not receive legal recognition. By 2012, their opinion had changed: 54% supported civil unions and 8% supported marriage equality.

Just as the LDS Church’s stance has changed, so has the country’s. In 2004, 41% of the general public supported same-sex marriage; in 2009, 57% supported civil unions but not marriage equality; by 2013, 58% thought that gay marriages should be legally recognized and that same-sex marriage-partners should benefit from the same rights as married men and women.

If looking back gives us insight into what is ahead, then the major religion story of 2014 may be a non-story. Rather than a vitriolic backlash from conservatives, religious and otherwise, the country may, like Utah, surprise spectators with a relatively subdued outcry. Likely causes: widespread fatigue about this subject and growing support for same-sex marriage. Will 2014 prove to be the year that the two-decades-old topic of same-sex marriage becomes a non-issue?

With regard to insurance-covered contraception, “equal access” will likely be the catch phrase. The US Supreme Court is currently considering this question: Does the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) exempt Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties, both for-profit corporations, from the federal requirement to provide employees with contraceptive coverage because these corporations’ owners object on religious grounds?

The Supreme Court justices’ ruling will likely hinge on their interpretations of four particular sections of RFRA. First, they will need to determine whether a corporation is legally equivalent to a “person” who has the right to exercise his or her religion.

Given that this same court ruled in favor of for-profit corporations seeking free speech rights, it is likely that a majority of the justices will (mistakenly) grant “person” status to corporations.

In this case, the justices will proceed with the second question: Are the corporation-owners’ religious views “substantially burdened”? The RFRA says that if a person’s exercise of religion is found to be materially hampered by the general laws that apply to everyone (neutral laws), exemptions must be granted. In the past, Justice Scalia has led the court in ruling that the use of peyote by Native Americans did not exempt teachers from anti-drug laws.

If the religious views of the corporations’ owners are not deemed “substantially burdened,” the justices will affirm the mandate and require the owners to provide contraception coverage. Otherwise, the judges will proceed with the third and fourth interpretations. They will ask whether the federal government’s contraception mandate advances a “compelling government interest” and whether the Affordable Care Act does so with the “least restrictive means” possible. The Obama Administration has to demonstrate that universal access to contraception is a public health concern, and that there is no less substantially burdensome way of achieving this goal.

The fervor on both sides of the contraception debate suggests that regardless of who wins, the US Supreme Court rulings will likely cause a prolonged engagement in religion and public life. If so, 2014 could be the year that the legal and political agendas for various political camps are set for decades to come. ■

*Nathan C. Walker, is an Ed.D.*

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# A “Duck Call” for All

By J. Randall O'Brien

The moral outrage surrounding Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson's remarks published in a recent issue of *GQ Magazine*, and his suspension and subsequent reinstatement from the popular television show produced by A&E Network, has long since subsided. Perhaps some modest theological reflection on the matter is still in season.

In his interview with *GQ*, Robertson expressed graphic intolerance of homosexuals and appalling insensitivity to the plight of African-Americans during the Jim Crow Era. Accusations of intolerance, and cries for tolerance, were aggressively leveled at both Robertson and the television network, depending on the side taken by the crier. Despite the hostile verbiage directed at the two central parties in the drama, prevailing reason concluded the following: The first amendment protected Robertson's right to free speech, but not his right to a television show. In other words, both parties were within their legal rights. Was there not, however, another critical issue involved, one worthy of our attention?

Beyond the particular and obvious issues raised in the interview lies a larger Christian debate over tolerance in moral matters. For many, tolerance for liberal speech and behavior equates to political correctness, widely considered a modern virtue by the political and religious Left, but often a vice by the Right. For others, tolerance of a cultural shift away from traditional Christian values is considered betrayal of the conservative cause and evidence of the baptism of an apostate church by secular society. Or, as the lament goes, the world is winning the Church; the Church is not winning the world.

Is tolerance a virtue or a vice? The easy answer is that it depends upon the issue, and to whom one speaks. As

a rule, one might anticipate conservatives like Phil Robertson to be intolerant of any real or perceived erosion of traditional values. One might also expect liberals to be more comfortable with evolving cultural values, perhaps proving impatient, even agitated, with conservative condemnation of cultural change.

Although millions were jolted by Robertson's words and A&E's response, each position represented a major segment of American society. Each party was intolerant, but for different reasons due to competing worldviews.

Since intolerance implies judgment, or suppression of freedom, Christians may disagree on its practice. On one hand, Jesus admonishes believers saying, “Judge not lest you be judged.” Also, in America, the land of the free, who are we to take freedom away from others while God and the Constitution grant freedom to them? On the other hand, Jesus judged the Pharisees and Sadducees, as well as his own culture. Doesn't the Good Book encourage believers to “contend for the faith,” a difficult assignment to complete without judging when a battle should be joined?

The people of God are called to “do justice.” However, justice is impossible apart from judgment. The Hebrew word translated as both justice and judgment is one and the same. Even forgiveness depends upon judgment. Forgiveness says, “I judge you guilty; and I forgive you.”

So how are we to think? To tolerate or not, judge or not, that is the question. The answer is “yes, of course.” We judge all things, meaning sometimes we inevitably practice tolerance, while other times we do not. Jesus judged the money-changers in the Temple, turning over their tables, but understood when two sisters blamed Him for the death of their brother.

Paul judged the sinful; Daniel judged the Babylonians. The prophets judged kings and screamed “No!” to their society. Without judgment there can be no justice, no repentance, no right or wrong, no morality nor immorality, no law and order, no fairness, no hope, and no conversion.

Perhaps what Jesus meant by His “judge not” admonition was that we should not set ourselves above others, arrogantly counting ourselves better than them. Once He asked, “Why look for the speck in your neighbor's eye when you have a beam in yours?” Then when some wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery, He responded, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” Then, by equating lust with adultery and sustained anger with murder in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it clear that we are all adulterers and murderers.

Therefore, “we” not “you” have a sin problem. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” “There is none righteous, no not one.” It is true that the Bible knows nothing of tolerance for sin, willful living contrary to the will and Spirit of God. However, and this is the rub, all of us are guilty. Not “you” but “we.” Not “them” but “us.” And all of us are eligible for forgiveness. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Tolerance, on the other hand, leaves sin unaddressed. The Good News is Christ came to address our sin problem, not to condemn the world, but to save it, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Radical Good News, indeed! As Brennan Manning puts it, “The Good News means we can stop lying to ourselves.”

If we lose the doctrine of sin, we  
*(continued on page 26)*

# God as Sister, God and Sister

by Martin E. Marty

Put “God” in a headline and we can’t help sighting it. Neil Steinberg, columnist in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (Feb. 13, 2014) did so: “Who’s God but us? Sister tells it like it is.” My wife, Harriet, the monitor of syntax and scornor of clichés who reads the papers over coffee across the table from Put this “Sighter” might well have questioned the syntax in line one and the cliché in line two. But she and I would quickly have gotten over any uneasiness as we eased into Steinberg’s column. He was celebrating Sister Rosemary Connelly, whom he heard speaking at a fund-raising lunch. There she said something he’d “never heard spoken before, never mind by a nun.” We’ll talk about her words in a moment.

Steinberg reminded *Sun-Times* readers that Sister, forty-five years ago, was the founder of Misericordia, “the city’s pre-eminent home for those with Down Syndrome and other cognitive disabilities.” Originally she was to care for foundlings left by their mothers on church doorsteps but, against the will of the Archdiocese of the time, she transformed Misericordia’s mission and its site.

Steinberg told of Sister’s tale of a heart-breaking moment when she had to turn away a 15-year old whose desperate mother could no longer lift or care for him. The problem: Misericordia’s beds were full, and the

two-year waiting list was 600-people long.

Yet somehow, without violating her self-imposed rules against showing favoritism, Sister was able to help. *How* is less important than *why*. Steinberg and the luncheoners gasped when Sister asked, and then answered her own question: “Who’s God but us? If we don’t do it, it’s not going to happen.”

Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike assert that there is no God but God. So Steinberg recoiled: “Who’s God but us? *Who’s God but us?* Pardon me, sister, but *daaaaaamn?*” He did not divulge whether her words were at the edge or the center of blasphemy or idolatry. Instead he contrasted them with all the ways others use “God” to justify their indifference or evil acts.

Then Steinberg imagined what went through Sister’s mind: “OK then, Mr. Lord of the Universe, if you’re going to fail this boy, I guess we’ll have to do the job for you.” It took two years but Sister raised the money and the boy has now been at Misericordia for fifteen years.

Steinberg: “Who’s God but us? That’s edgy stuff, Sister, practically sacrilege.” But not over the edge, if you think about what Sister Rosemary Connelly knows and does about priorities in worship and expressions of faith.

I suppose there are more nearly-acceptable orthodox ways of

approaching what Sister was saying and doing. My own church body has the motto: “God’s work—our hands.” Every other church body has analogues to it. But most of us are not much moved by these more cautious ways of expressing the matter, while risk-taking Sister takes risks here, ready to face her Maker. A little theological over-reach can be forgiven in a world where indifference usually keeps believers from making a difference.

And I can’t resist adding a word about how “we in the media” often distort the world of religion or religious people by the decisions we make about what makes news and what readers’ or listeners’ or bloggers’ appetites we want to feed. Conflicts, controversies, stories of abuse, deserve to be told and need to be told.

But the world of faith and of the faiths also has countless participants who may be less eloquent or capable or dogged than Sister Maureen. They *are* there, quietly working and singing and praying and fund-raising and doing and saying “edgy” things that merit attention. ■

**Reference:** Steinberg, Neil. “Who’s God but us? Sister tells it like it is.” *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 13, 2014. <http://www.suntimes.com/news/steinberg/25532506-452/whos-god-but-us-sister-tells-it-like-it-is.html>

Footnotes and bibliography for articles in this issue can be found on the web version located at [www.christianethicstoday.com](http://www.christianethicstoday.com)

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

### The Early Church on Killing

by Ron Sider

A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment

Reviewed by Tony Campolo

Ron Sider’s newest publication, *The Early Church on Killing*, is, as the subtitle suggests, a fairly comprehensive source book for anyone who is investigating what early Christians had to say about war, abortion, and capital punishment. This book should be of great interest to Red Letter Christians because it deals with these three hot-button subjects that inevitably emerge whenever Red Letter Christians get together and discuss social issues.

Firmly rooted in an Anabaptist tradition, it is not surprising that Ron has a bias against any form of violence against persons, born or unborn. He acknowledges right up front that he is a pacifist. He turns to the early Church Fathers to make the case that, from the earliest days of the Christian era up until the time of Constantine, the Church Fathers tended, for the most part, to oppose any justification for Christians to be engaged in killing, whether it be on the battlefield or at the hands of executioners, or in the womb of a woman.

The importance of understanding what the pre-Constantinian church leaders had to say about these three important subjects is clear to anyone who has tried to do theology. Too often, Christians have acted as though in their interpretations of Scripture they can disregard how those in the ancient Church read and understood the Bible. Over and against this shortsightedness the declarations of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as those in the Wesleyan tradition, have contended that Church tradition

must be considered when endeavoring to interpret Scripture and applying what it has to teach us to the contemporary situations in which we live. Too often we present-day Christians act as though two thousand years of saintly Christians interpreting the Scriptures can be ignored and that our own personal interpretations take precedence over what have been traditional interpretations of the Bible declared down through the ages.

The book of *Hebrews* reminds us that we are “surrounded with a great crowd of witnesses” to which we must be responsible in all that we do, but especially in our interpretations of the Holy Writ. As Ron Sider makes his case against Christians participating in war, supporting capital punishment, or justifying abortion, he supports his beliefs by resorting to the writings of some of the earliest Church leaders, thus taking Church tradition seriously.

It might be suggested that Sider is biased because of his *a priori* commitments to his Anabaptist theology; but as his commentaries on the Church Fathers make very clear, he has done his best to overcome any bias that may exist on his part. While he makes it clear that he believes that the overwhelming evidence supports his belief that the Church Fathers maintained a pacifist view when dealing with warfare, he makes sure to include those passages written by the leaders of the early Church which create some ambiguity on this subject. Specifically, he cites some passages from Clement of Alexandria which suggest that Christians who were in the army need not disengage from their vocations as soldiers in order to be faithful Christians. However, he then goes on to cite the fact that, according to Clement of Alexandria, Christians who were in the army ought not to kill in the context of battle — which

raises the question as to what their role should be if not engaging in killing their enemies.

Sider makes the interesting point, that Tertullian, another early Church theologian, cites his opposition to Christians being soldiers, not because he is opposed to bloodshed, but because Roman soldiers, prior to going into battle, were required to go through a cultic ritual in which they called upon pagan gods to support them and give them victory over their enemies. It was this idol worship associated with being in Caesar’s army that Tertullian claimed made being a soldier impossible for a true Christian.

While Sider makes it clear that the case in favor of Christians killing in the context of battle is very weak, he, nevertheless, points out that there is some evidence among the early Church Fathers that such behavior might be acceptable for soldiers without their losing their salvation. I was especially impressed with the way Sider shows that the early Church Fathers adamantly condemned abortion, and at times gave vivid descriptions of the special torments of Hell that women who had abortions would have to endure.

In reviewing the translations of the early Church Fathers’ writing which Sider included in this book, I could find no support for an endorsement for capital punishment. It is interesting to note that the new Pope supports this tradition, even though many Evangelical Christians on the political right endorse capital punishment, given the “right” circumstances.

The theological and biblical conservatism of the author is never concealed; but any reader of this book will have to admit that he tries hard to be objective. He does in this book what you would expect an honest scholar to do. ■



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## By the Rivers of Water

by Erskine Clarke (New York: Basic Books, 2013, \$29.99)

Reviewed by Darold Morgan

While browsing through our public library recently, I discovered a new prize-winning book on early 19<sup>th</sup> century mission ventures in West Africa. It turned out to be one of those gems, not only of exciting and informative reading, but a book brimful of rare insights about the challenges the first generation of American protestant missionaries faced on distant shores.

The hero and heroine of this mission story, interestingly related to the influence of the famed “haystack prayer meeting” of Congregational-Baptist fame, were a husband-wife team of Presbyterians, James Leighton and Jane Wilson. These natives of Georgia and South Carolina, products of a slave-owning society, lead us in their life story through the clash of North-South cultures in their decision to go to West Africa. That era of the 1830s of American history and protestant life is vitally important when related to the crumbling influences of New England’s rigid Calvinism, along with the anti-missions theology it spawned, which also resulted in a groundswell of mission energy in the mainline protestant churches.

Sadly, some of this motivation was attached to a dead-end solution of the American slavery dilemma which was the widespread effort to return slaves to their native African shores. Complex and tangled issues are discussed in this book and the result is some original insights about these strains of American history.

Some of the issues in conflict include the Wilsons’ freeing their own slaves in Georgia, an action violently opposed by their neighbors. Then comes the somewhat unsuccessful effort to encourage both slaves and freedmen

to emigrate back to Africa with them. This strategy prepared the way for Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists to support this work financially and to give it a spiritual rationale.

The heart of this engaging book is the actual travel to the mission field as it were, preparing supplies for the work, overcoming massive difficulties of getting to Africa, deciding where to settle, obtaining land from indigenous persons, and determining how to establish a Christian work in the context of a superstitious and violent culture. The initial plans included mission schools, medical services, and churches. Felt almost immediately was the impact of African diseases on the new missionaries. The Wilsons survived, but many of their associates did not. They faced the strange enigma of local slavery as well as the continued presence of European slave ships transporting newly-captured slaves to the New World supplied by the very people the missionaries were working with. These were unexpected challenges to be sure.

But the resiliency of these pioneer missionaries is powerfully depicted in the pages of this book. The erratic financial support from America complicated things greatly as did the infrequency of mail from home, the depths of the cultural differences and the superstitious beliefs, and the arrival of new missionaries who were unprepared for the challenges in Africa. But still, the sheer tenacity and dedication of this first couple and those who followed them shines through the telling of their story.

After 20 years of overseas ministry with only a brief trip or two to America, the Wilsons, with their health severely weakened, returned to America permanently. They were restored with rest and time with family and their ministries

turned to leadership of missionary support throughout America for the Presbyterian denomination.

The third and final chapter of their work developed with brutal suddenness as America was plunged into Civil War. The reader can sense the conflict the Wilsons experienced as Southerners living in New York as the nation divided. As the war began, they moved back to Georgia to be with their families despite their strong convictions about the evils of slavery. During the years of the Confederacy, the Wilsons were able to move about throughout the territory organizing the Southern Presbyterians into a new and separate denomination. They raised money for missionary support abroad, and this small but vibrant effort at organized support for world missions survived throughout the war and functioned even with the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan and the era of Jim Crow.

All of these disjointed facts are woven together in a competent style that holds the reader’s attention throughout. This book about missions in its infancy gives us some rare insights into American missionary development and the business of getting Jesus to people everywhere. One comes away from reading this book with genuine and helpful insights from the bleak history of slavery to the place of the church in the post-war South. Problems which were endemic then are still with us today to a disturbing degree. But as God raised up the Wilsons to do a truly remarkable work, so today is the calling and empowering people to do the work of Christ still valid. ■

*Darold Morgan is retired Southern Baptist executive and a member of the board of Christian Ethics Today Foundation.*

# Bringing Transcendence in Play

If I can lift up hope to a soul despairing,  
Or strive for justice with the will to stay,  
If I befriend another in burden-bearing,  
Forgive a wrong through Christlike caring,  
Oppose any of myriad evils with daring,  
Or guide a wanderer lost to find the way,  
Show compassion to the poor from day to day,  
Or inspire fresh courage that may  
defeating fears allay,  
I shall share in bringing transcendence in play.

—James A. Langley

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*Candidate in Law, Education, and Religion at Columbia University. He is the co-editor of Whose God Rules: Is the United States a Secular Nation or*

*a Theolegal, Democracy? with foreword by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. This essay first appeared in the January 9, 2014 issue of Sightings*

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*(continued from page 22)*

lose the doctrine of salvation. Simply put, no sin no Savior. Bonhoeffer surely had it right. The last word with Christ, when He gets His way is grace; but you cannot speak the last word, he noted until you speak the next-to-last word. And that word is “guilty.”

So, in the Duck Dynasty skirmish in the culture war, who is the sinner -- Phil Robertson's targets or Phil Robertson, A&E executives or you or me or all of us? The answer is all.

Our mistake is not in addressing the sin problem of the human race, whenever and wherever it rears its

ugly head. Our mistake is in failing to understand we are all part of the problem, and that a solution awaits. ■

*J. Randall O'Brien is President of Carson Newman University.*

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# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

“We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers.”  
—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

## MISSION

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

## PURPOSES

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

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

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

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