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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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Fortress or Sanctuary: Responses to Church Shootings¹

By Patrick Anderson, editor

If you are of a certain age like I am, you will remember the popular television show of the 1970s starring Carroll O’Conner as Archie Bunker. “All in the Family,” was the most popular program for several years and many millions of Americans watched it weekly. One of the memorable episodes featured Archie giving a response to a television editorial on the subject of gun control.²

The program’s huge popularity was due in large part to the writers’ penchant for dealing with the issues and problems facing Americans during the tumultuous 1970s. The daily headlines became fodder for each episode and comedy was the honey that helped the medicine go down. One such problem was airliner skyjacking, a too-frequent event in which an armed passenger would take control of the flight crew in midflight and force the pilot to reroute the plane to Cuba or some other destination by threatening to shoot the crew. In the television show’s rendition, a local television news station had aired an editorial blaming skyjacking on the proliferation of guns in America, and calling for stricter gun control.

Archie eagerly offered to give an opposing view, as fairness required, in a subsequent news program. The solution to the important issue of skyjacking, Archie said, was simple: “All you have to do is make sure everyone on the plane has a gun. Then when a skyjacker pulls out a rod, everybody else would pull out theirs and then the skyjacker would no longer have the advantage. You just pass out the guns as everyone gets on the plane and then take them back up when the plane lands. Case Closed.”

The opinion was both funny and believable. Archie’s philosophy has

more recently been stated as “The only solution to a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun,” the oft-quoted sentiment expressed by the National Rifle Association’s spokespersons. More guns in the hands of more Americans will cause less carnage. The presumption is that more good people than bad people would be armed. Of course the prospect of bullets flying around in a passenger jet while the armed “good guys” battle with the

If shooters tried to open fire at his church, Jeffress said, “they may get one shot off or two shots off, but that’s it — and that’s the last thing they’ll ever do in this life.”
Mercy.

armed “bad guys,” and the resulting plane crash was lost on Archie, and for a long time Archie’s proposed solution was not much more than a comic punchline.

The idea seems to epitomize the simplistic thinking many people are attracted to as solutions to complex problems. For a few years, well trained and armed federal air marshals were assigned to selected airline flights with the assignment to intervene in a skyjacking. The possible presence of air marshals on unnamed flights was well publicized with the intention being that skyjackers would be deterred by the possibility of their presence. The fact that sky marshals were trained to respond to an emergency without the use of a firearm was less well known. After all, even a bullet from

a sky marshal’s gun could pierce the fuselage and cause catastrophic damage.³ Eventually, enhanced passenger screening rendered the problem of skyjacking seemingly obsolete. But then the 9-11 skyjackers demonstrated that box-cutters were as effective as guns in taking over a plane.

The tragic and senseless massacre of worshippers at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas which left 26 persons dead and more than 20 injured has brought out the purveyors of easy answers. Not the least among them is Southern Baptist pastor, Robert Jeffress, of the historic First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas who told “Fox and Friends” that as many as half of the members of his congregation bring their firearms into the church each time they meet. If shooters tried to open fire at his church, Jeffress said, “they may get one shot off or two shots off, but that’s it — and that’s the last thing they’ll ever do in this life.” Mercy.

Imagine if you will, that tragic eventuality actually coming to pass at Jeffries’s church. Imagine the Sutherland Springs shooter, Devin Patrick Kelly, entering the sanctuary with a Ruger AR-556, the weapon of choice used in the rash of mass killings that have plagued America recently, and with a supply of 30-round magazines. That popular weapon is a variant of the AR-15, patterned after the standard-issue American military’s infantry weapon, the M-16. Manufactured by Sturm, Ruger and Company in Connecticut an estimated 5 million AR-15s are legally owned in America, and last year the company reported \$664 million in net sales.

But imagine in Pastor Jeffress’s fantasy a shooter with overwhelm-

ing fire power spraying rapid-fire bullets, mowing down worshippers in a bloody rampage. Imagine half the congregation pulling out their concealed handguns in the middle of that carnage and confusion. Hear the screams and see the people diving for cover. Imagine those armed worshippers, some well trained and experienced others not so much, trying to identify the source of the shooting if they can. Consider the thought processes going through the congregants' minds, both armed and unarmed, as they see hundreds of fellow worshippers with weapons drawn, seeking targets and shooting. Feel safer?

Imagine bullets flying from all angles as the gun-wielding congregants start shooting in an attempt to respond to the sights and sounds of bloodshed all around. How many shots do you imagine would be aimed at the shooter? How many would hit and how many would miss? How many would pass through the intended target and hit persons behind him? Imagine hundreds of bullets from guns all around the sanctuary in addition to the powerful AR-556 bullets, ricocheting off of the walls, striking people all around, adding more and more casualties. How many congregants would be killed by the hundreds of bullets fired by their fellow congregants? The original armed shooter may be one of the casualties, but at what cost?

Churches are no more likely to be targets of mass killing than any other place the public gathers. Indeed, the variety of venues for mass killing is one of the striking elements of the phenomenon. A night club in Orlando, an open-air concert in Las Vegas, a movie theater in Colorado, an elementary school in Connecticut all come to mind. But the carnage in houses of worship really troubles us. In the past 5 years we have been rocked by the shootings at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal

Church in Charleston, and now at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs. Additionally we have witnessed gunmen taking lives in a Mosque, a Jewish Center, and a Sikh Temple.

Yet it is helpful to know that mass killings in churches are really very rare, especially when one considers the tens of thousands of churches across our land both large and small. The non-profit Center for Homicide Research in Minneapolis calculated that churches experienced 147 shootings between 2006 and 2016. The overwhelming numbers of those shootings were non-fatal, and usually related to domestic abuse in one way

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or another. Only a handful resulted in multiple casualties. But the tragic death of helpless worshippers is a terrible, horrible possibility.

Nevertheless, the alarm among many church-goers is disproportionate to the actual likelihood of an assault by a gunman. Immediately after the Sutherland Springs massacre, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton told Fox News "We've had shootings in churches for [sic] forever. It's going to happen again, so we need people in churches – either professional security or at least arming some of the parishioners, or the congregation, so they can respond when something like this happens." Really? And Pastor Jeffress told the Fox viewers, "This is the world we're living in. We need to do

everything we can to keep our parishioners safe."

To follow Pastor Jeffress's (and other prominent pastors) and Attorney General Paxton's response, it appears their preferred course of action is for churches to become arsenals designed to provide protection for parishioners. Like Archie Bunker, they seem to think that whenever people gather, as many of them as possible should be armed, hoping that the "good guys" outnumber the "bad guys". It is easy to see how more guns benefit the gun and bullet manufacturers and dealers, and thus the NRA. But I fail to see how the church I attend would be a safer and more peaceful place of worship if half or more of my fellow worshippers were armed and loaded.

Actually, I am more afraid of the "good guys" than I am of the "bad guys." If half of the congregation where I worship were to be armed with loaded guns every week, every service, all the time...knowing what I know about human frailties, accidents, and misuse of deadly force I believe we would be more at risk than we would be from a shooter such as the one at Sutherland Springs. Indeed, the risk of a heavily armed shooter entering our house of worship seems akin to the likelihood of having a meteor strike our church during worship.

Nevertheless, a cottage industry has sprung up in which security companies offer consultation and products to churches seeking protection from shooters. Some denominations, church councils, lay leadership, and ministerial staff are wrestling with the concern expressed by some parishioners who feel at risk. Some churches, mega-churches primarily, already have armed security personnel on duty at church events. Few are like Pastor Jeffress's flock which appears to encourage members to arm themselves, or at least I think so. A friend in my hometown of Cedar Key, Florida told me that he is sure that

many people in the pew, including his own mother, carry loaded guns to church and everywhere else they go. Now I cannot help but speculate as to who is packing and who is not as I survey the congregation from my vantage point in the balcony or choir loft.

This is not a trivial matter, and I do not intend to address it as such. But if ever “what would Jesus do” came into play with Christians, attempts to self-protect ourselves from extremely unlikely bloody assaults in houses of worship from sudden, unexpected, heavily armed and armored, mentally unstable, substance affected persons seems to qualify.

Pastors have responded to the Sutherland Springs shooting in various ways. My friend, Wendell Griffen, shared this with me:

During worship last Sunday I opened the floor after the sermon for a conversation about reactions to FBC Sutherland Springs, TX. The responses were honest, moving, and thought-provoking. People shared their anger, sorrow, concern for the surviving people of FBC Sutherland Springs, and their feelings about the prospect of something like that happening to us. Two in our congregation mentioned concern for my safety.

I reminded our congregation that Jesus sent his first followers into the world “as lambs among wolves.” God knows there are ferocious people in the world. God knows we are concerned about them. But I told our worshippers that the key is not for the followers of Jesus to grow fangs and claws (and thus become wolves). Our directive from Jesus is to be alert (wise as serpents) and to be people who do not harm, but act as agents of healing. Jesus did not set Peter loose on the crowd Judas led to seize Jesus in Gethsemane. He told Peter to put his knife away, not to get a bigger one.

In efforts to calm frightened worshippers, we Christ-followers should be sure and do so without altering the basic premises upon which we gather

together to worship Jesus. I suggest that churches discussing whether or to what extent steps should be taken to assure the safety of congregants from the risks of shooters consider the following questions:

1. Are we truly and certainly at risk from these events? Statistically, we are more at risk from accidental firearms discharges than from terroristic church assault.

2. Can we take precautionary actions like identifying and ministering to persons in our extended church family who need help with medications or counseling or intervention our own church family?

3. Are we as a congregation ready

In efforts to calm frightened worshippers, we Christ-followers should be sure and do so without altering the basic premises upon which we gather together to worship Jesus.

and willing to have one or more of our fellow worshippers armed and ready to shoot and kill someone in our house of worship?

4. Are we as a congregation able and willing to have certain members trained and ready to respond to apparent and potential threats in non-confrontational ways that deescalate rather than inflame the crisis?

5. While considering armed resistance to shooters, can we also consider what would happen if a few persons would rush and subdue a shooter, even if they incur possible death or injury?

6. Can we put on the full armor of God, feel safe in the belief that God will protect us, rest secure in the loving arms of Jesus, and take our chances? Fortress or sanctuary? Which is it to be? ■

1 Thanks to John Tyler for reading an early draft of this essay and making valuable suggestions.

2 You can find that episode on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndETIVIsSHs>.

3 Two of the first sky marshals, both recent graduates of Texas Christian University where they had been linemen on the football team were friends of mine. Neither had any intention to shoot anyone; both believing they could subdue anybody anytime with brute strength and athleticism.

4 For instance, see: Man accidentally shoots himself and his wife at a church, shortly after a discussion on shootings http://wapo.st/2z8z2AJ?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.2a55dc99c8be

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My white friend asked me on Facebook to explain white privilege. I decided to be honest.

By Lori Lakin Hutcherson

Yesterday I was tagged in a post by an old high school friend asking me and a few others a very public, direct question about white privilege and racism. I feel compelled not only to publish his query, but also my response to it, as it may be a helpful discourse for more than just a few folks on Facebook.

Here's his post:

To all of my Black or mixed race FB friends, I must profess a blissful ignorance of this "White Privilege" of which I'm apparently guilty of possessing. By not being able to fully put myself in the shoes of someone from a background/race/religion/gender/nationality/body type that differs from my own makes me part of the problem, according to what I'm now hearing. Despite my treating everyone with respect and humor my entire life (as far as I know), I'm somehow complicit in the misfortune of others. I'm not saying I'm color-blind, but whatever racism/sexism/other -ism my life experience has instilled in me stays within me, and is not manifested in the way I treat others (which is not the case with far too many, I know).

So that I may be enlightened, can you please share with me some examples of institutional racism that have made an indelible mark upon you? If I am to understand this, I need people I know personally to show me how I'm missing what's going on. Personal examples only. I'm not trying to be insensitive, I only want to understand (but not from the media). I apologize if this comes off as crass or offends anyone.

Here's my response:

Hi, Jason. First off, I hope you

don't mind that I've quoted your post and made it part of mine. I think the heart of what you've asked of your friends of color is extremely important and I think my response needs much more space than as a reply on your feed. I truly thank you for wanting to understand what you are having a hard time understanding. Coincidentally, over the last few days I have been thinking about sharing some of the incidents of prejudice/racism I've experienced in my lifetime—in fact I just spoke with my sister Lesa about how to best do this yesterday—because I realized many of my friends—especially the white ones—have no idea what I've experienced/dealt with unless they were present (and aware) when it happened. There are two reasons for this: 1) because not only as a human being do I suppress the painful and uncomfortable in an effort to make it go away, I was also taught within my community (I was raised in the '70s and '80s—it's shifted somewhat now) and by society at large NOT to make a fuss, speak out, or rock the boat. To just "deal with it," lest more trouble follow (which, sadly, it often does); 2) fear of being questioned or dismissed with "Are you sure that's what you heard?" or "Are you sure that's what they meant?" and being angered and upset all over again by well-meaning-but-hurtful and essentially unresponsive responses.

So, again, I'm glad you asked, because I really want to answer. But as I do, please know a few things first: 1) This is not even close to the whole list. I'm cherry-picking because none of us have all day; 2) I've been really lucky. Most of what I share below is

mild compared to what others in my family and community have endured; 3) I'm going to go in chronological order so you might begin to glimpse the tonnage and why what many white folks might feel is a "where did all of this come from?" moment in society has been festering individually and collectively for the LIFETIME of pretty much every black or brown person living in America today, regardless of wealth or opportunity; 4) Some of what I share covers sexism, too—intersectionality is another term I'm sure you've heard and want to put quotes around, but it's a real thing too, just like white privilege. But you've requested a focus on personal experiences with racism, so here it goes:

When I was 3, my family moved into an upper-middle-class, all-white neighborhood. We had a big backyard, so my parents built a pool. Not the only pool on the block, but the only one neighborhood boys started throwing rocks into. White boys. One day my mom ID'd one as the boy from across the street, went to his house, told his mother, and, fortunately, his mother believed mine. My mom not only got an apology, but also had that boy jump in our pool and retrieve every single rock. No more rocks after that. Then mom even invited him to come over to swim sometime if he asked permission. Everyone became friends. This one has a happy ending because my mom was and is badass about matters like these, but I hope you can see that:

1. the white privilege in this situation is being able to move into a "nice" neighborhood and be

accepted not harassed, made to feel unwelcome, or prone to acts of vandalism and hostility.

When my older sister was 5, a white boy named Mark called her a “nigger” after she beat him in a race at school. She didn’t know what it meant, but in her gut she knew it was bad. This was the first time I’d seen my father the kind of angry that has nowhere to go. I somehow understood it was because not only had some boy verbally assaulted his daughter and had gotten away with it, it had way too early introduced her (and me) to that term and the reality of what it meant—that some white people would be cruel and careless with black people’s feelings just because of our skin color. Or our achievement. If it’s unclear in any way, the point here is:

2. If you’ve never had a defining moment in your childhood or your life where you realize your skin color alone makes other people hate you, you have white privilege.

Sophomore year of high school. I had Mr. Melrose for Algebra 2. Some time within the first few weeks of class, he points out that I’m “the only spook” in the class. This was meant to be funny. It wasn’t. So, I doubt it will surprise you I was relieved when he took medical leave after suffering a heart attack and was replaced by a sub for the rest of the semester. The point here is:

3. If you’ve never been ‘the only one’ of your race in a class, at a party, on a job, etc. and/or it’s been pointed out in a “playful” fashion by the authority figure in said situation, you have white privilege.

When we started getting our college acceptances senior year, I remember some white male classmates were pissed that a black classmate had gotten into UCLA while they didn’t. They said that affirmative action had given him “their spot” and it wasn’t

fair. An actual friend of theirs. Who’d worked his ass off. The point here is:

4. If you’ve never been on the receiving end of the assumption that when you’ve achieved something it’s only because it was taken away from a white person who “deserved it,” you have white privilege.

When I got accepted to Harvard (as a fellow AP student, you were witness to what an academic beast I was in high school, yes?), three separate times I encountered white strangers as I prepped for my maiden trip to Cambridge that rankle to this day. The first was the white doctor giving me a physical at Kaiser:

Me: “I need to send an immunization report to my college so I can matriculate.”

Doctor: “Where are you going?”

Me: “Harvard.”

Doctor: “You mean the one in Massachusetts?”

The second was in a store, looking for supplies I needed from Harvard’s suggested “what to bring with you” list.

Store employee: “Where are you going?”

Me: “Harvard.”

Store employee: “You mean the one in Massachusetts?”

The third was at UPS, shipping off boxes of said “what to bring” to Harvard. I was in line behind a white boy mailing boxes to Princeton and in front of a white woman sending her child’s boxes to wherever.

Woman to the boy: “What college are you going to?” Boy: “Princeton.”

Woman: “Congratulations!”

Woman to me: “Where are you sending your boxes?” Me: “Harvard.”

Woman: “You mean the one in Massachusetts?”

I think: “No, the one downtown next to the liquor store.” But I say, gesturing to my LABELED boxes: “Yes, the one in Massachusetts.”

Then she says congratulations, but it’s too late. The point here is:

5. If no one has ever questioned

your intellectual capabilities or attendance at an elite institution based solely on your skin color, you have white privilege.

In my freshman college tutorial, our small group of 4–5 was assigned to read Thoreau, Emerson, Malcolm X, Joseph Conrad, Dreiser, etc. When it was the week to discuss *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, one white boy boldly claimed he couldn’t even get through it because he couldn’t relate and didn’t think he should be forced to read it. I don’t remember the words I said, but I still remember the feeling—I think it’s what doctors refer to as chandelier pain—as soon as a sensitive area on a patient is touched, they shoot through the roof—that’s what I felt. I know I said something like my whole life I’ve had to read “things that don’t have anything to do with me or that I relate to” but I find a way anyway because that’s what learning is about—trying to understand other people’s perspectives. The point here is—the canon of literature studied in the United States, as well as the majority of television and movies, have focused primarily on the works or achievements of white men. So:

6. If you have never experienced or considered how damaging it is/was/could be to grow up without myriad role models and images in school that reflect you in your required reading material or in the mainstream media, you have white privilege.

All seniors at Harvard are invited to a fancy, seated group lunch with our respective dorm masters. (Yes, they were called “masters” up until this February, when they changed it to “faculty deans,” but that’s just a tasty little side dish to the main course of this remembrance). While we were being served by the Dunster House cafeteria staff—the black ladies from Haiti and Boston who ran the line daily (I still remember Jackie’s kind-

ness and warmth to this day)—Master Sally mused out loud how proud they must be to be serving the nation's best and brightest. I don't know if they heard her, but I did, and it made me uncomfortable and sick. The point here is:

7. If you've never been blindsided when you are just trying to enjoy a meal by a well-paid faculty member's patronizing and racist assumptions about how grateful black people must feel to be in their presence, you have white privilege.

While I was writing on a television show in my 30s, my new white male boss—who had only known me for a few days—had unbeknownst to me told another writer on staff he thought I was conceited, didn't know as much I thought I did, and didn't have the talent I thought I had. And what exactly had happened in those few days? I disagreed with a pitch where he suggested our lead female character carelessly leave a potholder on the stove, burning down her apartment. This character being a professional caterer. When what he said about me was revealed months later (by then he'd come to respect and rely on me), he apologized for prejudging me because I was a black woman. I told him he was ignorant and clearly had a lot to learn. It was a good talk because he was remorseful and open. But the point here is:

8. If you've never been on the receiving end of a boss's prejudiced, uninformed "how dare she question my ideas" bad-mouthing based solely on his ego and your race, you have white privilege.

On my very first date with my now husband, I climbed into his car and saw baby wipes on the passenger-side floor. He said he didn't have kids, they were just there to clean up messes in the car. I twisted to secure my seatbelt and saw a stuffed animal in the rear window. I gave him a look. He said,

"I promise, I don't have kids. That's only there so I don't get stopped by the police." He then told me that when he drove home from work late at night, he was getting stopped by cops constantly because he was a black man in a luxury car and they assumed that either it was stolen or he was a drug dealer. When he told a cop friend about this, Warren was told to put a stuffed animal in the rear window because it would change "his profile" to that of a family man and he was much less likely to be stopped. The point here is:

9. If you've never had to mask the fruits of your success with a floppy-eared, stuffed bunny rabbit so you won't get harassed by the cops on the way home from your gainful employment (or never had a first date start this way), you have white privilege.

Six years ago, I started a Facebook page that has grown into a website called Good Black News because I was shocked to find there were no sites dedicated solely to publishing the positive things black people do. (And let me explain here how biased the coverage of mainstream media is in case you don't already have a clue—as I curate, I can't tell you how often I have to swap out a story's photo to make it as positive as the content. Photos published of black folks in mainstream media are very often sullen- or angry-looking. Even when it's a positive story! I also have to alter headlines constantly to 1) include a person's name and not have it just be "Black Man Wins Settlement" or "Carnegie Hall Gets 1st Black Board Member," or 2) rephrase it from a subtle subjugator like "ABC taps Viola Davis as Series Lead" to "Viola Davis Lands Lead on ABC Show" as is done for, say, Jennifer Aniston or Steven Spielberg. I also receive a fair amount of highly offensive racist trolling. I don't even respond. I block and delete ASAP. The point here is:

10. If you've never had to rewrite stories and headlines or swap photos while being trolled by racists when all you're trying to do on a daily basis is promote positivity and share stories of hope and achievement and justice, you have white privilege.

OK, Jason, there's more, but I'm exhausted. And my kids need dinner. Remembering and reliving many of these moments has been a strain and a drain (and, again, this ain't even the half or the worst of it). But I hope my experiences shed some light for you on how institutional and personal racism have affected the entire life of a friend of yours to whom you've only been respectful and kind. I hope what I've shared makes you realize it's not just strangers, but people you know and care for who have suffered and are suffering because we are excluded from the privilege you have not to be judged, questioned, or assaulted in any way because of your race.

As to you "being part of the problem," trust me, nobody is mad at you for being white. Nobody. Just like nobody should be mad at me for being black. Or female. Or whatever. But what IS being asked of you is to acknowledge that white privilege DOES exist and not only to treat people of races that differ from yours "with respect and humor," but also to stand up for fair treatment and justice, not to let "jokes" or "off-color" comments by friends, co-workers, or family slide by without challenge, and to continually make an effort to put yourself in someone else's shoes, so we may all cherish and respect our unique and special contributions to society as much as we do our common ground.

With much love and respect,
Lori ■

This article was originally published at GoodBlackNews.org and has been edited for Christian Ethics Today.

Conservative Journey to Death Penalty Opposition

By Marc Hayden

In early 2013, I helped found Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty (CCATDP). It was the very first and only national conservative network devoted to questioning capital punishment's alignment with conservative principles.

Now four-and-a-half years later, after launching as a small fledgling group, both our standing and the state of the death penalty have drastically changed. Our network has extended into every state. There are 11 state-based CCATDP groups – a number that should continue to grow rapidly. Conservative legislators are sponsoring repeal legislation at never-before-seen rates, and I believe that we have made great strides in shattering the one-time pervasive myth that all conservatives support the death penalty.

However, I did not always personally oppose capital punishment. The journey that led me to be one of CCATDP's National Advocacy coordinators was glacial, starting much earlier in my life, and largely rooted in conservative pragmatism, not in my religious convictions.

Although I was born in Utah and spent a couple of years in Michigan during high school, I was raised predominantly in the southeastern United States where conservatism reigns supreme. I grew up in a conservative Christian household. In fact, the place I considered my hometown was a small city in southeastern Tennessee named Cleveland. The locals warmly referred to it as “the belt buckle of the Bible Belt.” I spent Sundays and sometimes Wednesday nights at church, and Vacation Bible School often dominated portions of my summers. My family was and still is comprised of devout Christians who are also unabashedly conserva-

tive. It was largely a given that they would vote Republican in deep red Tennessee. During my childhood, they remained active in politics to some degree, and a few of my earliest memories were actually of the family attending Republican Party rallies.

These political events were an amalgamation of a series of tired political stump speeches, second-rate country music and frequent outbursts from disgruntled southerners. All the

When he asked if I supported capital punishment, I didn't hesitate when I responded: “Of course, I do. My parents are Republicans!”

while, the crowd took advantage of the free popcorn, cotton candy and Coca-Cola products in a festival-like spectacle. These rallies left a terrible mess, which prompted my first “job” while I was in elementary school. I was tasked with the unenviable role of cleaning up after these events and, in exchange, I was given a whole five dollars. Even at that age, I thought it was a pretty raw deal, and, as a result, I was of little help. I gave them what they paid for – a measly five dollars worth of work.

It was around this time, when I was maybe five- or six-years-old, that I first remember critically considering the death penalty. While on the playground at Cleveland, Tennessee's Prospect Elementary, which was filled with aging and somewhat rusty play sets, I remember a friend's discussing the death penalty. I presume it was a

topic of conversation because there was a high-profile capital case in the news at the time. When he asked if I supported capital punishment, I didn't hesitate when I responded: “Of course, I do. My parents are Republicans!”

Even at this tender young age, it seemed clear to me that support for the death penalty was a given for conservatives, especially those in the south or, as we called them, “real conservatives.”

Yet, the seeds of doubt were also sewn at that moment. After those words thoughtlessly jettisoned from my mouth without giving the death penalty any real consideration, I remember pausing and wondering about the executioner's soul. I was and still am a proud Christian. So, at the time, I naturally worried about others' salvation and what actions our Creator deemed virtuous. I wondered: Does God appreciate or loathe the executioner's role in killing someone and do executions please the Lord?

Those questions went unanswered, or perhaps ignored, which made it easier to remain supportive of the death penalty. Eight or nine years passed until the next moment I recall seriously talking about capital punishment. This occurred when I was in junior high school, and Karla Faye Tucker's execution loomed. She had committed heinous acts; but by all accounts, it appeared that she had not only been reformed, but had also become a born-again Christian. I remember an outcry from religious leaders, including nationally known televangelist Pat Robertson, who passionately called for her sentence to be commuted. However, I didn't share their desire for mercy. I coldly shrugged my shoulders and told my

family that for every crime there is a just response, and she deserved to die for her egregious transgressions. Period. Not only that, but I felt that converting to Christianity didn't absolve individuals of their crimes in our earthly justice system. I also thought that pardoning someone or commuting their sentence because they had become a Christian and turned their life around would set a terrible precedent. I figured it would incentivize all death row inmates to insincerely "convert" to Christianity to reap the benefits. My lack of empathy and apparent disdain for mercy was a far cry from that time when I was a child and once worried about the executioner's soul.

The next several years passed without spending any considerable time dwelling on the death penalty. If anything, my support probably became more entrenched. However, after college, I once again revisited capital punishment. Even though I felt that some people simply deserved to die and that the death penalty was a great instrument for deterring crime, I was willing to begrudgingly allow my own views to be challenged. This was due to the training that I received while studying philosophy at Georgia State University in Atlanta. I had been instructed to think critically about complex issues and to remain open to reasoned arguments. Because of this, I had changed my perspective on many topics as I grew ever more conservative. Yet, to my surprise, my death penalty support began to incrementally erode as I learned more about capital punishment's application in practice.

One of the issues that weighed heavily on me was that of innocence. I had heard about individuals being exonerated after spending decades on death row, and I had watched television shows that featured these exonerees. Yet, for a long time, I thought the fact that these people had been released from prison was proof that the system

was working. I truly felt terrible that so many people had been wrongly convicted and sentenced to die; but I was still confident in the system. However, as the number of people exonerated from death row quickly mounted, it eventually became an issue that was difficult to ignore as I was confronted by the system's fallible nature. I wondered how many people's innocence had not been discovered and how many inmates may have consequently been wrongly executed. As a pro-life conservative, this bothered me. I thought: How could a government program that unnecessarily risked killing innocent Americans be considered pro-life? In all sincerity,

I thought: How could a government program that unnecessarily risked killing innocent Americans be considered pro-life? In all sincerity, it can't.

it can't. But I convinced myself that wrongful executions were probably rare enough that the death penalty's supposed benefits outweighed its faults. Despite my views, I continued to keep an open mind as my journey continued.

Like many conservatives, I take fiscal responsibility and limited government quite seriously. I believe they, along with a pro-life philosophy, are central tenants of conservatism. Yet, as I grew older, it seemed that the death penalty clearly clashed with these concepts. I keenly understood the death penalty's exorbitantly high price compared to life without parole. It can cost millions more than the alternatives and has even been the impetus for tax increases, which is one of conservatism's unforgivable sins. Thus, it didn't seem fiscally responsible. I also

privately admitted that capital punishment didn't fit within a framework of a limited government. After all, there is no greater authority than the power to take life; but our imperfect government retains the right to kill its citizens. Given the state's unenviable track record, this is a privilege that it clearly has not earned. As a result, endowing the government with this immense authority didn't sit right with me.

Even though I conceded that the death penalty wasn't pro-life, fiscally responsible or representative of a limited government, I still clung to capital punishment. I had bought into the myth that principled conservatives ought to support the death penalty. But I struggled to justify capital punishment because it so clearly clashed with my values. I acknowledged that the death penalty was inconsistent with conservatism, but I was willing to violate my principles if I could find an excuse to support executions. So, after some thought, I concocted a half-baked argument to buttress my flagging death penalty support. I surmised that if more lives are saved because of the death penalty's deterrent effect than are wrongly executed, then I could consider capital punishment a good government, pro-life program.

My argument was severely flawed. It ignored the individual rights and liberties of innocent people. Plus, I soon read a study revealing that there is no credible evidence to suggest that executions impact homicide rates. After I learned this, I slumped in my leather-back office chair in disappointment. I really wanted to be a proponent of capital punishment because, at the time, I incorrectly thought supporting it was the proper conservative viewpoint. Despite my best attempts and reliance on fallacious arguments, I had to conclude that I couldn't support the death penalty. I found it to be antithetical to conservative values in practice, and it simply wasn't beneficial.

As my career in politics progressed, I proudly worked to advocate for the conservative principles that drove me and countless others. I served as a legislative aide to Georgia's Republican Senate President Pro Tempore. I managed a Republican congressional race in North Carolina and aided a host of other Republican campaigns. I even went to work for the National Rifle Association (NRA) and was stationed in Panama City Beach, Florida. It was during this time that I ran across a curious job posting. A nonprofit that I had never heard of named Equal Justice USA (EJUSA) was seeking a conservative who opposed capital punishment to launch a new project. At that moment, the metaphorical light bulb illuminated in my head, and I realized that there must be many conservatives who hold deep death penalty reservations.

After reading and re-reading the ad, I hesitated for a moment and finally decided to apply for the job. I submitted my application and, after a couple of interviews over the subsequent few weeks, I was surprisingly offered the position and started working for the Brooklyn, NY-based EJUSA. Thankfully, I wasn't required to move to the northeast, which suited this southerner just fine.

After my brief orientation, I was tasked with launching a nationwide network of conservatives who were questioning the death penalty, which would be called Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty (CCATDP). This sounded like a monumental undertaking for someone as uninformed as I was. But I quickly learned that I wasn't building it from scratch – far from it. There were many nationally known conservatives who were already publicly opposed to capital punishment. In fact, our first two supporters were Richard Viguerie, who is known as the founding father of American conservatism, and famed conservative jurist Jay Sekulow – one of my father's heroes.

My first notable assignment at EJUSA was heading to Austin, Texas, to speak at the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty's (TCADP) annual conference in February of 2013. As a veteran of various kinds of conferences, I know that many are uneventful and imminently forgettable. However, this experience was much different. While I was at TCADP's conference, I had the pleasure of hearing Anthony Graves speak. He was wrongly convicted and sentenced to die, but had tirelessly fought for his freedom against a corrupt prosecutor for 18 years before gaining his freedom. His story was compelling, and it left me invigorated and excited

Even though I conceded that the death penalty wasn't pro-life, fiscally responsible or representative of a limited government, I still clung to capital punishment. I had bought into the myth that principled conservatives ought to support the death penalty.

about my coming work. It is one thing to know that nearly 160 people have been exonerated from death row, but to put a face and story with these numbers was a powerful experience.

I have since met many other death row exonerees from all walks of life who were nearly executed because of mistaken eyewitness testimony, prosecutorial misconduct and/or reliance on faulty forensics. While they have survived to tell their harrowing stories, many others have been executed who might have been innocent. Carlos DeLuna is one such person whose story I first heard at TCADP's conference, and which had a pro-

found effect on me. He was convicted and executed based on circumstantial evidence and the eyewitness testimony of a single man who claimed he was only 50% sure that DeLuna was the perpetrator. Meanwhile, another man also named Carlos, who was a protected police informant, frequently bragged about how he got away with murdering his ex-girlfriend, while the crime was pinned on the wrong Carlos.

When people ask me why I am involved in this work, I can say as a pro-lifer that I cannot sit idly as a government program continues to unnecessarily risk innocent lives. I do this work for people like Anthony Graves, Carlos DeLuna and the untold numbers of innocent people currently on death row.

After my experience at TCADP's conference, the conservative network, CCATDP, was quietly taking form and faced its first real test. In March 2013, we had planned to launch our group at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the nation's largest annual meeting of conservatives. I was a little apprehensive. While I was used to being the darling of most conservative crowds when I worked for the NRA, I wasn't entirely sure how my peers at CPAC would react to CCATDP and its mission.

Regardless of my unjustified concerns, I eagerly erected our booth in the sprawling exhibitor hall in metro D.C.'s fashionable Gaylord National Hotel and Resort. But I wasn't alone. I was joined at the conference by a team of conservatives, including a former Montana Republican gubernatorial nominee, who helped us work the booth. As we anxiously awaited the start of CPAC and the doors to the enormous hall finally opened, throngs of conservative activists poured in, and a horde of CPAC's attendees quickly flooded our small exhibitor space. Many swiftly changed their views on capital punish-

ment and asked how they could get involved with our network. A host of others freely admitted that they had long thought that they were the only conservatives who opposed the death penalty. They thanked us for existing, and some even asked if they could hug us to show their thanks for our work. Anyone who knows me understands that I am not a big hugger, but I reluctantly accepted the physical displays of gratitude anyway. From my perspective, CCATDP passed its first test with flying colors.

Shortly after CPAC, I traveled to Indianapolis to speak at a small workshop at the Journey of Hope's conference. Journey of Hope: From Violence to Healing is an organization led by murder victims' family members with the aim of educating the public on the death penalty's harmful effect on them. Before attending, I had read extensively about capital punishment's negative impact on victims' loved ones. I knew that it was often a false promise, and it was a complex and protracted process that forced victims' family members to relive the worst moments of their lives repeatedly and publicly. I had even heard of victims' relatives who had earnestly pleaded with prosecutors to seek sentences other than death for a variety of reasons; but their wishes were ultimately ignored as they were shamefully marginalized during the process. However, I am not sure that I really grasped what I had read until I heard several speakers at the Journey of Hope's convening. They recounted their heartbreaking ordeals and how the death penalty had made their lives much worse.

One of the speaker's stories that remained with me was that of SueZann Bosler. She rose to speak in the humble sanctuary of the church hosting the event, and explained how her father was a minister who opposed the death penalty. He had even instructed her that if he were ever to be murdered to make sure that

the offender didn't receive a death sentence. SueZann was also opposed to capital punishment, and when her father was regrettably killed in a senseless crime, SueZann aimed to keep her word to her deceased father. However, the prosecuting attorney and presiding judge threatened her. They callously stated that if she revealed her or her father's steadfast opposition to capital punishment on the witness stand, they would hold her in contempt of court and throw her in jail. As she recounted her shocking story, the emotion in the church sanctuary was palpable. As I heard her tale and that of many others, I concluded that the death penalty didn't provide the

I have since met many other death row exonerees from all walks of life who were nearly executed because of mistaken eyewitness testimony, prosecutorial misconduct and/or reliance on faulty forensics. While they have survived to tell their harrowing stories, many others have been executed who might have been innocent.

justice that the families of murder victims deserve.

Since the early days of CCATDP's founding, we have had prominent roles at numerous conservative and libertarian conferences across the United States with the same positive results that we experienced at CPAC. Increasing numbers of conservatives understand that the death penalty runs contrary to our timeworn principles. But if I am ever in doubt, another clear demonstration of this

truth is never far off.

While attending a regional CPAC in St. Louis, Missouri, I organized a meeting with conservative icon Colonel Oliver North. As I nervously waited for him to arrive in the darkened green room, he marched in with the stature and confidence that you'd expect from a Marine Corps colonel. Yet, in an incredibly kind, affable demeanor, he explained that he opposed capital punishment because he finds it to be unnecessary and dangerous in the hands of our imperfect government. Not long after that meeting, another well-known thought leader spoke out against the death penalty when former presidential candidate Dr. Ron Paul endorsed CCATDP and uncompromisingly stated that capital punishment is completely inconsistent with traditional conservatism.

As CCATDP continued to expand its reach and raise its profile, my colleagues and I have increasingly traveled across the country to speak at tea parties, Republican clubs, liberty groups, and pro-life organizations. It became clear that our message was gaining momentum, and we were being accepted with open arms into the most conservative corners of America.

Conservatives are turning against the death penalty with great frequency. However, I regularly bump into seasoned activists and political leaders who have long opposed capital punishment but who had kept their views a guarded secret. This happened one evening at the weekly convening of the well-established Georgia Tea Party, which meets in an unassuming back room of a former car dealership behind a mega-church in Marietta, Georgia. I was invited to present the conservative case against capital punishment and, at the end of the night, when a poll was taken to gauge the group's support for the death penalty, many had changed their minds on the spot. In fact, roughly 50% of the

group was in favor of repealing capital punishment – not a bad outcome after only a 20-minute stump speech, I thought. As I was packing up my materials to head home, the cofounder of the Georgia Tea Party leaned in towards me, smiled, and whispered, “I’ve been against the death penalty for 30 years. I just never told anyone.”

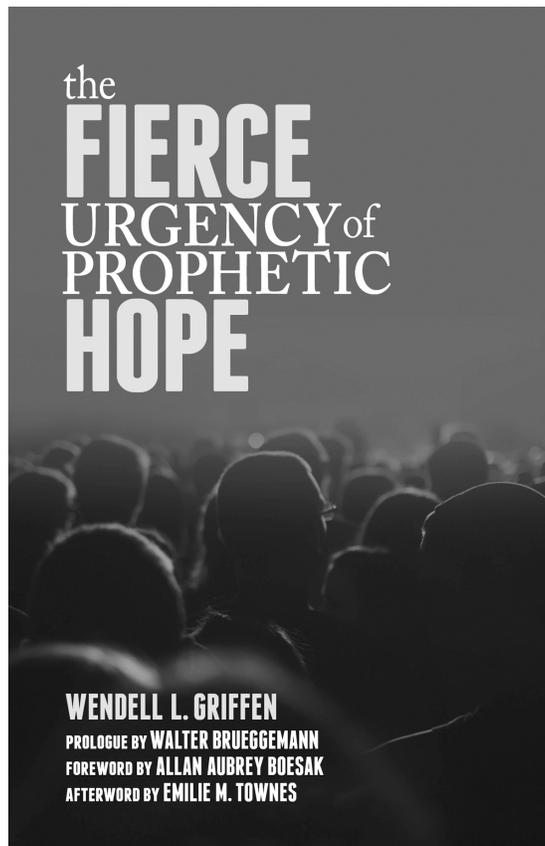
While the journey that led me to believe that capital punishment ought to be repealed occurred more recently, many of my older conservative peers, like my friend at the Georgia Tea Party, had turned against the death penalty long before. They have done so because ever since capital punishment was reinstated in the U.S., it has been a violation of conservatism in practice. Capital punishment fails what I call the conservative litmus test. It isn’t pro-life because it risks innocent life. It’s not fiscally responsible because it costs far more than the alternatives, and it’s certainly not representative of a limited government. Meanwhile, it fails to keep

Capital punishment fails what I call the conservative litmus test. It isn’t pro-life because it risks innocent life. It’s not fiscally responsible because it costs far more than the alternatives, and it’s certainly not representative of a limited government. Meanwhile, it fails to keep society safer and even harms the families of murder victims.

society safer and even harms the families of murder victims. This is the message that my colleagues and I share as we travel across the US and educate our peers on the failures of capital punishment; and, since our

launch in 2013, there has been a marked change. Conservatives at the local and national level are increasingly concluding that America’s death penalty is little more than the kind of big, broken government program that conservatives loathe. Given this reality, capital punishment’s days appear numbered. ■

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Not Exactly a Profile in Courage

By Randall Balmer

From time to time, the confluence of current events engenders a moral outrage so overwhelming that people of conscience feel obliged to respond, to strike out against injustice or in defense of those on the margins of society. We stand in need of such a declaration today.

The last several centuries provide many precedents. By the late 18th century, Quakers began to notice, and then to agitate against, the scourge of slavery. Theirs was a lonely voice at first, but the moral force of their opposition combined with the eloquence of those who joined the chorus, eventually stirred the conscience of the nation. Finally, albeit after a bloody war, the institution of chattel slavery was abolished, even though racial equality remains elusive.

Across the Atlantic, a group of Protestant ministers, witness to the gathering storm of Nazism as well as the complicity of German Protestant churches, decided they could no longer remain silent. They gathered in May, 1934, and adopted the Barmen Declaration, drafted by the venerable theologian Karl Barth, to declare their opposition to Adolf Hitler and to his ecclesiastical cheerleaders, who had anointed Hitler as a “German prophet” and who had tried to strip Christianity of all Jewish influences. One of the Barmen signatories, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, worked actively to resist Hitler, conspired to assassinate the Führer and was executed in a Nazi concentration camp.

After his arrest on Good Friday, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. sat in a jail cell in Birmingham. Someone smuggled him a newspaper in which a group of white clergy had published an open letter to the civil rights leader urging him to slow and to scale back

his push for racial equality. King, a Baptist minister, grabbed a pen and began writing in the margins. “Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas,” King began, as he proceeded to explain why the struggle for civil rights was a moral imperative. “Injustice anywhere,” he continued, “is a threat to justice everywhere.”

The moral force of his argument led to the March on Washington a few

Surely now is the time for religious leaders to take a stand, to state unequivocally that white supremacy is evil and contrary to any religious faith worthy of the name, to decry indiscriminate deportation and even perhaps to note that the Bible instructs us to welcome the stranger and to treat the foreigner as a neighbor.

months later and, finally, to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Other examples could be added here – Clergy and Laity Concerned about the War in Vietnam, for instance – when moral voices have been raised against evil and injustice.

Is there any moment more propitious than now? We have an administration with no moral compass on matters of ethics, justice, the environment or women’s rights, a president who suggests a moral equivalency

between white supremacists and those who oppose them. Donald Trump, who has demonstrated that he cannot even fake religious literacy – “Drink my little wine, have my little cracker” – wants to deport “dreamers” and build a massive wall. Surely now is the time for religious leaders to take a stand, to state unequivocally that white supremacy is evil and contrary to any religious faith worthy of the name, to decry indiscriminate deportation and even perhaps to note that the Bible instructs us to welcome the stranger and to treat the foreigner as a neighbor.

It’s time for voices in the wilderness, for people of faith to weigh in at this moment of cultural disarray and moral decay.

But wait! It appears that someone has heeded the call. Out of a gathering of evangelical leaders, a tradition with a distinguished (albeit distant) history of advocacy for those Jesus called “the least of these,” comes a document called the Nashville Statement. Signed by a veritable “who’s who” of the Religious Right – James Dobson, Tony Perkins, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Marvin Olasky, D. A. Carson, Richard Land – the statement was released just days after Trump had asserted the equivalency of white supremacists and those who marched against them in Charlottesville.

The timing couldn’t be better. What a moment to take a stand for moral decency in the face of another surge in racism and the persistent ethical indifference emanating from the White House. Surely now, more than ever, the nation needs to hear a prophetic voice, similar to the cries against slavery and the war in Vietnam.

“Evangelical Christians at the dawn

of the 21st century find themselves living in a period of historic transition,” the statement begins. Well, yes, I suppose that’s true. Evangelicals in the past, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, marched in the vanguard of progressive movements, including support for public education, women’s equality and the rights of workers to organize. That changed dramatically with the rise of the Religious Right in the late 1970s, when evangelical leaders elected to defend the tax exemptions of racially segregated schools. What followed was an abandonment of biblical principles in favor of the gospel of hard-right conservatism.

So, yes, evangelicalism has been in transition. It has veered from its own traditions of social justice. So the Nashville Statement will set things straight, will offer an emphatic and unequivocal course correction so that evangelicals can finally, after decades of moral drift, recover their prophetic voice, right?

Well, maybe not. The Nashville Statement is emphatic in its denunciations of . . . (wait for it) same-sex marriage.

Huh? White supremacists, some of them with influence in the White House, are running wild, dreamers face deportation, the Environmental Protection Agency is undoing environmental protections, the education

department is unraveling protections for sexual assault victims, gun violence is rampant, the president himself flaunts his marital infidelities and boasts of his tawdry behavior toward women. And the Nashville Statement comes out with a ringing denunciation of same-sex marriage?

Not exactly a profile in courage.

These signatories – all but a very few are male – are entitled to their theology and their interpretations of scripture, pinched as those interpretations may be. (The Bible has a lot more to say about divorce and care for the poor than it does about homosexuality.) And I certainly don’t deny their right to issue a statement on this

A once proud and noble tradition that championed those on the margins and more often than not stood for goodness and ethics and integrity has lost its soul.

topic, misguided as it is. But such a declaration would have a lot more credibility if any of those signing the document had bothered to denounce the president for his false equivalency of the Charlottesville protesters.

No such luck. On those matters of conscience, these soldiers of the Religious Right have sounded a meek retreat. But when it comes to same-sex marriage – *whammo!* – they’re all over it. Have these fellows never read the words of Jesus about the speck in their neighbor’s eye and the log in their own?

It’s sad, so very sad. A once proud and noble tradition that championed those on the margins and more often than not stood for goodness and ethics and integrity has lost its soul. Since its emergence in the late 1970s, the Religious Right has devolved into a wholly owned subsidiary of the Republican Party and now a lap dog for a morally clueless and ethically challenged president.

The Nashville Statement is both a sham and a shame. I suggest the signers reconvene in Nashville or wherever – Houston, perhaps, or even Charlottesville – and examine their collective conscience, search their soul and – who knows? – perhaps in the process discover a spine.

We could use an additional voice of moral conscience these days. The times demand it. ■

*Randall Balmer is the John Phillips Professor in Religion at Dartmouth. His most recent book is *Evangelicalism in America*.*

Overall in America, domestic violence accounts for 40 to 45 percent of shooting homicides carried out against girls and women aged 15 and over, and 2 percent of boys and men.

Same Rebel, New Level: Lecrae's Departure from Evangelicalism

By Ameen Hudson

Lecrae Devaugh Moore is not a stranger to the evangelical Christian world. In September 2008, he released an album entitled “Rebel.” It became the soundtrack to the lives of many evangelical Christians, young and old, urban and suburban.

The Hallmark track “Don’t Waste Your Life” (based on a book by popular reformed evangelical Pastor John Piper) inspired Christians to radically pursue Jesus in a way that would show the watching world that Christ is truly a treasure to which nothing else could compare.

The album represented a bold rebellion against a culture that also rebelled against Jesus and assailed Christians who desired to remain faithful to their beliefs. Fans and evangelical leaders alike loved Lecrae’s boldness and his commitment to truth. He artistically and unapologetically expressed their passions, beliefs and emotion through the medium of hip-hop.

This quickly launched Lecrae into the world of evangelical elites. Luminaries within the evangelical world (especially within reformed theology circles) embraced Lecrae and his crew—the 116 clique—as the young black urban theologians who flipped their traditional aesthetic of theological representatives upside down.

The Difference

The Pew research poll states that 76% of whites in the United States identify as Protestant evangelical Christians while only six % of black people and 11% of Latinos identify as the same.

This striking statistic gives us insight into how much of a minority African-Americans and Latinos are in an evangelical world that’s largely white. Though Lecrae’s events would be full of urban minorities, a predominantly

white crowd outnumbered them.

Despite this, there seemed to be an impervious unity that transcended the differences polarizing the outside world. This group of believers seemed immune to what divided those outside the church such as race/ethnicity and political affiliations. What they felt united them was their faith, theology and God; politics and color didn’t matter – or at least they thought it didn’t.

“You’ve lost focus on the mission. God didn’t give you your gifts to fight for black rights. Where is this in the Great Commission?” was just one of the more recent responses that made it across his timeline. “Just preach the Gospel and stop talking about politics!” was another recurring sentiment.

The Divide

Following the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo, and the subsequent acquittal of officer Darren Wilson (the shooter), many African-Americans and other minorities within the church (especially in light of a long recent history of police brutality) were reminded of how systemic injustice and racism worked within multiple levels of society—especially within the judicial system.

As protests in Ferguson emerged, young minorities began to speak out

against disparities while affirming the dignity, value and worth of people of color. Lecrae also began to speak out. To his dismay, his largely white (and even some black) evangelical fans met him with cold, hard dismissals, insensitivity and attacks.

Rather than being met with a willing heart to bear his burdens and stand with him in solidarity for justice, Lecrae was met with derision and disappointment. “You’ve lost focus on the mission. God didn’t give you your gifts to fight for black rights. Where is this in the Great Commission?” was just one of the more recent responses that made it across his timeline. “Just preach the Gospel and stop talking about politics!” was another recurring sentiment.

For many in Lecrae’s white evangelical fan base, there was an abysmal disconnect between biblical ethics of justice and how it relates to America’s treacherous history (and continuation) of systemic racism and institutional discrimination against black and brown image bearers.

In the wake of this cultural war of ideological justice, those of us who were outspoken on issues of police brutality, implicit biases and systemic evil were deemed to be outside of orthodox theology for upholding biblical imperatives of justice for the oppressed and marginalized.

The treatment of Lecrae was no different. He would soon discover the majority of the white evangelicals who supported him didn’t really like him for him, but for his representing and advancing their values through his music. He was a means to an emotional, intellectual and political (usually conservative) end. It was in this realization that Lecrae began to “rebel.”

The Departure and Hope

On Lecrae's newly released album "ATWT (All Things Work together)," he articulates his dissent on his track "Facts." Lecrae speaks to the Christianity within America that is largely linked to a blind nationalism and a false sense of God's favor by boldly proclaiming: *"I will not oblige to your colonized way of faith // My Messiah died for the world, not just USA."* He combats the notion that Christianity within America means that your socio-political stance defaults to right wing conservatism or a binary "left" or "right" partisanism altogether: *"They say, Jesus was Conservative Tell 'em, That's a lie // No, He not a Liberal either if you think I'll choose a side."* He also offers an apologetic for the existence of the black church in saying: *"They say 'Crae you so divisive, there shouldn't be a black church // I say 'Do the math segregation started that first!'"*

Lecrae's bold stance is unapologetic and raw. He has repudiated the sentiments from the evangelical world that would cultivate cold apathy and

Lecrae is real, bold and unashamed of who he is – a black man in America that loves Jesus and wants to impact and transform the world.

indifference in the face of injustice and suffering. He has embraced an all-encompassing Gospel that cares about the whole man – including his empowerment and just treatment in the here and now.

This album doesn't just speak to the "facts" around justice and Lecrae's divorce from evangelicalism, but also God's sovereignty over all the trials, blessings and failures in his life (and ours). This project is one of hope—hope that bleeds through the darkness of any situation to show us God is indeed working. "All things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)."

Lecrae is real, bold and unashamed of who he is – a black man in America that loves Jesus and wants to impact and transform the world. Critics of Lecrae may express their disdain of his newfound freedom, hearkening back to the Lecrae of old – the "Rebel" Lecrae. But what they don't realize is that the same bold, unapologetic "rebel" still exists but he is now free from the chains of evangelical expectation and has been set ablaze to be who God has always called him to be – a rebel.

*"I ain't really changed, it's the same old rebel
Still a radical, I'm passionate, it's just another level!" ■*

Ameen Hudson works and goes to school in the inner city of the Tampa Bay, FL and has a heart for the Urban Community. He is a member of Living Faith Bible fellowship, and strives to use his interests in theology, art/culture, race relations, and justice to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Protecting Our Way of Life

By Johnny White

It was the late 1990s. I enjoyed a group of eight to 10 guys who played golf every Friday morning at any one of the numerous municipal golf courses in San Antonio. We could always produce one and often two foursomes, and we rotated the responsibility for selecting the golf course and making the tee times.

I had recently enjoyed playing at an eastside municipal golf course at the invitation of a group of senior adult men from our church. They played on a Wednesday morning. I decided this was a great course for the regular Friday group, so I made a tee time and reported it to the group.

There was an immediate response: “We will *not* get to play at that course on a Friday!” My response was equally immediate and emphatic: “*Of course* we will. I’ve already called and made a tee time. There is no problem.” The comeback response from several of the guys was equally emphatic: “We will *NOT* play on that golf course on a Friday!” My response: “Wait and see.”

They shrugged and agreed, “Wait and see.”

We arrived on time. I led the way as we marched up to the counter. The African-American gentleman behind the counter took one look at us and said, “No tee times available today.”

I said, “We already have a tee time.” He said, “I already told you. No tee times available today!” “But we have a tee time!” I blurted out. He simply turned on his heel, walked into his office, and shut the door.

I’m sure I was red in the face and boiling angry as my buddy pulled me by the elbow toward the door. The other guys were laughing and in a hurry because they had already made an alternative tee time at another golf

course across town.

“What just happened?” I demanded to know.

So my buddy explained that the golf course in question was known as the Eastside Country Club on weekends and we were the wrong color. There was an unwritten but understood rule that on weekends “we” were not welcome at “their” golf course. Weekdays were different.

“That’s prejudice!” I declared for all

The African-American gentleman behind the counter took one look at us and said, “No tee times available today.”

to hear. “That’s race discrimination! That can’t be happening!” As I turned back toward the pro shop, I swore out loud, “The mayor is going to know about this!” My buddy called out, “The mayor already knows about it.” I confronted the African-American gentleman with my righteous indignation and he responded with words that ring in my memory to this day: “Now you know how it feels.” And once again, he turned on his heel and ignored me.

Attributed to Parker Palmer is an observation that I find to be true: “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.” This is an experience I have reflected on a lot. Over the years I’ve repeated the story numerous times and reflected on its microcosm metaphor on prejudice, reverse discrimination and how it feels to be the victim.

In retrospect, I wish I had asked that fine gentleman: “So how does it feel to have the power?” I doubt he would have expressed satisfaction at having “put me in my place.” I doubt that’s what motivated him. My suspicion is that he felt completely justified. He was simply protecting the hard-earned privilege he and all African-Americans had worked so hard for so long to achieve.

His actions were not vindictive, but protective. We were a threat to his hard-earned privilege to play golf on a public golf course. His actions were about preserving what he and so many others had worked to attain.

Something about that sounds and feels very familiar. It sounds a lot like that well-worn phrase from my Southern upbringing: “Protecting our way of life.” Having grown up in the “Old South” in the 50s and 60s - “protecting our way of life” is an uncomfortable, but familiar justification. It is the indoctrination I received as a child; the doctrine I came to believe and espouse as a teenager; and the prejudice I came to recognize and reject as a young adult.

In that segregated world of the “Old South” - the only world I had ever known - we were not taught to hate, but we learned racial prejudice by osmosis. It was in the air we breathed. We were “protecting our way of life” as the white majority who felt threatened by a racial minority. We didn’t identify it or admit it, but we lived in fear. Overcoming prejudice is about overcoming fear.

What exactly is the fear that has surfaced in the months since Donald Trump came from out of right field to win the presidency? Is it fear of losing the power and priority position that goes with being in the majority

position? Is it fear of immigrants, or Muslims, or homosexuals or African-Americans?

There is security in the majority, and white European Protestant Americans have enjoyed that position for a long time—from the beginning. That majority position is uncomfortably related to a sense of superiority. It's subtle, but all too familiar. It's protecting our way of life.

Herein lies the most upsetting part: The most intransigent supporters, defenders and apologists for this superiority-tainted phenomenon are Christian brothers and sisters who would never identify themselves as prejudiced or racist. They would never support white supremacy advocates. But, like it or not, admit it or not, they have nonetheless become kissing cousins because they harbor the same fear.

The most intransigent supporters, defenders and apologists for this superiority-tainted phenomenon are Christian brothers and sisters who would never identify themselves as prejudiced or racist. They would never support white supremacy advocates. But, like it or not, admit it or not, they have nonetheless become kissing cousins because they harbor the same fear.

Much has been written about how Donald Trump won the presidency—how his political coalition cracked the solid blue wall in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ohio; how he coalesced the “Solid South” phenomenon to other parts of the country.

At its core, it's about fear—fear of losing the familiar security of being in the majority. It's a universal fear which makes it easy to justify. Years ago, the cartoon character Pogo the possum got it right when he declared, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” ■

Johnny White recently retired as Senior Pastor of the interdenominational church, The Church at Horseshoe Bay, Texas. Previously he was Associate Pastor at Trinity Baptist San Antonio with Buckner Fanning.

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Mixed-Status Families and U.S. Immigration Law

By Tiffany Butler

Bethlehem – the City of David, the birthplace of Jesus. Generations before Jesus or David were born in this town, famine came to Bethlehem. Due to the famine, a man named Elimelech emigrated with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons to Moab in search of food and opportunity. Instead of a land of prosperity, the land of Moab for them is a land of bitterness and loss. While Naomi gains two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, she suffers the death of her husband and eventually her two sons. When she hears that abundance has returned to Bethlehem, she sets her face to return to the eventual City of David. Orpah returns to Moab, but Naomi's other immigrant daughter-in-law, Ruth, accompanies her to Bethlehem. What results from this story is what we refer to today as a "mixed-status family." Mixed-status families often consist of family members who are legal citizens, immigrants, naturalized citizens, and/or illegal immigrants.¹

The purpose of this paper is to review the immigration practices of Israel during the time of Ruth and Naomi, concerning in particular mixed-status families, as well as the rights subsequently afforded immigrants in these households. I will juxtapose these biblical practices with those of the United States today. I argue that a bibliocentric approach can effectively reform and simplify current U.S. mixed-status family immigration laws and, in the process, mitigate the heartbreak of broken families.

During the time of Ruth and Naomi, while there were restrictions concerning intermarriage between Israel and some other nations (Deut. 7:1-6), it appears the ultimate inten-

tion for these restrictions was to make known a jealous God who is not willing that His people should be led astray after the gods of other nations (Deut. 7:4; Ex. 34:10-16). However, if a foreigner would "bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him," the Lord would receive them (Isaiah 56:1-8). This was the case with Ruth who clung to Naomi, her people and her God. Seemingly,

Mixed-status families often consist of family members who are legal citizens, immigrants, naturalized citizens, and/or illegal immigrants.

this is all that was required to gain the same social rights and privileges as the people of Israel.

James K. Hoffmeier in his article, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Immigration Debate," discusses the difference between the use of the Hebrew word "*ger*," often used to mean "to sojourn" or "to live as an alien," and the Hebrew words *nekhar* and *zar*, often used to designate a "foreigner."

Hoffermeier argues that all of the scriptures that refer to social benefits (gleaning, work provisions, etc.) received by non-Israelites use the word *ger*, rather than *nekhar* and *zar* (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). He argues that this indicates the *ger* received a form of permission concerning social rights when their status changed within Israeli society. Further, we see the existence

of border-crossing regulations in the account of Moses and the Israelites as they sought passage through Edom (Numbers 20:14-21). In other words, open borders and free access to all the social rights of a citizen for foreigners did not even exist in biblical times. What this reveals is that no responsible country then or now governs without borders, or without laws and regulations to protect and support the population within those borders.²

As we consider human sin nature, it becomes clear that laws and regulations are necessary boundaries to protect good citizenship.³ Therefore, Hoffmeier makes an excellent point concerning the existence of some kind of process whereby a foreigner could cross borders, or become a legal immigrant or full citizen in Israel. However, apart from the necessity of immigration law, we must consider the process itself. Clearly, whatever process occurred in the account of Ruth was far less complicated than the current process within the United States. It was Ruth's familial association with Naomi that was enough to secure citizenship along with the social rights of gleaning in the field of Boaz. Various social rights given Ruth included 1) protection (Ruth 2:22), 2) food provision (Ruth 2:3; Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22), 3) work opportunities (Ruth 2:15, 17, 23), and 4), fellowship and social acceptance (Ruth 2:14).

How does the example of Ruth and her acceptance into Israeli society compare with the current mixed-status family laws within the US? Under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, for illegal immigrants to receive legal residency, mixed-status families must show that

“exceptional and extremely unusual hardship”⁴ would result for specified (and qualified/legal) dependents should the illegal family member be deported. This statement is problematic in at least two ways: 1) This criterion can be applied discriminately. 2) It overcomplicates clear considerations any family should receive when seeking to remain together in the same country.

The Obama Administration worked towards effective solutions aimed at keeping mixed-status families together. These initiatives included the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) and expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).⁵ They allow families to remain together in the U.S. while the legal status of immigrant family members is determined through the immigration process.⁶

Under the current Trump administration, DAPA and DACA appear to be under threat. For example, 90 percent of those deported by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the Obama Administration were illegal immigrants with criminal convictions. Under the Trump Administration, 64 percent of illegal immigrants deported had criminal convictions.⁷ These percentages indicate that the deportation of non-criminal illegal immigrants has risen, increasing the fear and uncertainty experienced by mixed-status families. Law and practice are constantly in flux, and with this dynamic, the legal environment within the US has made the process of keeping mixed-status families together opaque and unpredictable.

In light of all of this, how can we reconcile the biblical model of immigration with today’s laws? First, we must examine our own sociocultural bias by which we see the world around us. Glen Stassen and David Gushee, authors of *Kingdom Ethics*, say: “Many American Christians do

not have the skill (or will) to sort out the social factors shaping their lives, let alone where their faith convictions might conceal the interests of social groups (including their churches) that work at cross-purposes with the kingdom of God” (Chapter 9). It is the task of the individual and community to parse our cultural and political biases in order to seek to enter into the empathetic reality⁸ of others so that we may understand God’s justice for all – citizen and immigrant.

Second, as we enter into the empathetic reality of others, we stand to gain a richer perspective concerning mixed-status families and their acceptance into American life and

These percentages indicate that the deportation of non-criminal illegal immigrants has risen, increasing the fear and uncertainty experienced by mixed-status families.

culture. We only stand to gain as we seek to understand the hopes, dreams, emotions and fears of mixed-families within the United States. This understanding will help us to advocate for just initiatives for mixed-status family—such as advocating for IIRIRA reform towards reasonable, legal status consideration to any family member, as well as advocating for the continuance of initiatives like DACA and DAPA.

Third, Christians can assist mixed-status families by supporting low-cost and free immigration legal services where they live—organizations such as Seattle’s Union Gospel Mission (UGM), which offers free immigration legal assistance.⁹ In this way, mixed-status families will have easy access to affordable, professional help in navigating dynamic immigration

laws and regulations.

Finally, Christians can seek to welcome others, as Christ has welcomed us (Rom. 15:7), and to show love in action through hospitality to the foreigners and sojourners among us (Heb. 13:2).

In conclusion, I urge all Christians to examine scripture and immigration issues critically, inside and outside of their own bias. We must seek to enter the empathetic reality of others. In doing so, we may be able to glimpse the humanity and motivation of the mixed-status family living in the U.S. today, whereby we become a voice in support of keeping families together—families like that of Naomi and Ruth. ■

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Stop Coddling the Super-Rich

By Warren E. Buffett

Omaha

Editor's Note and Opinion: This Op-ed was published on August 14, 2011 in numerous newspapers in America. Since then the wealth of the mega-rich has continued to grow to the point that many economists today believe the divide between the very rich and everybody else has reached a very dangerous point. Yet the 2017 tax bill before Congress, ignores the advice of Warren Buffett and others, and showers the extremely wealthy with huge financial benefits at the expense of everybody else. The dollar amounts Mr. Buffett cite seem very small when compared to the levels of financial disparities today.

Our leaders have asked for “shared sacrifice.” But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched.

While the poor and middle class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks. Some of us are investment managers who earn billions from our daily labors but are allowed to classify our income as “carried interest,” thereby getting a bargain 15 percent tax rate. Others own stock index futures for 10 minutes and have 60 percent of their gain taxed at 15 percent, as if they’d been long-term investors.

These and other blessings are showered upon us by legislators in Washington who feel compelled to protect us, much as if we were spotted owls or some other endangered species. It’s nice to have friends in high places.

Last year my federal tax bill — the income tax I paid, as well as payroll taxes paid by me and on my behalf

— was \$6,938,744. That sounds like a lot of money. But what I paid was only 17.4 percent of my taxable income — and that’s actually a lower percentage than was paid by any of the other 20 people in our office. Their tax burdens ranged from 33 percent to 41 percent and averaged 36 percent.

If you make money with money, as some of my super-rich friends do, your percentage may be a bit lower than mine. But if you earn money from a job, your percentage will surely exceed mine — most likely by a lot.

To understand why, you need to examine the sources of government revenue. Last year about 80 percent of these revenues came from personal income taxes and payroll taxes. The mega-rich pay income taxes at a rate of 15 percent on most of their earnings but pay practically nothing in payroll taxes. It’s a different story for the middle class: typically, they fall into the 15 percent and 25 percent income tax brackets, and then are hit with heavy payroll taxes to boot.

Back in the 1980s and 1990s, tax rates for the rich were far higher, and my percentage rate was in the middle of the pack. According to a theory I sometimes hear, I should have thrown a fit and refused to invest because of the elevated tax rates on capital gains and dividends.

I didn’t refuse, nor did others. I have worked with investors for 60 years and I have yet to see anyone — not even when capital gains rates were 39.9 percent in 1976-77 — shy away from a sensible investment because of the tax rate on the potential gain. People invest to make money, and potential taxes have never scared them off. And to those who argue that higher rates hurt job creation, I would

note that a net of nearly 40 million jobs were added between 1980 and 2000. You know what’s happened since then: lower tax rates and far lower job creation.

Since 1992, the I.R.S. has compiled data from the returns of the 400 Americans reporting the largest income. In 1992, the top 400 had aggregate taxable income of \$16.9 billion and paid federal taxes of 29.2 percent on that sum. In 2008, the aggregate income of the highest 400 had soared to \$90.9 billion — a staggering \$227.4 million on average — but the rate paid had fallen to 21.5 percent.

The taxes I refer to here include only federal income tax, but you can be sure that any payroll tax for the 400 was inconsequential compared to income. In fact, 88 of the 400 in 2008 reported no wages at all, though every one of them reported capital gains. Some of my brethren may shun work but they all like to invest. (I can relate to that.)

I know well many of the mega-rich and, by and large, they are very decent people. They love America and appreciate the opportunity this country has given them. Many have joined the Giving Pledge, promising to give most of their wealth to philanthropy. Most wouldn’t mind being told to pay more in taxes as well, particularly when so many of their fellow citizens are truly suffering.

Twelve members of Congress will soon take on the crucial job of rearranging our country’s finances. They’ve been instructed to devise a plan that reduces the 10-year deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion. It’s vital, however, that they achieve far more than that. Americans are rapidly losing faith in the ability of Congress to deal

with our country's fiscal problems. Only action that is immediate, real and very substantial will prevent that doubt from morphing into hopelessness. That feeling can create its own reality.

Job one for the 12 is to pare down some future promises that even a rich America can't fulfill. Big money must be saved here. The 12 should then turn to the issue of revenues. I would leave rates for 99.7 percent of tax-

payers unchanged and continue the current 2-percentage-point reduction in the employee contribution to the payroll tax. This cut helps the poor and the middle class, who need every break they can get.

But for those making more than \$1 million — there were 236,883 such households in 2009 — I would raise rates immediately on taxable income in excess of \$1 million, including, of course, dividends and capital gains.

And for those who make \$10 million or more — there were 8,274 in 2009 — I would suggest an additional increase in rate.

My friends and I have been coddled long enough by a billionaire-friendly Congress. It's time for our government to get serious about shared sacrifice. ■

Warren E. Buffett is the chairman and chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway.

Pastor and Judge Wendell Griffen is a member of our board of directors and is a frequent contributor to *Christian Ethics Today*.

His new book, *The Fierce Urgency of Prophetic Hope*, has been highly acclaimed. We would like to send a copy to you as an expression of gratitude for your gift of support for the journal.

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When All Else Fails

By Lavonn Brown

On January 3rd, 2016 Donald Trump described his loyal supporters by saying, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and not lose any voters.” Could that be true? What would have to happen to the moral values of the American people for that to happen?

In the early 1930s a new leader was rising to power in Germany. Germany was in turmoil. The people longed for better days. This new leader was saying and doing strange things. For one thing he was promising to make Germany great again. Some people were disturbed by his actions. Yet he had his loyal supporters. They asked, “What if one of these days he stops doing crazy things and brings back the good old days?”

On June 30, 1934 the purge began. Mass executions took place. People who opposed the new leadership were killed by the hundreds and

arrested by the thousands for political and religious opposition.

How would Germany respond to this atrocity? With celebration? After all, Hitler was insisting he had saved the nation from serious danger. He had acted only in the interests of the German people to save the nation from turmoil.

Or, would they respond with protests? Marches in the streets? Outrage? The fact is, a strange indifference settled over the nation. Hitler began to receive telegrams of praise, some from prominent religious leaders in America, including Southern Baptists. The populace accepted the violent executions without protest. Rules of right and wrong were upended. No foreign nation recalled its ambassadors or filed protest. The world did not rise in revulsion.

Erik Larson, in his book, *The Garden of Beasts*, records one further insight worth noting. William

E. Dodd, U.S. Ambassador to Germany, lived in Germany during those years. He noted that one trait of the German people persisted during all the craziness: the love of animals, in particular horses and dogs. Beautiful horses were well cared for, clean, well fed and happy. Dogs were walked, talked to, coddled and well fed. All this was guaranteed by German law.

So, in 2017, in the light of all the craziness in our country, strange indifference and upending of rules of right and wrong, we Americans can relax. After all, we have strong laws forbidding cruelty to animals; it is punishable by law.

Or as Dodd said, “One might easily wish he were a horse.” ■

Lavonn Brown is a retired minister who served First Baptist Church in Norman, Oklahoma for 29 years. He lives with his wife, Norma, in Norman.

A Most Fascinating Documentary Movie.....Available on Netflix

The Armor of Light, a documentary film that first started making the festival circuit in spring 2015, confronts the gun policy debate in the context of American evangelicalism and the pro-life movement.

The film follows Rev. Rob Schenck, a well-known anti-abortion activist. He is president of Faith and Action in Washington, D.C. and chairman of the Evangelical Church Alliance. Following a mass shooting event not far from his home, Schenck began to seriously wrestle with his own views on gun violence and policy in the light of his firm position on “the right to life”. The film depicts his meeting Lucy McBath, a Christian woman whose unarmed teenage son, Jordan Davis, was shot and killed in the parking lot of a convenience store in Florida. The shooter used Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” laws as his defense at trial. A friendship developed between them, prompting Schenck to initiate a series of conversations around the country with evangelical leaders, questioning whether being pro-gun and pro-life are compatible positions.

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

Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit

By Barry Estabrook; Kansas City (MO); Andrews McMeel Publishing, LLC, 2011.

Reviewed by Rick Burnette

During the summer of 2011, I heard an NPR interview of Barry Estabrook about his new book, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*. The food writer described having observed three green spheres fall from a loaded farm truck near Naples, Florida, which then bounced off the pavement. Upon further inspection, he discovered essentially undamaged, unripened tomatoes.

Intrigued, Estabrook began to investigate tomato production in southwest Florida where two-thirds of America’s wintertime tomatoes are produced. He learned not only why a tomato can survive a 10-foot fall from a speeding truck, but also uncovered a deeply entrenched system of farmworker exploitation that has been propped up by consumer demand and corporate interests. In *Tomatoland*, Estabrook presents a long list of stakeholders in the tomato industry, including plant breeders and the powerful Florida Tomato Committee which sets the standards for the commercial crop. In this book, we meet trafficked Mexican and Guatemalan harvesters as well as a Pennsylvania farmer who grows and sells heirlooms to New York City chefs who know how tomatoes should look and taste.

We’re also introduced to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a human rights organization

that was organized in the late 1990s to address farmworker abuses including inadequate pay, intolerable working conditions, human trafficking and sexual violence.

When *Tomatoland* was published, CIW had, for years, been focusing its energies on persuading tomato growers to improve worker wages that had eroded over previous decades. Despite initial refusals to comply with farmworker demands, the growers were eventually compelled to increase

“A penny per pound would be a pittance to a fast food behemoth like McDonald’s, which has annual revenues of over \$22 billion. But when you are picking a ton of tomatoes a day, as a worker typically does, that’s a raise from \$50 dollars a day to \$70, the difference between below-poverty existence and a livable, if paltry, wage.”

their per-bucket compensation following CIW-led hunger strikes with additional pressure from clergymen. However, the raise was inadequate to lift workers out of poverty and the farm owners were still unwilling to provide a fair wage.

CIW then took the workers’ case to some of the biggest customers of Florida’s tomato industry—fast food corporations. Launching the Campaign for Fair Food, CIW’s strategy was to press companies to guaran-

tee farmworkers their basic rights and increase payment by a mere penny per pound for the tomatoes harvested. As Estabrook describes, “A penny per pound would be a pittance to a fast food behemoth like McDonald’s, which has annual revenues of over \$22 billion. But when you are picking a ton of tomatoes a day, as a worker typically does, that’s a raise from \$50 dollars a day to \$70, the difference between below-poverty existence and a livable, if paltry, wage.”

Met with resistance, CIW then led a boycott against Taco Bell in alliance with faith, community and student organizations. In 2005, the coalition eventually succeeded in persuading the shareholders and executives of Yum! (Taco Bell’s parent company) to engage. McDonalds and Burger King followed suit over the next three years and, by 2010, several other major food service companies had joined. After *Tomatoland* was published, Walmart also signed a Fair Food Agreement with CIW in 2014. Presently, Publix and Wendy’s refuse to participate in the Fair Food Program.

Farmworker abuses described by *Tomatoland* are not limited to southwest Florida. Such violations are found wherever migrants do the work that locals are unwilling or unable to do, whether in North Carolina Christmas tree farms or in California’s Central Valley. I encountered similar plights suffered by migrant workers along the Thai-Burma border where I lived for almost two decades.

In 2013, my family moved to southwest Florida, eventually engaging with an Immokalee farmworker-focused ministry. Despite CIW’s achievements, the poverty rate of this agricultural town is 43.9% and locals

are subjected to overpriced food and housing. Additionally, current anxieties related to the legal status of migrant workers has resulted in many residents avoiding particular locations, including schools and grocery stores, for fear of being arrested and deported.

Seven years ago, Estabrook was struck by the irony that “workers who pick the food we eat cannot afford to feed themselves.” Unfortunately, for many of Immokalee’s farmworkers, this sad fact remains.

The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries

by Basyle Tchividjian & Shira Berkovits, Greensboro, NC: New Life Books, 2017 \$22.47.

Reviewed by Rachel Shubin

So, you think your church or ministry is safe from sex abuse? Think again.

As Protestants, we tend to think of sex abuse cases in church as a problem that doesn’t really happen in our congregations. It’s not our problem. Our people don’t do that or haven’t experienced that. That’s a problem the Catholics have. That’s a problem for those guys way over there.

The Catholic Reaction

Not only is this not the case, but the cracks are starting to show. While the Catholic Church is now entering its third decade of rethinking and reacting to the abuse cases and abusers in their ranks, the very point that hamstrung them initially - that of being a massive, top-down organization bent on protecting themselves - is now working in their favor. The prevention and response policies that they have developed over the years can be organized from the top and then filtered directly down the pole.

My two younger kids are going to a Catholic school this year, and—

Estabrook was struck by the irony that “workers who pick the food we eat cannot afford to feed themselves.”

A revised third edition of *Tomatoland*, including four new chapters, is slated for release by Andrews McMeel Publishing in April, 2018. I recommend all justice lovers read it. ■

wow!—those guys are careful. To do anything at all, from helping in the classroom to driving on field trips to volunteering basically anywhere near kids, you have to get a background check and then go to a three-hour training on child safety and protection that requires a refresher with further training every subsequent year your kids attend school. These policies for the school are implemented by the diocese.

In contrast, neither of the two Christian schools my kids have

As Protestants, we tend to think of sex abuse cases in church as a problem that doesn’t really happen in our congregations. It’s not our problem.

attended has required this level of volunteer preparation (or any preparation at all) including background checks. Unlike the Catholic organizational system, Protestantism is a slivered mass of denominations and independent churches, none of whom are beholden to or cooperate with each other. When one group produces new policies, none of the other groups benefit, which makes our response time

Rick Burnette served as an agricultural missionary with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Thailand from 1994 through 2009. Afterward he worked with ECHO, Inc. in Thailand and Florida. He and his wife Ellen currently codirect Cultivate Abundance (www.cultivateabundance.org), a ministry focused on alleviating farmworker food insecurity through small-scale food production in Immokalee and elsewhere.

slow and increases the likelihood of abusers falling through the cracks by denomination- or church-hopping. Help Figuring Out Best Practices

In the process of spending most of the 2015-2016 school year researching and reporting on two specific sex abuse cases in a church setting, which involved an inadvertent crash course in the miserable realities of abuse dynamics, I came across Basyle (Boz) Tchividjian’s organization, GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in a Church Environment). GRACE is a two-pronged organization that both investigates organizations experiencing abuse complaints within their systems (investigations are at the organization’s request) and that provides training for churches on best practices for sexual abuse prevention and response.

Boz himself spent a decade prosecuting sex abuse crimes specifically in Florida and has amassed a board full of other Christian leaders in the field on both the legal and the counseling/psychology ends. To aid church leaders in preparing protection policies for their congregations, GRACE has put out a new book called *The Child Safeguarding Policy for Churches and Ministries*.

I received a free review copy and have spent the last several days reading it. It’s extremely helpful and covers these and other topics:

—Protecting the children in a

Christian environment from child abuse

- The warning signs of child abuse
- Crafting and implementing a child protection policy
- Responding to abuse allegations
- Caring for victims of child abuse
- The legal implications and requirements for churches and Christian ministries

While it is easy to think that this material is solely the purview of the children's pastor, that is not the case. Signs of child abuse can be alarmingly subtle and, if a child chooses you as the person whom they trust enough to disclose their abuse, that conversation will likely not start off sounding like it's about what has happened to them. It will begin with slightly odd things that are the child's way of testing whether or not you are a safe person for them to tell. If you don't know what you're looking for, you'll miss it and that child will sink back into tortured silence for years or quite possibly the rest of his or her life. (Well over 90% of children don't disclose and, of the ones who do, those who were abused by teachers or church leaders typically wait at least 10 years before they ever say anything.)

The Scope of the Sex Abuse Problem

What about scope? How many people are we talking about? Estimates by the Department of Justice are that one in four girls and one in six boys will be abused by the time they turn 18. So, yes. That's 20% of your congregation since many of those kids are now adults dealing with the after-effects. (These don't look tidy either,

by the way. The effects are often so severe that I've started thinking that, in many cases, the resultant mental illness would be more accurately described as mental or emotional injury). If your congregation has 200 people in it, that would mean that 40 of them have experienced some form of sexual abuse. And that's probably low because it's more common in church than even in the general population, and 93% of sex offenders describe themselves as religious. Abusers love churches. Churchgoers tend to want to believe the best about people, so they are very slow to believe someone could actually do such a thing, and are often overly quick to forgive even

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What if 20% of your church were victim to a natural disaster or a targeted scam or industrial poisoning? What if the employment rate in your church were 20% or what if 20% had cancer? Would that be discussed from the pulpit? Would we be talking about

how to support those 20% and show them love and care? Would we be talking about biblical responses and how Jesus loved, believed and cared for the hurting and grieving? You bet! But we don't do that with child abuse or really any kind of abuse at all. And so it goes unnoticed, unchecked and the people suffering leave, unloved.

The scope of the problem in the Protestant church is at least the size of the problem in the Catholic Church. And no, celibacy for priests wasn't the primary problem. Eighty percent of abusers are married men. Contrary to popular belief, marriage does not provide a protective or curative effect. For the last five consecutive years, sex abuse of minors was the top reason that churches were sued.

This is our problem. We are culpable. We are responsible both for our own turning away from victims in the past and for turning towards them in love now and in the future. We are responsible both for protecting children and the vulnerable and for handling abusers biblically by turning them over to God-appointed authorities which, in the case of criminal activity, means the police. We can do better. We have to do better. We shame the very Gospel when we don't. ■

Rachel Shubin describes herself as a critical thinker, obsessive reader and writer, Bible-studier, church-goer, Jesus woman. She lives with her husband and six children on a farm in Oregon. Her blog can be found at rachelshubin.com

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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