

# 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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# Confessions of a White Supremacist

By Patrick Anderson, editor

I was born and raised in the milieu of white supremacy. I cannot remember ever hearing the term explicitly, but the superiority of white people was implicitly understood and assumed. In a segregated world devoid of dark skinned people, where non-white persons were never encountered socially, my whiteness was more than just evident. It was pervasive, “normal,” and majoritarian. My mother and grandmother occasionally utilized the services of a black housekeeper, the church my father pastored employed a black custodian, but other than those persons my world was white. The schools I attended were all white; our church was all white; our neighborhood was all white. The city parks where I played ball were all white. The public swimming pool was all white.

My grandchildren roll their eyes when they hear me talk about that strange, colorless world in which I lived. Yet even they now live in a resurging environment, even in the community of faith, that expresses explicit and complicit paeans of white superiority. They hear white folks say “we want our country back,” “why don’t they teach values in school,” “build a wall,” “too many people who don’t look like us are doing stuff,” “law and order,”

Furman University where I attended on a track scholarship was all white until the first African American student was admitted my senior year. In college my encounters with non-white people expanded because our track team competed on a national stage, so I raced many black runners in track meets in New York, Philadelphia, Louisville, Miami, and Detroit...

never in South Carolina, or Georgia, or Tennessee. I remember times when I was the only white contestant in the indoor 600, or when our mile relay team was the only white entrant in the university division of the Penn Relays. Just before the command to “runners, take your marks” we shook hands and expressed insincere “good luck” utterances before a race. I remember sharing mutual congratulations and “good race” affirmations after races, even embraces and exchanges of sweat. Track is an uncomplicated sport in many ways. Whoever gets to the finish line first, wins. I remember thinking how much the same we were, how skin color mattered not at all when speed was the separation between us. Whoever gets there first, wins.

After college the milieu of my life changed. I worked in the juvenile justice system alongside African American and Latino caseworkers. I attended for a while a Spanish language church. I developed close friendships with non-white persons. Today I like to consider myself as “colorblind,” non-biased, and consider African Americans and Latinos as some of my best friends. My racial awareness expanded in the years of the Civil Rights Movement.

But the separations between myself and even my closest non-white friends cannot be merely brushed aside. President Obama recently referred to the “implicit racial bias” which exists in the police subculture. He could have made a much broader claim, for we white folks all share a deep and defining sense of superiority. Some

of us bury it better than others, but I see little in our American life that gives evidence of a “post-racial era” or a “colorblind” society.

The life experiences we have had in the white world are unlike the life experiences in the non-white world. This is true today as much as it was in my childhood.

I have never been denied a job because of my skin color. Banks or mortgage companies or real estate agencies have never red-lined my housing options or otherwise determined where I could live or purchase property. Access to doctors and health care has never been a problem for me. I have never been followed around by a store security guard. No one from my family was ever enslaved, lynched, beaten. My family name was not taken and a new one assigned.

I can walk, drive, stand, talk, laugh, be angry, and otherwise function without ever wondering if I will be killed by a cop. I have always lived that way. My family members have lived that way. My children and grandchildren live that way. The people with whom I routinely socialize live that way. How can I claim not to be “superior?”

The police do not see me as suspicious, or say one to the other at a traffic stop “He’s a bad looking dude.” My existence is never considered threatening or subversive. No policeman has ever said “Step out of the car. Put your hands on the roof and spread your legs.”

My African American friends have never lived the way I have lived. They never will. You, I, and most other people know this, deep down. ■

# In Defense of Red Letter Christianity

by Tony Campolo

Words, say experts on language, gain their meaning by how they are used within the social context that employs them. As a case in point, many theologically orthodox Christians during the first half of the 20th century had no problem using the label “fundamentalist” to define themselves. That label, however, gradually became associated with connotations which many found undesirable.

Following the famous 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee, which made rejecting Darwin’s theory of evolution a defining commitment in most fundamentalist circles, those who had used the label, were viewed as anti-scientific, and even anti intellectual.

As time went on, fundamentalists increasingly came to be viewed as Christians who embraced a pietistic lifestyle marked by strong opposition to using any kind of alcoholic beverage, dancing and, in extreme cases, going to the movies, and even the use of “make-up” by women.

More important, among fundamentalists, there was widespread affirmation of the theology of John Nelson Darby, commonly referred to as dispensationalism. This theology was popularized via the Scofield Reference Bible, which had footnotes that explained Bible verses in accord with Darby’s beliefs, and became a standard text for fundamentalists. Growing up, I remember singing, along with my fundamentalist teenage friends:

My hope is built on nothing less than Scofield notes and Scripture Press.

The impact of the Scofield Reference Bible in molding the fundamentalist mindset cannot be underestimated. It is a theology that has diminished the importance of social justice activism among church people.

Finally, it must be noted that fundamentalists somewhat have gained the reputation in the opinion of many as being judgmental and, in some cases harshly so, of anyone

who differed with either their prescribed theology or designated lifestyle.

Given these realities, it is not surprising that many Christians no longer wanted to assume the label “fundamentalist” for themselves. Instead, many prominent Christian leaders, such as Billy Graham and Carl Henry (the editor of *Christianity Today* magazine) increasingly identified themselves as “evangelicals.”

Sadly, as of late, this new title gradually has taken on negative connotations in the secular media. As evangelicals increasingly came to be identified on television and in newspapers as being Christians who are against gays and lesbians, questioning much about the movement for women’s rights, against non-Anglo immigrants and being anti-Muslim, the label “evangelical” became increasingly problematic for many Christians. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the rhetoric during the political campaigns of 2016.

A few years ago, Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* magazine called together a group of mostly young Christian leaders who faced the question as to whether or not the name “evangelical” had lost its meaning for us. We were still Christians who believed in the doctrines of the Apostle’s Creed, declared that salvation comes via surrendering to the spiritual presence of the resurrected Christ, and held a belief that scripture was written by persons who were inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit.

As we pondered together what to call ourselves, we came up with the name “Red Letter Christians.” It was our belief that the name was relevant for our times, primarily because the red letters of the Bible, which emphasize the words spoken by Jesus, spell out a radical counter-cultural lifestyle which orthodox believers are often prone to ignore. For instance, many of us believe that when Jesus said “*blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,*” that precluded the practice of capital punishment and, when Jesus taught us in those

red letters to love our enemies, He probably meant we shouldn’t kill them. And when He called for radical sacrificial giving to the poor, as He did in Mark 10, we believe that Jesus was serious.

We think that what Jesus spelled out in the Sermon on the Mount is superior to any ethic we find in the Old Testament. We say this because Jesus declares it to be so, especially in Matthew 5. What he has to say in that chapter about such things as divorce, retaliation toward those who have hurt us, and anger, proves to be a higher standard for us to live by than even what the Hebrew prophets had to say.

There are those who try to discredit our movement by suggesting that we negate those other parts of the Bible apart from the red letters. Nothing could be further from the truth. We believe that the rest of the Bible points to Jesus and, like the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we find the nature and mission of Jesus spelled out throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. Beyond that, we believe that the rest of the Bible can be understood only insofar as it is read through the eyes of the Jesus revealed in the red letters.

Red Letter Christians have very few problems with the theology of evangelicals. Our problems are with the identity they have established and the politics they have embraced and, in some cases, even sanctified. We argue that Jesus is neither a Republican nor a Democrat and to cast Him as the legitimator of any political ideology is idolatry.

Given the existential situation that we face here in America, we believe that the label “Red Letter Christians” ([www.redletterchristians.org](http://www.redletterchristians.org)) is a label whose time has come. ■

*Tony Campolo is an American Baptist, sociologist, pastor, author, public speaker and former spiritual advisor to U.S. President Bill Clinton. Known primarily for his work with Red Letter Christians,*

# Doninonism Rising: A Theocratic Movement Hiding in Plain

By Frederick Clarkson

In June 2016, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) held a private meeting with conservative movement leaders to plot his political future. Attendees afterwards cast him in the role of Ronald Reagan, who'd lost the 1976 Republican presidential nomination to Gerald Ford, but led a conservative comeback in 1980 that made Jimmy Carter a one-term president. The thinking was that Cruz did well enough in the 2016 Republican presidential primaries before losing to celebrity billionaire Donald Trump that he could plan to run again in 2020 or 2024. "He was with kindred spirits," said Brent Bozell, the conservative activist who hosted the meeting, "and I would say most people in that room see him as the leader of the conservative movement."<sup>1</sup>

The rise of Ted Cruz is a singular event in American political history. The son of a Cuban refugee and evangelical pastor, Cruz was raised in the kind of evangelicalism-with-a-theocratic-bent that has come to epitomize a significant and growing trend in American public life. That is, dominionism: a dynamic ideology that arose from the swirls and eddies of American evangelicalism to animate the Christian Right, and become a defining feature of modern politics and culture.

Dominionism is the theocratic idea that, regardless of theological camp, means, or timetable, God has called conservative Christians to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions. The term describes a broad tendency across a wide swath of American Christianity. People who embrace this idea are referred to as dominionists. Although Chip Berlet, then of Political Research Associates, and I defined and popularized the term for many in the 1990s<sup>2</sup>, in fact it had (along with the term dominion theology) been in use by both evangelical proponents and critics for many years.<sup>3</sup>

## DOMINIONISM DEFINED

In many ways, Ted Cruz personifies the story of dominionism: how it became the ideological engine of the Christian Right, and how it illuminates the changes underway in American politics, culture and religion that have helped shape recent history.

Ted Cruz's father, Rafael, who served as his son's principal campaign surrogate during his senate and presidential campaigns, has been a profound and colorful influence. The elder Cruz was a member of the Texas board of the Religious Roundtable,<sup>4</sup> a leading

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Christian Right organization of the late 1970s.<sup>5</sup> "Our conversation around the dinner table centered around politics—as to why we had to get rid of this leftist progressive called Jimmy Carter," Rafael Cruz told an interviewer. "Ted got a dose of conservative politics from a biblical worldview for a whole year when he was nine years old."<sup>6</sup> That was the year the Religious Roundtable hosted the historic National Affairs Briefing Conference in Dallas. It was held in tandem with the 1980 Republican National Convention, and attended by some 17,000 conservative Christians. It was there that Ronald Reagan famously declared: "I know

you can't endorse me, but I endorse you and what you are doing."<sup>7</sup>

Some see Ted Cruz as not only following in the footsteps of Reagan, but fulfilling a religious destiny. "Talk to me about your son and his rise. This must be a thing of God. It's meteoric," David Brody, chief political correspondent for the *Christian Broadcasting Network*, asked Rafael Cruz in an interview in 2013, during Ted's first year as senator<sup>8</sup>. Evangelical historian John Fea explained why Cruz might be viewed this way. During a sermon at the New Beginnings church in Bedford, Texas, in 2012, Rafael had described his son's senate campaign as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy that "God would anoint Christian 'kings' to preside over an 'end-time transfer of wealth' from the wicked to the righteous."

"According to his father and [New Beginnings Pastor Larry] Huch, Ted Cruz is anointed by God to help Christians in their effort to "go to the marketplace and occupy the land ... and take dominion" over it, Fea continued. "This 'end-time transfer of wealth' will relieve Christians of all financial woes, allowing true believers to ascend to a position of political and cultural power in which they can build a Christian civilization. When this Christian nation is in place (or back in place), Jesus will return."<sup>9</sup>

Rafael Cruz and Huch have long embraced a strain of evangelical theology called Seven Mountains dominionism, which calls for believers to take control over seven leading aspects of culture: family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business and government. The name is derived from the biblical book of Isaiah 2:2 (New King James Version): "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains."

Seven Mountains dominionism

(popularly abbreviated as 7M) emerged in the 2000s through a campaign in the form of popular books, videos, sermons and seminars.<sup>10</sup> It has spread like wildfire across Pentecostalism ever since.

The Cruzes are close to Christian nationalist author and longtime Texas Republican leader David Barton, who headed a super PAC in support of Cruz's presidential bid. Barton embraces 7M<sup>11</sup> even while disingenuously<sup>12</sup> claiming the term dominionism is an invention of liberals intended to smear Christians. "It's like saying 'Oh, you're a Nazi, oh, you're an anti-Semite, you're a bigot, you're a racist, you're a dominionist,'" he said in a 2011 radio broadcast.<sup>13</sup>

Ted Cruz has, perhaps shrewdly, neither publicly affirmed nor denied the dominionism that surrounds him. He is a longtime member of a prominent Houston Baptist congregation, but his embrace of the dominionist vision is evident to those who are paying attention. When Cruz speaks of religious liberty, says John Fea, he means it as "a code word for defending the right of Christians to continue to hold cultural authority and privilege." Cruz, according to Fea, is engaged in the "dominionist battle" of our time.<sup>14</sup>

All of this was pretty hot stuff and dominionism would no doubt have become more of an issue had Ted Cruz's 2016 campaign lasted longer. But Cruz is 45 years old in 2016 and appears to have a bright—and perhaps historic—political future. He won statewide office on his first try and has benefited from being underestimated. Since arriving in the Senate in 2103, he has made a show of sticking to his principles, much to the chagrin of his colleagues. But following his presidential run, Cruz is now one of the best known politicians in the country and possible heir-apparent to the Reagan revolution. No small achievement for a freshman senator.

Meanwhile Cruz and other national pols comprise the tip of a very large, but hard to measure political iceberg. There are untold numbers of dominionist and dominionism-influenced

politicians and public officials at all levels of government and who even after leaving office, shape our political discourse. Roy Moore, the elected Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, has been a rallying figure for dominionists of all stripes for the better part of two decades. Most recently, he has led efforts to exempt Alabama from federal court ordered compliance with marriage equality, citing his view of "God's law." Moore's fellow Alabamian, Justice Tom Parker, has been on the court since 2004, and has employed theocratic legal theorist John Eidsmoe as his chief of staff.<sup>15</sup> Others at the top of recent American political life have included Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Mike Huckabee<sup>16</sup> and Newt Gingrich.<sup>17</sup> Other prominent

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elected officials in the dominionist camp include Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (R-TX),<sup>18</sup> Gov. Sam Brownback (R-KS),<sup>19</sup> Sen. James Lankford (R-OK),<sup>20</sup> and Rep. Steve King (R-IA).<sup>21</sup>

Prominent politicians' involvement in dominionism is certainly the most visible evidence of the movement's advances over the past half-century, but it's not the only result. Dominionism is a story not widely or well understood. Because this is so, it is important to know what dominionism is and where

it came from, so we can see it more clearly and better understand its contemporary significance.

## TWO STREAMS INTO THE MAINSTREAM

There are two main expressions of dominionism, each influential far beyond their foundational thinkers. Briefly, Christian Reconstructionism, founded by the late theologian R.J. Rushdoony (1916-2001) advances the idea that Christians must not only dominate society, but institute and enforce Old Testament biblical law. Unlike the doctrines developed within specific denominations, Christian Reconstructionism has been a movement of ideas that transcends denominations and has influenced far more people than those who ever adopted the label. One of the movement's main contributions has been to provide a biblical rationale for political action for the Christian Right and a theory of government and public policy development.

Religion scholar Michael McVicar has found that Rushdoony's writings began to reflect an interest in dominion in the late 1950s.<sup>22</sup> His vision of how to bring forth "dominion men," via advancement of a "Biblical worldview" has helped lead conservative evangelicals towards aggressive political engagement since the 1970s. Rushdoony is also credited with laying the foundation for, among other things, the modern homeschooling movement and fighting for maximum latitude for private Christian schools on issues like accreditation—normally a matter of government oversight, but something Rushdoony compared to government tyranny.<sup>23</sup>

The other main strain of contemporary dominionism (which in turn has also been deeply influenced by reconstructionism) is 7M dominionism, advocated by Pentecostals of the New Apostolic Reformation.<sup>24</sup> 7M is rooted in a Pentecostal movement of the 1940s, according to an academic book by John Weaver published in 2015.<sup>25</sup> The Latter Rain movement taught that there would be an outpouring of supernatural powers in a

coming generation, allowing them to subdue or take dominion over nations. The Latter Rain movement promised this would happen along with the restoration of “the neglected offices in the contemporary church of apostles and prophets.”<sup>26</sup> Teachings about the supernatural authority of the apostles have provided key theological and structural elements of contemporary dominionism. These teachings, previously rejected as “deviant” by Pentecostal denominations are now so ubiquitous that they are more tolerated than opposed.<sup>27</sup>

Latter Rain theology was revived under the under aegis of longtime Fuller Theological Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner, who organized a global network of hundreds of apostles. Many of these apostles lead groups of non-denominational churches and ministries called “apostolic networks,” which sometimes comprise tens of thousands of members. Today, NAR theology and its apostles and prophets have assumed an increasingly high profile in religious and civic life in the U.S. They were well-known in the past decade, for example, for mass rallies named The Call, led by Lou Engle, who is also internationally known for his anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ activism.<sup>28</sup> They have also gained political influence. For example, several leading apostles were among the three-dozen “conveners” of a June 2016 meeting at which Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump courted the support of some 1,000 evangelical leaders.<sup>29</sup>

Within the NAR, the justification for the offices of apostle and prophet is based on the biblical book of Ephesians (4:11). They are said to complement or complete the offices of minister, teacher and evangelist into what is called the “five-fold ministry.” Apostles and prophets are top leaders, usually operating outside of denominations—which they are intent on dissolving in the name of Christian unity. They, respectively, lead these non-denominational networks and offer guidance with prescient thoughts and sometimes direct revelations

from God. Sometimes, the roles are combined.<sup>30</sup> This is a very different religious environment than any other sector of Christianity and underscores the way that doctrines among the dominion-minded can be rather fluid, even as they see themselves headed toward the same or similar goals.

It is important to underscore that dominionism, even as it evolves, is not a passing fashion but an historic trend. This trend featured fierce theological battles in the 1980s that pitted the largely apolitical pre-millennial dispensationalism that characterized most of 20th century evangelicalism<sup>31</sup> against a politicized, dominion-oriented post-millennialism.

The turning point in this theological struggle was the 1973 publication of Rushdoony’s 800-page *Institutes*

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of *Biblical Law*, which offered what he believed was a “foundation” for a future biblically based society, and his vision of generations of “dominion men” advancing the “dominion mandate” described in the biblical book of Genesis.<sup>32</sup> The *Institutes* sought to describe what a biblically-based Christian society would look like. It included a legal code based on the Ten Commandments and the laws of Old Testament Israel. This included a long list of capital offences—mostly religious or sexual crimes.<sup>33</sup> But Rushdoony and other leading Reconstructionists did not believe that “biblical Law” could be imposed in a top down fashion by a national theocracy. They thought the biblical kingdom would emerge from the gradual conversion of people who would embrace what they consider to be the whole word of God, and that this could take

hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of years. Rushdoony and many Reconstructionists also believed strongly in a vastly decentralized form of government. Theorist Gary North writes, for example, that, “It isn’t possible to ramrod God’s blessings from the top down, unless you’re God. Only humanists think that man is God.”<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, Reconstructionist thinkers could not prevent others from feeling a greater sense of urgency about moving up the time-table,<sup>35</sup> or from taking dramatic political action, or in the case of anti-abortion activists, even committing vigilante violence.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the *Institutes* and the Reconstructionist works that followed provided a justification for political action that pulled many evangelicals from the political sidelines and into the fray. They also provided an optimistic theology of inevitable victory, suggesting therefore that political action was not only possible but necessary. In the longer term, it also established the often unacknowledged ideological framing for the Christian Right, the basis for 21st century politics, and the possibility of a Ted Cruz as a major figure in public life.

#### THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE

One influential body of Reconstructionist thought was published by Gary North in the mid-1980s. A 10-volume series, called “Biblical Blueprints” and written by different authors, sought to flesh out and update the vision by engaging contemporary matters from education to economics and from politics to divorce. By the late 1980s, a dynamic conversation was well underway about the nature of conservative Christian political action—what it could reasonably expect to accomplish, on what timeframe, by what means, and whether it was necessary at all. These and other Reconstructionist authors were discussed in evangelical leadership circles. But controversy broke out in 1987 following a major critical report in *Christianity Today* that detailed their theocratic agenda. This article introduced Christian Reconstructionism, and the terms dominion, dominion

theology and dominionism to many evangelicals.<sup>37</sup> A still wider public learned about Reconstructionism the same year when *PBS* broadcast a series on the Religious Right by Bill Moyers.<sup>38</sup> Books by prominent evangelical authors and academics opposing dominion theology soon followed, including one by Hal Lindsey, the bestselling evangelical author of his time.<sup>39</sup> Evangelical religious historian Bruce Barron warned of a growing “dominionist impulse.”<sup>40</sup>

This was perhaps the height of the battle over evangelical theology, in which the premillennial dispensationalist camp—which believed that in the end times, true Christians would be “raptured” into the clouds, and Jesus would return to defeat the forces of Satan—was challenged by the post-millennialist Christian Reconstructionists—who argued that Jesus could not return until the world had become perfectly Christian and the faithful had ruled for 1,000 years. One of the longstanding consequences of this difference had been that premillennialists were disinclined to political action, while the postmillennial position required it in order to build nations based on biblical principles or even biblical laws. Christian Reconstructionist authors brought an additional and epochal piece to the puzzle, by outlining for the first time what Christian or biblical governance should look like.

An additional strain of dominionist thought has also been deeply influential in the wider evangelical community. The popular 20th century theologian Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) sold some three million books, some of which are still in print. Together with his son Frank, he also made a series of influential films. Schaeffer’s 1981 book, *A Christian Manifesto*, published at the dawn of the Reagan era, famously served as a catalyst for the evangelical wing of the anti-abortion movement, the broader Christian Right, and the creeping theocratization of the Republican Party.<sup>41</sup>

Schaeffer advocated massive resistance to what he saw as a looming anti-

Christian society. His work inspired dominionist political action even though he claimed to support religious pluralism and oppose overt theocracy. One major difference between Schaeffer and the Reconstructionists is that while they agreed about the threat to Christianity, Schaeffer did not believe in the contemporary applicability of Old Testament laws and Rushdoony’s slow motion approach to dominion. Instead, Schaeffer emphasized the need for militant Christian resistance to what he called “tyranny.”

Schaeffer argued that “the common people had the right and duty to disobedience and rebellion if state officials ruled contrary to the Bible. To do otherwise would be rebellion against God.”<sup>42</sup>

According to historian John Fea,

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*the best expression of co-belligerency may be the 2009 Manhattan Declaration, a three-part platform declaring “life, marriage and religious liberty” as conservative believers’ defining concerns.*

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“Schaeffer played an important role in shaping the Christian Right’s belief in a Christian America,” drawing an ideological plumb line from the Bible to the Declaration of Independence via the theologians of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>43</sup> Schaeffer said that the situations that justified revolution against tyranny in the past are “exactly what we are facing today.” The whole structure of our society, Schaeffer concluded, “is being attacked and destroyed.”<sup>44</sup>

To fight that trend, Schaeffer advocated what he called “co-belligerency:” strategic partnerships that set aside theological differences in order to cooperate on a shared political agenda.

(Thirty years later, the best expression of co-belligerency may be the 2009 *Manhattan Declaration*, a three-part platform declaring “life, marriage and religious liberty” as conservative believers’ defining concerns. This agenda is now shared by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, much of the evangelical Christian Right, and allied politicians in the Republican Party.<sup>45</sup>)

But Schaeffer didn’t articulate a political agenda much beyond the issues of what would later be called the culture war. He believed America was founded as a Christian nation, but he remained in the premillennialist camp and so effectively ceded the playing field of law and public policy to Rushdoony, who offered a standard by which all others would be measured.

Nevertheless, Schaeffer’s work probably caused more people to turn to overt dominionism than any other thought leader before or since. For many, Schaeffer was the beginning of a theological journey from anti-abortion activism to dominionism. Randall Terry, the founder of the anti-abortion direct action group, Operation Rescue, in the 1980s said, “You have to read Schaeffer’s *Christian Manifesto* if you want to understand Operation Rescue.”<sup>46</sup> But by the 90s, he was wondering what would come next. In his own 1995 book, *The Sword: The Blessing of Righteous Government and the Overthrow of Tyrants*, Terry seemed to supply the answer, demonstrating the influence of his conversations with Gary North.<sup>47</sup> “I gladly confess that I want to see civic law in America (and every nation) restored to and based on the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai,” Terry wrote. He considers it to be “flawless, infallible and unimprovable—the very best we could possibly build on.”<sup>48</sup>

Although some writers have tended to lump all dominionists together, dominionists have differences and disagreements about means and ends, just like any other movement. (They also change over time.) For example, Rushdoony opposed the civil disobedience advocated by Schaeffer and left

the board of the Rutherford Institute, the public interest law firm he had started with John Whitehead, because Whitehead and fellow director Gary North supported the tactic. And while North supported non-violent direct action, he disagreed with the vigilante murder of abortion providers as advocated (and ultimately committed) by fellow Christian Reconstructionist Paul Hill.<sup>49</sup>

But it is the broad vision that dominionists share that should be of greatest interest and concern to those outside the movement. C. Peter Wagner traces the lineage of his version of dominion theology “through R.J. Rushdoony” and theologians of the Protestant Reformation in his 2008 book, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*.<sup>50</sup> Wagner adopted an old concept: “sphere sovereignty,” the idea that all areas of life must be brought under a comprehensive biblical worldview. While Rushdoony called this “theonomy,” Wagner’s 7M theology offered a contemporary version with a Pentecostal twist. (There is some metaphorical flexibility in this sector as the term “mountains” is sometimes used interchangeably with “spheres” or “gates.”) Reflecting the trend away from premillennialism, Wagner emphasized the “primacy” of the cultural (or dominion) mandate, over evangelism.

Part of the significance of the convergence of these strains of dominionism is that 7M provides a popularized vision of the reconstructed society that does not require an advanced degree in theology to understand. “[W]e have an assignment from God to take dominion and transform society,”<sup>52</sup> Wagner simply declares. This break with the archaic and esoteric language of the Latter Rain and Christian Reconstructionist writers, and even Francis Schaeffer, has enabled the dominionist movement to broaden and deepen its reach. This synthesis and more palatable approach was decades in the making. There had been Pentecostal and Reconstructionist dialogues over the years that allowed Reconstructionist thought leaders

to see that it was possible get wider swaths of Christianity to adopt their foundational ideas. After one such dialogue in Dallas in 1987,<sup>53</sup> Christian Reconstructionist pastor Joseph Morecraft exclaimed, “God is blending Presbyterian theology with Charismatic zeal into a force that cannot be stopped!”<sup>54</sup>

#### DOMINIONISM REFRAMED AS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The emergence of religious liberty as one of the central issues of our time stems from multiple sources.<sup>55</sup> But the issue is far from being just a disagreement about how to balance the religious freedom of some with civil and constitutional rights of others. In fact, religious freedom has long been seen by dominionist strategists as a weakness of constitutional democracy that they

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*I gladly confess that I want to see civic law in America (and every nation) restored to and based on the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai,” Terry wrote.*

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can exploit to advance their agendas.

The U.S. approach to religious freedom was largely an outgrowth of the thinking of Thomas Jefferson, whose Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom was drafted in 1777, and finally passed under the legislative leadership of James Madison in 1787. The bill, which helped inform the Constitution’s and later the First Amendment’s approach to religion, provided that one’s religious identity “shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”<sup>56</sup> Dominionist leaders generally recognize that Jeffersonian notions of religious freedom and the society they envision are almost entirely mutually exclusive ideas. So they have chosen to be smart about it.

“We must use the doctrine of religious liberty,” Christian

Reconstructionist theorist Gary North declared in 1982, “to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.”<sup>57</sup>

North believes that the Constitution generally, and specifically the proscription against religious tests for public office included in Article 6, are “legal barrier[s] to Christian theocracy.” But he envisions a day when biblically correct Christians gain enough political power to be able to amend the Constitution to limit access to the franchise and civil offices to “communicant members of Trinitarian churches.”<sup>58</sup>

Rushdoony was not interested in religious freedom except insofar as it had implications for “Christian freedom.” In 1980, after many years of legal advocacy for Christian homeschooling and private schools, Rushdoony asked a protégé, attorney John Whitehead, to create a public interest law firm, the “Christian Rights Foundation.” The organization that emerged was ultimately named the Rutherford Institute, after the 17th century theologian Samuel Rutherford, who asserted that even the King of England must obey God’s laws. The Institute was to be strategic and not parochial. It would represent any kind of Christian and even groups that were “heretical and non-Christian” (the Church of Scientology was mentioned as one example) in cases that would have precedential value for advancing their vision of Christianity.<sup>59</sup>

Dominionist theorists view the Jeffersonian idea of religious equality under the law as inherently tyrannical. “There are two major stages in the attack on religious liberty,” Rushdoony declared in 1965. “First is the state is secularized in the name of freedom and second, every prerogative of the church is attacked in an indirect manner so that ... its right to exist is



denied.”<sup>60</sup> This is the thinking that informs many contemporary claims of attacks on the religious liberty and fears of persecution by a secular totalitarian government.

Religious liberty arguments, which can at once cloak and advance a conservative religious agenda, are increasingly ubiquitous on the Christian Right, and are sometimes intended to baffle liberals. In 2011, C. Peter Wagner seemed to make a surprising case for religious tolerance to a National Public Radio audience. “I’m sorry that some radicals speak up strongly against having a mosque in their neighborhood,” he said, “and I don’t think that’s patriotism. I think America needs to make room for liberty.”<sup>61</sup> But Wagner knows there is no actual room for religious liberty in a dominionist society, as he made clear when the NPR listeners weren’t tuned in:

“Dominion has to do with control. Dominion has to do with rulership,” Wagner declared at an NAR conference in 2008. “Dominion has to do with authority and subduing, and it relates to society. In other words, what the values are in Heaven need to be made manifest here on earth. Dominion means being the head and not the tail. Dominion means ruling as kings. It says in Revelation Chapter 1:6 that He has made us kings and priests—and check the rest of that verse; it says for dominion. So we are kings for dominion.”<sup>62</sup>

Significantly, Rushdoony and the late Howard Phillips, the Christian Reconstructionist founder of the Constitution Party, did considerable organizing around the Bob Jones University tax case—the *cause celebre* of the 1970s and early ‘80s that is widely credited with galvanizing the Christian Right as a political movement. In the landmark case of *Bob Jones University v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Greenville, South Carolina-based school was not entitled to federal tax exemption if it maintained its policy against interracial dating. The case epitomized the Reconstructionist and Schaefferite view of the perpetual

showdown between a “biblical worldview” and “secular humanism.” The case is a forerunner to today’s efforts to gain exemption from the law based on religious liberty claims.<sup>63</sup>

Today, the major issues of the culture war have been substantially reframed in terms of religious liberty, as the co-belligerents seek to declare their individual and institutional religious consciences are violated in various ways, and therefore are exempt from what jurists call the “generally applicable laws.” The results have been mixed.

The religious freedom argument deployed against contraception and abortion won a major victory in the Supreme Court case of *Hobby Lobby v. Sebelius*, where the court held that closely held corporations have a right to freedom of conscience sufficient for

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### *Dominionist theorists view the Jeffersonian idea of religious equality under the law as inherently tyrannical.*

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the evangelical family-owned Hobby Lobby chain not to have to include certain contraceptives in their employees’ health insurance.

In the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, religious liberty arguments could not overcome the civil rights argument for marriage equality,<sup>64</sup> but similar arguments have informed state-level versions of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which have sometimes sought for example, to exempt businesses from having to provide services related to same-sex marriages.

#### DOMINION BY MAJORITY

Dominionist theorists and contemporary leaders know that they need to move carefully, lest they provoke powerful opposition. Some leading dominionists will go so far as to say that they do not seek a theocracy when that is clearly their goal. For example, C. Peter Wagner, in his book, *Dominion!*, says he wants to get his people “into posi-

tions of leadership” to reshape the country “from top to bottom.”<sup>65</sup>

Wagner’s successor as the convenor of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders (USCAL), Joseph Mattera, takes the same approach.<sup>66</sup> USCAL is one of several NAR leadership groupings that teach that Christians of the right sort must hold governmental power and implement a biblical approach to the law.<sup>67</sup>

Mattera, who pastors a church in Brooklyn, New York, adds that the historic evangelical goal of universal conversion is unnecessary to achieve dominion. One of the “keys to dominion,” he says, is prolific reproduction and indoctrination of Christian children. Christians, he believes, should seek to multiply faster than those who are limiting the size of their families, so their children would “have more influence... [and]... more votes than anybody else and we would have the most power on the earth.”<sup>68</sup> (Mattera’s gradualism is not limited to waiting for babies. His regional Apostolic Leadership team includes Democratic New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera,<sup>69</sup> who has also taught at Mattera’s Leadership Institute on waging a “Kingdom Revolution” to advance a “biblical worldview.”<sup>70</sup> They waged an unsuccessful Democratic primary effort in 2014 against five candidates in an apparent effort to make the Democratic-dominated Council more conservative.<sup>71</sup> Cabrera himself ran an unsuccessful Democratic primary challenge to his incumbent state senator in 2014,<sup>72</sup> and tried again in 2016 with backing from charter school development interests.<sup>73</sup>)

Christian Reconstructionists involved in the natalist Quiverfull movement have a similar view. As Kathryn Joyce explained in *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, they envision themselves producing arrows in God’s quiver in the war for dominion.<sup>74</sup> Although certainly not all homeschoolers are Christian dominionists, those who are understand the concept of Quiverfull as a metaphor for their role in this epochal struggle. “The womb is such a power-

ful weapon,” Nancy Campbell, who has six children and 35 grandchildren, told *National Public Radio*. “It’s a weapon against the enemy.” Families in her church have an average of 8.5 children. Campbell said, “My greatest impact is through my children. The more children I have, the more ability I have to impact the world for God.”<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, Quiverfull children are usually homeschooled and, as religion scholar Julie Ingersoll explained in her 2015 book on Reconstructionism, that’s also part of Rushdoony’s long-term plan. As Rushdoony wrote, “The explicit goal of Christian education is dominion.”<sup>76</sup> The Reconstructionists, Ingersoll concludes, are building a “separate and distinct subculture in which they can raise their large families without the influence of humanism.”<sup>77</sup>

For the Apostles and Prophets who comprise Mattera’s USCAL, 7M roads to dominion are just as clear. The government officials that emerge from their ranks must be informed by a “biblical worldview” and their “every purpose must be to establish or further the Kingdom of Jesus on earth.”<sup>78</sup>

This may be a less peaceful process than Wagner and some 7M readers would have us believe. Many dominionists of all stripes anticipate deepening political tensions, violence and even religious or secessionist war, especially in the wake of legal and social acceptance of marriage equality and permanent access to legal abortion.<sup>79</sup> Gary North thought this was likely. He predicted in 1989 that as the dominionist movement rose, the idea of constitutionally protected religious pluralism “*will be shot to pieces in an ideological (and perhaps even literal) crossfire*” as Christians and humanists continue to square off in “an escalating religious war.”<sup>80</sup> [emphasis in the original]

One contemporary example will suffice. David Lane, a leading Christian Right electoral organizer, declared in a 2013 essay that religious war may be on the hori-

zon.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile he has shifted the electoral emphasis of his Mississippi-based American Renewal Project. (The group hosts all-expenses-paid policy briefings for clergy and their spouses, featuring top politicians like Gov. Mike Pence (R-IN), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Gingrich, Huckabee, Cruz and often David Barton. (Republican presidential contender Donald Trump addressed one such event in August 2016.<sup>82</sup>) They are currently recruiting and training clergy with a dominionist vision to run for office at all levels.<sup>83</sup> Lanes own pastor, Rob McCoy, won a city council seat in Thousand Oaks, California, in 2016.<sup>84</sup> Lanes vision is clear: “I don’t think there’s any such thing as a separation of church and state. This was not established as a secular nation, and anybody that says that it is, they’re not reading American history. This was established by Christians for the advancement of the Christian faith. My goal is to return to restore a biblically based culture and a Judeo-Christian heritage.”<sup>85</sup>

Lane reprised the theme of his inflammatory essay in dog whistle fashion in 2015, invoking the names of two warriors of Old Testament Israel. “We just need a Gideon or Rahab the Harlot to stand,” he declared.<sup>86</sup> But one does not invoke these biblical figures to call for religious revival, elect candidates to city council, or to advance a legislative agenda. The biblical Gideon leads an Israelite army in an ethnic cleansing of the Midianites who were oppressors and worshiped false gods. (Lanes piece was titled, “To Retake America, We Must Defeat Her False Religion.”) Rahab sheltered two Israelite spies in preparation for the sacking of the city of Jericho by Joshua’s army, resulting in the massacre of everyone but Rahab and her family.

It is worth noting that NAR events often begin with processions of young men marching to the military beat of drums and blowing shofars—ram horns used for battle signals in ancient Israel.<sup>87</sup>

THE SMEARS OF AUGUST

The election of 2008 saw the first major party candidate for national office who had been obviously influenced by dominionist thought. GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin was a longtime member of an NAR-affiliated church, and had been mentored in politics by Alaskan Apostle Mary Glazier for two decades. The revelation of these ties when Palin came onto the national stage resulted in explosive, if short-lived, media attention.<sup>88</sup>

Controversy erupted again in the run-up to the 2012 election primary season. Media reports about dominionist influences on GOP presidential contenders Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and Gov. Rick Perry (R-TX)<sup>89</sup> threatened to make dominionism a household word. It was reported that, among other things, Bachmann’s law school mentor at Oral Roberts University was Christian Reconstructionist John Eidsmoe.<sup>90</sup> (Reconstructionist Herb Titus also served on the schools small law school faculty.) And leading NAR figures staged an unprecedented prayer rally of some 30,000 people in Houston to launch Gov. Perry’s campaign, to which even C. Peter Wagner traveled from Colorado to attend.

The thought that dominionism might become an issue in the presidential campaign must have sent Republican-oriented PR shops into panic mode. Journalists, scholars and activists who had written about dominionism were soon subjected to a wide-ranging smear campaign that featured nationally syndicated columnists from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.<sup>91</sup> This effort sought to discredit the idea that dominionism was a real thing or, even if real, that it was not of much significance. The real purpose of those using the term, the columnists alleged, was to tar evangelicals. Lisa Miller of the *Post* wrote, “Dominionism is the paranoid *mot du jour*.”<sup>92</sup> Bachmann and Perry’s campaigns ultimately lost traction for other reasons. And in spite of many vigorous responses to the columnists

pooh- poohery,<sup>93</sup> media coverage of dominionism collapsed even as dominionist thought continued to animate and sustain the Christian Right.

Dominionism denial exists within a wider context of a culture of doubt and denial about the strength and resiliency of the Christian Right itself.<sup>94</sup> It can be difficult to take dominionism seriously if you think that the movement it drives is dead, dying or deeply diminished. That said, it is also true that some writers use have used the term dominionism as an all-purpose epithet and have thereby unfairly broad-brushed people who do not embrace the harsh theocratic future envisioned by some.

But these distracting outliers are not as significant as the writing about dominionism from a wide variety of points of view that has been published over more than four decades. For example, in 1996, Rice University sociologist William Martin published *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* as a companion volume to the PBS documentary series by the same title.<sup>95</sup> Authors of hundreds of books<sup>96</sup> and articles<sup>97</sup> have discussed dominionism before and since 2011. (Dominionism denial nevertheless resurfaced as Ted Cruz's presidential prospects rose in 2016 and the role of dominionism began to be discussed.<sup>98</sup>)

In any case, ideas about dominion, dominionism and dominion theology and the terms themselves, have been a central part of the discussion of evangelicalism and the development of the Christian Right for decades. This will continue, regardless of what politically motivated dominionism denialists may publish next.

#### DELIVER US FROM HILLARY

Dominionism now appears to be a permanent feature of politics at all levels. For three presidential elections in a row, dominionist politicians have played prominent roles. Following Mike Huckabee and Sarah Palin in 2008, Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry in 2012, and the remarkable run

of Ted Cruz in 2016, dominionists are among the most prominent politicians in the country and enjoy significant public support and acceptance as a legitimate part of the political mix.

While Senator Cruz's campaign was supported by leading NAR figures and most other Christian Right leaders, there was always a Plan B as well. One NAR prophet said God had told him in July 2015 that he will use Donald Trump to "expose darkness and perversion."<sup>99</sup> Donald Trump also enjoyed significant support from other Christian Right figures, notably 7M theorist Lance Wallnau (who also sits on the board of an NAR political arm, the Oak Initiative<sup>100</sup>).

Wallnau sought to explain the paradox of evangelical Christians supporting Trump from early on even though he didn't seem like a good fit. Trump, as has been much discussed, was a longtime supporter of abortion and LGBTQ rights, a thrice-married philanderer, a failed casino magnate with ties to organized crime,<sup>101</sup> and someone whose Christian credentials were dubious at best. Nevertheless, Wallnau suggested that God could use Trump to achieve his purposes even though he was a flawed vessel. Wallnau recalled the story of Cyrus, the King of Persia in the biblical book of Isaiah who, as had been earlier prophesied, freed the Jews who had been captive in Babylon for 70 years, and helped to build the temple in Jerusalem. God used the pagan Cyrus, as Wallnau put it, as a "wrecking ball" for his purposes.<sup>102</sup> Wallnau thought God would use Trump to challenge "an increasingly hostile anti-Christian culture"<sup>103</sup> and "deliver us from Hillary."<sup>104</sup>

Wallnau's story makes clear that at least some 7Mers do not require moral or doctrinal conformity to accept someone as a co-belligerent, or even as a leader, as long as they can help get them part of the way down the road to dominion. It also underscores that while the various doctrines feeding into the dominionist movement are clear, the degree to which they are adopted, and the means and

timeline by which dominionists may seek to achieve their goals, will vary according to individual and factional interests.

Dominionism, like the Christian Right itself, has come a long way from obscure beginnings. What is remarkable today is that the nature of this driving ideology of the Christian Right remains obscure to most of society, most of the time. Dominionism's proponents and their allies know it takes time to infuse their ideas into the constituencies most likely to be receptive. They also know it is likely—and rightly—to alarm many others.

Religion scholar Michael McVicar recounts an illuminating anecdote from that pivotal 1980 gathering of the Religious Roundtable addressed by Ronald Reagan. During the meeting, Robert Billings, one of the founders of the Moral Majority, privately observed to Gary North that, "If it weren't for his [Rushdoony's] books, none of us would be here." North replied, "No one in the audience understands that." Billings replied, "True. But we do."

"Insiders knew about Rushdoony's influence, even if the rank and file did not," McVicar concludes. That continues to be true. The role of dominionism is largely hidden in plain sight from those most affected, on all sides.<sup>105/sup></sup> ■

*This article appears in the forthcoming Summer 2016 edition of The Public Eye magazine and is reprinted with permission. Frederick Clarkson is a senior fellow at Political Research Associates. He co-founded the group blog Talk To Action and authored Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy. Follow him on Twitter at @FredClarkson. - See more at: <http://www.politicalresearch.org>*

*NOTE: In order to save space in the print edition of Christian Ethics Today, the references are omitted; all endnotes can be found on the web edition of the journal at [www.christianethicstoday.com](http://www.christianethicstoday.com)*

# THE DEADLIEST SIN

By Fisher Humphreys

## Pride and the Bible

The Bible says that God keeps aloof from people who are proud: “Though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away” (Ps. 138:6). “Toward the scorners [God] is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor” (Pr. 3:34). This verse is quoted twice in the New Testament, once by James and once in 1 Peter.

The book of Proverbs emphasizes that eventually the proud get their comeuppance. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). “A person’s pride will bring humiliation, but one who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Pr. 29:23).

The most vigorous condemnation of pride in the Bible is Mary’s Magnificat (Lk. 1:46-55). Mary praises God not only for lifting up people who are lowly but for humiliating people who are proud. The song reflects an ancient Jewish tradition that it is the downtrodden members of the covenant people who really love God.

Jesus obliquely condemned pride by praising its opposites: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:3, 5). He urged his followers to follow his example by being givers rather than takers. When they quarreled about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom, he said, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and

to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

The writers of the New Testament got the point. In their writings they uniformly resisted pride and selfishness in favor of humility and care for others.

## Pride and the Church’s Teaching

The biblical condemnation of pride took root in the church and has been developed across the centuries. In the sixth century, Pope St. Gregory the Great developed a list of the seven

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*In Milton’s Paradise Lost, Satan says: “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.”*

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deadly sins and listed pride as the deadliest.

Pride came to be understood as the cause of the fall of Satan. Satan was thought to have been a glorious angel who rebelled against God and was thrown down from heaven. Why? Because he did not want to let God be God. He wanted to be God. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Satan says: “Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.”

Martin Luther, commenting on Romans 5:4, wrote that human beings are naturally *incurvatus a se*, curved in on themselves. It is an image of self-destructiveness like that of a feral animal whose curved tusks continue to grow until they pierce the animal’s skull and kill it.

Theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich have added some distinctly modern insights to the tradition. For example, they point out

that human beings who are finite and mortal nevertheless have the capacity to imagine what it would be like to be infinite and immortal. The gap between our actual condition and what we can imagine about ourselves generates existential anxiety. That anxiety gives rise to multiple sins, especially pride. It works like this: In order to alleviate our anxiety about our finitude and mortality, we deny them. We conduct our lives as if we are infinite and immortal.

Of course, this is irrational, since it’s obvious to everyone that we are finite and mortal. But we are so desperate to relieve our anxiety that we pretend we aren’t. We whistle when we walk by the cemetery. Creatures who have been made in God’s image attempt to be God. In the words of Tillich: “Man is tempted to make himself existentially the center of himself and his world.” This is the tragedy of human existence. It is why the Christian tradition says that pride is the worst sin of all.

## Good Pride

Not all pride is sinful. Here are three examples of good pride. We should be proud of our grandchildren when they study hard and make good grades. We should be proud of our church and its ministries to people in need. We should be proud of our best accomplishments in life.

Pride of this kind has good effects. It can motivate our grandchildren to study. It can lead our churches to act with compassion and effectiveness. It is an incentive for each of us to strive to accomplish good things in life.

Even though this kind of pride is good, it does carry a risk, namely, that we come to value the things of which we’re proud more highly than we value God. We could treat our grandchildren as the most important thing

in the world, thus making our family into an idol. We could treat our church as if it is the only good church around. We could look with contempt on people who do not accomplish as much with their lives as we have done with ours.

But simply taking pride in things such as our grandchildren, our church, and our accomplishments does not necessarily mean we have committed idolatry. With a moment's reflection we can see that humble persons, humble Christians, can be proud of their grandchildren, their church and their own best accomplishments.

This leads to the question: How can we distinguish good pride from bad pride? It's tricky, but here are some thoughts. Pride in the accomplishments of others is less likely to be sinful than pride in your own accomplishments. Your pride in your grandchildren's hard work and good grades is good. You should have it, and you should tell your grandchildren you are proud of what they have achieved.

Also, pride in what you accomplish is less likely to be sinful than pride in yourself. If you are proud of having worked hard and made a good score on the Graduate Record Exam, that probably isn't a sin. But if your GRE score makes you think you're smarter than everybody else, and even that everybody else is stupid, your pride is sinful (as well as delusional).

### **Pride and Other People**

When we are arrogant we attempt to put ourselves at the center of the universe. We try to displace God, and we try to displace others, from the center. We relate to others as if their lives do not matter. We may even be contemptuous of them. We use them. We manipulate them. We attempt to control them. We put them down. We keep them down.

In other words, pride is intensively competitive. Pride makes us want to vanquish people. We want to win; but that's not the worst of it. We want others to lose. A character in one of

Iris Murdoch's novels says, "It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail."

There are some areas of life where competition is a good thing. Two of these are athletics and economics. Obviously, athletes become better and better as a result of their competing with other athletes. They play to win, and that's all right because everyone in the game has agreed to the competition, and they all know—or should know—that it's only a game. The losers aren't lesser persons—they're just lesser players. That's compatible with Christian teaching.

In economics, the most successful system by far is inherently competitive. Capitalism has generated more wealth than any other system in the history of the world, and it also has provided maximal freedom for citizens.

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*Pride makes us want to vanquish people. We want to win; but that's not the worst of it. We want others to lose.*

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The problem with capitalism, of course, is that there are people who are unable to compete. Many countries, including our own, create social programs to try to insure that those who can't compete successfully nevertheless have a decent life. For example, we provide public schools. We do this for the benefit of all children, and we do it also for the general welfare of the country. Public schools are socialistic rather than capitalistic. They and many other similar programs take the brutal edge off the competition inherent in capitalism.

In most of life other than economics and athletics, competition is bad for human beings. When a husband and wife compete against each other, their marriage is a disaster. When parents encourage their children to compete against each other, the family is in trouble. When friends compete

against each other, they put their friendship at risk.

Competition in most areas of life is not compatible with living as Christians. When we compete, we want other people to fail, but when we follow Christ, we want other people to succeed. The satisfaction we feel when we succeed and others fail is incompatible with Jesus' way of life. You can't have it both ways. You either wish people well, or you compete with them; you can't do both. Outside carefully confined areas of life, such as athletics and economics, competition is about sinful pride.

### **Three More Facts about Pride**

I want now to mention three facts about pride, all of which can motivate us as we attempt to avoid pride in our own lives. First, while it's easy for others to see pride in us, it's difficult for us to see it in ourselves. If it's so obvious to them, why not to us? I don't know the answer. But recognizing this fact alerts us to the fact that it isn't easy to avoid pride.

Second, pride is not a popular sin. When others see your pride, they don't like it, and they don't like you. Friends will join you in some sins. For example, they will join you in getting drunk and will enjoy the sin with you. But no one will join you in your pride. They will distance themselves from you when you are arrogant.

We hate others' pride but not our own. We may not even recognize that we're proud; but if we do, we don't find our pride repellent the way others do. In fact, we are drawn to it. It feels good to think of ourselves as the center of the universe.

A third fact is one we moderns seem to be more aware of than ancient people were. We recognize today that many of the people who are boastful and arrogant are in fact not really proud of themselves at all. They are rather tormented by a sense of inadequacy. They brag and strut in order to cover up inner feelings of self-doubt and self-hatred. They can't love their neighbors as themselves

because they don't love themselves. Most people who bully others are not brave; they're cowards. Their bluster is to conceal from others that they're really weak rather than strong. This is not to say that they don't have any skills; they may have. But their bullying is motivated by a profound sense of inadequacy.

### **The Alternative to Pride**

Now we turn to the Christian alternative to pride—namely, humility. You would think that, since people dislike pride, they would like humility, but they mostly don't. In part this is because humility is misunderstood. People assume that a humble person is weak or servile. That's not true. Jesus was humble, but he wasn't weak and he certainly wasn't servile.

People also assume that a humble person is ineffective. That's not true, either. Humble people can be very effective. Some of them become splendid leaders. But they don't lead by bullying. They lead by offering a vision, by inspiring others, and by persuading others to follow them.

Humility is not feelings of inferiority, either. It certainly is not a sense of self-hatred. Humble people don't lack respect for themselves. They just have respect for others as well as for themselves.

Humility is respect for God and respect for other people. It is letting God be God. It is affirming the worth of other persons in addition to yourself. Humility is realistic. God is God, and we are not. Other people do have worth, not just ourselves. The eighth psalm says that God has made human beings a little lower than God. John says that God loves all human beings. The New Testament teaches that Christ gave his life for all human beings. For all these reasons human beings should be treated with respect. That is the meaning of humility.

The advantages of humility are great. It overcomes soul-destroying self-centeredness. It frees us from endless efforts to justify our own existence by competing with others. It makes possible authentic community, authentic friendships and authentic love. It delivers us from contributing to the endless barrage of petty criti-

cism that characterizes the life of communities.

### **Conclusion**

God has provided Christians with resources for the struggle against pride. At the top of the list of resources is the example of Jesus who, "though he was in the form of God . . . humbled himself and became obedient" (Phil. 2:6-8). Then there is the Spirit who lives within us and is working to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. There is the church, a community where pride is condemned and humility is respected. There is the Bible which gives us a clear message about pride and humility. And there is a promise that Jesus made to us about humility and all other forms of goodness, both for ourselves and our world: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6). ■

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

**BOOK REVIEWERS INVITED....***Christian Ethics Today* receives and possesses books from various publishers which need to be reviewed for the journal. If you are interested in reviewing a book for us, contact the Editor.

# A Baptist Pastor's Plea To Love Our Muslim Neighbors

By Chris George

Hundreds of people packed the Newton County courthouse in Covington, Ga., on August 22 to protest the placement of a mosque in their neighborhood. Sadly, it was not the first time that fierce anger and opposition to Muslims was expressed in the metro Atlanta area.

Two years ago, the Kennesaw City Council voted (without cause) to reject a permit for the creation of a small, storefront mosque in their community.

Two months ago, homeowners in Cobb County fought against the placement of a Muslim cemetery.

It is not only happening in our community, but across our country.

Many of the loudest protesters are people of faith and members of my faith community—Christians. We are people called and commissioned to love God and love others, but still struggling with an age-old question: *Who is my neighbor?*

Words like “us” and “them” are some of the first we learn as children and we never forget those words. I have heard them echoed over and over again in recent days. “We” don’t want “them” here. “They” don’t have a place in “our” neighborhood.

At the 2016 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, a pastor rose with some comments and a question. He said, “*They* (Muslims) are murdering Christians, beheading Christians, imprisoning Christians all over the world... *These people* (Muslims) are a threat to *our* very way of existence as Christians in America... How in the world (can) someone within the Southern Baptist Convention support defending of the rights of Muslims to construct

mosques in the United States?”

Dr. Russell Moore, President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, listened patiently and responded unequivocally.

“Sometimes questions are complicated and sometimes we have hard decisions to make, but this is NOT one of those times,” Moore said. “What it means to be a Baptist is to support soul freedom for everybody.”

His answer was grounded in Baptist theology, but it was also

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*Jesus said, “Love God and Love your neighbor.” It is not an either/or, but a both/and. If we love God, we will love our neighbor, regardless of our differences.*

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grounded in an ancient rule “often called *golden*” that we “love our neighbors as we love ourselves.”

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus answered the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Defying the conventional wisdom of his day (and ours), Jesus broke down the walls of “us” and “them,” calling for us to love beyond ethnic differences and religious labels.

My church, Smoke Rise Baptist Church, is located at a great cultural crossroads just a short distance from Clarkston, Ga., the largest refugee community in the Southeast United States. Within 10 miles of our church, we have a Hindu Temple, Muslim mosques,

Jewish synagogues, and Buddhist Temples.

The neighborhood is changing. Our church has decided to respond not in fear, but in faith.

Fear labels. Faith loves.

Our church welcomes other houses of worship in our community, because we believe that religious liberty must be for all, or it will not exist at all.

We choose to be a Good Neighbor.

Jesus said, “Love God and Love your neighbor.” It is not an either/or, but a both/and. If we love God, we will love our neighbor, regardless of our differences.

Clarkston, Georgia is the home of the largest refugee community in the Southeast United States.

The conversation in Newton County and in many others places across the country is about more than politics or building permits. It is about people.

One person who has inspired our congregation is Malik Waliyani, an Indian-born Muslim. In April, he purchased the local gas station about a block from our church. In July, his station was robbed and ransacked. After learning of his loss, we wanted to be a good neighbor and support him. So, one Sunday, our congregation went to buy gas and groceries from his store.

He gave us the items we purchased, but he also gave us something else that Sunday, something that you can’t get on a shelf, something priceless... He gave us his friendship.

In August, Malik came to our church and shared a meal with us, expressing gratitude and introducing himself and his faith to his new neighbors.

Malik is a Muslim AND Malik is

our friend and our neighbor.

Georgia is still scarred from a time where exclusion was the order of the day. But, a new day is dawning. Today, Georgia is the most diverse state in the Southeast. We have a unique opportunity to move beyond our prejudicial past and embrace a new identity as a community of welcome, a place where words like “us” and “them”

are outdated and obsolete.

Georgia can be a place where everyone is treated like a neighbor and where strangers are welcomed as friends—Southern Hospitality in the best way.

We stand at the intersection of yesterday and tomorrow. Will we will run back to the past with fear or walk forward toward the future with faith? ■

*Rev. Dr. Chris George is senior pastor of Smoke Rise Baptist Church, a congregation located in Stone Mountain, Ga., and affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. This article first appeared on HuffingtonPost on 08/30/2016 and is reprinted here with permission of the author.*

## **Debtor's Prayer**

I owe so much to so many:

I have been fed by fields I did not till.

I have eaten from tables I did not set.

I have crossed bridges I did not build.

I have sat in the shade of trees I did not plant.

I have received knowledge I did not research.

I have drunk from wells I did not dig.

I receive so much from others while my giving is so scarce.

*....by Henley Barnette*



# The Last Trump?

by Roger Griffin

*"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."*

—1 Corinthians 15:52-53

To English eyes, the run-in to the U.S. presidential election sometimes suggests that the Olympic Organizing Committee has been commissioned to run politics. I hope some remarks from a historian from across the Pond and three thousand miles outside the Washington Bubble will add more light than heat.

## Trump and Christianity

Throughout history, state power and state violence against the vulnerable have formed an unholy alliance with religion, perverting creeds which (if the sacred texts are read selectively in a compassionate spirit) may even encourage respect for nature and compassion for all human beings.

The Aztecs, the ancient Egyptians, Jews, and Romans, the Crusaders and Conquistadors of Christianity, the countries fighting in the First World War, whether Christian or Islamic, and whatever alliance they were part of, all believed they had, as Bob Dylan once put it, "God on their side."

The horrors of Japanese Imperialism were enacted by a regime legitimized by Shinto, a nature religion. Hitler invoked God repeatedly and has convinced at least one scholar that he was a true Catholic. The Sinhalese extermination of the Tamil Tigers was justified by Buddhism. Islam has been invoked by all the most brutal tyrants of the Middle East. Religious sectarianism and interfaith wars have probably cost millions of lives throughout history.

So when we learn that James Dobson, founder of the group Focus

on the Family, claimed Donald Trump recently accepted "a relationship with Christ," adding, "I know the person who led him to Christ," jaws should not drop. Both George Bush and Tony Blair, who almost double-handedly are responsible for the collapse into anarchy of Iraq and the consequent rise of ISIS, claimed a special relationship with (an allegedly Christian) God. Christian supporters of Trump should perhaps be urged to re-read some of the key passages of the New Testament in which Jesus reveals his Gospel of compassion for different

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*Throughout history, state power and state violence against the vulnerable have formed an unholy alliance with religion.*

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ethnicities and the socially deprived, and the tolerance of violence directed against oneself. The sword he brought divided Christians from Jews in terms of salvation, not Americans from the rest of the world militarily.

## Trump and Fascism

Despite the frequent stigmatizing of Trump by his critics as a "fascist," it would be refreshing if more journalists used political categories with greater nicety. Trump is a populist or, to be exact, a radical right-wing populist. He owes his power to voicing in hardly sophisticated rhetoric widespread prejudices and simplistic diagnoses to complex problems which, if translated into practice, would prove counter-productive, discriminatory and inhuman in many areas, both domestically and on the international stage. The flamboyant Vladimir Zhirinovskiy

in pre-Putin Russia was a right-wing populist who said he wanted to charge foreigners in Russia a fee if they could not speak Russian, make vodka dirt cheap, and force all of Europe's homosexuals to live in Holland. Putin is another, far more dangerous form of populist with geopolitical ambitions, while Berlusconi was a more lightweight, comic, less puritanical version; whatever their considerable weaknesses neither can be accused of fascism. To be fascists they would, like Mussolini and Hitler, have to set about seizing power democratically so as to be able to dismantle or pervert the institutions of liberal democracy entirely. Trump, whatever his faults, has given no sign that he intends the destruction of the U.S. constitutional system and its replacement by a totalitarian "new order" with himself as its charismatic leader for (in his case a short) perpetuity. This is true of other so-called "fascists" such as Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, George Bush or Barack Obama, which similarly disqualifies them from the description. I grant that saying "Trump is a radical right-wing populist" has less of a (populist) ring as a headline than "Trump is a Fascist," and lends itself to less funny cartoons; but that is what he is. He wants America to be great again, but not to be reborn in a totalitarian new order, let alone force its citizens to be subjected to a coercive state monopoly of power which, for one thing, would stop billionaires like him from enjoying the fruits of their ill-gotten gains or running for president.

## Trump and Fanaticism

Still, Trump embodies and encourages a process that underlies a considerable percentage of the suffering that has been inflicted by a minority of depraved human beings on fellow human beings down through the centuries: Manichaeization. The

Trumpian world is split into good and bad, black and white (or in his case White and anything non-White, or White without an American accent). Like a grotesque parody of Dante's Inferno, Trump's Hell has many places reserved for a host of those who are beyond redemption as potential American citizens. Manichaeization combined with unchecked political or religious power leads to inhumanity because those "in darkness" are demonized and dehumanized to a point where their suffering and death is regarded as *moral* and compassion for them is hence legitimately suspended.

All anti-state and state terrorists apply a Manichaeized ideology to reduce the irreducibly complex realities of the world to a simple dualistic narrative. At this point, the new-born "visionary" sees him- or herself (curiously) as entrusted with a mission to represent, or even fight for, Good. A close study of the atrocities of Nazism, the massacre of Breivik, or the horrors (not at all "medieval") of ISIS will reveal different groups of human enemies to be demonized and persecuted, but the same dualism, fundamentalism and fanaticism at work. "Fanatic," from the Latin for a temple (thus a "profanity" is something outside the temple) implies that the Manichaeon has a religious sense of fervor about the truth and, *in extremis*, will regard violence and inhumanity committed against alleged enemies of the Truth (or the culture/nation that is its guardian) as a sacred duty. But because Trump is operating in a rationally constructed, liberal constitution, there are countervailing powers that would restrain him from undertaking the most extreme actions. Once his hysteria and incompetence

revealed themselves as a bad basis for a successful U.S. presidency he would in any case soon be removed democratically and peacefully, like Thatcher or Berlusconi, without being shot like Mussolini, committing suicide like Hitler, or being lynched like Saddam Hussein.

#### **A Bottom Line**

So what are genuine American humanists—Christian, Muslim or secular—to do as the great political Superbowl approaches? Perhaps they should bear in mind that the crises of the present world system demand forms of non-fanatical activism which refuse to demonize or dehumanize anyone, even Mr. Trump. He is not the first simple-minded demagogue to appear on the political stage of a major nation. Nor will he be the

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*the crises of the present world system demand forms of non-fanatical activism which refuse to demonize or dehumanize anyone, even Mr. Trump.*

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last. Trump is no more (politically) immortal than his predecessors, and it is for those who can live with the complexity and tragedies of the world without being seduced by simplistic diagnoses and solutions to make sure they outlive him. ■

#### **Resources**

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Matthews, Dylan. "I asked 5 fascism experts whether Donald Trump is a fascist. Here's what they said." *Vox*. May 19, 2016.

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*This article first appeared on September 8, 2016 in Sightings and is the first in a series of articles on the Trump phenomenon—or "Trumpism," if such a thing can be defined—and what it says about the relationship between religion and politics in America today. The views expressed in these pieces belong to their respective authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the Martin Marty Center or the University of Chicago Divinity School. Look for further installments leading up to the U.S. presidential election.*

Roger Griffin, is Professor in Modern History at Oxford Brookes University. He is widely acknowledged to be one of the world's foremost experts on the socio-historical and ideological dynamics of fascism, as well as the relationship of various forms of political or religious fanaticism, and in particular contemporary terrorism, to modernity. His publications include *The Nature of Fascism* (Pinter, 1991), *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Palgrave, 2007), and *Terrorist's Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (Palgrave, 2012).

# Patriots Who Kneel

By Marv Knox

Three of America's most incendiary issues—race, patriotism and sports—have ignited into a bonfire of controversy. Soon, we'll be seeing "America: Love it or Leave it" bumper stickers again.

And if we reduce race in America to bumper-sticker mentality, we'll miss a splendid opportunity to advance as a nation.

Unless you're on a mission to Mars—and how are you reading the Baptist Standard?—you probably know the background: San Francisco 49ers backup quarterback Colin Kaepernick has kicked off the National Football League season by refusing to stand during the National Anthem. He is taking a knee to protest racial injustice, he said.

"I think it's become so obvious that athletes and people in general have to react," Kaepernick told ESPN. "At what point do we do something about it? At what point do we take a stand and as a people say, 'This isn't right?'"

Since Kaepernick began his protest, some other NFL players have joined him, and reaction across the league has been divided. Not surprisingly, the protest has become a factor in the presidential campaign.

If you're of a certain age or you studied America's response to the Vietnam conflict, this feels like déjà vu all over again. While our troops fought a real war overseas, people back home fought a verbal war, at least in part, over the meaning of patriotism.

Then, as now, some people equate saluting the flag and singing the National Anthem—and, since 9/11, "God Bless America"—as true patriotism. This is understandable, because the flag and the National Anthem are prominent symbols of our shared legacy and democratic ideals. When we glimpse Old Glory or sing "...

Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave," we still get goosebumps.

Two wrongs make ... two wrongs

It's not that simple, of course. In fact, it's wrong-headed on two levels.

First, some people love our nation passionately, and they want it to improve. So, they choose strong symbolic protest—such as refusing to stand during the National Anthem—as a way to get people's attention. They're kneeling on a seismic, volatile platform to point out where and how

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*Some people equate saluting the flag and singing the National Anthem—and, since 9/11, "God Bless America"—as true patriotism.*

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America needs to rise to its patriotic ideals.

Although their criticism can be labeled as disloyalty, it's often the truest form of loyalty. It's the kind of loyalty that risks rejection, condemnation and scorn for the sake of higher ideals. In the case of Kaepernick and his fellow protestors, it ranges from censure and ridicule, to potential loss of endorsement funds, possibly even to shortened careers. Even if you disagree with their methods, you have to admit they're embracing one of our most patriotic principles—personal sacrifice—for the sake of their cause, racial justice.

Second, some people wave the flag and bellow the National Anthem as validation of their patriotism, and yet

their daily, ongoing actions undermine their professed love our nation and the principles for which it stands. Their lips say, "yes, yes," but their actions shout, "no, no."

They fashion themselves as "patriots," but their behavior belies their braggadocio. They do and say things that perpetuate racial division and injustice. They undermine the rights and equality of blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, Muslims, women, the LGBT community, and just about anybody who is "different." Actions that harm and oppress minorities of any kind desecrate our national flag, which stands for liberty.

(An aside: Don't you find politicians' criticism of Kaepernick & Co. ironic when those same pols lament how terrible America is these days? Maybe it's OK to run down your country to scare up white votes but not to secure black equality.)  
Detracting from teachability

The loud declarations over the NFL-sideline protests distort the issue and detract all of us—whatever our race, ethnicity and national origin—from the teachable moments that should be taking place on Sunday afternoons across America.

Rather than dismiss protesting athletes as pampered, high-paid jocks who should just shut up and play football, we should ask what propels them to risk their reputations and careers. If we look past the bumper-sticker answers, perhaps we will see they have a point. We need to improve racial equality in America. And even if we don't agree with their method of protest, that doesn't mean we dismiss their point. We still need to do something about racial inequality in America.

Baptists, of all Americans, should be sympathetic to the right to protest. We were born in dissent 408 years ago. During the colonial period, we

were the outcast protestors, despised for our outlying religious beliefs. During the foundational years of this young nation, we championed the First Amendment—the very document that guarantees both our religious expression and Kaepernick’s protest. Across the generations, with

some shameful exceptions, we have been the champions of rights for all kinds of minorities and dissenters, as well as thorns in the side of the otherwise comfortable.

It’s time to stand up for the rights of young men who kneel during the National Anthem. And it’s time to

demand we all listen to the reasons they choose to kneel. ■

*Marv Knox is the editor of the Baptist Standard. This editorial was published September 14, 2016 and is republished with permission. Follow Marv on Twitter: @marvknoxbs*

### **Words of Wisdom, by Henlee Barnette**

*A verbal contract with a religious institution  
is not worth the paper it is written on.*

*I can speak more freely about an issue  
when I am not encumbered by the facts.*

*For the Christian the bridge between doubt and faith  
is a good night’s sleep.*

*If you go the second mile  
you will enjoy an uncrowded road.*

**from *Homely Joys: Prayers, Poems, and Barbs*  
by Henlee Barnette and James Barnette**

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.”

Please use the enclosed envelope to let us know you wish to continue to receive the journal in the mail.

Thank You

# GOD DRAMA: Fifteen Years Later...

By Wendell Griffen

Text: Exodus 32:7-14

7 The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; 8 they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" 9 The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. 10 Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.' 11 But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever." 14 And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Psalm 14 To the leader. Of David.

1 Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'

*They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;*

*there is no one who does good.*

2 The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind

*to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God.*

3 They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;

*there is no one who does good, no, not one.*

4 *Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers*

*who eat up my people as they eat bread,*

*and do not call upon the Lord?*

5 *There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous.*

6 *You would confound the plans of the poor,*

*but the Lord is their refuge.*

7 *O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!*

*When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people,*

*Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.*

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## The nation that prayed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist massacre soon put aside faithfulness to truth and justice.

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Fifteen years ago, on September 11, 2001, a massacre occurred when 19 men armed with box cutters commandeered four commercial airliners after the planes departed the Logan Airport in Boston, Massachusetts. Two jets were crashed into the World Trade Towers in New York City. A third jet was crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Passengers on the fourth jet stormed the cockpit and forced the men who had overtaken it to crash near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, before it also could be used as a weapon to attack a target in Washington (presum-

ably either the White House or Capitol).

More than 3000 persons were killed in the attacks, including the passengers and crew members of the four airliners, the 19 men who overtook them, and more than 400 police officers and firefighters. Another 6000 persons were injured.

In the face of this massacre, many people found solace in places of worship. We gathered to draw strength from sacred writings, songs of faith, and the companionship of other grieving souls. For some people, faith in God was shattered. But most people fell back on some notion of faith in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks and massacre.

What happened to the nation that was moved to prayerful reflection in its sorrow? What happened to the belief that our people should trust God for strength to persevere, heal and grieve? What happened to the idea that we should trust God for wisdom on how to respond to acts of religious fanaticism? What happened to respect for and hospitality to immigrants, aliens and strangers? What happened to respect for religious diversity and justice? What happened to being people committed to peacemaking?

The nation that prayed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist massacre soon put aside faithfulness to truth and justice. We heard and heeded voices who urged us to dismiss as unrealistic or simply politically unpopular the divine mandate that we show hospitality to immigrants, respect for human and religious diversity, and commitment to fairness. Like the Hebrews who constructed a golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai, people in the United States turned from following the God of all comfort, love, peace, justice and

mercy.

However, the idol we turned to was not a golden calf. Fifteen years after the September 11, 2001 massacre, the sad truth we must face is that our idols became fear and war.

Within weeks of September 11, fear-mongering political leaders in Washington introduced and hurriedly enacted the USA Patriot Act. That law allowed for indefinite detention of immigrants. It permitted law enforcement officers to enter and search a private home or business without the knowledge or consent of the owner or occupant. It authorized the issuance of National Security Letters that allow the FBI to search telephone, email and financial records without a court order. The USA Patriot Act exposed us as people eager to worship fear.

Operation Iraqi Freedom also exposed our “golden calf” of war, as national leaders unwisely committed the nation to wage war against the government of Iraq. Fifteen years after September 11, the world knows the United Nations weapons inspectors spoke truth when they declared that there were no “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq. Fifteen years after September 11, we have yet to confess to God, the people of Iraq, the military personnel who served in Iraq, and the families of those killed and permanently scarred physically, emotionally and morally because of their involvement with Operation Iraqi Freedom, that we sacrificed their lives and moral wholeness on the altar of a false god.

Operation Iraqi Freedom did not help us find the Al Qaeda leaders who masterminded and ordered the September 11 massacre. It merely enriched defense contractors, weapons suppliers, fed our misguided sense about “national security,” and left Iraq destabilized politically, economically, and socially.

According to a paper authored by Professor Neta Crawford of Brown University, as of August 2016 the United States has already appropriated, spent or obligated itself to spend more than \$3.6 trillion in current dollars on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan,

Pakistan and Syria and on Homeland Security (2001 thru fiscal year 2016). The Defense and State Departments have combined requests of more than \$65 billion more dollars as dedicated war spending for the next fiscal year (2017). Another \$32 billion is requested by the Department of Homeland Security for 2017. When these amounts are added to the estimated future spending needed to provide medical care and disability benefits to veterans, the total U.S. budgetary cost of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria reaches \$4.79 trillion.[1] That money will not be spent on education, homelessness, roads and bridges, research on curing preventable illnesses and injuries, or improve our environment.

The USA Patriot Act and Operation

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### *Our “God Drama” resulted in our holding children of God in prison camps at Guantanamo, Cuba, and in CIA prisons around the world.*

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Iraqi Freedom are examples of our “God Drama.” As the lesson from Exodus 32 about the Hebrews who constructed a golden calf demonstrates, humans will manufacture idols rather than trust divine grace and truth. We are easily manipulated to fear and demonize others rather than treat them as other children of God.

The “God Drama” that produced the USA Patriot Act causes people to believe politicians who urge us to fear, distrust and mistreat children of God who are followers of Islam. The “God Drama” that produced Operation Iraqi Freedom blinds us from confessing that the victims of the September 11 massacre were not honored when our government kidnapped and held people without charging them with any crimes or providing them with

trials.

Our “God Drama” resulted in our holding children of God in prison camps at Guantanamo, Cuba, and in CIA prisons around the world.

Our “God Drama” led us to pretend to not know, and later act as if we do not care, that our society permitted government agents to mistreat other children of God by using “enhanced interrogation measures” such as water boarding, sleep deprivation and other torture techniques. We have seen over the past 15 years what happens when a society casts aside faith in the God of love, truth, justice, mercy, peace and hope and builds idols of fear and war because of “God Drama.”

The lesson from Psalm 14 also challenges us to ponder what happens morally to people who cast aside faith in divine love, truth, justice, peace, joy and hope. According to the Psalmist, people who reject faith in God also behave as if they are not morally accountable. Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” They are corrupt; they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good... Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the LORD? (Ps. 14:1, 4)

Fifteen years after the September 11 massacre, we have yet to demonstrate the humility to confess that the USA Patriot Act was corrupt. We have yet to show the humility required to confess that the war in Iraq was abominable. We may never know how many hundreds of thousands Iraqi civilians have been injured or killed. We have yet to admit we sinned against the people of Iraq by deliberately committing war—murder on a national scale—against a nation that did not threaten us and was never implicated in the September 11, 2001 massacre. [2]

Do we have the humility to admit we sinned against the people who died and were wounded in that war, no matter where they were from? Do we have the humility to admit we sinned against God? Or are we so morally compromised as a society that we do

not recognize the willful refusal to confess the sinful consequences of our “God Drama?”

Whether we find it comfortable or not, the Psalmist declares that there are painful consequences for the moral foolishness of rejecting the God of love, truth, justice, peace, mercy and hope and behaving as if there is no god. Those consequences affect the most vulnerable people in a society—described in Psalm 14 by the term “the poor”—first and always. But the consequences do not stop with those who are most vulnerable. “God Drama” impacts everyone and everything in a society one way or another. Recall the \$4.9 trillion figure I mentioned earlier. That debt will hang over the heads of our children, their children and their children!

The Exodus lesson also shows that our “God Drama” grieves God. Recall that interesting conversation between God and Moses when God speaks of the Hebrew people liberated from Egypt with exasperation. The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people [notice they are not ‘my people’], whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now leave me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.’ [Ex. 32:7-11] This passage suggests that when our “God Drama” leads us to substitute the God of justice for idols God has

drama!

The Psalmist was, in like manner, obviously grieved by the societal impact of what I am calling “God drama.” Yet, he did not end his song with despair. The Psalmist was comforted by the belief that God is with the company of the righteous. You would confound the plans of the poor but the LORD is their refuge [Ps. 14:5-6]. The Psalmist concluded his reflection in prayerful hope. O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad [Ps. 14:7].

God knows and cares about us! God is not through with us! God has not abandoned us! God will deliver us, somehow! God can restore us, somehow! God will correct us, some-

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***Our God Drama does not trump God's grace!  
Our God Drama does not trump God's truth!  
Our God Drama does not and will not trump God's justice and mercy!***

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how! The Psalmist bet his future on faith that God's love for us is tested, but ultimately not overcome, by our God Drama!

Our God Drama does not trump God's grace! Our God Drama does not trump God's truth! Our God Drama does not and will not trump God's justice and mercy!

Yes, we have God Drama! Yes, our God Drama conduct produces painful

consequences to us and grieves God! However, our God Drama does not and will not cancel God's love for us. God has a future for us brighter than our God Drama. Let us affirm and live in the power of this truth on this anniversary of the September 11 massacre, and always.

Amen. ■

[1] See paper by Neta C. Crawford at [http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/](http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2016/Costs%20of%20War%20through%202016%20FINAL%20final%20v2.pdf)Costs%20of%20War%20through%202016%20FINAL%20final%20v2.pdf.

[2] A measure of the moral injury from our God Drama is U.S. disregard for the death and suffering inflicted on the Iraqi civilian population by the war in Iraq. The most conservative estimate is that 150,000 civilians were killed in direct violence. However, that number does not include civilians killed (some estimates put this number at equal or higher than the death toll estimated from direct violence) from indirect causes, including those who have died due to lack of medical attention and disruption of the health care system that pre-dated the war. See <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/iraqi>.

*A sermon preached on September 11, 2016 (Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost) at the New Millennium Church, Little Rock, Arkansas (9 a.m. service) and First Presbyterian Church, Little Rock, Arkansas (11 a.m. service). Wendell Griffen is a member of the Board of Directors of Christian Ethics Today, pastor of New Millennium Church, and Circuit Judge at Sixth Judicial District of Arkansas, Fifth Division*

# Clergy for a New Drug Policy

By Martin E. Marty

When was the last time any of us read of a war being over? The War in Afghanistan? The Culture War(s)? The War on Poverty? For all we know, factions may still be seething over issues, such as they were, in the Thirty Years' War or (we'll raise you 70) the Hundred Years' War. So it is startling to read, as we do now with some frequency, that the "War on Drugs" is over. Look out the window at the overcrowded prisons housing addicts and drug dealers, penal colonies which grow every year, and it's hard to believe that the "war" is over. This is so especially because in many jurisdictions law-enforcement powers keep arresting and confining ever more addicts with no alternative.

The War on Drugs over? Could this be because we have run out of people to arrest and imprison? Have we run out of publics which remain ready to prosecute the war by filling the prisons? Hardly. As Alexander E. Sharp (MDiv '96) reminds readers in an article in *The Christian Century* whose title sounds optimistic ("After the War on Drugs"), our nation has spent over \$3 trillion waging that war since 1971. Manya Brachear Pashman reported in the *Chicago Tribune* over a year ago that Federal Prison populations had ballooned from 25,000 in 1980 to 219,000 in 2013 and that "[r]ecidivism also escalated as criminal records prevented many ex-offenders from securing employment or housing." The War on Drugs over?

Sharp, Brachear Pashman, and many other google-able reporters are describing what creative people are doing now because they see that enforcement has not lowered but, instead, added to the prison

populations. Our experiences here at *Sightings* do not qualify us to be "war correspondents" or experts on drugs. What draws us to this topic is the fervor and imagination with which clergy in many denominations, beginning with Unitarian Universalists, have recognized that the war is lost, and that new strategies are needed. Several of the writers agree, or report on those who observe, that it is counterintuitive for religious leaders (who join with social workers, some law enforcement agencies, and citizens of goodwill in general) to provide safe havens for addicts. The visionaries are also lobbying legislators to effect changes in approaches so as better to deal with addiction and its attendant ills.

Pastor Sharp, a longtime activist on social-justice fronts, describes successful programs like Vancouver's Insite, the first legal, supervised injection center, where addicts come for clean needles, at least minimal medical care, company, counsel, and steps toward new lives—something the policy of imprisonment almost never has done. In Vancouver, the drop-ins at Insite are observed by experts to minimize injury as they shoot up. Then the visitors go from stalls to a lounge area, then to a detox unit, and often to an 18-bed, long-term recovery unit. Sharp reports on the spread of experiments to other cities, and notes that there are significant declines in recidivism where these Insite-type efforts are made.

Such units follow a "four-pillar" approach, which the pioneering psychiatric nurse Liz Evans developed with colleagues. "We demonized drug users," says Evans; something else was needed, an approach that does not say

"people are bad because they are making wrong decisions." Heroin use and addiction to painkillers have killed 78 people each day in the United States under the old War on Drugs model. Writes Sharp: "a fundamental shift in policy is under way—a shift toward a more humane and hopeful policy." The problem afflicts families, churches, campuses, farm communities, and small towns as much as inner cities.

Many mistakes will be made along the way in pursuit of a new policy, but Pastor Sharp and his hopeful counterparts are clear about their "counterintuitive" yet humane vision. They can count on much clergy support, because priests, ministers, and rabbis are on the front line and frustrated by the futility of the War on Drugs. They support the fourth pillar in the new approach, "harm reduction." ■

## Resources

- Brachear Pashman, Manya. "Clergy join push to legalize marijuana in mission of social justice." *Chicago Tribune*. June 2, 2015.
- Sharp, Rev. Alexander E. "Ending the Drug War and Saving Lives." *The Huffington Post*. October 6, 2015.
- "The War on drugs failed. What now?" *The Christian Century*. August 30, 2016

*Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago Divinity School. His biography, publications, and contact information can be found at [www.memarty.com](http://www.memarty.com). This article is reprinted with permission.*



# Like Katy Perry, I broke up with the conservative evangelical project

By Brian D. McLaren

**I**n evangelical families like the one I grew up in, conservative meant good and liberal meant evil. We conservatives were on “God’s side,” and “they” were of the devil. That’s what many of us were taught and that’s what we believed. Many still believe it.

Katy Perry comes from the same conservative evangelical background I do. That may come as a surprise to anyone who saw her singing in places like the Democratic National Convention and speaking in support of Hillary Clinton. (Attending such events is not on the bucket list of anyone from our background.)

I don’t know the details of Perry’s breakup with political conservatism, but I spent over 20 years as an evangelical pastor, and the more deeply I engaged with the life and teaching of Jesus at the heart of my faith, the less enamored I became with the political project to which evangelicalism was giving its soul. I felt increasingly out of sync with an evangelical community more concerned with conservative politics than the compassion of Christ.

How else do we explain why nearly 80 percent of white evangelicals currently embrace the candidacy of Donald Trump, whose way of life and values could not be more opposite to their own? How else can we explain their visceral disgust with Hillary Clinton who, whatever her flaws, is a committed Methodist Christian who grew up in Sunday school, started out as a young Republican, and was drawn into social justice concerns through the influence of a youth pastor? Katy Perry and Donald Trump ... They’ve got me thinking about

10 reasons I have had to part company with the Conservative Evangelical Project:

1. I want to associate with people who are respectful and treat others, even their opponents, with basic human decency and civility.

Too many conservative leaders have become increasingly disrespectful to the point of being rude, crude and mean-spirited. It’s become impossible to ignore — from Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., shouting “You lie!” during the

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*I felt increasingly out of sync with an evangelical community more concerned with conservative politics than the compassion of Christ.*

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president’s State of the Union address to Donald Trump reaching historic lows with name-calling, crude insults, genital braggadocio, and violent rhetoric.

2. I can’t support regressive thinking that longs for a time when life was worse for nearly everybody except people like me.

Whether you like President Barack Obama or not, former religious right activist Frank Schaeffer told the ugly truth about contemporary conservatism: It has carried out a vicious “slow motion lynching” of our first African-American president. Today’s conservatives have been undermining voting rights for minorities, vilifying immigrants, scapegoating LGBTQ people, and resurrecting white privilege and white supremacy to maintain systemic

injustice. One simple word in Trump’s campaign slogan — “again” — harkens back to a time of deep discrimination against everyone who doesn’t look like or pray like me.

3. I won’t be pandered to or manipulated based on religious self-interest or bigotry.

Today’s conservatives support a frightening array of proposals that go against our Constitution’s call for “equal protection”: banning people from entering the country based on religion, mass surveillance of communities based on religion and creating registries of people based on religion.

4. I am drawn to policies that support conquering poverty, not perpetuating it.

When I began to understand the complex causes and conditions that trap people in poverty, I better understood the need for quality education, nutrition, health care, child care, occupational safety, fair pay, racial equity, and public transportation. I became increasingly drawn to leaders who work to reduce poverty by reducing teen pregnancy, addiction, family breakdown, domestic violence, gangs, mass incarceration, and untreated mental illnesses. In short, the more I became committed to poverty reduction, the more I saw how conservatism keeps people trapped in poverty.

5. I cannot support the massive transfer of wealth from the poor and middle classes to the rich.

Conservatives often complain that liberals want to transfer wealth, but the fact is, for decades conservatives have supported a massive transfer of wealth to those who need it least. They have long promised that if we just help the rich through tax cuts, deregulation, and undermining worker rights, the benefits would “trickle down” to the rest of us. When

I was younger, I was naive enough to believe this kind of voodoo economics, but with age I've come to see that all that actually trickles down is a toxic slurry of pollution, unemployment, crumbling infrastructure and economic inequality that is pummeling Americans, regardless of race or religion.

6. I have grown so tired of being misinformed and manipulated about abortion.

Here are the facts: Abortion rates went up under former Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, then down under Bill Clinton, remained level during George W. Bush and have fallen about 13 percent during the Obama administration. There were 29 abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44 in the Reagan years, and the number has dropped to 16 today. As evangelical-born writer Rachel Held Evans has said, criminalizing abortion only reduces its safety, not its incidence.

The conservative culture war on abortion has failed. Its "baby-killer/women-hater" rhetoric has polarized and paralyzed us for decades. If we want to reduce abortion, we must focus on policies that have been proven to do so: better education, health care, and wages — which, it turns out, are policies that also improve women's lives and strengthen families.

7. I care about the health of the earth.

My faith leads me to support environmental policies that build a cleaner, more sustainable and ultimately more profitable future. When I hear conservative candidates talk about shutting down the Environmental Protection Agency and getting rid of government regulations that protect the environment, I wonder how many more Flint-style water crises there will be, how many more Gulf oil spill disasters there will be, how many more inches (or feet!) the sea will rise, and how much national and global instability will result. I'm no fan of big government, but conservatives argue for shrinking government to a size that it can no longer hold big business accountable as it plunders our one and

only beautiful planet earth for short-term profit and long-term disaster.

8. I won't feed terrorism.

Too few conservatives seem to understand the simple strategy of terrorism: use inexpensive, unpredictable, and highly visible attacks to instill fear among rich and powerful nations to entice them to bankrupt themselves financially and morally through endless and unwinnable wars. When conservatives advocate for "bomb the hell out of them," "waterboarding" and "carpet-bombing" strategies to beat terrorism, they are foolishly marching us right into the trap the terrorists have set.

9. I am sincerely concerned about Trump's base.

A good friend of mine, a Trump supporter, said this to me the other day: "Whatever you think of Trump, white men like me feel like we've lost a lot. We're everybody's whipping boy. We're tired of being disrespected. Trump gets that." I think there are millions of Americans, many of them white and working class, who feel like my friend. Their jobs were shipped overseas. They've been hurt by an economy that aggregates wealth at the very top. They've fallen between the cracks of a dysfunctional Congress so divided that it gets next to nothing done. Sadly, beyond stirring them up with angry speeches, once Trump gets what he wants from them — their vote — he'll leave them even worse off and therefore angrier. We need actual policies that will help them build a better future, not vain promises about returning to the past.

10. I believe in the power of love, not the love of power.

I understand that millions of Americans are pumped up by Trump's talk about being tough, his "punch him in the face" bluster, his disgust with a free press, and his glib praise of dictators and torture. But my faith leads me to see true greatness in service and true power in love, self-control, and neighborliness — not domination, reactivity, and revenge. Trump's love of power may have served him well in business and enter-

tainment, but in political leadership, it will be his Achilles' heel, and his reactivity and lack of humility will make him chaotic and dangerous.

Not only that, but supporting a crude, angry, unaccountable and self-indulgent leader sets a terrible example for our children and grandchildren. And if conservatives reward Trump with a victory, can you imagine what the next generation of conservative politicians will be like?

Listen, I don't always agree with everything that goes under the label of progressive, and progressives need to be way more effective at communicating and implementing their best ideas. But I cannot support any party or candidate — local, state, federal or presidential — characterized by mean-spiritedness, bigotry, unfairness, carelessness toward the poor, funneling wealth to the richest, undermining abortion reduction, destroying our fragile planet, playing into the hands of terrorists, exploiting the anger of suffering people, and being driven more by the love of power than the power of love.

Any one or two of these reasons would have been sufficient to lead me away from voting conservative. All of them together make me a consistent and passionate progressive voter in this election, win or lose ... not in spite of my Christian faith, but because of it.

To all who come from the conservative evangelical heritage Katy Perry and I share, I would say this: Your pastors, parents, or radio/TV preachers may not grant you permission to break up with conservatism, but you have it anyway.

Permission is granted by your conscience. ■

*Brian McLaren is an author, speaker, and networker among innovative faith leaders. His fifteenth book, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, was released September 2016. He is an Auburn Senior Fellow and board chair of Convergence Network. This article first appeared on Religion News Service on September 16, 2016 and is reprinted with permission.*

***A prayer written in the last year of his earthly life***

*Eternal God, who changes not, abide with me, for the shadows of the closing day are gathering around me. Let me see the dawning of a new day. Grant me the patience to bear the pain and limitations of old age. As I grow older, family and friends depart. Friends from my Christmas list and the school directories depart. I write "deceased" by their names.*

*Save me, oh Lord, from being a helpless and useless old man. So teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom in the twilight of my life. Strengthen my faith as I approach my Great Transition from this world to the world without end, and from which no traveler returns. When I walk through the valley of death, let me not walk alone but in your loving presence.*

*Amen*

...by Henlee Barnette

**from *Homely Joys: Prayers, Poems, and Barbs*  
by Henlee Barnette and James Barnette**

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# Trump's "Truthful Hyperbole" & Christianity's "Money Cult"

by Gary Moore

"Exaggeration is the language of the Devil."  
Norman Mailer *The Gospel According To the Son*

During recent decades, this investment advisor/Christian financial author has increasingly felt my clients and readers are adrift on a sea of illusions, primarily as everyone was listening to entertaining politicians and televangelists rather than thoughtful or boring economists. I'd about decided to retire and stop writing as I thought Jesus himself could no longer help most Christians know the truth that America is vastly wealthy, even if we don't steward it very well for most. Then I received an olive branch of hope regarding truth. I wish it was from a Christian source but it was my current issue of *The Economist* magazine.

The cover story was entitled: "The Art of the Lie: Post-truth politics in the age of social media." That's obviously a play on Donald Trump's tweeting and book entitled *The Art of the Deal*. In that book, Mr. Trump enthused, when he should have confessed: "I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole." Dictionary.com defines hyperbole as "intentional exaggeration." Before it became politically correct, we called it lies. Of course, we've all heard you can tell politicians are lying as it's when they're moving their lips. What's new these days is that we'd add "or when tweeting." For even GOP Senator Ted Cruz has said that when Mr. Trump lies, he doesn't even know it as he's immoral.

*The Economist* article began: "Consider how far Donald Trump is estranged from fact. He inhabits a fantastical realm where Barack Obama's birth certificate was faked, the president founded Islamic

State (IS), the Clintons are killers and the father of a rival was with Lee Harvey Oswald before he shot John F. Kennedy... Once, the purpose of political lying was to create a false view of the world. The lies of men like Mr. Trump do not work like that. They are not intended to convince the elites, whom their voters neither trust nor like, but to reinforce prejudices. Feelings, not facts, are what matter in this sort of campaigning." The article included a chart that showed the more people believe conspiracy theories, the more they support Mr. Trump. It might have suggested his intentional exaggerations are more popular than checked by evangelical leaders preaching "prosperity theology," a popular new media-centered cult-teaching that exaggerates what the Bible promises financially. The parallels between the new age theology and modern political/economy are frightening.

I studied political science in college and am a long-time Republican turned registered Independent. I may yet consider it my moral duty to abstain from this election. So I initially thought *The Economist* should have balanced its article by commenting on Hillary Clinton's possibly poor recollections of Whitewater, Benghazi and emails. But then I realized I was reading an economic publication and even I couldn't think of a major economic exaggeration by Mrs. Clinton, despite the fact most Americans have a habit of voting their wallets. True, during the relatively light recession preceding the election of 1992, I strongly disagreed when Governor Clinton adopted the dispiriting campaign theme of "The economy stupid." Due to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, I was writing our economy might enjoy a peace dividend and America's real problems were spiritual and moral. From what I had heard about Governor Clinton's sexual appetite, I didn't think he would help with that. Of course, most voters didn't care so "I did not have sex with that woman"

entered our political lexicon, alongside Republican "hyperbole" such as "I am not a crook" and "Read my lips."

Governor Clinton was simply playing to what voters were feeling, ironically often due to politically conservative evangelical leaders. The book-of-the-year in evangelical Christianity in 1992 was about a "coming economic earthquake" that would soon devastate America due to our five trillion dollar federal debt. Written by a one-time friend and evangelical media celebrity who is now deceased, it was a classic example of how evangelical leaders have baptized grossly exaggerated economic hyperbole, and hurt innocent evangelicals in the process. Millions were further hurt as my friend baptized "trickle down" libertarian economic philosophy when he wrote: "As cruel as it may sound, from the long-term perspective of the economy, it would be better to raise taxes on the poor than on the wealthy." Biblically challenged, that could still be why GOP politicians have complained half of lower-income Americans pay no taxes but Mr. Trump says it is "smart" when billionaires like himself don't.

Such exaggerations of biblical concepts, and common sense, have also further divided the Church. My friend and mentor the legendary mutual fund manager Sir John Templeton taught us that when my friend wrote his book, America's federal debt to GDP ratio, the most commonly watched indicator, was actually about one-fourth of what it was at the end of World War Two, and one-eighth of what it was in Great Britain at that time. At the same time, credit card debt, which evangelical leaders also demonize, was about 1% of our nation's assets. But when I suggested those leaders were straining economic gnats while swallowing camels by ignoring rising inequality and unethical conduct on Wall Street, I was "shunned," to use an Amish term. An associate of my friend publicly called me a "tool of Satan." When evangelical

leaders later grossly exaggerated Y2K, I again wrote books and articles to help the confused and despondent. I was further shunned.

My books and articles usually encouraged less selfishness, or more social responsibility, on the part of Wall Street investors. Socially responsible investing is one of the fastest growing movements on Wall Street as its firms and academic research has suggested ethics may even produce superior returns. But again, the most popular evangelical financial leaders have actually *discouraged* ethics when investing. Some say it just doesn't matter. Most have argued ethics will cost us money. That alone explains what many "values voters" have truly valued despite Moses teaching managing one's wealth in a socially responsible fashion is a matter of life and death (Exodus 21:28). Many evangelicals still ignore such teachings as prosperity gospel is about "your best life now" while the Bible says salvation in the next world is a matter of having fulfilled our social responsibilities to the poor, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and helping the imprisoned (Matthew 25).

We punish ourselves when we preach cultural exaggerations rather than biblical truths. Twenty-five years after the earthquake book, most economists have seen little evidence of any tremors caused by the federal debt. Most agree it was actually the huge debt of Wall Street institutions, which troubled no evangelical financial pundit I'm aware of, which ignited the Great Recession as "liar loans," also ignored by evangelical pundits, imploded in the mortgage market. It was largely bailing Wall Street out of those lies and exaggerated leverage that caused Washington to take on even more debt. Yet a recent article in *Christianity Today*, to which I contributed, quoted an assistant professor of *political science* as saying it is "consensus" that the federal debt is a giant in our children's promised land. That is anything but true. Even the past chair of Wheaton's *economics* department wrote a book about how evangelical leaders exaggerated fears over debt.

So most evangelicals still feel Mr. Trump is correct to continue demonizing the federal debt. That's particularly

ironic, and double-minded. Mr. Trump himself says his real estate empire has been built on borrowing OPM, or other people's money, including millions from his father. And a recent report by the Petersen Institute, perhaps America's severest critic of the debt, said Mr. Trump's Reagan-like policies of large tax cuts for the wealthy combined with increased military spending would be "horribly destructive." David Stockman was President Reagan's budget director and warned such policies would cause the debt to balloon during the eighties. He has just written: "***What is profoundly disappointing about the Trump campaign's stab at a semi-coherent economic plan is that it is a dog's breakfast of some plausible policy ideas, really bad fiscal math and a relapse to the discredited, 35-year-old dogma of sweeping income tax cuts which pay for themselves. They don't.***"

If Mr. Stockman wasn't a Trump supporter, I expect he would have closed with "Fool me once..." For most economists agree Mr. Trump's warmed-over policies from the eighties will add another ten trillion dollars to the nearly twenty we owe today, creating a thirty trillion dollar debt for our children. Economists at the IMF have suggested that's the limit of our government's borrowing ability. But spiritually it's impoverishing. It only took five trillion of debt to cause evangelical leaders to feel and preach the end was near twenty-five years ago. If you've read *American Apocalypse* you know evangelical leaders, and televangelists in particular, habitually preach the end is near. That is simply their worldview. And it takes a lot of money to buy media time. So after disgraced televangelist Jim Bakker went to prison, he called resetting the doomsday clock a great fundraising tool. It's likely one reason many haven't saved for retirement and such. Yet somehow, prosperity theology was also supposed to guarantee wealth in this world. The irony is the same leaders are usually so double-minded they often raise money for institutional improvements that will serve their ministries far into the future. The past thirty years of increasing theology and political hyperbole suggest double-mindedness rather

than holistic thinking simply contributes to a sluggish economy and growing inequality as wages stagnate for ordinary Americans but asset values rise for the wealthy.

Fortunately, there is good reason to believe Mr. Trump himself knows his policy proposals are simply more intentional exaggeration intended to appeal to those disenfranchised by three decades of trickle-up economics. Mr. Trump hosted an economic special in 2011 on The Discovery Channel. After criticizing those who considered America to be an economic weakling, ***Mr. Trump estimated America's net wealth, after all debts are repaid to foreigners, as being \$280 trillion.*** Though exaggerated, that sounds pretty "great" to me. The last budget of President George W. Bush's White House estimated our net wealth at about half of that. Yet it still said our net debt was "relatively small" given the size of our assets. So I assume the businessman Trump was simply exaggerating to convince upper middle-class Discovery Channel viewers that they could afford his luxury condos, high-end golf courses, foreign-made clothes, and ostentatious casinos and hotels.

But now that he's a politician trying to appeal to the disenfranchised voter, he's lamenting the state of our economy, demonizing the debt and suggesting only he can fix our problems, a humanistic claim if there ever was one. But he might just be right for his supporters. All he'd have to do to make America's economy "great again," at least in their minds, is to confess the numbers he shared in his television special. Ideally, he'd also confess they are exaggerated. But that's not the style of Mr. Trump. Major financial publications have long said Mr. Trump has grossly exaggerated his own wealth, a likely reason voters will never see his tax returns.

Politics being the polarizing force it is in post-Christian America, most evangelicals will never warm to Mrs. Clinton. The irony is that she's a life-long Methodist, perhaps America's first evangelicals, who has taught Sunday school, as her mother did. (I am an Evangelical Lutheran, an even older form of evangelicalism.) And a lead editorial in *The*

*Wall Street Journal* by a former religion editor of *Newsweek* recently said Mrs. Clinton, “is by far the more religious candidate. What’s more, hers is the more religious political party.” He went on to explain Methodists believe public service is a form of ministry and Mrs. Clinton has long consulted the *Methodist Book of Resolutions*, the denomination’s official book of social and political positions. The editorial, entitled “The Democrats’ Methodist Moment” described how Democratic platforms have reflected Methodist positions since the 1972 campaign of George McGovern, the son of a Methodist minister who studied for ministry at a Methodist college. I’d add the Methodists were pioneers of the socially responsible investing movement, which routinely warned about liar loans. So in a very real way, America’s bi-polar politics is largely a result of new-age evangelicals disagreeing with traditional evangelicals.

I didn’t know that twenty-five years ago when I detoured through today’s evangelical subculture after my first book was picked up by an evangelical publisher. It troubled me for a while that I couldn’t think like these new evangelicals. But evangelical scholars from Mark Noll, author of *The Scandal of The Evangelical Mind*, Os Guinness and Chuck Colson have helped me understand today’s evangelicals don’t think as much as feel. *Christianity Today* has written about how biblically ignorant most evangelicals are. Still, it’s been a mystery to me how any evangelical leader remotely familiar with biblical financial teachings feel they should embrace an obviously nominal Christian who’s only qualification for office seems to be that he inherited a small fortune that borrowing and trickle-up asset inflation turned into a larger fortune. It’s even been estimated that had Mr. Trump simply invested his inheritance into an S&P 500 index fund, he’d have more money than even he now claims. And of course, there’s the matter of his bankruptcies, which he has described as personally enriching business strategies but the Bible calls “evil” when loans could be repaid (Psalm 37:21).

So I’ve been wading through another scholarly book entitled *The Money Cult*.

It essentially explains why few of us can even imagine televangelist and best-selling author Joel Osteen—or Paula White, a leading televangelist, prosperity theologian and Trump supporter—holding a Bible aloft at the beginning of a show and stating they believe it says anyone who would be a disciple of Christ must give up all of his or her possessions (Luke 14:33). If asked, they’d rationalize that is simply encouraging generous giving in order to achieve a hundred fold financial return in this world. But Jesus’ disciples, St. Francis and Mother Teresa took that teaching quite literally.

Of course, we financial advisors also quote that passage as often as Mr. Trump tells his disciples to love their enemies. Yet no financial planner reasonably familiar with the Bible swears he takes it all literally before presenting a financial plan to Christians. We know the Bible forbids the earning of interest from fellow believers and our faith taught that until Protestant Reformers liberalized the teaching, legitimating banking and capitalism for Christians ***Still, if televangelists would simply acknowledge such biblical teachings, it might help evangelicals understand they may be socially and politically conservative but they also take more liberties with biblical economic teachings than any Christians in history. The humbling truth that we’ve all fallen short by taking liberties with the Bible might help reunite the Church. Maybe our nation and world.***

Perhaps even politics. Disenfranchised voters who long for a leader of the people might prefer candidates more like Moses, who the Bible describes as the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3) and the poor shepherd-boy David. With all their human flaws, they knew the abundant life requires both virtue and government, not one or the other. We might then grasp that when St. Paul asked us to be “of one mind,” he wasn’t asking us to agree about all matters of political-economy. As C.S. Lewis also said, when God told us to feed the poor, God did not give us recipes. Paul was primarily asking us to avoid being as double-minded as many evangelical leaders have become today by compartment-

talizing our faith and culture rather than integrating them. Paul knew we can’t prosper spiritually and financially amid the confusion of politicians and televangelists speaking the language of the Devil while claiming to speak for God, who told us we can’t worship both God and Mammon. Again quoting Lewis, when we shoot for heaven, we get earth thrown in; but when we shoot for earth, we get neither.

I grew convinced of that when I served on the board of televangelist Robert Schuller’s Hour of Power. It was the world’s most viewed at that time. When I first met Dr. Schuller, he challenged my financial advisors cannot afford to be optimists, we must be realists. He usually disagreed when I asked him to be more realistic about finances. After I left the board, I was pained but not surprised when the ministry fell into bankruptcy. That could be important for televangelists to understand at this time in history. As described in *The Money Cult*, Dr. Schuller was mentored by Normal Vincent Peale. Mr. Trump has said Dr. Peale’s “positive thinking,” which Dr. Schuller called “possibility thinking,” has been a major contributor to his growing wealthier. The bankruptcy tells me we need more realistic thinking in Washington, on Wall Street and among prosperity theologians.

*The Economist* might agree. It concluded its article by prophesying: “Whatever Mr. Trump comes up with next [which fact-checkers agree was confessing the birther conspiracy he led for years was another lie just before adding the exaggeration that the conspiracy was started by Mrs. Clinton], with or without him in the White House, post-truth politics will be with us for some time to come.” In language some might better understand, Mr. Trump could be a sign that the end of biblical and traditional Christianity is near indeed. ■

**Gary Moore** is the Founder of The Financial Seminary. He **has forty years of Wall Street experience and has written many books and articles on religious approaches to political-economy and personal finance. He lives and works in Lakewood Ranch, Florida.**

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## Incoming.....Letters to the Editor

*Pat, for almost 25 years now I have enjoyed reading every issue of Christian Ethics Today. I wish every person in America could read it. Keep up your good work. Continued good wishes.*

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*Dr. Anderson,*

*I just read the opening article in the Spring 2016 issue by professor Sider....and I must say I was quite disappointed...The article was nothing more than a commercial for Hillary Clinton...God does not use the same criteria that we do in choosing people to serve Him. Mr. Trump may be one of those He would choose. I have no doubt that Mrs. Clinton is not....I would hope that in the future...you would only print articles that lead us to use the Bible as our guide in making decisions...Please don't use this magazine as a political platform for candidates that go against what God teaches. Sincerely,*

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*I appreciate Christian Ethics Today. I share it with others in my church. Your articles give insight into issues which I don't get elsewhere. Thanks.*

Fort Collins, CO

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*I lean to the right of your positions, but find most articles stimulating. Sincerely.*

Poncha Springs, CO

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*Christian Ethics Today is the only thing that keeps me "sane" in this political season.*

Tallahassee, FL

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*Dear Editor Anderson:*

*On page 23 of your Spring 2016 issue, you requested people to let you know if they enjoy receiving the periodical.... We so enjoy receiving Christian Ethics Today. It's a pleasure to tell you so...*

*Cordially Yours,*

Library Director, Covenant Theological Seminary.

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*Thank you for the good work you do.*

Rosenberg, TX

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*Dear Friends:*

*I am currently being held on Death Row at Parchman... I am writing you today to let you know how much your magazine means to us here on The Row. I pass it around and it rarely fails to produce a quality discussion. Thank you... I would like to continue to receive Christian Ethics Today. I am sorry I do not have any money to contribute at this time. Thank you for everything.*

*Peace is only in Jesus...*

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

## MISSION

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

## PURPOSES

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

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

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

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."

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation is a non-profit organization and has received a 501 (c) (3) status from the Internal Revenue Service. Gifts are tax deductible.

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## OUR ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBERS

Pat Anderson  
P.O. Box 1238  
Banner Elk, NC 28604

Office: (828) 387-2267  
Cell (863) 207-2050  
E-mail [Drpatanderson@gmail.com](mailto:Drpatanderson@gmail.com)

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