

# Christian Ethics Today

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

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# James Dunn and the Restless Melody of Peace

By Bill J. Leonard

“Well, damn.” That’s what James Dunn would say if one of us was being memorialized today. We know he’d talk like that at our passing, because, well, that’s how James talked; and because we were all his best friends! Jorene Taylor Swift at Broadway Baptist, Fort Worth wrote: “We loved James for many reasons—I was proud of him because he said things we all want to say and he said them in such a pithy, direct way—he was our own Baptist folk hero and probably the most important—once he met us he never forgot our names.” You think you have personal stories about James? Well, he had personal stories about most of you, too, and when he saw you, or your name came up, he’d tell those stories, the devil take the hindmost. No matter, when James Dunn was one-on-one with you, it was like you were the only person in the world. His longtime friend and ecumenist George Reed says that James “probably left more people with more memories than anyone else I’ve known.” No argument there.

Dunn outdistanced death so many times that most of us lost count. He ran through his nine lives years ago—multiple cancer treatments; radiation and chemotherapy administered in unspeakable places, like Dallas and Houston; untold near-misses while driving his car—one friend says that he never rode with James unless he was prayed up!

And then there was the ruptured aorta in March, 2003, which he would not have survived save for the quick action and oxygen of the Wake Forest emergency team. On that day I had just finished class when a staff member burst in to say, “Dr. Dunn has had some sort of spell in Reynolda Hall.” Rushing across the Wake Forest quad I thought—honestly—“James has either had a heart attack

or punched out a Republican.” His tough, tender heart held 12 years longer, thank God.

After the 2003 health event, I encouraged him to outline this service, and we follow it today, gathering with the Knollwood congregation he and Marilyn have loved and faithfully served for over a decade. In that document, he requested that his longtime friend Bill Moyers and I should speak, but we’ve divided the occasions, and Mr. Moyers will present a Dunn memorial lecture at the Wake Forest

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University School of Divinity next fall at a date to be determined. James would be delighted that Bill Moyers, the dearest of his dearest friends, will return to the WFU campus.

It was Moyers who first suggested we invite James to Wake Forest to help start the School of Divinity in 1999. Moyers’ providential recommendation, made during a 1997 visit to the university, was, shall we say, a Holy Ghost moment. “Imagine what studying with Dunn will mean to students,” Moyers commented. Well, we couldn’t have imagined. Dean Gail O’Day, who deeply regrets not being here today, writes: “Not only were our students able to learn from and with a man of his level of accomplishment and acumen, but they were also able to experience firsthand what real passion and commitment look and live like. Recent graduate Reverend Abigail Pratt summed it up on Face

Book: “Thank you Dr. Dunn for the smiles and laughs, for supporting us as young ministers, for advocating for women in ministry, for fighting for religious freedom, for always raising hell when there was hell to be raised (and even when there might not have been), thank you.”

James included me among today’s participants, with this admonition: “Just preach the gospel,” “and if you mention me at all, try to tell the truth, mostly.” Here’s the truth: James Milton Dunn was committed to Jesus Christ, to Marilyn McNeely Dunn, to Baptist ways of being the church, to the ceaseless struggle for religious liberty, to his Texas heritage, and to the Democratic Party—all in that order, EXCEPT on election day!

Whatever else James taught us about life and faith, it was inseparable from the Jesus story. Like those earliest disciples, Dunn was haunted, maybe even hounded, by Jesus, who he was, what he said, and the implications of Jesus’ most basic message: “The kingdom of God has come near you.” Bill Moyers wrote: “Like his mentors, J.M. Dawson and T. B. Maston, the mystery of the Christ event has been central to James’ understanding of his faith and practice. The encounter occurred early on and it transformed him, producing a principled commitment to action and aware[ness] at every turn of that transcendent Presence.” Moyers, 1999

Like those who first encountered him on the lakeshore, it was Jesus who claimed James, and James who claimed Jesus. Indeed, one of his most famous declarations—“Ain’t nobody gonna tell me what to believe except Jesus”—got him into huge trouble with folks right and left of center. That line, and its accompanying theology, was neither glib platitude nor quirky individualism, but a heart-riven

confession grounded in the power of uncoerced faith and the transforming community of God's New Day in the world. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus sends out the gospel's first responders, giving them economic, spiritual and practical instructions, centered in this imperative: "Tell them, the kingdom of God—God's New Day—has come near you." That message, honed by the likes of Walter Rauschenbusch, Dorothy Day, and Gardner Taylor, shaped James' own radical Christianity, centered in personal transformation, communal justice, and compassionate dissent.

You heard it in his prayers. At the opening of the Wake Forest School of Divinity, James prayed: "Help us to be so full of our freedom in Thee, so literally liberated from the fears and phoniness that damn so much of theological education that we rejoice even in the responsibilities that ride piggyback on every freedom. And in it all, empower and humble each one of us, professor and student, donor and Dean, to do all we do as our high calling of God in Jesus Christ." Across the years, students in that first class have referenced that prayer both for its call to freedom in Christ, and as the first time they ever heard the word "damn" in a prayer.

Then there was the irony of it all. For James Dunn, the gospel was nothing if not filled with irony, the "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs." Yes, he said, the gospel of Jesus is peace-inculcating, life-transforming and world-confronting—but often it doesn't seem to work like it's supposed to, perhaps because of the way we are, or the way the world is, or the way we "knit-pick" (James' word) at the Jesus story.

Nobody perpetuated gospel irony more than James. Take Jesus' words: "I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves." But given the "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs," James taught us that when it comes to gospel justice we may need to be

RAVENOUS LAMBS, confronting the wolves head on with another way of looking at the world. I never met a more ravenous lamb than James Dunn—turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, but in your face when necessary for justice, reconciliation and compassion.

He exemplified the irony and wonder of that amazing verse in Ezekiel: "Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them." James surely hoped that his restless peace would lead to changes in church and society but, like Ezekiel, he recognized that some folks never hear. He would bear witness; follow his conscience; and let God sort out the results.

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I shall never forget the day I was sitting in my office watching Dr. Dunn testify at the Senate appointment hearings for John Ashcroft to be attorney general of the USA. James' name appeared at the bottom of the screen, along with the words "Wake Forest University." "O God," I said out loud, as a prayer, not an oath. Minutes later, the phone rang and a voice on the other end said, "Does this man who's testifying against Mr. Ashcroft work at Wake Forest?" Yes, I replied. "Well," she continued, "he's criticizing a fine Christian. Can you stop him?" "No, ma'am," I replied, "I'm just his colleague; you'd have to talk with Jesus if you want to stop him." "You're no better than he is," she declared, and hung up. James Dunn taught us to follow Jesus' ironic call to be "wise as serpents, innocent as doves" when justice and conscience requires.

And then there's peace. Jesus tells those early gospel nomads, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person. . . ." This room brims with people on whom God's peace came to rest because of James Dunn. It wasn't peace as tranquility, but a restless peace that pushes and presses, not for the sake of argument, although James could out argue the best of us; but the same restless peace that impelled Jesus of Nazareth to preach the gospel to the poor, recovery of sight to the sightless, to bind up the broken hearted, to set at liberty the oppressed, and declare that God's New Day really has come near. By grace, the restless peace James carried with him everywhere he went found its way to us. Sometimes you'd hear yourself telling him "your every weakness," as the hymn says, and some mysterious, ironic, restless sense of peace would come over you. Or you'd hear him address the world's great injustices and, before he'd finished, you'd committed yourself beyond yourself. James was at peace, I think, but it was a peace that demanded action and effort, a gospel cause with political, social and spiritual implications.

And to the bitter end, James Dunn's stubborn insistence that God's New Day really had come near made him one of the freest people I have ever known. In today's text, the disciples return, confessing that to their surprise this gospel stuff really worked, to the point that "even the worst of the demons run for the hills when we show up in your name." James knew that kind of hope in his bones—God's restless peace made him free and fearless from the west side of Fort Worth to Pennsylvania Avenue. Through it all, Dunn was an equal opportunity prophet, ever challenging the principalities and powers in church and state. Despising hierarchies, he wrote: "Nothing so violates the basic nature of a Baptist church as the assumption of power by a few." He drove Christian Fundamentalists crazy right

and right. Bill Clinton called him a “fly in the ointment” of Washington. He chastised Al Gore for supporting for private school vouchers. And when that prophetic calling kicked in, none of us could quiet him.

On July 4, 2005, our daughter Stephanie and I accompanied James to Old Salem Square to hear our colleague, the Moravian historian Dr. Craig Atwood, read the Declaration of Independence at a celebration begun there in 1786. We neglected to take chairs so leaned against the white picket fence that borders the square. Warfare in Iraq was “surging” and Afghanistan was exploding, and George Bush was president. Craig started through the Declaration’s list of grievances against the English king such as: “He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone,

for the tenure of their offices, and the amount, and payment of their salaries. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people. . .” At every sentence, Dunn would make noise—“Yes he has.” “Uh huh!”

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*Bill Clinton called him a “fly in the ointment” of Washington.*

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“Oh yes he has.” Some people took notice and frowned, but James was undeterred. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and he let his freedom of dissent ring. I finally said: “James, if you don’t quiet down, even the Moravians will throw us out of here.” James didn’t quiet down; and the Moravians didn’t throw us out. Oh, freedom.

On July 4 of this year, the day he died, I found a little memo pad on James’ desk on which he had written these words. Whether his or someone else’s I don’t know: “Lord, help us love like we’ve never lost—work like it’s not for money—and DANCE—like nobody’s watchin!” All right, James, you’ve gone about as far with us as you could go—carried some of us even. But by God, we’ll keep on dancing, with you and with Jesus; Dancing toward the Kingdom of God to the sweet, restless melody of peace.

World without end, amen. ■

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## Generations Crossed

With shining curls beneath a bonnet,  
So innocent against the wide, wide sea,  
At a tender age, lovelier than a sonnet,  
Entranced with sand and surf, carefree.  
Her smile and wave, like mine, were not striven,  
The generations were crossed beside the sea;  
There, and since, I hoped I may have given  
What she so freely gave to me.

—James A. Langley

# Responsive Reading, James Dunn Memorial Service

(Compiled by Bill J. Leonard)

**Reader:** “Yea, though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

**Congregation:** In the Psalms, all views of death had to reflect its closeness. . . . The writers of the psalms confronted death but saw through it to life because in death they saw God.” (Martin E. Marty)

**Reader:** “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

**Congregation:** “Enforced uniformity confounds civil and religious and denies the principles of Christianity and Civility. . . . A national church was not constituted by Christ Jesus. That cannot be a true religion which needs carnal weapons to uphold it. . . . No [persons] shall be required to worship or maintain a worship against [their] will.” (Roger Williams)

**Reader:** “Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.” (Amos 5: 23-24)

**Congregation:** “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

**Reader:** “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

(Luke 14: 12-14)

**Congregation:** “What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words—we can, to a certain extent, change the world. . . .”

(Dorothy Day)

**Reader:** “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3: 28)

**Congregation:** “Anything that is as old as racism is in the blood line of the nation; it’s not any superficial thing—that attitude is in the blood and we have to educate about it.”

(Nannie Helen Burroughs)

**Reader:** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

**Congregation:** “What’s right and good doesn’t come naturally. You have to stand up and fight for it - as if the cause depends on you, because it does.” (Bill Moyers)

**Reader:** “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

**Congregation:** “No aspect of our lives remains untouched by the conversion that is God’s call and God’s gift to us. Biblically, conversion means to surrender ourselves to God in every sphere of human existence; the personal and social, the spiritual and economic, the psychological and political.”

(James Dunn)

**Reader:** “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

**Congregation:** “Something fine, something of essence, hopeful and elegant, gauge of civility and a more excellent way, something of us at our best was gone. . . . Then when I had cried enough, I got up, blew my nose, and went to the house. . . . *In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!*” (Will Campbell)

**All:** Amen, and Amen! ■

# Remarks by President Obama in Eulogy for the Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney

Delivered at the College of Charleston  
Charleston, South Carolina

THE PRESIDENT: Giving all praise and honor to God.

The Bible calls us to hope. To persevere, and have faith in things not seen. “They were still living by faith when they died,” Scripture tells us. “They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on Earth.”

We are here today to remember a man of God who lived by faith. A man who believed in things not seen. A man who believed there were better days ahead, off in the distance. A man of service who persevered, knowing full well he would not receive all those things he was promised, because he believed his efforts would deliver a better life for those who followed.

To Jennifer, his beloved wife; to Eliana and Malana, his beautiful, wonderful daughters; to the Mother Emanuel family and the people of Charleston, the people of South Carolina.

I cannot claim to have the good fortune to know Reverend Pinckney well. But I did have the pleasure of knowing him and meeting him here in South Carolina, back when we were both a little bit younger. (Laughter.) Back when I didn't have visible grey hair. (Laughter.) The first thing I noticed was his graciousness, his smile, his reassuring baritone, his deceptive sense of humor — all qualities that helped him wear so effortlessly a heavy burden of expectation.

Friends of his remarked this week that when Clementa Pinckney entered a room, it was like the future arrived; that even from a young age, folks knew he was special. Anointed. He was the

progeny of a long line of the faithful — a family of preachers who spread God's word, a family of protesters who sowed change to expand voting rights and desegregate the South. Clem heard their instruction, and he did not forsake their teaching.

He was in the pulpit by 13, pastor by 18, public servant by 23. He did not exhibit any of the cockiness of youth, nor youth's insecurities; instead, he set an example worthy of his position, wise beyond his years, in his speech, in his conduct, in his love, faith, and purity.

As a senator, he represented a sprawling swath of the Lowcountry, a place that has long been one of the most neglected in America. A place still wracked by poverty and inadequate schools; a place where children can still go hungry and the sick can go without treatment. A place that needed somebody like Clem.

His position in the minority party meant the odds of winning more resources for his constituents were often long. His calls for greater equity were too often unheeded, the votes he cast were sometimes lonely. But he never gave up. He stayed true to his convictions. He would not grow discouraged. After a full day at the capitol, he'd climb into his car and head to the church to draw sustenance from his family, from his ministry, from the community that loved and needed him. There he would fortify his faith, and imagine what might be.

Reverend Pinckney embodied a politics that was neither mean, nor small. He conducted himself quietly, and kindly, and diligently. He encouraged progress not by pushing his ideas alone, but by seeking out your ideas, partnering with you to make things happen. He was full of empathy and fellow feeling, able to walk in somebody else's shoes and see through their

eyes. No wonder one of his senate colleagues remembered Senator Pinckney as “the most gentle of the 46 of us — the best of the 46 of us.”

Clem was often asked why he chose to be a pastor and a public servant. But the person who asked probably didn't know the history of the AME church. As our brothers and sisters in the AME church know, we don't make those distinctions. “Our calling,” Clem once said, “is not just within the walls of the congregation, but...the life and community in which our congregation resides.”

He embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words; that the “sweet hour of prayer” actually lasts the whole week long that to put our faith in action is more than individual salvation, it's about our collective salvation; that to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society.

What a good man. Sometimes I think that's the best thing to hope for when you're eulogized — after all the words and recitations and resumes are read, to just say someone was a good man. (Applause.)

You don't have to be of high station to be a good man. Preacher by 13. Pastor by 18. Public servant by 23. What a life Clementa Pinckney lived. What an example he set. What a model for his faith. And then to lose him at 41 — slain in his sanctuary with eight wonderful members of his flock, each at different stages in life but bound together by a common commitment to God.

Cynthia Hurd. Susie Jackson. Ethel Lance. DePayne Middleton-Doctor. Tywanza Sanders. Daniel L. Simmons. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton. Myra Thompson. Good people. Decent people. God-fearing

people. People so full of life and so full of kindness. People who ran the race, who persevered. People of great faith.

To the families of the fallen, the nation shares in your grief. Our pain cuts that much deeper because it happened in a church. The church is and always has been the center of African-American life a place to call our own in a too often hostile world, a sanctuary from so many hardships.

Over the course of centuries, black churches served as “hush harbors” where slaves could worship in safety; praise houses where their free descendants could gather and shout hallelujah rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad; bunkers for the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. They have been, and continue to be, community centers where we organize for jobs and justice; places of scholarship and network; places where children are loved and fed and kept out of harm’s way, and told that they are beautiful and smart and taught that they matter. That’s what happens in church.

That’s what the black church means. Our beating heart. The place where our dignity as a people is inviolate. When there’s no better example of this tradition than Mother Emanuel a church built by blacks seeking liberty, burned to the ground because its founder sought to end slavery, only to rise up again, a Phoenix from these ashes.

When there were laws banning all-black church gatherings, services happened here anyway, in defiance of unjust laws. When there was a righteous movement to dismantle Jim Crow, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from its pulpit, and marches began from its steps. A sacred place, this church. Not just for blacks, not just for Christians, but for every American who cares about the steady expansion of human rights and human dignity in this country; a foundation stone for liberty and justice for all. That’s what the church meant.

We do not know whether the killer of Reverend Pinckney and eight others knew all of this history. But he surely

sensed the meaning of his violent act. It was an act that drew on a long history of bombs and arson and shots fired at churches, not random, but as a means of control, a way to terrorize and oppress. An act that he imagined would incite fear and recrimination; violence and suspicion. An act that he presumed would deepen divisions that trace back to our nation’s original sin.

Oh, but God works in mysterious ways. God has different ideas.

He didn’t know he was being used by God. Blinded by hatred, the alleged killer could not see the grace surrounding Reverend Pinckney and that Bible study group — the light of love that shone as they opened the church doors and invited a stranger to join in their prayer circle. The alleged killer could have never anticipated the way the families of the fallen would respond when they saw him in court — in the midst of unspeakable grief, with words of forgiveness. He couldn’t imagine that.

The alleged killer could not imagine how the city of Charleston, under the good and wise leadership of Mayor Riley — (applause) — how the state of South Carolina, how the United States of America would respond — not merely with revulsion at his evil act, but with big-hearted generosity and, more importantly, with a thoughtful introspection and self-examination that we so rarely see in public life.

Blinded by hatred, he failed to comprehend what Reverend Pinckney so well understood — the power of God’s grace.

This whole week, I’ve been reflecting on this idea of grace. The grace of the families who lost loved ones. The grace that Reverend Pinckney would preach about in his sermons. The grace described in one of my favorite hymns — the one we all know: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I’m found; was blind but now I see.

According to the Christian tradition, grace is not earned. Grace is not merited. It’s not something we deserve. Rather, grace is the free and benevolent

favor of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. Grace.

As a nation, out of this terrible tragedy, God has visited grace upon us, for he has allowed us to see where we’ve been blind. He has given us the chance, where we’ve been lost, to find our best selves. We may not have earned it, this grace, with our rancor and complacency, and short-sightedness and fear of each other — but we got it all the same. He gave it to us anyway. He’s once more given us grace. But it is up to us now to make the most of it, to receive it with gratitude, and to prove ourselves worthy of this gift.

For too long, we were blind to the pain that the Confederate flag stirred in too many of our citizens. It’s true, a flag did not cause these murders. But as people from all walks of life, Republicans and Democrats, now acknowledge — including Governor Haley, whose recent eloquence on the subject is worthy of praise as we all have to acknowledge, the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride. For many, black and white, that flag was a reminder of systemic oppression and racial subjugation. We see that now.

Removing the flag from this state’s capitol would not be an act of political correctness; it would not be an insult to the valor of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be an acknowledgment that the cause for which they fought — the cause of slavery — was wrong — the imposition of Jim Crow after the Civil War, the resistance to civil rights for all people was wrong. It would be one step in an honest accounting of America’s history; a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds. It would be an expression of the amazing changes that have transformed this state and this country for the better, because of the work of so many people of goodwill, people of all races striving to form a more perfect union. By taking down that flag, we express God’s grace.

But I don’t think God wants us to stop there. For too long, we’ve been

blind to the way past injustices continue to shape the present. Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our children to languish in poverty, or attend dilapidated schools, or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career.

Perhaps it causes us to examine what we're doing to cause some of our children to hate. Perhaps it softens hearts towards those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal justice system — and leads us to make sure that that system is not infected with bias; that we embrace changes in how we train and equip our police so that the bonds of trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve make us all safer and more secure.

Maybe we now realize the way racial bias can infect us even when we don't realize it, so that we're guarding against not just racial slurs, but we're also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jamal. So that we search our hearts when we consider laws to make it harder for some of our fellow citizens to vote. By recognizing our common humanity by treating every child as important, regardless of the color of their skin or the station into which they were born, and to do what's necessary to make opportunity real for every American — by doing that, we express God's grace.

For too long —

AUDIENCE: For too long!  
THE PRESIDENT: For too long, we've been blind to the unique mayhem that gun violence inflicts upon this nation. Sporadically, our eyes are open: When eight of our brothers and sisters are cut down in a church basement, 12 in a movie theater, 26 in an elementary school. But I hope we also see the 30 precious lives cut short by gun violence in this country every single day; the countless more whose lives are forever changed — the survivors crippled, the children traumatized and fearful every day as they walk to school, the husband who will never feel his wife's warm touch, the entire commu-

nities whose grief overflows every time they have to watch what happened to them happen to some other place.

The vast majority of Americans — the majority of gun owners — want to do something about this. We see that now. And I'm convinced that by acknowledging the pain and loss of others, even as we respect the traditions and ways of life that make up this beloved country — by making the moral choice to change, we express God's grace.

We don't earn grace. We're all sinners. We don't deserve it. But God gives it to us anyway. And we choose how to receive it. It's our decision how to honor it.

None of us can or should expect a transformation in race relations overnight. Every time something like this happens, somebody says we have to have a conversation about race. We talk a lot about race. There's no shortcut. And we don't need more talk. None of us should believe that a handful of gun safety measures will prevent every tragedy. It will not. People of goodwill will continue to debate the merits of various policies, as our democracy requires — this is a big, raucous place, America is. And there are good people on both sides of these debates. Whatever solutions we find will necessarily be incomplete.

But it would be a betrayal of everything Reverend Pinckney stood for, I believe, if we allowed ourselves to slip into a comfortable silence again. Once the eulogies have been delivered, once the TV cameras move on, to go back to business as usual — that's what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society. To settle for symbolic gestures without following up with the hard work of more lasting change — that's how we lose our way again.

It would be a refutation of the forgiveness expressed by those families if we merely slipped into old habits, whereby those who disagree with us are not merely wrong but bad; where we shout instead of listen; where we barricade ourselves behind preconceived notions or well-practiced cynicism.

Reverend Pinckney once said, "Across the South, we have a deep appreciation of history — we haven't always had a deep appreciation of each other's history." What is true in the South is true for America. Clem understood that justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other. That my liberty depends on you being free, too. That history can't be a sword to justify injustice, or a shield against progress, but must be a manual for how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past — how to break the cycle. A roadway toward a better world. He knew that the path of grace involves an open mind — but, more importantly, an open heart.

That's what I've felt this week — an open heart. That, more than any particular policy or analysis, is what's called upon right now, I think — what a friend of mine, the writer Marilyn Robinson, calls "that reservoir of goodness, beyond, and of another kind, that we are able to do each other in the ordinary cause of things."

That reservoir of goodness. If we can find that grace, anything is possible. If we can tap that grace, everything can change.

Amazing grace. Amazing grace.  
(Begins to sing) — Amazing grace — how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see.

Clementa Pinckney found that grace.

Cynthia Hurd found that grace.

Susie Jackson found that grace.

Ethel Lance found that grace.

DePayne Middleton-Doctor found that grace.

Tywanza Sanders found that grace.

Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. found that grace.

Sharonda Coleman-Singleton found that grace.

Myra Thompson found that grace. Through the example of their lives, they've now passed it on to us. May we find ourselves worthy of that precious and extraordinary gift, as long as our lives endure. May grace now lead them home. May God continue to shed His grace on the United States of America.



# The Black Church in the South During Slavery

By Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp

From the white Baptist and Methodist missionaries sent to convert enslaved Africans, to the earliest pioneers of the independent black denominations, to black missionaries in Africa, to the eloquent rhetoric of W.E.B. DuBois, the story of the black church is a tale of variety and struggle in the midst of constant racism and oppression. It is also a story of constant change, and of the coincidence of cultural cohesion among enslaved Africans and the introduction of Protestant evangelicalism to their communities.

For our purposes, the account begins in the decades after the American Revolution, as Northern states gradually began to abolish slavery. As a result, sharper differences emerged between the experiences of enslaved peoples in the South and those Northerners who were now relatively free. By 1810 the slave trade to the United States had come to an end and the slave population began to increase naturally, giving rise to an increasingly large native-born population of African Americans. With fewer migrants who had experienced Africa personally, these transformations allowed the myriad cultures and language groups of enslaved Africans to blend together, making way for the preservation and transmission of religious practices that were increasingly “African-American.”

This transition coincided with the period of intense religious revivalism known as “awakenings.” In the Southern states beginning in the 1770s, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical religions such as the Methodist and Baptist faiths.

Many clergy within these denominations actively promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God, a message that provided hope and sustenance to the slaves. They also encouraged worship in ways that many Africans found to be similar, or at least adaptable, to African worship patterns, with enthusiastic singing, clapping, dancing, and even spirit-possession. Still, many white owners and clergy preached a message of strict obedience, and insisted on slave attendance at white-controlled

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*Through signals, passwords, and messages not discernible to whites, they called believers to “hush harbors” where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with evangelical Christianity.*

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churches, since they were fearful that if slaves were allowed to worship independently, they would ultimately plot rebellion against their owners. It is clear that many blacks saw these white churches, in which ministers promoted obedience to one’s master as the highest religious ideal, as a mockery of the “true” Christian message of equality and liberation as they knew it.

In the slave quarters, however, African Americans organized their own “invisible institution.” Through signals, passwords, and messages not

discernible to whites, they called believers to “hush harbors” where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with evangelical Christianity. We have little remaining written record of these religious gatherings. But it was here that the spirituals, with their double meanings of religious salvation and freedom from slavery, developed and flourished; and here, too, that black preachers, those who believed that God had called them to speak his Word, polished their “chanted sermons,” or rhythmic, intoned style of extemporaneous preaching. Part church, part psychological refuge, and part organizing point for occasional acts of outright rebellion (Nat Turner, whose armed insurrection in Virginia in 1831 resulted in the deaths of scores of white men, women, and children, was a self-styled Baptist preacher), these meetings provided one of the few ways for enslaved African Americans to express and enact their hopes for a better future. ■

*Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp then Associate Professor of Religious Studies University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, May 2001. This is an excerpt from **An Introduction to the Church in the Southern Black Community**, the collection of documents brought together in this project begins to tell the story of the growth of Protestant religion among African Americans during the nineteenth century, and of the birth of what came to be known as the “Black Church” in the United States. Permission was granted to reproduce this excerpt.*

# Four Louisville Ministers Proclaim 'War on Fear and Racism'

Juneteenth marks the day in 1865 when news of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation finally reached slaves in Texas, two and a half years after it was delivered.

True, news traveled slowly in those pre-internet days, but not that slowly. This liberating news was suppressed, denied, hidden.

Despite today's internet speed, the terrorist assassination in Charleston reveals how our human liberation continues to be suppressed, denied, hidden. It seems some have not fully heard or internalized the implications of that 1863 proclamation — that all persons are equal, possessing by virtue of birth enough sacredness to elicit gratitude and wonder.

What keeps this proclamation of our human oneness from becoming the normative narrative of our land?

What deep-seated fears foment dread and even hatred in otherwise beautiful human hearts?

Why, 150 years after the ratification of the Constitution's 13th Amendment, do some of our self-proclaimed law-abiding kindred continue to resist the providence of God in freeing blacks from second-class citizenship, while also freeing whites from the myth of superiority?

The events in Charleston, while tragic beyond words, are but the latest in a string of recent stories revealing how, despite the 1860s Herculean effort to change our country's laws, the spiritual truth behind these laws has yet to reach the literate and religious hearts of white Americans. Events in Charleston, Ferguson, Baltimore, Staten Island and, quietly but potently, in Louisville reveal patterns of fear-fueled disdain that continue to inform the experience of black Americans in 2015.

It is time for another war — a war on fear and racism.

This war will not employ guns and

grenades, but the non-violent tactics of the 1960s civil rights movement, targeted at capturing hearts even as it liberates cities like Louisville from the residual effects of slavery.

This war will liberate white Americans chained to subtle and not-so-subtle patterns of material and emotional dominance over black Americans. These patterns justify racist business decisions that keep black communities poor. They retain "us" and "them" thinking that becomes the seedbed of competition, disdain, and

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*We seek neither popularity nor personal gain. We pledge our pulpits, our positions, and the remaining years of our lives to proclaim our one united and sacred humanity. We seek the truth which can set all free.*

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eventually demonization and extermination.

Our battle cry is not new, but it is renewed.

American slavery left most black persons educationally and economically destitute. One hundred and fifty years later the effects are still evident. Jim Crow laws perpetuated the pattern, but today's new Jim Crow laws continue to imprison black communities who have few options and understandably give in to despair.

Tour certain streets of West Louisville and you will find yourself in *Zombierville*: a community of living people in whom hope has died. These are not bad or lazy or evil people, but people robbed of their institutions, whose communities are stripped bare of the means of economic vitality, who

are displaced from one neighborhood to another based on decisions in which they have no voice, and whose family systems are profoundly compromised by despair and destitution.

Enough is enough.

We have been brought together "for such a time as this." As such, we will move from truth-telling to action and, when necessary, strategic confrontation, as we assess who is our ally and who is, for today, our enemy.

We will not be co-opted by either armies of domination or armies of unholy anger. Because the human heart is our central domain we will fight to free all hearts enslaved by racism, including our own.

We will fight to transform educational and economic opportunities for Louisville's black community until there is a level playing field, where "every valley is lifted up and every mountain made low."

We seek neither popularity nor personal gain. We pledge our pulpits, our positions, and the remaining years of our lives to proclaim our one united and sacred humanity. We seek the truth which can set all free.

In short, the suppression, denial, and hiding of Juneteenth must finally, like the Confederate flag, be put away forever. And when our prison walls collapse brick by brick, we will join the mighty chorus singing through all time and space, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we're free at last." ■

*A statement to the public by The Rev. Kevin Cosby, St. Stephen Baptist Church; The Rev. Chris Caldwell, Broadway Baptist Church; The Rev. Joseph Phelps, Highland Baptist Church; The Rev. Bruce Williams, Bates Memorial Baptist Church. And published in the Louisville Courier-Journal, August 2015.*

# Yes, the Civil War Was About Slavery

By Bruce Gourley

Baptists and other white Americans North and South during the Civil War-era were unequivocal: secession, the existence of the Confederate States of America, and the Civil War were all the result of slavery, the immoral (or moral, depending on one's race, political persuasion and/or geographic location) institution that was the economic engine of the South.

As one historian summarized, "slave labor was the foundation of a prosperous economic system in the South." Yet that Southern "economic system" truly benefited only a small percentage of elite white southerners—plantation owners—as Bruce Levine's *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South* so aptly documents. Paradoxically, the creation of the South upon the practice of African slavery ensured the destruction of the region.

How did African slavery arrive at a point in history where it led to the bloodiest war in American history?

African slavery had been a part of America since early colonial days, but by the nineteenth century was increasingly controversial and largely concentrated in the agricultural-driven southern states.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, cotton became the leading cash crop of the South, and black slavery became necessary to sustain the cotton economy. The northern industrial economy in turn was partially dependent upon the slave-produced cotton, even as northern anti-slavery sentiment mounted on two fronts: a growing number of northerners considered slavery sinful, while many newly-arrived European immigrants and western-bound pioneers, seeking new economic opportunities, viewed as a threat to their jobs and livelihoods the potential expansion of slavery outside the South.

Meanwhile, by the 1840s, enough prominent white Baptists in the South had moved up the social ladder and into the ranks of slaveholders to merit a public, aggressive, systematic apology of black slavery on biblical grounds. The corollary to black slavery was white supremacy, and Baptists joined white Southern Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians and others in defending the growing, Southern caste system of white supremacy and black slavery.

From the advocacy of white

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*But by the mid-1840s Baptist sentiment in the South – at least as expressed in denominational leadership – was of the consensus that the enslavement of blacks was ordained of God and must be defended.*

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supremacy and black slavery a new Baptist denomination was born. Foreshadowing the Civil War, white Baptists in the South withdrew fellowship from their northern counterparts on May 10, 1845, forming the Southern Baptist Convention in order to better defend the South's practice of and dependency upon black slavery.

By this time, Southern white elites' defense of slavery was fully developed, led by South Carolina. South Carolina's Baptists were the most influential in the South, while the state as a whole served as the heart of the slave aristocracy, its massive plantation and slave populated coastal area among the richest counties in the entire American nation. In 1845, former South Carolina governor James Hammond spoke on behalf of his fel-

low slave lords when he declared that free societies were the problem. Slave societies, by way of contrast, maintaining a caste system that kept inferior humans in check, ensured the "foundation of every well-designed and durable" republic. Thomas Jefferson's belief that "all men are created equal" was "ridiculously absurd." Hammond went so far to say that not only were blacks unfit for freedom, but the white working class should also be enslaved for their own "emancipation." Aristocrat's views of the unworthiness of working whites, however, would be publicly toned down by the war years, as rhetoric of white solidarity came to serve the more useful purpose of rallying poor whites to secession from the United States.

While white Southern Baptist elites of 1845 agreed that human equality was wrongheaded and black slavery morally pure (most probably did not condone the enslavement of working class whites), they had not always believed thus. To be certain, the birthing of the pro-slavery Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 did not happen in a vacuum, nor was it necessarily inevitable.

Prior to the 1820s, many Baptists North and South were anti-slavery, reflective of larger views in the South at that time, a legacy of a pre-cotton economy. But by the mid-1840s Baptist sentiment in the South – at least as expressed in denominational leadership – was of the consensus that the enslavement of blacks was ordained of God and must be defended.

The transformation of the thought of the prominent Baptist minister John Leland (who ministered first in Virginia and then in the Northeast) in regards to slavery illustrates the change that took place among white Baptists of the South. As Leland's views transitioned from anti-slavery to pro-slavery, renowned Baptist preacher

and denominational leader Richard Furman, while president of the South Carolina State Convention of Baptists in 1822, wrote on behalf of South Carolina Baptists to the governor of South Carolina about slavery. His letter, a response to the attempted slave insurrection led by Denmark Vesey months earlier, is considered a watershed event in the beginning of a movement toward consolidation of white Baptists in the South to the pro-slavery position.

*“... because certain writers on politics, morals and religion, and some of them highly respectable, have advanced positions, and inculcated sentiments, very unfriendly to the principle and practice of holding slaves;... These sentiments, the Convention, on whose behalf I address your Excellency, cannot think just, or well founded; for the right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.”*

While nearly two more decades would pass before the sentiments of white South Carolina Baptists were fully realized among Baptists of the South at large, the die had been cast: Baptists in America were on the road to formal division over the issue of slavery. The General Missionary Convention formed in 1814 by Baptists North and South was clearly unraveling by the early 1840s, as American (Northern) Baptists became increasingly hostile to slavery and many white Baptists of the South, desiring to be insiders rather than outsiders in Southern culture and society, became ever more defensive of their region’s “peculiar institution.”

When the rendering came, Baptists in the South made certain the world knew why. Differences over missionary strategy and funding were highlighted at length, but were not the primary causation of the split. Largely comprised of slaveholders, the gathering at the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia, in May 1845 publicly pled their case. Slavery was biblical. Therefore abolition was sinful, and Baptists of the North were wrong to oppose slavery. Abolitionists of the

North were responsible for the Baptist division; southern Baptists had been patient with the agitators, but enough was enough. Pledging allegiance to slavery, they vowed “we will never interfere with *what is Caesar’s*” (a biblical allusion implying it was their moral and legal responsibility to uphold the legal institution of slavery). And for good measure, the delegates expressed outrage that a northern Baptist missionary had “actually remitted money to the United States to aid in the assisting of slaves to ‘run away from their masters.’” (Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1845.)

From this point forward, white Baptist leaders in the South through the end of the Civil War openly and insistently championed and defended

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*For the right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures both by precept and example.*

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white supremacy and black slavery, along the way migrating into a form of Christian nationalism heretofore foreign to the very Christian denomination that had been the most vocal advocate, since the seventeenth century, of the separation of church and state.

In Alabama, one Baptist news editor in 1850 said of slavery, “As a question of morals, it is between us and God ... as a question of political economy, it is with us alone, as free and independent states.” The same year, Alabama’s Bethel Baptist Association, reflecting Calvinistic theology, insisted the master-slave relationship was the product of God’s providence. In 1856 an Alabama Baptist labeled slavery “as much an institution of Heaven as marriage.” And in 1860 another declared, “The best defense of slavery ... is slavery as it is.” (See Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, p. 108)

White Baptists were merely echo-

ing what other Southern whites were saying. Alabama Presbyterian minister Rev. Fred A. Ross wrote a book defending slavery in 1857. Entitled *Slavery Ordained of God*, Ross declared: “Slavery is of God, and [should] continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family.”

With the Republican Party in 1860 united in resisting the expansion (and hence future) of slavery, the preservation and expansion of slavery lay with the Democratic Party. Yet Democrats in their 1860 convention were split over the issue, with the Deep South’s delegates (all slave lords or allies of slaveholders) determined to trump the Unionist commitments of other Democratic delegates. When the Democratic convention, meeting in Charleston, the epicenter of the South’s slavocracy, split over the issue of slavery, South Carolinian slave lord John S. Preston, as he led his fellow slave lords out of the convention hall and ultimately toward secession, summed up the Deep South elites’ unwavering commitment to slavery by declaring: “Slavery is our king; Slavery is our truth; Slavery is our Divine Right.”

Meanwhile, Virginia slaveholder and aristocrat George Fitzhugh spilled a great deal of ink defending black slavery and condemning human equality and free societies. Fitzhugh declared that he was “quite as intent on abolishing Free Society” as Northerners were on “abolishing slavery.” When war broke out, Fitzhugh framed the conflict as a war “between Christians and infidels.”

On March 21, 1861 newly-elected Confederate vice-president Alexander Stephens, formerly a U.S. Senator from Georgia, summarized the singular ideology of the newly-formed Confederate States. Condemning the United States’ ideal of “all men are created equal,” Stephens declared: “*Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery — subordina-*

*tion to the superior race — is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”*

Yet many Southern non-slaveholders, including Baptists, resisted secession. Prior to 1861, some Baptist leaders in the South, while ardent defenders of slavery, advised against secession. As the secession movement grew and the Confederacy formed in the spring of 1861, the South’s politicians and influential men echoed Stephens in openly acknowledging that slavery was the motivation for rebelling from the United States. Baptist leaders, even those initially apprehensive regarding secession, echoed this message from pulpit and political platform alike. Baptist congressmen from southern states resigned their seats, and prominent Baptist slaveholders helped lead their states to secede from the Union and craft new constitutions.

Throughout the war, Southern Baptist leaders consistently identified slavery as the cause of the war. Specifically, the North’s attempts to abolish God’s institution of African slavery caused the war, and the Confederacy was left with no recourse other than to turn to war to preserve God’s wills for the races.

Two Baptist sermons — one delivered three months before the war began, and the other delivered midway through the war — serve to illustrate the dedication and devotion of white Baptists in the South to white supremacy and black slavery.

On January 27, 1861, before a standing room only audience Ebenezer W. Warren, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Macon, Georgia, delivered a sermon entitled “Scriptural Vindication of Slavery,” here partially quoted: “Slavery forms a vital element of the Divine Revelation to man. Its institution, regulation, and perpetuity, constitute a part of many of the books of the Bible .... The public mind needs enlightening from the sacred teachings of inspiration on this subject .... We

of the South have been passive, hoping the storm would subside .... Our passiveness has been our sin. We have not come to the vindication of God and of truth, as duty demanded .... it is necessary for ministers of the gospel ... to teach slavery from the pulpit, as it was taught by the holy men of old, who spake as moved by the holy Spirit .... Both Christianity and Slavery are from heaven; both are blessings to humanity; both are to be perpetuated to the end of time .... Because Slavery is right; and because the condition of the slaves affords them all those privileges which would prove substantial blessings to them; and, too, because their Maker has decreed their bondage, and has given them, as a race, capacities and aspirations suited alone to this

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*“Both Christianity and slavery are from heaven; both are blessings to humanity; both are to be perpetuated to the end of time...” Pastor, First Baptist Church, Macon.*

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condition of life ....”

On August 21, 1863, Isaac Taylor Tichenor, arguably the most influential Baptist minister in Alabama and known as the “fighting chaplain” for his service in the Confederate Army, stood before the Alabama Legislature and delivered a “Fast Day” sermon (such days were periodically called by government leaders North and South as a way of invoking God’s blessing). The South was weary, Tichenor acknowledged, but defending slavery and the Confederacy from the evil abolitionist North was a holy task, and God’s hand remained upon his faithful people. Tichenor then declared: Two weary years of war have wrung this question from the agonized heart of our bleeding country. “Oh! That we could have peace!” exclaims the statesman, as he ponders the problems that

demand solution at his hands. “Peace,” sighs the soldier, as he wraps his blanket around him and lies down to sleep upon the open field. “Peace!” moans the widow, as she reads the fatal news of her heroic husband fallen on some bloody field, and bitterly thinks of the darkened future in store for herself and her orphaned children. The prayer of the land is for peace. You may hear it in the sanctuary, at the fireside, around the family altar, in the silent chamber, on the tented field. When will it come? .... If God governs the world, then his hand is in this war in which we are engaged. It matters not that the wickedness of man brought it upon us, that it was caused by the mad attempts of fanaticism to deprive us of our rights, overthrow our institutions [African slavery], and impose upon us a yoke which, as freemen, we had resolved never to bear.”

The Southern Baptist Convention, represented by slaveholding elites, repeatedly pledged loyalty to the Confederate nation that God had entrusted with keeping Africans in bondage. South Carolina Baptists lauded a May 1863 SBC affirmation of slavery as the cause of the war and God’s will for blacks:

*... the war which has been forced upon us by our assailants, is grounded in opposition to an institution which is sustained by the sanctions of religion. They [Northerners] assume that slavery is a sin and therefore ought to be abolished. We contend that it is a Scriptural institution. The very nature of the contest takes the point in dispute out of the category of politics, and delegates it to the sphere of Christianity. We are really contending for the precepts of religion, against the devices of the wisdom of this world, and it is, therefore, not only the policy, but the duty of religious bodies to define their position in this great contest. The [SBC] convention has done well in giving unambiguous utterance to its sentiments on this subject.*

Never did it seemingly occur to Warren and Tichenor and most other white southern Baptists that God would want freedom extended to slaves. Whites were God’s chosen peo-

ple, and blacks were destined to always be enslaved to God's chosen ones. Resistance to God's plan for humanity had led the North to start the war. Now at the very time that black slavery was receding around the globe in the name of God's love for all people, God's true will of racial subjugation on earth rested with the South. Freedom was the right of whites; slavery was the lot of blacks. For the great cause of upholding God's will for the races, war – and the deaths of hundreds of thousands – was warranted.

In January 1864, against the backdrop of the declining fortunes of the Confederacy, the editor of the Virginia Baptist *Religious Herald* put the matter succinctly: "Abolition," he declared, is "the Final Antichrist."

While vividly disagreeing with their Southern counterparts over the nature of abolitionism, Baptists of the North echoed their Southern brethren's

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*The Southern Baptist Convention, represented by slaveholding elites, repeatedly pledged loyalty to the Confederate nation that God had entrusted with keeping Africans in bondage.*

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insistence that the war was about slavery, the one war-related issue of which Baptists of both regions were in full agreement. A brief statement by Illinois Baptists in June 1863 represented the convictions of most Baptists throughout the North:

*We recognize human slavery now, as we have heretofore done, to be the cause of the war its kindred evils, and we reiterate our convictions that there can be no*

*peace and prosperity in the nation until it is destroyed.*

Following the war, many white southerners, including Baptists, publicly denied their earlier insistence that slavery was the cause of the war. Rather than slavery, "states rights" became the new cause of the war "between the slaveholding states and the non-slaveholding states."

This denial remains widespread today among many white southerners of the twenty-first century. Yet the record is clear. Slavery was the publicly acknowledged cause of the American Civil War, South and North. If slavery had not existed in Antebellum America, the American Civil War would never have occurred. ■

*Dr. Bruce T. Gourley is the Executive Director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society*

## The Battle Is Not Done

Overdue the removal of the battle flag of a 'Lost Cause'  
To some museum, or other relegated place,  
It stands for slavery and a master race,  
Lift high instead a just standard, fairer laws.

Raise Old Glory, with thanksgiving, for a new day won,  
For bigotry unmasked, and in retreat,  
The hubris shown for its conceit,  
Yet knowing that the battle joined is not done.

—James A. Langley

# Ralph Blair, Unexpected Pioneer

By Fisher Humphreys

Dr. Ralph Blair practices psychotherapy in New York City. He is a prolific writer and an urbane conversationalist and correspondent. He has assembled a magnificent collection of art, letters, and autographed books. He teaches a weekly Bible study in his office on the Upper East Side. He is an evangelical Christian.

And he is gay. Surprisingly, he never struggled with this fact: "I was a Christian who happened to be attracted to a few people of the same sex. Okay. I took the simple but profound gospel of Christ at face value and moved on from there."<sup>1</sup> He never felt he was a victim.

This has not prevented him from appreciating the pain which most homosexuals have experienced in their families and churches as well as in society at large. In 1975 Blair created and today he continues to lead Evangelicals Concerned, a New York-based corporation whose mission is to encourage conservative evangelical Christians and their churches to welcome and affirm homosexuals. It sounds like an impossible task, but Blair is quietly hopeful. After all, he points out, the civil rights movement brought about a transformation in churches even though no white parents ever discovered that they have given birth to a black child; why shouldn't churches undergo a similar transformation in their attitude toward homosexual persons, given that every day heterosexual parents are discovering that they have given birth to a homosexual child?

There is a popular assumption that all religious people who work on behalf of homosexuals are theologically liberal. Blair's life and work prove that this is not universally true. Blair is a theological conservative. He champions the cause of helping churches change their mind about homosexuality, not in spite of the fact

that he is a conservative evangelical Christian, but because he is. In Blair's life and work evangelicalism and homosexuality are fully integrated.<sup>2</sup> Life

Ralph Blair was born in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1939, the oldest of three children of James and Emma Blair. The following year he was baptized into a congregation of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. At the age of 12 Blair was grasped by the truth and hope and beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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## *In Blair's life and work evangelicalism and homosexuality are fully integrated.*

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He went on to have experiences in higher education that reflect both his conservative evangelicalism and his commitment to a revised understanding of homosexuality. He attended three of the most conservative Christian schools in America. His first two years as an undergraduate were spent at Bob Jones University, the epicenter of Fundamentalist university education. He spent a year at Dallas Theological Seminary, the principal institutional defender of the dispensationalist interpretation of the Bible. And he spent a year at Westminster Theological Seminary, a stronghold of Reformed and Calvinistic theology. Blair appreciates these schools and never speaks negatively about them.

On the other hand, his degrees are from different kinds of schools. His undergraduate degree is from Bowling Green State University in his home state of Ohio. He earned a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Southern

California where he studied with the great Christian philosopher Geddes MacGregor, among others. His thesis at USC was on voluntary euthanasia. He received his doctorate from Pennsylvania State University; his dissertation was about counseling homosexual persons and their families.

While he was studying philosophy at USC Blair spent a summer back in Youngstown in order to help found a Presbyterian church; today it is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America. After leaving USC he worked for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1965 he gave a talk to some Yale students in which he voiced his support for same-sex couples. The students welcomed the talk, but some administrators of IVCF did not. As a result he was not reappointed by IVCF for the following year. Blair then worked for a year with college students at Pennsylvania State University as interim Baptist chaplain through the American Baptist Convention, although he was not a Baptist. He stayed on at Penn State to earn his doctorate. In 1969 he was invited to come to New York as Director of Counseling at the New York City Community College, a part of the City University of New York (CUNY). He has been a New Yorker ever since. He doesn't drive a car; he walks from his home to his office, both located on the Upper East side. Work

Blair possesses the entrepreneurial spirit. During his tenure at CUNY he created and chaired the National Task Force on Personnel Services and Homosexuality. This enabled him to lead workshops and give lectures in New York and elsewhere to therapists, counselors, physicians, medical students, and others about working with homosexuals. Through the Task Force he launched and edited a series of

books about homosexuality entitled *The Otherwise Monograph Series*. Its authors were distinguished scholars who were experts in the subject; Blair's own volume was on the etiology of homosexuality.

In 1971 Blair resigned his position at the university and established his private practice in psychotherapy. Today, at the age of 76, he continues his practice.

At the time Blair began his work in New York the official view of the medical and therapeutic communities was that homosexuality was a mental disorder, and it was difficult for gays to find a psychiatrist or a psychotherapist who would not treat them as ill. So in 1971 Blair founded the Homosexual Community Counseling Center, a referral system which provided gays and their families with information about where they could receive sympathetic counseling and other services. After the medical community changed its view the Center was no longer needed, and it was disbanded.

In 1973 Blair founded and edited the quarterly *Homosexual Counseling Journal*. The journal sponsored major conferences in more than a dozen American cities from 1974 to 1976.

Late in 1975 Blair met with Robert Rayburn, the founding president of Covenant College and Seminary. He told Rayburn about his intention to start a solidly evangelical ministry of support for the integration of evangelical Christian faith and homosexuality. Rayburn suggested that Blair launch the ministry during the next annual meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals. Blair took Rayburn's advice, and Evangelicals Concerned came into existence in February 1976 during the NAE meeting in Washington, D.C.

In Evangelicals Concerned Blair found the instrument through which he has made his greatest and most lasting contributions. Through EC, as well as through his work as a psychotherapist and through his weekly Bible studies, Blair ministers directly

to homosexuals and their families and friends. Also through EC he reaches out to evangelical leaders, people, churches, and schools to encourage them to have a better understanding of same-sex orientation and to be more accepting of gay persons and gay couples.

EC currently sponsors two major events a year, a preaching conference in October and a retreat in the summer. Blair himself speaks at the events, but he always invites other evangelicals to speak as well. Some of these speakers are gay and others are not. Across the years speakers at his connECTION retreats have included well-known Christian leaders such as Ken Medema, Lewis Smedes, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Peggy

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*Given what the Bible says about such activity, how can a Bible-believing Christian like Blair possibly think that homosexual sexual activity is not sinful?*

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Campolo, Charlie Shedd, Ken and Nancy Hastings Sehested, Randall Balmer, Cynthia Clawson, and Jack Rogers.

Ralph invited me to speak at the EC retreat at Kirkridge in Pennsylvania in 2010. The moment he invited me I knew immediately what my topic would have to be—forgiveness. In America homosexuals have been hurt by the wider society as much as any group I know, and Jesus taught his followers that the way to respond when they were hurt was to forgive those who hurt them. It is not an easy thing to do, but it's the best thing, and with the Lord's help we can forgive our enemies.

On the website of Evangelicals Concerned ([www.ECinc.org](http://www.ECinc.org)) there is information about the conferences. There also are links to the two quarterly publications of EC, both of which Blair writes. One is

called RECORD and is a running commentary on news and developments concerning homosexuality and evangelicalism. The other is called REVIEW, and in it Blair reviews new books and articles about Christian faith and homosexuality. Blair has been doing this writing for forty years. In his writing he goes the second mile to express his appreciation for the work of others. However, there are some things which he opposes very, very forcefully. These include, on the one hand, claims that it is psychologically healthy for gays to engage in promiscuous sex, and, on the other hand, claims that gays can be "cured" and transformed into heterosexuals.

The Bible

Also on the website there is information about the million-dollar question which hovers in the background when one thinks about Blair's work. It is the question of the Bible. In particular, it is the question of the meaning of seven passages—Blair calls them "the clobber passages"—which refer to sexual activity between persons of the same sex. Given what the Bible says about such activity, how can a Bible-believing Christian like Blair possibly think that homosexual sexual activity is not sinful?

The short answer is that Blair thinks that the Bible does not refer to homosexuality *as it exists today*, particularly among Christians. That is, the Bible contains no references to consensual, loving, faithful, peer relationships between persons of the same sex. It does refer to relationships that are non-consensual, as in the threat of gang rape in Genesis 19. And it refers to promiscuous sexual activities engaged in as part of idolatrous worship (Romans 1). But it does not refer to caring relationships such as many Christians today undertake. This interpretation is not original with Blair who points out that it was made as early as 1964 by the devoutly evangelical and widely respected German theologian Helmut Thielicke, and it has been made by many Bible scholars since.



A brief article like this is no place to try to assess whether the understanding of the Bible which Blair holds is correct; the issues are too technical. What I can do is to note that there are some very knowledgeable, very responsible, very faithful Christian interpreters who come down on both sides of this issue. In the past few years, for example, the distinguished evangelical New Testament scholar and current dean of the divinity school at Duke University, Richard B. Hays, has written essays saying that the sort of interpretation that Blair offers is not correct; and the distinguished evangelical ethicist David Gushee of Mercer University (now also a columnist for Religion News Service) has written a book endorsing the kind of interpretation that Blair holds.<sup>3</sup> It is simply false to argue that the explanation for the differences in these scholars' interpretations is that one of them believes the Bible and the other does not.

The Christian church has always managed to live with differences in interpretation of the Bible on important issues such as, for example, predestination. Perhaps the church will learn to do the same thing concerning homosexuality.

The Pioneer

Americans' attitudes toward homosexuals have shifted dramatically in the past few years. This shift occurred much more rapidly than the shift in attitude toward women which resulted in the 19th amendment of the Constitution (1920), and much more rapidly than the shift in attitude toward African-Americans which resulted in the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965). The shift concerning homosexuals, like these other shifts, was preceded and made possible by the work of people who held a minority view and worked to gain a broader

acceptance for their view.

When Ralph Blair began the work of publicly calling conservative evangelicals to be accepting of homosexuals, he did not know any other evangelical Christians who were doing this work. He was a pioneer. For more than half a century he has continued to work for a reformation in the conservative evangelical churches he loves so much.

It seems possible to me that in the not-too-distant future many evangelical churches may change their attitudes toward homosexuals just as they have changed their attitudes toward women and toward racial minorities. If this happens, they may look back on the energetic, patient, pioneering work of Ralph Blair who showed the

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*It seems possible to me that in the not-too-distant future many evangelical churches may change their attitudes toward homosexuals just as they have changed their attitudes toward women and toward racial minorities.*

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way to a more hospitable Christian church.

In an address given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2003 Blair said:

I would challenge my fellow Evangelicals to take a closer look at what they think they know about homosexuality and what they know about Christian faith. Let's take the gospel seriously and not relegate it to a mere mantra. Let's take sin seriously and not trivialize it as merely a matter of anatomical correctness. Let's take Christian discipleship biblically,

with no propping up of a few poorly grasped Bible verses out of all proportion to Jesus' clear call for a grateful love for God and a rigorously generous love for our neighbors. And let's . . . find the self-sacrificing solution to hostilities at the cross of Christ, the only Savior and Lord there is.<sup>4</sup> ■

*Fisher Humphreys is Professor of Divinity, Emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.*

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1 Ralph Blair, "On Evangelical Faith and Homosexuality," a presentation made at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2003, viewed at <http://ecinc.org/on-evangelical-faith-and-homosexuality/>.

2 When Blair began speaking about homosexuality in the 1960s it was customary to refer to all non-heterosexual persons as *homosexuals*. By the 1970s, when Blair began writing about homosexuality, the word *gays* had come into use. Since then many writers make numerous distinctions among the non-heterosexual population, sometimes employing acronyms such as LGBTQ. These distinctions are important, but for convenience and also for accuracy in reporting about Blair's views, I have in this article used only the two earlier words.

3 Richard B. Hays, "Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies" in Jeffrey S. Siker, ed., *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994). Richard B. Hays, "The Biblical Witness concerning Homosexuality" in Maxie Dunnam and H. Newton Malony, eds., *Staying the Course* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2003). David P. Gushee, *Changing Our Minds*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Canton, Michigan: David Crumm Media, 2014).

4 Ralph Blair, "On Evangelical Faith and Homosexuality," a presentation made at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2003, viewed at <http://ecinc.org/on-evangelical-faith-and-homosexuality/>.

# Preventing Abortion: Will 20 Weeks Do It?

By Paul D. Simmons

The House of Representatives just passed H.R. 36, oddly called “The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act,” which proposes to extend legal protection from abortion to the unborn beginning at 20 weeks of the woman’s pregnancy. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) and Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), and was strongly supported among Republicans in the House. The sponsors claim that research says the fetus at this stage can feel pain which is why doctors use anesthesia for surgery with the unborn.

The search for the time during gestation at which the fetus should be regarded as a person and thus have the full protection of the law has been an on-going debate since the issue was raised in *Roe v. Wade*. The question is the stage at which there is sufficient neurological and physiological development that the fetus is viable—that is, able to live outside the womb without extensive technological support. Note that the 21 week rule is touted as fulfilling the viability criterion. Their statement gives two reasons: “the unborn child can live outside the womb” and it feels pain. Whether this approach will stand the scrutiny of the Court remains to be seen. *Roe v. Wade* (1973) reckoned the fetus acquires the ability to live outside the womb at about 28 weeks gestation. The perception promoted by the anti-abortion movement is that there is a widespread incidence of premature births that could be assisted to survive by medical technology has promoted the 20 week rule as the solution. Whether a 20 week fetus could live without extensive Neonatal Intensive Care it (NICU) support, however, is extremely problematic. Commentators are already suggesting that the 20 week standard will likely not pass judicial scrutiny.

Some want no law permitting abortion at any stage, of course. Even a fertilized ovum should be protected according to traditional Roman Catholic teachings. Pope Pius IX declared emphatically that one is a person “from the moment of conception” adding that any direct killing of the fetus at any stage was a mortal sin.” While Catholics have historically engaged in a wide variety of responses to problem pregnancy, the teaching of the Papacy has been consistent since Gregor Mendel’s findings in genetics.

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*Many of those adamantly opposed to abortion are willing to go to any length to stop an abortion, as evidenced by the murder of Dr. Tiller and other abortion doctors and their assistants.*

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Nuns and certain theologians have been especially vocal in opposing this extremely narrow approach and the Catholic journal *Conscience* openly advocates choice.

The effort to ban abortion at 20 weeks is consistent with the plans projected by anti-abortion activists who exploit the latitude allowed by the Supreme Court in *Webster*<sup>1</sup> that permitted states to implement hindrances and limitations to a woman’s choice.<sup>2</sup> Among those hindrances have been such things as requiring abortion procedures in approved facilities and such limits as 24 hour (or longer) waiting periods, requiring ultrasound pictures to be presented to the woman and allowing ever-decreasing distances at which protestors must remain as they cajole, shove and shout their message at women entering abortion clinics.

Many of those adamantly opposed to abortion are willing to go to any length to stop an abortion, as evidenced by the murder of Dr. Tiller and other abortion doctors and their assistants.

The Supreme Court has also shown deference toward a more restrictive interpretation of the Constitution in recent years. *Roe v. Wade* showed considerable regard for the woman’s suffering and decisional prerogatives during pregnancy making even late-term abortions possible where there was evidence of “undue burden.” That rule was altered in the decision regarding *Partial-Birth Abortion*,<sup>3</sup> in which Justice Kennedy joined conservatives to form a majority that spoke of “the living, human organism” that was at stake in the debate and whose dignity and rights had to be preserved. That sounds like the typical thought found in Right-to-Life literature. Women’s rights groups fear that if the current makeup of the Supreme Court holds during the next two decades, women will be right back in the era when reproductive rights were severely restricted. The message women will get is that they are loved and appreciated but expected to be docile recipients of whatever nature may throw at them and to accept a second-class citizenship that relegates them to serve the dictates of a male-dominated legal system.

The 20 week approach is based on the opinion that the fetus feels pain which should exclude the procedure on humanitarian grounds. This argument has some semblance to reasonableness. But the “pain” criterion is terribly problematic since the nerve system of the fetal body is hardly developed and the sensory portions of the brain are not yet in place. By “pain,” the abortion objectors mean the fact that a fetus will withdraw a limb or show sensitivity to touch

with an object wielded by the physician. But sensitivity to touch is hardly “knowing” that one has been touched. So the criterion is less than convincing to a wide range of people, especially embryologists and neonatologists.

Reasons such as the set-back for women’s rights and lack of scientific support for the viability theory figure in the surveys that show a lack of support among Americans for the 20-week proposal itself. Sixty-one percent of voters say abortion should be legal throughout the pregnancy.

Political fervor among avid anti-abortion foes is not dissuaded by negative public opinion polls, of course. The public recognizes that difficulties may and do often present themselves to the pregnant women after 20 weeks. A considerable number of voters regard the time and energy spent on yet another effort to ban abortion would better be spent on more important and pressing issues. The Right-to-Life movement has made its point but now is increasingly regarded as anti-woman, anti-science and anti-democratic. It may happen that a reasonable bill will come from the acrimony and incendiary atmosphere in Congress, or, that no bill at all will be forthcoming, which seems more likely. The Senate’s quick action to send the bill to Committee is an indication of the national sentiment.

A strong majority (78%) of Democrats oppose the 20 week rule, as do 62% of Republicans and 71% of Independents. The overwhelming majority vote in the House indicates the conservative resurgence and the influence of anti-abortion extremists among Republicans. Should the Bill come to the floor, Sen. McConnell (R-KY) will have the power to manipulate whether and how the Senate gets to vote. He is strongly anti-choice and presumably supports the 20 week rule. The Senate debate will likely be heated and the final margin of a vote much closer than in the House. Americans can only hope that cooler heads will prevail so that central Constitutional values will be preserved and women’s prerogatives

of choice during pregnancy will be preserved.

Women, not fetuses, are the “persons” who have Constitutional protections and prerogatives of choice regarding their preferences and decisions related to “life, liberty and happiness.” Women’s decisions are vital to their personal well-being and extend to matters of family planning and dealing with tragic events and pregnancy termination under adverse circumstances.

Anti-abortion rhetoric is also in need of a facts-check. The first dubious claim, if not outright misrepresentation, relates to the claim that a 20 week fetus is “viable,” that is, capable of living outside the womb. Their approach also implies that no technol-

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### *There is a direct relation between poverty and a high abortion rate.*

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ogy is necessary to assure the baby’s living and flourishing.

The concern about “feeling pain” implies sufficient sensory and intellectual development for the fetus to know he or she is being mutilated or dismembered. This claim is not supported by medical science. Fetal development at 20 weeks is insufficient to assure a brain capable of thought processes. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*<sup>4</sup> of 1306 babies born at 20-25 weeks gestation indicated that 8% were not even counted as a statutory live birth; 39% had some heartbeat but no other signs of life. For those born 20-22 weeks the duration of survival was less than 60 minutes. Only after 23 weeks gestation did 4.5% live to 1 year and that was for those weighing 500 gms or more. Among those who survived with ventilatory support, most were afflicted with lifelong physical and neurological liabilities, some of which will prove lethal. The authors concluded by saying that aggressive resuscitation of fetuses should be

attempted at 25 weeks but not those at 22 weeks. In other words, more harm than good comes from rescue measures for most infants at 20-24 weeks gestation.

The study makes two points relative to this discussion. First, it raises a serious question about the claim that drawing a line on abortion at 20 weeks will prevent pain and suffering on the part of the woman and fetus. That claim is misleading at best and blatantly untrue at worst. Second, it lays bare the fact that the 20 week rhetoric is a thinly-veiled cover for an anti-abortion crusade that belongs to the same category as efforts to require extended waiting periods, counseling with ultrasound pictures of the fetus in utero, and efforts to make illegal the medications used in abortion. Instead of reducing the amount of suffering and pain for women and their families, the suffering and humiliation for women are greatly increased.

The criminalization of actions by women is another major consequence of the anti-abortion crusade. Indiana has sentenced Purvi Patel to 21 years in prison for what she maintains was a miscarriage. She came to an Emergency Room covered with blood and needing medical assistance, which she received, along with being charged with feticide. Such is the loveless logic associated with legislation designed to “protect fetuses” but not women.

Feticide is also on the books in Nicaragua, where women are subjected to intense scrutiny, pelvic exams, interviews with family, etc. Once the pregnancy is registered at a clinic for prenatal care, the woman is followed to determine whether she delivers a live baby on schedule. If she does not the assumption is that she has had an abortion. The consequences include imprisonment and fines both for the woman and any physician or other person thought to have assisted her.

Wisconsin legislators proposed a \$10,000 or 42-month prison sentence for any physician who violated the provisions of a 10-week ban.

Common sense and the professional ethics of the physician were disregarded in the fervent effort to prevent abortions. Repressive laws follow bad theology and misguided ethics.

There are two very specific and positive ways to respond to the crisis confronting the woman. The first is to help relieve the problem of poverty or extreme financial distress. There is a direct relation between poverty and a high abortion rate. The second is to provide reliable sexual information including all-option counseling and making contraceptives available. These steps both recognize and support the dignity of the woman and contribute directly to her personal needs.

The proper focus in the debate about abortion is the woman, not the fetus. Anti-abortion leaders have, ever since *Roe v. Wade*, attempted to shift the emphasis to so-called fetal rights. The “innocence” of the fetus carries additional weight to that of the woman in the mind of the public. The “innocence” of the fetus is contrasted to the “guilt” of the woman. The woman’s “guilt” is traced in traditional religious thought to the origins of humanity and the Fall. “She” is portrayed as “the first to fall” and thus the one primarily responsible for the sinfulness of humanity. It becomes easy to shift the emphasis when dealing with abortion from the circumstances driving the crisis to the larger question of primary guilt. By that measure, the woman loses every time. But she is the one uniquely at issue in the abortion debate. In the biblical story, she is created in God’s *image*, and thus is endowed, like God, with capacities for reflective choice and moral decision-making. She is a human being and carries the burden and responsibility of making decisions that reflect her unique place in creation.

The fetus does not have those abilities and likely attains them in rudimentary form only with the formation of the neo-cortex or no earlier than about the 26<sup>th</sup> week of gestation. The abortion question focuses the person-

hood of the woman who, in turn, considers the potential personhood of the fetus in terms of the multiple dimensions of her own history and the future. Hers is a god-like decision. Like the Creator, she reflects upon what is good for the creation of which she is agent and now bears the ability to bring another into existence. She is a steward, not the Creator, of powers that now belong to her. As steward, she is to reflect upon those powers and use them for good and not ill—for herself and the creation of which she is a part and with which she interacts as

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### *The “innocence” of the fetus is contrasted to the “guilt” of the woman.*

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Agent. Her own well-being, the health and well-being of the fetus and that of the future become primary factors in her decision.

The personhood of the fetus is not actual but *attributed or anticipatory*. Objectively, enough has been said to underscore the fact that a 21-week fetus is not sufficiently developed to consider it an actual person. But potentiality has its place in the woman’s response to this moment. She (along with family or husband) may regard the fetus as a person and provide it with all the respect, love and protection a person should be given. It is not yet a person, but it may be named and accepted as a person, providing the emotional, spiritual and nurturing environment necessary to become a person.

This important human phenomenon of attributing personhood to the fetus in the womb is either ignored or discounted by those who oppose the legal availability of abortion. The search for objective criteria for personhood seems cold and calculating to those who have only experienced the joyous, celebrative side of pregnancy. It is inconceivable to them that any woman would choose to terminate a pregnancy. Little wonder they react

with revulsion, fear and anger at people they believe to be unappreciative of gestating life. The mistake is the confusion between actual and anticipatory personhood. To relate to a fetus as “person” is not the same as discovering the personhood of the fetus. The fetus is not a person by any objective criteria, but it may be ascribed personhood on highly subjective grounds.

Not every pregnancy results in a positive personal relationship between woman and fetus. Pregnancy is not always a happy occasion—it may be a destructive experience fraught with horror and threat to the woman. Bonding simply does not take place. The fetus may be perceived as a threat to the woman’s health or a reminder of sexual abuse or the dangers attending the processes of conception and gestation. An ectopic pregnancy poses a threat to the woman’s life as do such problems as placental previa or complications from the woman’s earlier heart problems. The human experience of pregnancy is tremendously varied. Relating just how God’s providence is being expressed under intensely threatening circumstances requires keen insight and empathy. God’s activity is not always and under all circumstances the same thing. Pregnancy under coercive or threatening circumstances will likely not be considered an experience to celebrate. And it will likely be difficult to think of it positively as a matter of divine goodness. Grace is given the woman to deal boldly with the threat to her life and well-being.

### CONCLUSIONS

How then should Americans provide protections for the woman to act out her stewardship of procreative powers? Those who turn to Scripture (Hebrew, Christian and Moslem) for guidance regarding abortion will confront instead a profound silence regarding elective abortion. What guidance is given is drawn from inferences woven into the stories of women confronting pregnancy and childbirth.

Harsh penalties can be found for

women who aborted in the surrounding mid-eastern cultures. But neither Hebrew nor Christian Scriptures contain regulations of the practice. Exodus 21 contains a story of a miscarriage as a result of a brawl, but the resolution is ambiguous, thus allowing room for discussion. Nowhere in the Bible is there a specific prohibition of abortion. This silence about what was undoubtedly part of life in the community of the people of God is truly amazing. Either (1) no Hebrew or Christian woman ever faced a problem pregnancy and resorted to abortion, or (2) abortion was not an issue for civil regulation, but was managed as a private, family and personal matter by women faithful to God's leadership and supported by the community of faith.

Only the second approach takes account of the multiple dimensions of the issue and thus seems the most plausible explanation of the biblical silence. In its silence, the Bible affirms the privacy in which such decisions should be made, and the woman is acknowledged as an equal partner/participant in the Stewardship of faith. Decisions about childbirth and or termination belong uniquely to her since pregnancy is highly personal. She must reflect upon her circumstances, examine her motives and family commitments, and anticipate the future.

This approach also seems implicit in the New Testament. Jesus never mentioned the subject, and the Apostle Paul was silent about it. For all his

practical guidance about moral living and the Christian community, not once did he mention abortion. He seems to have placed it under the umbrella of faith, grace and freedom (Eph. 2, Gal.5). In this matter, as with all challenges to faith, the believer is to "work out your own salvation in fear and trembling. . ." (Phil. 2:12). Paul did not deal in weeks of gestation or conditions of lethal deformity or disease.

Those difficulties would be confronted by the woman and her family as they occurred in nature or history.

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### *The personhood of the fetus is not actual but attributed or anticipatory.*

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But she would be protected from the bigotry and humiliation of public scorn, or the depersonalization at the heart of being reduced to a "thing" unworthy of love by mobs motivated more by hate than compassion." The woman was a person *imago dei* in need of the sustaining, forgiving and accepting love of the faith community. Christians should know better than most that those facing difficult choices full of moral ambiguity under tragic and perplexing circumstances need the supportive love of community, not the scornful condemnation of people untouched by grief and incapable of love.

We cannot improve on the story of

that community of care that emerged among the followers of Christ. They were not armed with laws to reform the world but with a message of love that could heal its hurts and bind up its wounds.

In my judgment, the 20-week rule is a sideshow attempting to mislead and misinform the public. Those who promote the slogan would have us settle for inadequate and unhelpful legal regulations in the face of women's difficult task of discerning God's will under trying circumstances. She does not need jail or loveless harangues. She has suffered enough from people who offer cheap answers for life-threatening problems. What she needs now is merciful but skilled medical treatment and a community of care that offers sustenance and a quiet place for prayer and meditation. She is going through an experience from which we might all learn lessons of grace and truth, all of which we miss if we support or settle for the 21-week rule. ■

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1 *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, 109 S. Ct. 3040 (1989).

2 See Dennis J. Horan, et. al. *Abortion and the Constitution: Reversing Roe v. Wade Through the Courts* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987.

3 *Gonzales v. Carhart*, 550 US 124 (2007).

4 "The Limit of Viability: Neonatal outcomes of Infants born at 22-25 weeks' Gestation." *NEJM* on-line June 4, 2015.

# Planned Parenthood and El Roi (The God Who Sees)

By Aaron Weaver

For two weeks in July, I traveled with a bunch of Baptists across South Africa for a mission experience followed up with a global gathering of Baptists — the 21<sup>st</sup> Baptist World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance. While in-country, I was reminded of the nickname given to South Africa by Archbishop Desmond Tutu — the Rainbow Nation — a metaphor for a post-apartheid vision for multicultural unity. “We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans...will be...assured of their inalienable right to human dignity — a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world,” said Nelson Mandela at his presidential inauguration in 1994.

During my brief time in the Rainbow Nation, I witnessed a God who sees and saves babies through the work of indigenous ministries — ministries that have rescued and received more than 1,500 babies in the past decade and a half. Each year, more than 3,500 newborns are abandoned across South Africa and, in Johannesburg, the country’s largest city, 200 babies are abandoned monthly.

I saw up-close the holy work of ministries that provide a safe home to babies that have been abused, neglected, survived attempted abortions and treated like trash — dumped on the side of a street, in a gutter, in shoe boxes and latrines.

The stories shared showed a chilling reality that I had a hard time wrapping my mind around.

Upon returning home, I was bombarded with a deluge of articles, tweets and cable news segments about a series of covert investigative videos showing Planned Parenthood officials casually discussing the harvesting of aborted baby parts.

Central to the controversy was the

discussion in the videos around the exchange of money for the organs of fetuses (we learned that heads command the highest price), and the ways in which this harvesting process influences actual abortion procedures.

“We’ve been very good at getting heart, lung, liver, because we know that, so I’m not gonna crush that part, I’m not gonna crush below, I’m gonna crush above, and I’m gonna see if I can get it all intact,” said Dr. Deborah Nucatola, Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s senior director

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*Major League Baseball teams could say that they sell about 20 million hot dogs and play 2,430 games in a season, so baseball is only .012 percent of what they do.*

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of medical services in the first video.

“Let me just figure out what others are getting, and if this is in the ballpark, then it’s fine, if it’s still low, then we can bump it up. I want a Lamborghini,” said a laughing Dr. Mary Gatter, PPFPA’s Medical Directors’ Council President in the second video.

“It’s another boy,” a medical assistant announced in the nauseating fourth video depicting lab workers picking thru baby parts in a dish.

Congressional investigations have been launched. To date, Alabama, Louisiana and New Hampshire have cut its Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood. While a bill to defund Planned Parenthood, which receives more than 500 million annually in federal funding, was rejected by the Senate, a political showdown looms on the Fall horizon.

Jim Wallis, a leading voice for progressive evangelicals, called the covert videos an “in-your face reminder of our culture’s blatant disrespect for life.”

Kirsten Powers, a pro-life columnist and commentator who served in the Clinton Administration, said that the problem here is not the tone, not the casual chat over a meal about how to extract a fetus without tearing it apart.

“It’s the crushing,” Powers wrote. “It’s the organ harvesting of fetuses that abortion-rights activists want us to believe have no more moral value than a fingernail. It’s the lie that these are not human beings worthy of protection.”

Many warn against defunding Planned Parenthood, trotting out the oft-cited stat that abortion accounts for *only* three percent of its services — 97 percent of which include providing women’s health services such as cancer screening and prevention, contraception and pregnancy tests. That’s fuzzy math though.

“By Planned Parenthood’s math, a woman who gets an abortion but also a pregnancy test, an STD test and some contraceptives has received four services, and only 25 percent of them are abortion,” wrote one columnist. “Major League Baseball teams could say that they sell about 20 million hot dogs and play 2,430 games in a season, so baseball is only .012 percent of what they do.”

What’s fuzzier is the ethical logic of Christians “personally opposed to abortion” who somehow rationalize and justify sending taxpayer dollars to Planned Parenthood, a group that performs 330,000 abortions a year. The notion that we can reduce the number of abortions through subsidizing an organization for which abortion is its foundational service — financially and philosophically — is morally incoherent.

Two years ago, I penned an article on abortion in the aftermath of the trial of abortion provider Kermit Gosnell, who murdered babies born alive. There, I asked why we as justice-seeking Baptists stay silent and fail to back restrictions on abortion rights while we loudly urge restrictions on gun rights.

Noting that we revere science — refusing to deny evolution and climate change — I wondered why we choose silence in the face of medical advances since *Roe* which have placed many abortions well outside of some morally gray area. I asked why we

don't speak out against an abortion lobby — led by Planned Parenthood — that has been rightfully dubbed the “NRA of the Left”?

Why do we so often allow our partisan politics and allegiances to shape how we respond to issues like *this*?

We champion freedom but we're beholden to an ideological orthodoxy that says to be a good progressive, to be a good liberal, one must toe the political line — clinging ostentatiously to a belief in X, Y and Z, even if Z makes our souls shudder a bit.

So we don't think about *it*. We stay silent.

My fellow progressive friends, where's the human dignity in “I'm gonna crush below...I'm gonna crush above”? How can we be at peace with ourselves as a society when we so willingly fund a group that does *that*?

Is your conscience pricked?

Mine is. ■

*Aaron Weaver is a PhD graduate of Baylor University's History Department, a writer, and is the Communications Manager of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.*

## Say Not the Stranger

Say not the stranger has nothing to teach,  
No wisdom to share, no worthy views to impart;  
Such a meeting may offer a startling reach  
Of learning, friendship, guidance, some fresh start.

Discernment is crucial lest we be led astray  
By a false friend, or charlatan bent on harm,  
Who will poison the well and only bring dismay;  
The corrupters an Unseen Friend will help to disarm.

Strangers' gifts are open to those who care,  
A gracious Providence has so willed,  
Thereby we may meet some angels unaware,  
Even encounter the Christ and prove Emmaus fulfilled.

—James A. Langley

# Chipping Away at the Block of Wood in My Eye

By J. Randall O'Brien

[Introductory word: Family Systems Theory calls for a focus upon one's self, rather than upon another, when seeking to improve interpersonal dynamics. After all, one's own part within a relationship is the only part one has the power to change. Following Family Systems Theory, the words below apply to the behavior of none other than the author. Others are welcome to find themselves in the narrative as they may choose.]

**L**GBTQ issues stand near the top of the world's social agenda. In America, the recent Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in favor of same-gender marriage appears to represent accurately the reality of our "5-4 nation." That is, the American populace is sharply divided on the issue of same-gender marriage, although the majority has prevailed.

Rather than listen carefully, prayerfully, and sympathetically to the voices on each side of the divide, I could uncharitably judge these folks or those -- you know, them! But Jesus told us not to do that. "Judge not, lest you be judged," He said.

While conveniently neglecting the beam in my own eye, I could focus on the speck in the eyes of others. But Jesus taught us not to do that, too. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" He asked.

I could refuse to love those with whom I disagree, and refuse to pray for them. But Jesus commanded otherwise, didn't He? "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

So how am I to relate to persons on each side of the same-sex v. traditional marriage debate? Perhaps I could, and should, first present the arguments

on each side of the debate; but others more qualified than I routinely render that service. Besides, my whole point pertains to the manner in which I am to treat all parties, regardless of the merit of their position in this cultural battle. Right?

In the biblical story of the Good Samaritan, religious persons such as I pass by a person beaten, robbed, bloody and in great need. Then a person of no social standing helps the abused victim. The story offers a view of different kinds of people as they relate to the vulnerable: some beat 'em up; some pass 'em up; and some pick 'em up.

The context of this story? After teaching that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, Jesus was challenged by a religious person, demanding, "Who is my neighbor?" By telling this story Jesus turned the tables on the questioner, masterfully substituting the real question in play: "AM I a neighbor?"

Well?

Am I?

Countless dear people created in the image of God, good persons loved dearly by God, each for whom Christ died, are hurting on both sides of this battle in our so-called culture wars. What does the story have to say to me? How might the Story of the Good Samaritan apply to my life? Clearly, I must answer these questions: Will I beat people up? Pass them up? Or pick them up? Well?

Sometimes I wonder what questions the Good Lord might ask me on Judgment Day? No need to wonder. A copy of the final exam appears in my New Testament in Matthew 25.

- Did I feed the hungry?
- Did I give water to the thirsty?
- Did I care for the stranger?
- Did I clothe the naked?
- Did I look after the sick?

- Did I visit the prisoner?

In other words, did I help those in need?

To be sure the New Testament makes perfectly clear that one's eternal destination is determined by what one does with Jesus Christ, not by one's doing good deeds. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

But Jesus also warned, "Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven."

Hmmm. . . . Evidence of one's saving relationship with Jesus Christ manifests itself in the way others are treated? Yes, appears so. "Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brothers you did it unto me," Jesus emphasized.

Did you notice four of the Judgment Day questions above pertain to helping people who suffer involuntarily (the hungry, thirsty, sick and naked). No one volunteers for these states of being. Then one question refers to a situation which may be either voluntary or involuntary: being a stranger. Circumstances may vary dictating this dilemma.

The final question, it must be noted however, relates to caring for those who have voluntarily made bad choices: prisoners.

The bottom line? I am expected to minister to and care for the needy -- regardless. No strings attached. Whether their condition is brought on by voluntary or involuntary choices, I am to love, care for, and help my fellow persons in their hour of need.

My takeaway? I am neither to judge mean-spiritedly those on the far Right, nor those on the far Left, neighbors along the social, political, religious/secular divide.



I should never be false to my convictions, nor violate my conscience. No one asks that of me, however. While I respect all others, I must respect myself, as well. That self-respect comes more easily as I listen to the hard struggles of others, genuinely care for them, and seek to be a compassionate friend.

This, I take it, is life lived in a manner pleasing to God.

God is love. And I am to love, too.

As the Reverend Billy Graham once put it, "God's job is to judge. The Holy Spirit's job is to convict. My job is to love."

My other job is to chip away at the block of wood in my eye. ■

*Randall O'Brien is president, Carson-Newman University, and a frequent contributor to Christian Ethics Today. This essay was also published on HuffingtonPost on 8/10/15.*

## On The Way

Nathan Brown

Dad's retired and on his way to pinch-hit in Tulsa on an October Sunday morning.

He has a certain coffee stop just before the turnpike, a favorite form of meditation.

He pulls up to the window and reaches for the football-shaped rubber coin purse in his pocket.

that I remember playing with when I was five, or so. She leans out, "Mornin'.

You all dressed up, on your way to church?" "Well, actually, I'm on my way

to Tulsa to preach this morning." "Oh! So you a pastor." "Yes." "Well...would you pray

for me right now? I got some negative people and thoughts in my life I needa get rid of."

Dad says sure, then she asks for his hand. He reaches up. He prays. She squeezes.

And I imagine myself into the car in line just behind him seeing the white hand extended

from the cuff of a white shirt clasped by the two beautiful black hands at the end of a gray

uniform and wonder if the sight alone would be enough to bow my head in worship with them.

By Nathan Brown,  
Poet Laureat for Oklahoma, 2013-2014  
Published in his book, *Karma Crisis: New and Selected Poems*, 2012, Mezcalita Press.

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

## The Pope and Climate Change: A Reading of *Laudato Si'*

Reviewed by Derek C. Hatch

A great deal of widespread media attention preceded the release of Pope Francis's latest encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (“On the Care of Our Common Home”).<sup>1</sup> Rarely has there been such anxiety and anticipation for the publication of a papal document. After this wait, on June 18, 2015, the pope released<sup>2</sup> the encyclical, which takes the form of a letter addressed to “every person living on this planet” (3).

Before considering the content of the encyclical in greater detail, it is worthwhile to place Pope Francis in context. When Jorge Maria Bergoglio, a Jesuit from Argentina, was elected as the bishop of Rome in March 2013, many were surprised, largely because Bergoglio was not listed on any list of possible papal successors to Benedict XVI. This feeling was heightened when he chose the papal name of Francis, after St. Francis of Assisi, a thirteenth-century theologian/mystic/preacher and founder of the Franciscan religious order, as well as when he described this selection as part of his hope to lead a church that was of the poor and for the poor.

While many are keen to distinguish Francis from his papal predecessors, on the subject of caring for creation, there is much continuity. For instance, in *Evangelium Vitae* (1993), Pope John Paul II railed against a “culture of death” consisting of abortion, capital punishment, and war, yet a culture that also included environmental degradation.<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, for his part, was known as the “green pope” because of his advocacy for environmental issues, including taking steps for the Vatican to use more

renewable energy.<sup>4</sup> In his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict, noting the symbiotic relationship between humans and the rest of creation, wrote that “the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature.”<sup>5</sup> Francis, then, enters the conversation with this backdrop, even acknowledging it in the introduction of the encyclical (3-6).

Even with this continuity, the present pope approaches the subject of

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*The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.*

---

ecology in his own manner. Much has been made of Francis's style of using informal means of communication, such as interviews and conversations, alongside more traditional modes of papal discourse such as encyclicals and apostolic exhortations.<sup>6</sup> This style is evident to readers of *Laudato Si'* as well, where the pope often crosses the boundary between conversation and authorized declaration. Even its title of this letter, which means “Praise be to you,” is derived from a more devotional form of literature, St. Francis of Assisi's “Canticle of the Creatures”, which appears in full in paragraph 87 [Protestant unfamiliar with St. Francis's writings will recognize this phrase in the adapted text of “All Creatures of Our God and King,” which declares: “All creatures of our God and king, lift up your voice and with us sing, O praise ye!”].

With this Roman Catholic context established, it is worth noting that in portions of the encyclical,

Francis offers statements similar to those provided by evangelical groups that are concerned with “creation care.” The National Association of Evangelicals, for example, declared in its 2004 statement “For the Health of the Nation” that human beings are caretakers and stewards of God's creation without “a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part.”<sup>7</sup> Sharing this concern, Pope Francis describes the environment's current state by observing, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (21). This is produced by a “throw-away culture” that does not consider the impact of leftover waste and the sourcing of the raw material that produced that waste. In response, Francis situates ecological concern within the common good, which means that the climate belongs “to all and [is] meant for all” (23).

Throughout the first chapter of the encyclical, the pope displays a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing the environment. Human behavior involving increased release of greenhouse gases produces and/or aggravates global warming (23). Deferring to scientific consensus regarding the state of the climatic system, Francis views climate change as “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (25). He names access to safe drinking water as “a basic and universal human right” that is threatened by disease, pollution, and the effects of drought conditions (29-30). He laments the loss of natural biodiversity, where extinct species “no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us” (33). Indeed, Francis is clear that environmental concern is not optional, but something that should be the focus of our attention.

Moreover, these concerns are thoroughly biblical, as chapter two of

the encyclical details, discussing that Scripture's creation accounts place human beings in three interwoven relationships – with God, with others, and with the rest of creation (66). Francis writes that “When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered” (70). Thus, when an unbiblical understanding of humanity's dominion over creation leads to an “unbridled exploitation of nature” (67), all created life is threatened. As stewards of God's gifts, we care for creation because “the earth is the Lord's” (Psalm 24:1).

Consistent with his earlier work in documents such as *Lumen Fidei* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, the pope places particular emphasis on the effects that environment degradation has on the poor. Oftentimes the land that has been ruined by pollution or other dangerous ecological practices is left to the poor or the poorer nations of the world. Francis writes that many people are forced to migrate from their homes due to ecological disasters such as drought and famine. Yet often because of international indifference, they are not granted status as refugees. As a result, “they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever” (25). Regarding access to drinking water, supply is limited by pollution, but this is exacerbated by privatization, making an essential ingredient for life a commodity “subject to the laws of the market” (30). Without an altered course, the pope foresees that “once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise of noble claims” (57).

Throughout the document, Francis critiques the idea that a “deified market” joined to the myth of progress will solve these environmental problems. Even at its best, he states, “[B]y itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109). Moreover, an exclusive market-based approach insulates many global lifestyles and insti-

tutions that actually contribute to the damage in view, even if these actors give lip service to ecology by using “green” rhetoric. This prompts Francis to indicate his surprise at “how weak international political responses have been. The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance” (54). Indeed, a dynamic relationship exists between the social and the ecological: “We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (139). The wealthy cannot continue to live in an unsustainable manner and hope to care for the impoverished or creation.

As a result, Francis notes that mul-

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*Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*

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tivalent solutions will be required for these interconnected problems: “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (139). Indeed, seeing economic oppression and environmental degradation as two sides of the same coin, Francis echoes the work of liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, stating, “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (49).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the common good cannot be equated

with technological progress or the increase of abstract economic metrics. As Francis states, “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (158). This common good is incarnated as “a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society” (91).

Further, a great deal of contemporary concern about the environment centers on potential solutions, with many proposals that offer apparent promise. About one of those, carbon credits, Pope Francis is skeptical, seeing this option as “a quick and easy solution under the guise of a certain commitment to the environment, but in no way does it allow for the radical change which present circumstances require” (171). Other more technological options similarly imply that climate change are largely caused by inefficiencies and not by a global lifestyle of consumerism. While Francis is clear that advanced technology holds promise for lessening the damage to the environment, he is also clear that “technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others” (20). That is, the climatic crisis is not a problem that only requires a technological solution. To only look for this would retain belief in the myth of progress and replicate the objectification of nature. Instead, technology's benefits must be tempered by better vision: “By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything

as an object to be used and abused without scruple” (215).

Thus, while technology can alleviate our ecological problems, its influence is mixed. The pope notes that opposition to addressing climate change can take many forms and “can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions” (14). By contrast, Francis states, “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change” (202). In other words, the main thrust of his letter is that humanity’s relationship with the created order is broken (though not beyond repair). Moreover, that relationship is not divorced from humanity’s intrinsic links to God and to others. Hence, throughout the encyclical, Francis repeats the refrain: “Everything is connected” (16, 70, 91, 92, 117, 120, 137, 138, 142, 240). What the ecological crisis demands, then, is not only a technological plan, but a renewed spirituality.

At first glance, spirituality may seem to have little to do with climate change, but Francis recognizes what William Cavanaugh has also noted – the “throwaway culture” of consumerism is not simply a lifestyle based in external choices, but a spiritual discipline that strikes at the heart of one’s existence – one that is dangerous because “Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction” (204).<sup>9</sup> The centerpiece of this transformed spirituality is the pope’s namesake, St. Francis of Assisi. Renowned for his love of all of God’s creatures, the patron saint of ecology offers a model of human existence for “care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (10). As others have observed, this spirituality calls for a conversion to a radical form of asceticism.<sup>10</sup> This life of self-denial is based on St. Francis’s exemplary path of simple living, yet a central truth resides beneath the surface: “a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to

be used and controlled” (12).

Consequently, in St. Francis, the pope finds a renewed spirituality and a renewed understanding of humanity’s place within God’s creation – not one of utility and benefit, but one of mutual aid and intimate care. It is a spirituality that sees the world in a different manner and lives in gratitude for God’s good gifts of creation. As Francis states, “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things” (233).

While non-Catholics may pay

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*Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.*

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little attention to papal documents, *Laudato Si’*, grounded in the life, thought, and spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, arises from the depth of the Christian tradition and calls all Christians and all human beings into a deep relationship with one another, with creation, and ultimately with God. Christians should take seriously the environmental challenges that threaten all of creaturely existence, and this encyclical offers resources for scientific, theological, and ethical discussion. However, while these challenges are significant, Pope Francis is certain that “Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems” (61). To pursue this hope requires what the pope calls “ecological citizenship,” which is formed in many places, including school, in family life, and in church (211, 213). When that spirituality is

genuinely appreciated and embraced, then we will recognize and live out the reality of Francis’s statement: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (92). ■

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1 All citations of the encyclical will be parenthetical and will refer to paragraphs within the document. The encyclical itself is available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_encicla-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encicla-laudato-si.html).

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3 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, §42.

4 Through the installation of roof-top photovoltaic cells and planting a 37-acre forest, among other efforts, Vatican City under Benedict XVI became the first carbon neutral state.

5 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, §51.

6 William L. Portier, “Street Pope: Francis & the Pastoral Rhetoric of Invitation” dotCommonweal (October 7, 2013), available at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/street-pope>.

7 National Association of Evangelicals, “For the Health of the Nation,” 11. Available at <http://nae.net/for-the-health-of-the-nation>.

8 Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*.

9 William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 48-53.

10 Jana Bennett points to Francis’s additional ascetic exemplars – Charles Foucauld (125), St. John of the Cross (234), and St. Therese of Lisieux (230). See Bennett, “The Everyday Ascetic: Thoughts on *Laudato Si’*,” <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/the-everyday-ascetic-thoughts-on-laudato-si/>.

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## What Other Baptists Can Teach Other Christians About Patriotism

By Kristopher Norris and John Schweiker Shelton

A Review of *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*, By Curtis Freeman, Research Professor of Theology and Director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School, Baylor University Press, 15th September 2014.

It's not often that you hear Baptists talking about catholicity. We Baptists have more-often-than-not contented ourselves with a dissenting, sectarian existence and a spotty ecclesial memory that does more time-traveling than Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*—launching from Jesus, John the Baptist, and the apostles straight over 1,500 years of tradition to Smyth and Helwys and then charging onward at breakneck speed into modernity. In all fairness, the more erudite among us Baptists may have also kidnapped Luther and Calvin along the way, though by our tally, that's still nixing one and a half millennia of Christian thought.

Fortunately, several Baptists have begun to rethink our place within the universal (lower-case “c” catholic) church: that is, both the body of believers across time and the body of believers across the world and denominational lines.

In his latest book, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists*, Curtis Freeman writes compellingly of the crucial position and role in which Baptists stand to bless the church catholic. Freeman urges Baptists to see themselves as part of the larger body of believers that includes Roman Catholics, pedo-baptists, and others who might not necessarily esteem the Baptist “distinctives” of local church autonomy, the priesthood of all believers, and religious freedom. Freeman argues that Baptists stand at the edges of catholicism and yet fully within her body. Baptists see the church catholic as it ought to be and, like gadflies, drive the whole body of

believers toward that beatific vision.

If it is possible to be a Baptist within a larger, non-Baptist Christian communion without compromising our identity as Baptists, could it also be possible to be a Christian within a larger, non-Christian body without compromising our identity as Christians?

Many would answer with a resounding “no!” if that body happens to be a nation-state. Christianity that gets mixed up with the interests of the nation must necessarily compromise its commitment to the Cross of Christ. And yet this may well be a shortsighted response. Does our “other” Baptist identity have anything to teach us about how we should understand our national identity?

Here we could take a cue from George Orwell—most certainly not a Baptist—writing during the midst of World War II, when nationalism-run-rampant was threatening to tear the world apart. Orwell writes, “[Nationalism] is the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests.” Yet he recognizes an alternative form of love and respect for one's nation. He warns, “Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. Both words are normally used [somewhat interchangeably] but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved.”

For the American patriot, unlike the American nationalist, there is plenty of room for the critique of America. Yet despite the open eyes with which the patriot sees all of her nation's flaws and shortcomings, she still is able to celebrate her nation. For she recognizes that her life is contingent upon her ancestors' lives. To not recognize this—that is, to not be a patriot—would be to deny her very history and tradition, even if her country's history has many dark moments, as ours does. For as Christians, we know that a thing need not be perfect or even discernibly good in order to be loved. We know this because God loves us in this way. And we see that true love for a thing, divine love, never leaves that thing the same as it was beforehand. Perfect love trans-

forms all that it touches.

Though we are first and foremost citizens of another, heavenly nation, we can pray for the nation in which we pilgrims have been placed. We can love a non-perfect America in this kind of way because it is the nation that we have been given to steward and to transform. In order to protect the integrity of our earthly citizenship, we must first and foremost be Christians. This isn't at the cost of our earthly citizenship, it actually helps us to be better citizens of the earthly and heavenly cities.

In the same way, then, Baptists must not forsake our own wider church ancestry, even if that church history and tradition have many dark moments. This is the Body we have been placed in and called to love. We can love a non-perfect church in this kind of way because it is the communion that we have been given to steward and to transform.

Baptists are uniquely posed to be faithful, participating dissenters in both the catholic church and in whatever nations we find ourselves sojourning. The general characteristics that make us Baptist—the commitment to a stronger local identity, a more inclusive model of discernment in which everyone has a voice, and the freedom to express our faith through a public witness—are also fruitful for our earthly citizenship. They make us better citizens, seeking to bless our nation as we also call for it to be a more just and merciful order. And they make us better members of the Body of Christ, expressing our common global communion as we also call for it to be more faithful to the One who calls us to be one. ■

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*John Schweiker Shelton is a graduate student at Duke Divinity School, where he studies political theology and cheers against the Duke men's basketball team.*

# Red Letter Christians Think the Pope is a Protestant

by Tony Campolo

Someone has said that Pope Francis is really a Protestant. He is, if Protestant is defined as someone who protests. His recent encyclical *Laudato si'* is a protest against the often irresponsible industries as they pollute the environment.

The Pope especially protests the ways in which coal is burnt in the production of electricity. He is right to protest. What comes out of the smoke stacks of coal-fed electric power plants is linked to 50,000 deaths a year, according to Physicians for Social Responsibility. Because children and the elderly among the poor are the most vulnerable, the Pope, following his namesake, St. Francis, has a special concern for those that Jesus calls “the least of these.”

This encyclical is not just a plea for curtailing the pollution of God’s planet; the Pope is also calling for a change in our cultural values. In this encyclical, he protests the heightened individualism of our modern world that is concerned only with personal comfort and pleasure and, instead, he calls for an ethic that highlights a commitment to “the common good.” For Red Letter Christians that means that we must ask ourselves, before we do things that impact the environment, what Jesus would do if Jesus

was in our place. There is no doubt that all that Jesus did and calls us to do puts the welfare of others above materialistic self-interest.

Like Jacques Ellul, the 20th century French sociologist, and the British economist, B.F. Shoemaker, this pope protests the technocratic society which is not only using up the earth’s non-renewable resources, but has created means of production that has been destroying meaningful work, creating unemployment, and generating low paying jobs among the poor.

In case you think that Pope Francis is some kind of Luddite, rejecting all forms of technological advances, you really should read *Laudato si'*. If you do, you will find that he very much encourages the kind of technology that will reap great benefits for the poor of the world. He singles out the invention and the deployment of solar panels as an example of good technology. This particular means for generating electricity could and should be made available to poor families, not only in America, but also in villages and hamlets in the third world.

Most of us have been unaware that the cost of solar panels has dropped 75% in the last six years, and there are indications that the costs soon will drop dramatically further. In light of

that fact, Pope Francis proposes that as part of foreign aid packages, countries like the United States should require that receiving nations--as a condition for receiving funds-- make solar panels available for poor citizens, rather than using their grant money primarily for the benefit of the rich.

Of course, this sets up the pope as an ideological enemy of the likes of the Koch brothers who are willing to spend 500 million dollars in the 2016 election to ensure that a Republican candidate becomes president, who is committed to stopping government endorsement and support for forms of energy that do not use fossil fuels. Their reason is that they have become billionaires through their investments in the coal and oil industries.

As influential as Pope Francis has become, I seriously doubt whether his Biblically based efforts to save the environment will succeed, given the opposition from those special interest groups that are focused on maximizing profits--even at the expense of the rest of us, and especially at the expense of the poor. But then, God’s prophets are seldom taken seriously during their lifetime. Let’s pray that Pope Francis is an exception. With God, all things are possible. ■

## Simple Man

Simple man, fighting, dying, bleeding for life he’ll never know.

Rich man, selling freedom for profit

Simple man, paying for rich man’s pleasures.

Rich man, spinning the hero story.

Simple man, consumed by ghost of war.

Rich man, building charity’s to comfort the soul.

Simple man, knows no charity can erase the stench of death.

Rich man, sleeps well at night.

Simple man sleeps with the lost, if at all.

by Paul Valdes

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- 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
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*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.

From the beginning *Christian Ethics Today* has been sent without charge to anyone requesting it, “as money and energy permit.” More than ever before, your financial support is “greatly needed, urgently solicited, and genuinely appreciated.”

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