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Who Sinned?...

By Patrick Anderson

Many organizations and denominations which carry the label Christian, are riven by disagreements regarding some aspects of sexuality. Notably, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) recently joined the ranks of denomi-networks in seeking some resolution to two mutually exclusive viewpoints held by its members.

First, some members believe in total acceptance and integration of lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ) persons in every aspect of the work the Gospel, particularly as missionaries and ministers. Second, other members believe their understanding of the Bible precludes LGBTQ persons from certain roles of service, especially as missionaries and/or ministers.

From a practical standpoint, the two sides are not compatible. Truly, these two "masters" cannot be simultaneously served. Nor is this the first time Baptists have found themselves embroiled in cultural impasses.

Neither the issue of slavery nor the role of women in church and society can be held up as shining examples of rational or even civil discourse among Baptists.

Baptists and Slavery

In the 19th century, Baptists in America disagreed so vehemently on the issue of slavery that the denomination split along north (anti-slavery) and south (pro-slavery) lines. Southern Baptists and all other church denominations in the south defended slavery. They used cultural and rational arguments and, to no small extent, Holy Scripture to justify the subjugation of dark-skinned people by light-skinned people. The role of sin in the dark-skinned condition was also justified by the stories of Noah's son Ham. White supremacy was understood to be normative, and preferable. After the south lost the war and for decades into the 20th century, white Baptists in the south shared the shameful belief in and practice of white supremacy with the other white Christian groups—Methodists, Presbyterians and the rest.

Baptists and Gender Equality

Late in the 20th century, faced with the cultural shifts regarding the role of women in society, Southern Baptists took a strong stance against women in ministry. By the end of the century, in 2000 the SBC had codified this stance in a new statement of faith that in part maintained that "the role of senior pastor is reserved for males only," and "wives should graciously submit to their husbands." Although not as seismic a split as that caused by the slavery controversy more than a century earlier, the public stance taken by the SBC to oppose equality for women in ministry led in no small part to the departure of some churches and individuals and the formation of the Alliance of Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Neither the issue of slavery nor the role of women in church and society can be held up as shining examples of rational or even civil discourse among Baptists. Slavery disputes led to all-out, literal war—a war between mostly white northerners and white southerners resulting hundreds of thousands of them on both sides killed and untold numbers more maimed. Slavery ended, but the underlying value system which sustained slavery persisted. In both instances—slavery and the roles of women—arguments were made on the basis of culture, biology and the Bible.

Southerners defended slavery of dark-skinned persons as a cultural norm. White southerners were frightened at the prospect of a cataclysmic cultural change that would recognize dark-skinned people as equal to light-skinned people. Such a shift would bring about the collapse of their culture. What would happen if black people suddenly saw themselves as equal to whites? What if they wanted to drink from the same water fountains, utilize the same public bathrooms and waiting rooms, go to the same schools, hold public office, or (gasp!) you-name-it?

Likewise Southerners, Baptists especially, have seen the subjugation of women as a cultural norm, holding onto an almost exclusively male-dominated culture. They look on the decisions to suppress women in leadership with no evident chagrin. They fear women. What would happen to our culture if women wore the pants in the house? How could women lead in a man's

world? What would happen if women were to decide they could hold executive positions in business and government? What if they were to think they could not only preach, but be police officers, fighter pilots, soldiers, or (gasp!) electricians, carpenters or plumbers? Biological differences surely must prove that men are superior and women are inferior.

A belief in biological differences between male and female underlie the theological stance in much the same way as perceived biological differences between black folks and white folks were used to justify slavery. White people believed black people were inferior intellectually, morally, and physically. They could not think, do right or swim. Women are considered inferior to men as well. They are too emotional, too timid, too irrational. The "causes" of gender and color differences became pivotal for many defenders of the status quo. Women were to be treated as inferior to men because of the SIN they committed through Eve in the Garden of Eden. Dark-skinned persons were to be treated as inferior to light-skinned persons because of the SIN committed by Ham after the great flood.

New Issue, Old Arguments

Today, the cultural issues revolve around sexuality, particularly the acceptable roles of lesbians, gay persons, bisexuals, transgendered and queer persons (LGBTQ). Again, cultural, biological and religious arguments are heard. What would happen if persons of the same gender want to get married? Adopt babies? Purchase property? Go to the same bathrooms? Publically display their affection? The culture would collapse and civilization as we know it would end.

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But, it is in the realm of biology where much of the debate has centered. What causes a person to be LGBTQ? Is it a matter of nature or nurture? Is it a behavior which is learned (and therefore can be unlearned) or is a person "born that way?" The scientific reality has shown that simplistic either-or arguments are not adequate to explain the complexity of humans.

Scientific studies provide convincing evidence of a genetic component in behavior and orientation. But to argue that behavior is the result of biological determinism does not close the book on the subject. What about the moral or legal aspects within civil society? We cannot merely say that people act the way they do because they are born that way and cannot help themselves. If we equate genetics with behavioral determinism, then we eliminate all responsibility and sanctions for any behavior, a position that most of us would not be willing to accept, LGBTQ included.

We can say that choice is not the only factor in a person's sexual identity, that genetic and other biological factors are in fact dispositive. But genetic or natural traits do not absolve us of responsibility for actions. Sexual desire runs the gamut of human experience and there are numerous individuals that have inbred or learned desires related to children, animals or even dead bodies that we simply do not condone as a society.

The biological determinism argument does not work as a mandate for full acceptance of all sexual diversity. If so, we would need to condone any and all sexual desires. If we claim a biological cause for behavior, we are left to excuse any number of behaviors which science has found to be biologically influenced (notice, not caused) including aggression, addiction, impulsivity, and any number of behaviors. Science accepts the fact that neither nature nor nurture, but a complicated confluence of the two, is responsible for sexual orientation and gender identity.

The roles of nature and nurture are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are intimately connected and interdependent. It is the biological organism in interaction with the environment, which produces behaviors. The moral component to all behaviors is not exclusively dependent on either nature or nurture.

Some Christians denounce any and all non-heterosexual, monogamous-in-marriage behavior as aberrant, unnatural and sinful. That is the basis within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's current policy excluding LGBTQ from serving as missionaries or ministers. It is a morality statement. Somebody sinned, and some continue to sin, and the result is that LGBTQ persons are damaged goods—disqualified from holding certain roles.

That is similar to the approach the disciples took

with a man blind from birth:
*As (Jesus) passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing (*John 9:1-7).

This episode in the life of Jesus reveals elements of knowledge and emotion. The disciples' question (who sinned?) reflects a prevalent ideology of the times—that sickness, disability, or any infirmity are the result of sin. Demon possession was the explanation for various forms of mental illness or autism or any number of recently diagnosed conditions. SIN was a catch-all explanation for all sorts of conditions in the first century.

But, I cannot help but understand the disciples' question about the man born blind as an empathetic inquiry. "How can this be, Rabbi?" It is the eternal question about suffering. Jesus responded in kind, supplementing his philosophical verbal answer with an act of ultimate mercy, an empathetic response.

People tend not to be persuaded by logic and facts alone. Many are persuaded primarily by emotion, tradition and the opinions of those around them. Objective facts that support our perspectives are helpful reinforcers of our opinions; but to get us to consider others' opinions, or to convince others to consider ours, depends to a large extent on people's emotions and our common humanity.

The factor that has changed many persons' attitudes toward LGBTQ is having actual contact or relationship with someone in that community. Most church people, I think it is fair to say, have never knowingly encountered a transsexual person. Not many church people are aware that babies born with both ovaries and testicles occur once in every 2000 births, making that population larger than the Jewish population in the world. Such gender complication produces ambivalence about gender identity which presents that population with a serious existential dilemma.

As church folks discover nieces and nephews, grandchildren, brothers and sisters who are LGBTQ, their attitudes change rapidly. The existence of LGBTQ fellow church members, co-workers, neighbors, teammates and relatives is more commonplace than many church folks thought a decade or two ago.

Just as we modern Christians shake our heads and roll our eyes at the disciples' question to Jesus, or to the defense of slavery, or the subjugation of women… so, I believe, we will all one day respond to the present generation's animus to and subjugation of the LGBTQ community. As with all questions of ethics and morality, the ways we treat fellow humans and our understanding of the Gospel leave us with the responsibility to engage in the conversation with all of the church and fiercely hope for a widely-held new understanding.

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As Jesus said, *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*

I think the answer to "who sinned?" is found in the mirror.

Broken People

By Marion D. Aldridge

The idea that God loves broken people (drunks, sexual misfits and those who fail to respect authority) was not part of my religious heritage. Instead, there was a focus on God's scorn and punishment for those who fail. Whilee gave lip service to God's unconditional love, being consigned to an eternity in a painful hell eventually began to sound conditional to me.

At different points in my life, I've heard that church should be a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. I've been blessed by many congregations that understand their role as an infirmary for those who have been injured and wounded by life. I've also seen too much of the polar-opposite where people are taught that God prefers the righteous, the pure, and the holy.

Recently, I read a book of brief daily devotional thoughts written by laity, edited by Edward R. Murrow, named *This I Believe*. It's not a Christian volume in any way. The contributors, none of whom were theologians and few of whom were writers, were asked in the 1950s to pen a brief essay on whatever was central in their lives. Their answers fascinated me—everything from music to hard work to freedom to baseball. I appreciated their variety. Lou Crandall's essay, however, made me giggle—not that it was intended to be humorous. An engineering, architecture and construction genius, Crandall wrote he liked the characters in the Bible for being "the closest examples of human perfection." He added, "They were unselfish, steadfast in their faith, and unstinting in their help to others."

I don't know which Bible he was reading, but little of that is in the Bible I use. The complicated, often selfish, seldom steadfast, always surprising human personalities in the Old and New Testaments include trickster Jacob, Rahab the harlot, impatient Moses, adulterer and murderer David, frightened Jonah, and impulsive Peter—and these were the good guys.

Years ago, I picked up a biography of a renowned Baptist leader, George W. Truett, a pastor during the first half of the 20th century. As I read the first few pages, I realized the author had engaged in hero worship. Truett, in the writer's eyes, was one of the greatest men who'd ever lived, beyond comparison or criticism. I put the book down and never read another page. Anybody flying that high above the rest of us could teach me little. When I read the stories of George Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Anne Lamott, their humanity and their flaws are magnificently obvious. Personal growth, I notice, happens most often where life is challenging and raw, when something is broken and needs to be repaired.

I never fully trust men or women who seem to have gone from victory to victory. I've heard advice that comes from some superhero pastors, tycoons, and authors, and it's clear some of them know nothing about the world in which I live. They are Gold Medal champions in life, whereas most of us are just happy to finish the race without embarrassing ourselves.

Once, when I was a young seminarian and the pastor of a small congregation in Louisville, Kentucky, my wife and I had a terrible argument while driving to church. Our words to one another were hurtful. When we arrived, we got out of the car, steam practically rising out of our ears. We went our separate ways, she to a Sunday school class, and I to the pastor's study.

"What a hypocrite I am!" I thought as I tried to prepare myself to lead worship and preach. "What do you have to say to these people? You're as bad as anybody else. You're a fraud. Who do you think you are to stand behind a pulpit and preach God's word?"

For good or ill, I preached. I couldn't look at my wife. It was a short sermon, and the congregation was probably glad.

As time passed, I re-evaluated that Sunday, especially since there were others like it. Eventually, I decided an argument with my wife didn't disqualify me from preaching. Being human qualified me! Being wounded, scared and scarred—those are the credentials needed to be a good pastor.

It took me another five or six years as a minister to understand this basic truth. I'd gone to seminary intending to memorize answers to biblical or theological questions, to be indoctrinated, I suppose. The truth was I'd already been indoctrinated by 25 years in Sunday school. What I began to discover as I matured was my humanity. The seed was planted for a better and different education than I had anticipated.

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Is Choosing to Die Sometimes Morally Permissible and Spiritually Defensible?

By Mike Attas and Robert Baird

Michael, under hospice care, had lung cancer that had metastasized to his brain. Suffering also with shingles, he was in agony. Physicians and hospice personnel struggled to find a pain control regimen that would provide him some relief and, thus, some quality of life. The pain medications included morphine, Thorazine, Elavil, decadron, and ibuprofin. An increase in back pain led to the discovery of an infection of the vertebrae, requiring surgery that left the spinal column and vertebrae exposed from the shoulder blades to the waist. The irrigation of his wound and the changing of the dressing were agonizing. During the eight days after surgery, his condition deteriorated and the morphine was increased from 40 mg. per hour to 255 mg. per hour. "Even with massive doses of morphine and valium he did not experience comfort."[1] To choose to die in such circumstances can be both morally permissible and spiritually defensible. Indeed, requiring individuals to live under such circumstances against their will actively injures them by forcing their continued existence.[2]

It is our (Attas and Baird) feeling, our conviction, our moral intuition, our judgment that choosing to die under certain circumstances is morally permissible and spiritually defensible.

She sits in an alcove at the end of the hall wholly unaware of her environment. Every morning attendants lift her from bed and tie her into a comfortable chair with soft pieces of cloth. During the day, she hangs there; they tend to her bodily needs, including feeding her by putting food in her mouth and massaging her throat, helping her to swallow. In the evening, they replace her in bed. With ongoing care, she could continue to exist in this manner for years.[3] To choose in advance to die in such circumstances can be both morally permissible and spiritually defensible.

While the thesis of this paper is that choosing to die is sometimes acceptable, morally and spiritually, this essay has a sub-text relating to the process of moral decision-making. That sub-text will be addressed first; its relevance to the essay's basic claim will become clear.

We speak in a variety of ways about our moral beliefs. We say, "I have a strong intuition or feeling or moral conviction that a course of action is right or wrong." We speak of conscience as our guide, as in "my conscience is leading me to do this or telling me to do that." For most of us, these are simply ways, sometimes metaphorical, of asserting our moral judgment, of stating what we think we ought to do or what is permissible to do. It is our (Attas and Baird) feeling, our conviction, our moral intuition, our judgment that choosing to die under certain circumstances is morally permissible and spiritually defensible.

The problem, of course, is that one's moral intuitions and feelings can be mistaken. One's conscience can mislead. Moral judgments may be wrong. In the face of this fact, the proper option is the way of philosophy: thinking hard about one's intuitions and judgments and considering reasons for and against them. "I am," said Socrates, "one who must be guided by reason."[4] Contemporary philosophers, too, are "professionally wedded to reasoning."[5]

We are, then, doing philosophy. We are not simply expressing our opinion. We are attempting to reason clearly about what we think is morally permissible and spiritually defensible. We are expressing a *considered* judgment, one that has been sustained after reflection and discussion. No guarantees, of course. Even after careful thought, one can be wrong. Moral decision-making is risky business.

Evidence that it is risky is that thoughtful people of good faith continue to differ about moral matters. Consider the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003 and our current military involvement in Afghanistan; consider same-sex marriage, capital punishment, or abortion. Why is moral agreement hard to come by? There are explanatons why the giving of reasons does not always resolve disagreements. The philosopher John Rawls refers to what he calls the burdens of judgment: the reasons why agreement in moral matters is difficult.[6] The evidence for competing views is often complex and conflicting. Even when there is agreement on the evidence, individuals may weigh various pieces of

evidence differently. Moreover, this process of weighing evidence, interpreting data, and making judgments is influenced by past experiences that vary with each individual who, to a significant extent, is a product of his or her history. Finally, even when there is absolute agreement on moral principles, individuals have to make tough judgments about the application of principles in particular situations. Moral agreement even among reasonable persons is, thus, hard to come by.

A student at the end of an ethics course expressed disappointment in the class. "I thought," he said, "that if I took a course in ethics, I would come out with a set of principles or standards that would tell me precisely what to do in any situation I faced." In effect, he wanted a definitive moral calculator. He wanted a set of principles that would relieve him of moral decision-making, relieve him of making particular moral judgments. That we cannot be so relieved is both the glory and the anguish of being human. The glory is the creative satisfaction that comes with responsible decision-making. The anguish is the inevitable presence of moral disagreements.

And there is certainly disagreement regarding the morality of choosing to die, particularly when that choosing moves beyond passively letting nature take its course. Physician-assisted death is among the most controversial moral disagreements in this country, though a recent Gallup Poll (2017) shows a strong majority of Americans (73%) support physician-assisted death.[7]

Defenders of the choice to die are often described as being caught up in a "Culture of Death" by those who attempt to grab the rhetorical and moral high ground by identifying themselves with the "Culture of Life."

And physicians, too, are increasingly supportive. "Fifty-seven percent of physicians believe physician-assisted death should be available to terminally ill patients, up from 54% in 2014 and 46% in 2010 . . ."[8] Moreover, "a growing number of medical societies, such as the California Medical Society, have dropped their opposition to physician-assisted death and have adopted a neutral position."[9]

In a recent piece in the *New York Times*, "Should I help My Patients Die?" palliative care specialist Dr. Jessica Zitter discusses some of the complicated issues surrounding the question of assisted death and her discomfort with the idea. Nevertheless, she admits:

> I want this option available to me and my family. I have seen much suffering around death. In my experience, most of the pain can be managed by expert care teams focusing on symptom management and family support. But not all. My mother is profoundly claustrophobic. I can imagine her terror if she were to develop Lou Gehrig's disease, which progressively immobilizes patients while their cognitive faculties remain largely intact. For my mother this would be a fate worse than death.[10]

While physician-assisted death, she concludes, should be "a tool of last resort, medical aid in dying is the law in my home state [California] and I am glad for that." [11]

Some opponents of physician-assisted death, however, characterize the position we will defend in strong language, seeing it as an evil—a mischievous and dangerous[12] folly[13]. Defenders of the choice to die are often described as being caught up in a "Culture of Death" by those who attempt to grab the rhetorical and moral high ground by identifying themselves with the "Culture of Life." As the Gallup Poll makes clear, however, a majority now supports choosing to die under certain circumstances. We should add further that many Christians support such a choice, again, under certain circumstances. Indeed, a preeminent American theologian and philosopher, John Cobb, Professor Emeritus, Claremont School of Theology, argues that the Christian Church should repent of its opposition to those who would choose to die under certain conditions.[14] After considering opposing arguments and rethinking ours, our conviction remains that choosing death in certain circumstances is morally permissible and spiritually defensible.

By the phrase "choosing to die," we mean: (1) the intentional termination of life, (2) by an act of omission or commission, (3) by the choice of the one who dies (a) because he or she is experiencing physical distress and emotional suffering that rob life, from his or her perspective, of the possibility of positive meaning, or (b) because he or she is no longer capable of conscious life. (In this case, of course, the choice would have been made in advance.)

Choosing to die by an act of omission involves refusing treatment when to do so will likely result in death sooner rather than later. Examples include rejecting a respirator, refusing chemotherapy, or foregoing penicillin. This form of choosing to die is not particularly controversial. Most individuals and religious traditions agree: At times, it is legitimate to cease medical intervention even though to do so means dying sooner than one otherwise would. At times, it is morally permis-

sible to choose to die sooner rather than later by rejecting medical intervention.

The thesis we are advancing, however, is stronger than this; for we are defending choosing to die under certain circumstances by an act of commission, that is, directly causing death by giving an individual an injection or by providing medication that the person assumes responsibility for taking. Such an action is legal in some countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Canada, Switzerland and Japan) and in six states in this country (Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, California and Vermont) and in Washington D.C. The difference between the practices in the Netherlands and Belgium, on the one hand, and the other countries listed and the states in this country, on the other, is the difference between active euthanasia and physician-assisted death. In active euthanasia, the physician administers the lethal injection. In physician-assisted death, the physician provides the means of dying which the patient then pursues on his or her own.

We will defend the moral permissibility of both of these practices, always with the proviso of carefully worked out procedures and guidelines. We will advance two arguments—the first has to do with moral permissibility, the second with spiritual defensibility.

The first argument is rooted in the value of individual agency and responsibility. This value was cogently expressed in the 1992 Supreme Court Decision, *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*: "matters involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment."[15]Again, says *Casey*, "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."[16] The essence of this claim is that, apart from one's family and other communities of one's choosing, the larger society is not justified, at least in some circumstances, in deciding such an issue for the individual. What some have called a zone of privacy should prevail here.

Valuing individual agency need not involve a failure to recognize and to value the communal nature of life. Indeed, life itself is a gift of community, of a community of two, which immediately becomes a community of more than two, and eventually a community of many. Moreover, decisions we make, particularly momentous decisions, have consequences for the various communities of which we are a part. Any decision for death, then, should be, to some extent, a communal one.

Neither is valuing individual agency to be confused with absolutizing autonomy or making a fetish of individual freedom. Frequently, those who value individual agency are accused of putting an excessive and obsessive emphasis on autonomy, on individual choice and self-determination. That criticism cuts both ways: Some put excessive and obsessive emphasis on social control. In fact, the issue is not individual freedom *or* community. It is freedom within the midst of a community that recognizes the value of individual agency; for without individual agency and freedom there can be no moral accountability.

We indicated earlier that making moral judgments is both the glory and the anguish of being human. Making such judgments is the glory of being human because it focuses our capacity for conceiving of ends and goals and purposes in life, and the freedom to exercise that capacity is among the greatest of human goods. Such freedom gives "substance to the concept of liberty."[17] We are responsible for the course of our lives; that is what is meant by human agency.

Since dying is an inevitable aspect of life, should we not feel an obligation, to the extent possible, to assume some responsibility for that too? Concern with how we die is a further manifestation of concern with who we want to be, with how we want to be remembered.

Since dying is an inevitable aspect of life, should we not feel an obligation, to the extent possible, to assume some responsibility for that too? Concern with how we die is a further manifestation of concern with who we want to be, with how we want to be remembered. It is as if we were painting the picture of, or writing the story of our lives, and concern with our manner of dying is concern for the final details of the portrait or the final chapter of the story. This becomes critical when we are faced with becoming a person incompatible with the values we cherish or incompatible with how we want to be remembered by those we love. Does not our right as agents involve the right to preclude this from happening? Do we not as moral agents have the right to paint the final stroke or to write the last line? Some goods are more important than mere biological existence.

Of course, the idea of making choices—including the decision to end one's life—in keeping with the values we cherish is complicated by the fact that we are com-

mitted to a whole host of values and some of our own commitments may be in tension. The value of agency and self-determination may lead in one direction, while valuing the voice of one's community may lead in another. To repeat an earlier emphasis, there is no escaping judgment.

We also recognize that for many, their values preclude assisted death under any circumstances. Moreover, we do appreciate the unavoidability of and the value of undergoing suffering in the course of human life. John Wilcox, in his perceptive book, *The Bitterness of Job: A Philosophical Reading*, correctly and valuably notes that

> living is more than acting. To live is to act; but it is also to undergo, to experience, to suffer, to be a patient…. My life is, in part, a matter of whether I rob my neighbor…[or] help him in time of need…of things I do; but…[life] is also a matter of becoming sick, of growing old, of being injured… of dying—not things I do…but things I undergo….[18]

Wilcox reminds us that at times being a responsible patient requires that one live with sickness, that one accept the debilitation of old age, that one accept injury, or that one passively undergo death. Some may affirm this in a way that precludes assisted death. (We do not know Wilcox's position on this matter.) We want to affirm much of what Wilcox affirms, but we do not think, in the last analysis, that it counts against the moral permissibility of choosing death under certain circumstances.

One of the strongest objections to the agency or self-determination defense is the claim that it is self-contradictory or self-defeating. Choosing to die, argues Leon Kass, is not affirming autonomy. It permanently destroys autonomy; it takes away forever the ability to make choices.[19] Michael Gill's response to Kass is persuasive, however. With proper guidelines, physician-assisted death can be restricted to those for whom death is imminent (as do the legal guidelines in all of the states that permit physician-assisted death), restricted to those for whom agency and autonomy will end soon, or has already ended (as illustrated by the case described in the second paragraph of this essay). As Gill puts it:

> The person with a terminal illness who decides to commit suicide is not changing the universe from a place in which she would have been able to exercise her autonomy in the future into a place in which she will not be able to exercise her autonomy in the future. For she will not be able to exercise her autonomy in the future no matter what she does. Hers is not a decision to prevent herself from being able to make future decisions, because future decisions will not be hers to make regardless. The ending of her decision-making ability is a foregone conclusion. She is simply choosing that it end in one way rather than another. The person who commits suicide [given certain preconditions for the legalization of such an act] should be compared to someone who blows out a candle that has used up all its wax and is now nothing but a sputtering wick that is just about to go out on its own. She should not be compared to someone who snuffs out the bright, strong flame of a new candle.[20]

Now to the second of the two arguments we are advancing in defense of assisted-death under certain circumstances, the claim that such an action can be spiritually defensible. [21]

Religious communities have, by and large, opposed active euthanasia and physician-assisted death. This opposition is expressed in several formal statements: a Jewish document: "only He who gives life may take it away;"[22] a Baptist formulation: "We believe life and death belong in the hands of God;"[23]an Episcopal statement: the "Church believes that as God gives life so only through the operation of the laws of nature can life rightly be taken from human beings;"[24] and Pope John Paul II's affirmation: "God alone has the power over life and death."[25] These statements have been referenced in particular because they express the religious reason for the opposition so directly; a recent study by the Pew Foundation reaffirms this typical religious objection to assisted death.[26]

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The argument is straightforward. God is the giver of life; therefore, only God has the right to take it. When we intervene in the time of death, we usurp divine prerogative. This has been and continues to be the fundamental religious argument against active euthanasia and physician-assisted death.

We want to respond to this objection by suggesting a religious perspective for thinking about human responsibility that might reorient our view on who has responsibility for death. The framework we propose takes its key from the weakness in the traditional religious objection that since God is the giver of life, only God has the right to take it.

One might readily grant that the premise of this argument is true in one sense, but there is also a sense in which it is false. Anyone who views God as creator, as the author of natural processes, will view God is the source of life. But those processes have been designed to include human beings as necessary to the production of human life. Both God, then, as the foundation of natural processes and human beings as the agents of reproduction are necessary conditions for the creation of human life. Moreover, scientific advances in medicine enable us to make human life possible in circumstances where previously it was impossible. Humans, then, are necessary for the creation of life, and, at times, necessary for the sustaining of life.

To be created in the image of God is understood in a variety of ways. A widely held interpretation is that we, too, are endowed with the ability and freedom to create. We have accepted this power regarding the creation and sustaining of life. Is it not time to assume it with regard to death? "Only he who gives life may take it" is the traditional religious argument against choosing when to die. But does not the fact that God has assigned us a role in the creation (the giving) and sustaining of life suggest the possibility that God may, at times, be assigning us a role in the taking of life Old Testament scholar Barry Bandstra has suggested that "the image of God is something we *have* as well as something we *do*."[27] The idea is that we have authority and dominion over the created order that leads to a responsibility for action. That is an awesome responsibility. Clearly God has given us authority and dominion and responsibility for the creation of and sustaining of life. Is the authority to create a human life and to sustain it any less awesome than the authority to ease another into death when that other has judged his or her life to have reached its creative end? We accept responsibility for the creation and sustaining of life. Why not also for a comforting death?

To paraphrase the 18th century philosopher, David Hume: If it is God's role to decide when we shall live and when we shall die, then we play God just as much when we cure people as we would do by helping them to die.

When we think of the natural order that God has created, an order that includes tsunamis, earthquakes and hurricanes that can in an instant dispatch human lives by the thousands—when we think of this natural order, it seems clear that God has allocated incredible responsibility to humans for coping with the cards we are dealt. The point is: God no more tightly controls death by "an act of pure (and) singular divine agency" than he "controls the creation of life through pure (and singular) divine agency."[28] We readily recognize human responsibility for the beginning of life; we should acknowledge the extent to which we already assume much responsibility for the continuation of life and for when life ends.

A fundamental religious model within the Judeo/Christian tradition is the image of God as father or parent. Consider parents' relationships with their children. Thoughtful parents raise children to assume increasing responsibility for their own decisions. They help them become mature by increasing their accountability. Evidence that children have become adults is their ability to assume responsibility for the profound choices that affect their lives and the lives of others.

What about the divine parent? Does it not appear that God is using time itself[29] and the evolutionary process to increase the responsibility of his children? Does that not seem to be God's plan for human development—increasing our responsibility even for (especially for) matters of life and death? In attempting to understand how God relates to the created order, understanding the evolutionary process must play a key role. Human beings have evolved over time in a variety of ways—biologically, socially, religiously and technologically. Notably, what have evolved are human capacities, and the physician/philosopher Tristram Engelhardt is surely correct: "the expansion of human capabilities has resulted in an expansion of human responsibilities . . . ."[30]

The pediatrician in the hospital nursery assumes responsibility for life when she places the prematurely-born in the incubator. A member of a medical emergency team assumes responsibility for life when he resuscitates a heart attack victim. The surgeon assumes responsibility for life every time she removes a perforated appendix. We have long since passed the "watershed of medical innocence."[31] That has been inevitable in the evolutionary process.

To paraphrase the 18th century philosopher, David Hume: If it is God's role to decide when we shall live and when we shall die, then we play God just as much when we cure people as we would do by helping them to die.[32] Isn't assuming something of a god-like role and taking responsibility part of what it means to say that we have been created in the image of God? In fact, evolution seems to have prepared us to interfere increasingly with natural processes by "making things

happen that otherwise would not have happened, or preventing things from happening that otherwise would have happened."[33] As the philosopher Simon Blackburn notes: As a critical objection, "the charge of playing God has *no independent force*."[34] The only time people raise this objection is when the interference occurring is something to which they object.[35] In ways we all approve, we play God by assuming responsibility for creating life, and we increasingly assume god-like responsibility for life by mending it when it is broken. Is it less human, less religious, to assume, at times, responsibility for death?

The Christian tradition rejects biological idolatry. This has relevance for the Christian view of a successfully completed life. We admonish ourselves and others to be in the world, but not of it. Even a non-religious person can be sympathetic with this admonition. Life alone, simple biological existence, is not the highest value. Altering slightly the observation of another: if "life is not an absolute good to be preserved" under any circumstances, neither is death "an absolute evil to be avoided at all costs."[36]

When illness, accident or the ravages of time take away one's understanding of the meaningfulness of life or take away irrevocably that which makes one a person, is not the absolute determination to keep the body functioning a form of biological idolatry at odds with the religious spirit? Can the assumption of responsibility under certain circumstances (the proviso "under certain circumstances" always understood) for deciding that it is time to die not, then, be considered a role divinely given?

I remember both the first and last time I disconnected a respirator and stayed at the bedside while my patient quietly expired. In 45 years of clinical medicine, it never got any easier. I never quit asking myself if it was the "right" thing to do. It never quit hurting.

David Thomasma, writing from within the Catholic tradition, understands the "breathtakingly" difficult issues involved in the assisted-death question, and his pacifism causes him to be cautious about such assistance. Nevertheless, he concludes "that it is a brutality to the sacredness of human life to extend it unduly," that "to wish to say 'no' . . . may be a grace given by God," and that "to help [someone die] may be an act of faith in the invisible hand of God."[37] In fact, several people have indicated to us that they could envision such a moment as sacramental. We, too, have often thought that under certain circumstances, the gathering of one's family, friends, spiritual mentor, and physician for the purpose of easing one into death can be a sacred moment in which others become the hands of God. We envision it as a spiritual occasion in which gratitude is expressed for what has been and for what continues, in memory, to be, and a spiritual gathering in which hope is expressed for what yet may be.

A few caveats: We have witnessed the remarkable role hospice can play at times in easing an individual into death without assisted death or euthanasia. Indeed, the broad-based support in this country for the right to choose death under certain circumstances has probably served as an impetus for the hospice movement and as an impetus for developments in palliative care at the end of life. This is all to the good.

Furthermore, we have much appreciation for the work of our colleague, philosopher Kay Toombs and her thoughtful writings on disability. In her reflections on how to define disability, on what it means to experience disability, and on how society responds to the disabled, we have been reminded of the extent to which attitudes in society toward caring for others influences our thinking about issues such as choosing death.[38] We certainly agree that deep and pervasive social attitudes toward caring need exploration and, perhaps, alteration, and that these matters are directly relevant to debates about physician-assisted death. Such issues are, in fact, the focus of Dr. Atul Gawande's widely read and reviewed 2014 book *Being Mortal*. He acknowledges, however, that "suffering at the end of life is sometimes unavoidable and unbearable, and helping people end their misery may be necessary." He adds: "Given the opportunity, I would support laws to provide [prescriptions to hasten the timing of their death]." It is important to emphasize, however, that Gawande acknowledges this in the context of emphasizing that we should not permit dependence on providing the means of hastening death to keep us from developing palliative care programs that would reduce the call for such hastening, that would reduce the call for physician-assisted death.[39]

And there are additional issues with which we have not dealt—issues requiring ongoing serious conversation. Life is complex, and death makes it more so. Moreover, we fallible creatures see through a glass darkly. But for every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die. At times, death is good. At times, bringing it about may be both morally acceptable and spiri-

tually defensible.

Since the issue we are discussing is such a personal and sensitive one, we have decided to conclude with this physician's personal reflection. I remember both the first and last time I disconnected a respirator and stayed at the bedside while my patient quietly expired. In 45 years of clinical medicine, it never got any easier. I never quit asking myself if it was the "right" thing to do. It never quit hurting. Yet, despite the soul-searching and the pathos and the tears, it always felt like I had acted in my patients' best interests. I felt that I had lived, albeit painfully, into the fullness of my vocational calling. I have performed that act hundreds of times in futile and painfully hopeless conditions. And given the complexity of what it means to be a "healer" in the truest sense of the word, I felt that I had lived into the true, raw, honest depth of the human condition as it intersects the practice of modern medicine.

I have read, both with wonder as well as frustration, academic and theological arguments for and against physician-assisted suicide. I understand the need to parse, explain and justify a given position. And certainly this paper explains in detail why my colleague and I take the faith-based arguments seriously within our mutually shared Christian tradition. I fully understand and respect the need to place the arguments within a given religious persuasion; for that is where many of us live and place the ground of our daily lives and commitments. And while I understand the academic differential between 'active' and 'passive' physician-assisted death, I would submit that ontologically they are one and the same. They are acts that begin in the prefrontal cortex and cognitive areas of the brain. They excite certain neurotransmitters to action. A limb moves. A finger pushes a button or a plunger. And a human being dies. Those are the anatomic and physiological facts. To say that one is "morally acceptable" and thus, legal, and another is somehow "immoral" and illegal is to miss the point. We live, like it or not, in an imperfect world where doctors do their best on behalf of patients. We often do that quite well; yet, as we all know, we may miss the mark and make errors of both commission and omission. Being human—that also is our destiny and our fate. It comes with the territory. We can't pass it on to ethics committees or legislatures that often have hidden or political agendas. We are called to act on behalf of our patients, often even when we do not "know" their expressed wishes. And to compound that difficulty, even families may differ on the best course of action.

When I was teaching undergraduate medical ethics, I often asked the simple question: Why do you want to go into medicine? The answers varied of course: to help people; to cure cancer; to do mission work; to heal the sick; to love; to make lots of money; because my parents wanted me to. A rare student would answer: to relieve human suffering. Not once did I ever hear "to prolong life at all costs". Yet that answer is the presumed underpinning of laws that do not honor the fact that we all are finite creatures. That naïve perspective drives legislative policy in modern society when at no point within a 3000-year history of medicine has that been a declared or even implicit goal. I believe that suffering in terminal illnesses can be not only meaningless but may actually detract from our full humanity. The notion that suffering is a part of "soul making" often falls to shreds at the bedside. My colleague and I believe that at times the most loving, compassionate, Christian, and yes, healing thing we can do is to act on behalf of patients by allowing and, at times, assisting them to die peacefully. We can assist them with grace and dignity and respect for their uniqueness and humanity and for their "imago Dei." And when we do that with compassion and love, then I think we live fully into the concept of healer.

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Holy Women Who Hoped in God; I Peter 3:5

By Rachel Shubin

I'm tired. After reading yet another round of blog posts about wives submitting, submitting more, and, oh yeah, are you really submitting enough, I've just had it—particularly when the hypothetical situation presented in the post has all the hallmarks of being an abusive one. It's not an anomalous post. It's the same post I've seen over and over for years by various pastors and authors with different fictitious names attached to the made-up characters.

Is your husband throwing things and screaming obscenities at you and the toddlers? Submit more, be extra-sweet to him, and tell everyone how great he is. That'll soften his heart and fix him right up. See? I Peter 3 says so—particularly verses 5 and 6. (Substitute Eph. 5:22-23 or Colossians 3:18 if you need some other passages from which to cherry-pick.) If it's an Abigail situation, you can leave; but right up until he tries to kill you or asks you to do something illegal, the Bible says you have to obey him and win him by your quiet demeanor. Out of the entire compendium of Scripture, I cannot fathom why these verses are the ones that get shoved at heartbroken, terrified women.

Is your husband throwing things and screaming obscenities at you and the toddlers? Submit more, be extra-sweet to him, and tell everyone how great he is. That'll soften his heart and fix him right up.

This time, the writer went with the I Peter passage for his proof text, and verses 5 and 6 caught my eye: *"So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you."*

Hmmm, what holy women are we talking about? If the Biblical ideal is a gentle, quiet, submissive woman who cheerfully obeys her husband's every word (or that of her father or whatever authority is around), even if she disagrees with it, and if Peter is pointing his readers to their examples here, then there should be women like this all over the Bible, right? They shouldn't be too hard to find. Let's take a look at most of the prominent and some of the obscure women of the Old Testament who are either generally thought of today as good examples or who are referred to in complimentary terms elsewhere in the Bible. Let's find all the submissive women!

Rebekah?

No. Rebekah goes directly against Isaac's wishes to give Esau the inheritance after the Lord specifically speaks to her while the twins are in the womb and tells her that the elder with serve the younger. God tells her that Jacob is the one, but Isaac wasn't going with the program. After Rebekah tricks Isaac into giving Jacob the inheritance and then gets Jacob out of the country before Esau kills him, not only is she not censured for any of this deception, but she is one of only three people in the Bible mentioned as willing to "take the curse" on themselves for the sake of God's chosen people. The other two are no less than the Apostle Paul and Jesus himself. (Rebekah's story, Genesis 27:1-28:2)

Rachel?

No. Jacob consults both her and Leah on whether to move or not—even after God tells him he has to go. Jacob makes no commands, demands or even requests for them to go with him. He explains the situation, and then his wives mull it over and respond that this is acceptable and coincides with their own reasons for going. The conversation ends with Rachel and Leah telling Jacob, "So do whatever God has told you," which sounds very much like permission and assent that they will go as well. It's an excellent example of mutual cooperation, and this is in a situation where God clearly commanded him to go! (Genesis 31:1-16)

Tamar?

Definitely no! After her husband dies and his next brother down gets himself all smote up for sleeping with her and then purposely doing the pull-out routine

so he doesn't have to provide her with an heir as was the legal deal at the time (can't be sharing the inheritance!), Judah (Tamar's father-in-law) refuses to fulfill his promise to give her his last son so she can bear a child. Choosing the obvious solution to the problem, she dresses up like a prostitute and tricks Judah into sleeping with her. Judah doesn't even manage to figure out that it's she.

When Judah learns that his unmarried daughter-in-law is pregnant, he tries to have her executed (by burning!), but she outwits him when she proves the child is his. Not only is she not censured in any way for this, but Judah specifically says that her behavior is more righteous than his. And—not only that—but their son ends up in the line of Christ, and Tamar herself is the first of only three women that Matthew mentions by name in his genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1 (not counting Mary).

Israelite midwives?

No. They disregard royal edict and save bunches of boy babies from slaughter (Exodus 1:15-22).

Jochebed (Moses' mother)?

No. She also disregards royal edict and saves baby Moses by sending him down the river in a basket to hide his identity, which is a terrifying option just to consider (Exodus 2:1-3).

Oh! Also, she's married, and her husband doesn't really factor in to the story at all. Presumably he doesn't mind her having the highest position in the land and doing such a bang-up job at it.

Miriam?

No. She was brave, even as a child, when she arranged for Moses' mother to nurse Moses for Pharoah's daughter after Pharoah's daughter found baby Moses in a basket among the reeds (Exodus 2). Later she was a prophetess and a pretty big deal of a woman, leading alongside Moses and Aaron after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. She even managed to get her own song into the Bible (Exodus 15; Numbers 12).

Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah?

Never heard of them? They were Zelophehad's five daughters who convinced Moses to give them a portion of their father's inheritance after he died, instead of passing it all on to their uncles. These women are mentioned five times in the Old Testament (Num. 26:33; 27:1-7; 36:1-12; 1 Chr. 7:15; Josh. 17:1-6).

Achsah?

Don't know who she is either? Achsah was Caleb's daughter, who requested an inheritance of land from him. When he agreed, she then asked him for that other part over there with the streams on it too, which he also gave her (Josh. 15:16-19).

Rahab?

No. Rahab was a hooker from Jericho who became traitor to her own people by protecting the Israelite spies. She managed not only to not get herself killed by either side in the process but saved her entire family as well. She too was a direct ancestor of both King David and Jesus, and Rahab the foreign-born prostitute is number two of the three women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Christ (Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5).

Ruth?

Well, acting on a little plotting advice from her mother-in-law, Ruth secures herself a new husband by snazzing herself up, putting on perfume, and then sneaking over to the threshing floor on threshing party night after Boaz is fed, properly wine-ed up, and asleep, which means she can curl up beside him on his hay bed and ask him to marry her when he startles himself awake. She is the third and last woman to get a nod in Matthew's genealogy. Did I mention that Rahab was Boaz's Mom? The guys in that family seem to like strong foreign women who graft themselves into Israel. Interesting that these three women—Tamar, Rahab and Ruth—are the ones who make it into the genealogy (Ruth 3; Matthew 1:5).

Deborah?

No. Deborah judges Israel faithfully and leads it to success in war. Her reign is followed by 40 years of peace, and she is the only judge with such a strong record. Even though Barak was the general, Deborah called him out when he wasn't doing what he was supposed to be doing, and Barak even begged her to come along to the battle even though she said his glory would be given over to a woman if she did (see Jael below). Deborah, not Barak, called the army to advance, and Barak took direction from her. Oh! Also, she's married, and her husband doesn't really factor in to the story at all. Presumably he doesn't mind her having the highest position in the land and doing such a bang-up job at it (Judges 4-5).

Jael?

Nope. She violates her husband's peace treaty with King Jabor, Isreal's enemy, by cracking open Jabor's top general's head with a tent peg. This earns her a big section written about her exploits in a victory song (Judges 4:21; 5:24-27).

Hannah?

Barren Hannah prays for and is granted a son (Samuel), whom she brings to Eli the High Priest at age three to lend him to the Lord for the rest of his life. Hannah tells her husband, Elkanah, what she plans to do. It's not phrased as a question, and he tells her to do what seems good to her. Like the story of Jacob and Rachel, this passage also comes off as marital cooperation, in both cases with the husband deferring to his wife (1 Samuel 1-2).

Abigail?

No. Abigail completely disregards her husband Nabal's wishes to repay David rudely for the good David has done to Nabal's shepherds. She doesn't have any kind of conversation with Nabal about his behavior or her plans to go directly against his orders (it specifically says she doesn't tell him what she's planning to do) but unilaterally decides to go off and take care of the problem herself. Then when she gets to David, she doesn't bother even trying to preserve Nabal's reputation or speak well of him, but chucks him right under the horse's hooves and tells David that Nabal is worthless and foolish. This all manages to prevent her entire household from getting wiped out and results in her becoming wife to King David after the Lord strikes down Nabal 10 days later (1 Samuel 25).

So, what example is Peter trying to get across to the women he's writing to by pointing them to the holy women of former times? Is it unilateral obedience in all circumstances? I don't think so.

Huldah?

Heard of her? She was a prophetess of enough renown that when Hilkiah, the high priest, finds the Book of the Law, doesn't even recognize it, and sends it off to King Josiah who has never seen it either, Josiah sends emissaries with the book to the prophetess Huldah to find out what's what. None of the men there seem too buzzed by the fact of her authority regarding Scripture— including the king, the high priest, and her husband; and they all take her seriously when the word she sends back to Josiah amounts to "God says you guys are toast." Also, did I mention that Josiah chooses her to verify the Scripture over any of her *four* contemporary male prophet counterparts: Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk? (II Kings 22:3-20; II Chronicles 34: 8-33)

Esther?

Ahhh, Esther. After being kidnapped and groomed to extra-beauteousness for an entire year with a whole bunch of other pretty girls, Jewish Esther goes in to the king who thinks she's the most alluring and makes her queen; however, she can only go back into his presence at his request. After discovering that the king is planning to wipe out all the Jews in the entire country, she risks her own life by going in to him anyway and managing to talk him out of genocide. I think Esther is probably the closest to the ideal submissive wife. But that raises the question: Why is the supplication method of a teenage, captive, kidnapped girl whose erratic husband threw out the last wife and to whom it was illegal on threat of death for her to talk unless invited to do so, is now the suggested marital model for free, adult, married women? Weird that she was so submissive!

Esther's situation would be similar to that of a young Christian girl's getting kidnapped by ISIS and then married off to the unstable head warlord who is plotting to kill off all the Christians in the entire country. Asking your husband to maybe not do that in the most submissive, demure way possible would be absolutely advisable. Doing so any other way and even doing so at all are both likely to get you executed. Escape is not an option. Is this in any way similar to a free, adult equal explaining her desires, requests or complaints to her counterpart (wives are at least ontologically equal, right?)? Is this the model for our Christian spousal relationships? Also, Esther doesn't listen to her husband's authority. She bypasses him entirely and listens to her uncle (Esther 4:11; 5:1).

The Proverbs 31 woman?

While she is usually held up as the ideal wife, several things about her don't exactly fit the party line. While she is a capable manager of her home and kind to all, she is also shrewd in business and real estate, and the word translated "virtuous" here is also translated as "valiant" or some other word denoting strength all the other times it is used in the Bible except for twice in Proverbs when referring to women

and once in Ruth where it is often translated "excellent." Nowhere does it imply that her capabilities are subject to or dependent upon either her father or her husband. It does, however, say that her husband prospers because of her.

So, what example is Peter trying to get across to the women he's writing to by pointing them to the holy women of former times? Is it unilateral obedience in all circumstances? I don't think so. None of those women had a clear "Yes, sir" relationship with authority in which they operated solely as an obedient subordinate.

Some of them went directly against their civic rulers (Esther, Moses' mother, the Israelite midwives, Rahab) and some against their husbands or other males in their household (Abigail, Rebekah, Tamar, Jael). Some of them were rulers or in authority themselves (Deborah and Huldah); some operated on a cooperative give-and-take with their husbands (Rachel, Hannah, Sarah); and some just waltzed up and boldly explained what they wanted or needed (Zelophehad's daughters, Achsah, Ruth). You could argue for many of them that the times they act counter to what they've been told are when they are directly asked to sin; but I think that overlooks some interesting occasions.

Arguably, Ruth could have seen Naomi's plotting as sinful and said "no," but didn't. And many of these women seem to have had relationships with their husbands that appear unconcerned with who is supposed to be submitting to whom. I think Peter is trying to tell the women he's writing to that there is a balance between cooperation and resistance, and both are viable options depending on the circumstances.

Most of the teachings I've heard on these women over the years, which has been extremely minimal for most and none at all for the rest, have been quick to point out that each one was an exception. Deborah was the only woman judge. She was an exception to God's design, and therefore nothing to aspire to. Rebekah was tricky. Esther and Ruth are both okay. They both do what their uncle and mother-in-law tell them to do, and it works out. Oh, and Abigail. Oddly, that story doesn't really get a very full explanation because of those pesky bits where she badmouths her husband and goes behind his back.

It's a pattern. It's a pattern of valiant women, strong women who put themselves in danger to protect others; who stand up to people when God tells them to, regardless of whether that person is their husband, their king, or an enemy general.

What I see when I look at this is not a list of exceptions. It's a pattern. It's a pattern of valiant women, strong women who put themselves in danger to protect others; who stand up to people when God tells them to, regardless of whether that person is their husband, their king, or an enemy general. It's a pattern of cooperation when possible and resistance when cooperation is impossible. It's a pattern of God's protection and provision. It's a pattern of women of courage and faithfulness. This is our legacy and our inheritance. We are mighty women of God, holy woen of old. This is who we are.

"And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

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

Where are the "Originalists" in the Debate over Gun Safety?

By Randall Balmer

One of conservatives' favorite tropes over the past several decades in discussing the content of the U.S. Constitution is a defense of the "original intent" of the founders. Conservatives have deployed this judicial doctrine against what they decry as judicial activism, rulings on the part of judges that, conservatives insist, abrogate the separation of powers mandated by the founders in the Constitution.

The proper approach to the Constitution, these "originalists" argue, is to discern what the founders intended rather than treat the Constitution as a living document that articulates fixed principles that must be adapted to changing historical and cultural circumstances. As the late Antonin Scalia, the Supreme Court justice most identified with originalism, said in 2012, "The Constitution is a static being." A decade earlier, Scalia declared, "The Constitution I apply is not living but dead, or as I put it, 'enduring.'"

Originalists, for instance, have insisted that the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment should not be applied to sexual orientation and the right to marry. Because the amendment was drafted to protect freed slaves, the argument goes, it has no applicability to same-sex marriage.

For Scalia and other originalists, determining original intent requires "immersing oneself in the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time — somehow placing out of mind knowledge that we have which an earlier age did not, and putting on beliefs, attitudes, philosophies, prejudices and loyalties that are not those of our day."

Some conservatives have taken originalism to ridiculous extremes. Roy S. Moore, former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court (and, more recently, defeated Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate) insisted that the free exercise clause of the First Amendment applied only to Christianity because the founders did not know any religion besides Christianity. That assertion, of course, is false – the founders were well aware of Jews and Muslims as well as other religions—but it illustrates some conservatives' almost slavish devotion to originalism.

Let's return to Scalia's comments about "immersing oneself in the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time" and shift our attention from the First Amendment to the Second Amendment, which reads, *"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."*

Surely, any self-respecting originalist, someone sincerely trying to understand "the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time," would not ignore the full text of the amendment. Although the National Rifle Association and other gun advocates routinely quote the second half of the amendment, "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed," a more honest reading would include the initial clause: *"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State. . . ."*

Indeed, historians have demonstrated that the founders were anxious to ensure that militias were properly armed against the British. Very likely, therefore, the founders intended to secure the right to bear arms for members of militias.

But even if we set aside the militia argument, an originalist approach to the Second Amendment—one concerned about "the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time" – would surely strain to justify a constitutional right to semi-automatic weapons. Did the founders really intend to ensure the right to the AR-15 that the mentally unbalanced teenager used to kill 17 in Parkland, Fla.? An originalist might reasonably argue for the constitutional right to wield a musket, but an automatic weapon would surely go beyond the bounds of original intent.

After yet another horrific shooting, we hear once again that conservatives' "thoughts and prayers" are with the victims' families. Rather than accept another round of empty pieties, we should demand that they embrace their own rhetoric and apply the doctrine of original intent to the Second Amendment, thereby clearing the way for sensible legislation on gun safety.

Randall Balmer, a graduate of Des Moines Hoover, is the John Phillips Professor in Religion at Dartmouth College. *This essay first appeared in Iowa View and was published Feb. 22, 2018 and is reprinted here with permission of the author.*

Why Do Evangelicals Still Support Scott Pruitt?

By Aaron Weaver

A $50-a-night condo deal from a lobbyist pal. More than $100,000 for first-class airfare and $40,000 on a soundproof phone booth. A 20-person 24-hour protective detail and emergency sirens en route to a French restaurant. Travel costs closing in on $3 million. Big raises for top aides and demotions for officials who dare question the spending habits of their boss—head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt.

Pruitt is under fire for these and other possible ethics violations from his first year as EPA administrator. Environmental groups have launched a "Boot Pruitt" campaign. Sixty-four House Democrats sent President Trump a letter asking him to fire Pruitt. Several Republicans have even called for Pruitt's resignation as the number of investigations are mounting.

Not surprisingly, President Trump is standing by his ethically-challenged EPA chief, resisting advice from his Chief of Staff, John Kelly, to give the boot to the former Oklahoma attorney general. In a Saturday evening tweet, Trump doubled down on his support of Pruitt.

Evangelicals also appear to be silently sticking with Pruitt, a member and former deacon of First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow, Okla., and former trustee of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., from 2012 until 2017.

When then President-elect Trump announced Pruitt as his pick to lead the EPA, top leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention sent their praise.

As Pruitt faced fierce criticism from Democrats, scientists and environmental organizations for his earlier statements questioning climate change, a group of 48 prominent evangelical leaders backed Pruitt in a public letter to Trump.

Climate change was off-brand and not compatible with the narrow anti-abortion, anti-LGBT agenda of evangelical gatekeepers

The evangelical leaders called Pruitt "well qualified" to head the EPA and said he deserved "the full support of the United States Senate in his confirmation." These evangelicals aimed to counter the claims of climate change denialism leveled against their Southern Baptist brother, insisting that he had been "misrepresented as denying 'settled science.'" Pruitt had just called for "a continuing debate" on the impact and extent of climate change, they said.

With this public defense of Pruitt, these evangelicals were continuing down a path started more than a decade ago as awareness about the urgent global challenge of climate change was increasing within evangelicalism. In 2006, a coalition of well known evangelical pastors and professors calling themselves the Evangelical Climate Initiative released a declaration urging environmental concern and imploring Congress to adopt legislation to curb carbon emissions. Shortly after, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a statement warning that climate change was "threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community" and distract its members from "the priority of the Great Commission."

In other words, climate change was off-brand and not compatible with the narrow anti-abortion, anti-LGBT agenda of evangelical gatekeepers beholden to the deregulation philosophy of the religious right dating back to the days of protecting segregated Christian schools.

In other words, climate change was off-brand and not compatible with the narrow anti-abortion, anti-LGBT agenda of evangelical gatekeepers beholden to the deregulation philosophy of the religious right dating back to the days of protecting segregated Christian schools.

As national media continued to cover the ways some evangelicals were "going green," Southern Baptists hit back a year later with a statement arguing that the scientific community was divided on the extent of human responsibility for climate change.

This is, of course, the exact same rhetorical tactic that the group of evangelical leaders took in defense of Pruitt. The science isn't really settled so the debate

must continue, etc … Back then, this proved to be a useful tactic and evangelical environmentalism seemed to die a sudden death in 2008 after the failure of the Bush-era Climate Security Act, the bipartisan cap-and-trade legislation eventually killed by Senate Republicans.

We know why Trump is sticking with his guy. While dysfunction pervades the Trump Administration, the EPA administrator's deregulation successes in year one were plentiful, including the rollback of 22 regulations with a recently announced plan to ditch President Obama's fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks. We also can't forget Pruitt's proposal to repeal the Clean Power Plan, regarded as President Obama's signature accomplishment in addressing climate change, which called for a 30 plus percent reduction in power plan carbon emissions by 2030.

The EPA under Pruitt has also lifted regulations monitoring fracking and limits on toxic air pollution. Pruitt has made himself the sole-decider on jurisdictional issues regarding the Clean Water Act, ensuring the opinions of industry leaders are favored over local leaders on issues involving the nation's central law governing water pollution. Research advisers have been replaced with industry scientists. Pruitt even rejected the recommendation of EPA scientists and approved the use of a toxic pesticide known to cause neurological damage in children.

And most importantly, Pruitt has been a faithful cheerleader for President Trump's rejection of climate science, advising him to pull out of the Paris Climate Accord over objections of others in the administration.

That the morally bankrupt Trump would overlook the ethical improprieties of Pruitt is a surprise to no one. But what's the excuse for evangelicals? How do #NeverTrump evangelical voices have nothing to say about the glaring ethical breaches of their pal, Scott Pruitt?

Evangelicals gave Pruitt their support at a critical time, playing a key role in securing his confirmation. Pruitt was said to have always modeled integrity. It would seem the former Sunday school teacher left his integrity in that wacky, paranoia-induced $43,000 soundproof booth.

Can evangelicals recover their own integrity?

Evangelical credibility is at an all-time low. Despite the racism, Russia revelations, sex assault allegations, and porn star payoff, evangelicals continue to approve of Trump at a rate nearly double that of the nation. Sixty-one percent of evangelicals still back Trump compared with an overall approval rating of just 32 percent, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey.

What will it take for evangelicals to rid themselves of these unethical messes?

In his April cover story for *The Atlantic,* titled "Trump and the Evangelical Temptation," former Bush White House speechwriter Michael Gerson wrote that evangelicals have an "urgent task" ahead of them: "to rescue their faith from its worst leaders."

In his April cover story for The Atlantic, titled "Trump and the Evangelical Temptation," former Bush White House speechwriter Michael Gerson wrote that evangelicals have an "urgent task" ahead of them: "to rescue their faith from its worst leaders."

The time may have passed for a real rescue. But recovery could begin with reminding themselves and Scott Pruitt that ethics matter and the purpose of the EPA is to protect the public, not to do the bidding of polluters.

Aaron Weaver is a historian and faith-based communicator with expertise on evangelicals and politics with a focus on Baptists. He is also a participant in Blessed Tomorrow, a progressive coalition of faith leaders focused on finding solutions to climate change. His writings on religion and environment have been published at Religion News Service, Religion Dispatches, Patheos, Christian Ethics Today, and Baptist News Global among others.

Tributes to James Cone

By Jemar Tisby

Editor's Note: James Cone may not be known to many readers of Christian Ethics Today, but he should be. I first encountered his writings about the time I discovered Maryknoll and Orbis Press, and writers like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Juan Luis Segundo. The liberation theology body of literature has had a tremendous influence in my life and work. James Cone recently passed away; the following excerpts from the enormous number of tributes to his Christian witness perhaps will spur a new interest in his writings beginning with his 1969 book, A Black Theology of Liberation and culminating his 2011 book The Cross and the Lynching Tree.

On April 26 America received its first-ever memorial dedicated to the more than 4,000 victims of lynching in this country. Two days later, James Cone, the acclaimed author of "The Cross and the Lynching Tree," died.

"Both Jesus and blacks were 'strange fruit'," Cone explains. "Theologically speaking, Jesus was the 'first lynchee,' who foreshadowed all the lynched black bodies on American soil."

…The memorial reminds visitors that lynching victims are real people, not simply anonymous figures from history. They have heart-wrenching stories such as Luther Holbert who was forced to watch as a white mob burned his wife, Mary, alive before they killed him. Others lynched Elizabeth Lawrence for telling white children not to throw rocks at black children. Lynchers killed Mary Turner, eight months pregnant, for protesting the lynching of her own husband, Hazel Turner. The voyeuristic and violent deaths of these individuals plus thousands more represent the heinous apotheosis of American racism.

…Christianity as practiced by white racists and segregationists merely compromised with the *status quo*. But James Cone refused to assign any authenticity to a religion that claimed to be Christian but did not address the liberation of black people from white supremacy. Cone wrote *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* as a theological response to the extrajudicial murders of black people due to racism.

…[I]n 2011, Cone wrote *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, and…he traces the parallels between Christ's crucifixion and the persecution of black people in America. For Cone, the lynching tree is a visual and historic representation of white racist tyranny. Juxtaposed with the cross of Jesus Christ, lynching becomes a kind of crucifixion for black people.

Just as the religious and political leaders of his day lifted Jesus up on a cross to remove his threat to an oppressive hegemony, white supremacists lifted up black people in brutal lynchings designed to preserve the racial hierarchy.

"Both Jesus and blacks were 'strange fruit'," Cone explains. "Theologically speaking, Jesus was the 'first lynchee,' who foreshadowed all the lynched black bodies on American soil."

"The cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me to understand the tragic meaning of the cross," Cone writes.

Yet Jesus did not remain on the cross. The resurrection represents hope out of despair and life out of death. "It is the cross that points in the direction of hope, the confidence that there is a dimension to life beyond the reach of the oppressor," Cone writes. It is to the cross — as the triumph of liberty over lynching — that black people must cling in order to make sense of their plight in America.

…James Cone has laid down his cross to take up his eternal rest. The lynching memorial in Montgomery challenges a new generation to take up the cross of justice today and continue with the struggle for black liberation.

Full text found in Religion News Service, | April 30, 2018. Jemar Tisby is the president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective. He is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Mississippi. His book, The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism is forthcoming from Zondervan. Follow him on Twitter: @JemarTisby.

James Cone and Becoming Black With God

By Amy Butler

"…In his lovely, gentle way, he was professionally pissed off, never fully comprehending how anyone could ever imagine a God who was not an advocate for the oppressed. Always. He is famous for writing, "We must become black with God," which was not so much a comment on phenotypes and skin color but rather an unyielding declaration of the truth that God is always, always on the side of the oppressed. After this famous line, Cone goes on to say, "To receive God's revelation is to become black with God by joining God in the work of liberation."

…James Cone faithfully and rigorously maintained the voice of the oppressed. And he would always smile, and talk to my kids, and laugh at my jokes. In short, he was a living embodiment of the gospel — the radical, unrelenting, justice-seeking gospel…."

Amy Butler is pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. This was published by Baptist News Global, May 1, 2018.

"Writing is the way I fight": Remembering James H. Cone

By Robert Ellsberg

"I worked with James Cone for over 30 years. For at least 20 of those years, I am not sure that he really trusted me.

My predecessor as editor-in-chief at Orbis Books made what turned out to be an incredibly wise investment in reprinting several of James's early books…

…There came a low point in our relationship when he told me that I was "the most difficult white man" he had ever worked with. If I recall that unhappy history, it is because it is important for understanding how much it meant to me, over time, to earn his trust and respect.

After a lull of a couple of years, we warily resumed our regular meetings. He was working on a new book, though he was coy about whether he would offer it to Orbis. "We'll see about that," was all he would say. Finally, he showed me the first draft of "Strange Fruit," which became *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

…The topic of our conversations over a period of decades was largely focused on his educating me about where he came from, what was important to him, what were the sources and influences and experiences that had shaped him and his theology. It was a running seminar on the general theme of "the making of a black theologian."

I learned about the influence of his parents and the confidence and courage they had instilled in him: "I always knew that I was loved." The influence of teachers who had encouraged him and recognized his

…James Cone faithfully and rigorously maintained the voice of the oppressed. And he would always smile, and talk to my kids, and laugh at my jokes.

talents… The skeptics... The mentors…The impact of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X…James Baldwin…the birth of black theology, an irresistible force that could not be contained, forged out of anger, sorrow and a pain too deep for words…the impact of his engagement with liberation theologians from around the world. The ways his theology had continued to evolve in response to criticism and the signs of the times…tempered by concern lest this become just another academic pursuit, detached from the real-

life experience and ongoing struggles of people in the streets.

…Before I started editing the manuscript that became *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, we met many times for the purpose of his explaining to me "why I had to write this book." He talked of Bearden, Ark., and the community and family that had nurtured him in the midst of a terrible time, his sense of accountability to his roots, to be a voice for those, like his parents, who had no voice. It was important for him to tell me that this was not just an academic project. I assured him that I got it.

It was also important for him to make sure I understood that his theology did not just come out of sorrow and anger. It also came out of love and celebration of the spirit of resistance and black pride, the music, the funk and soul of black religion and culture, the faith that asserted the sacredness of black lives in a culture that denied it, the faith that would not let violence and hatred have the last word. And it was important that I understood that his theology was heir to a long tradition of enslaved and oppressed black people who recognized the life-affirming and liberation-affirming message of the cross, even in the face of white "Christians" who ignored and desecrated its meaning.

…James did not easily let people into his personal life. Our meetings continued to be marked by certain professional boundaries: usually a meeting in his apartment to discuss business, followed by a walk to his favorite restaurant for informal conversation over lunch, which often concluded with a piece of his favorite coconut cake.

…James was incredibly moved by the reception to *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. In many talks he would say that this was his favorite among all his books—truly the culmination of his career. Through it, he found a new audience in the era of Black Lives Matter…But he had more to say.

A couple of years ago we began talking about what he felt—even then—would be his last book. He delivered it to me early this year. It was obvious from his appearance that something was the matter. "Are you O.K.?" I asked. "Well, I have cancer," he said matter-of-factly. At that time, it was unclear just how serious this would be. But it added a sense of urgency—and sacredness—to this project. I commenced work and sent him edited chapters as fast as I could. "I am a very happy man," he wrote after looking at one of these chapters. "I trust you with my book."

Through the privilege of working with this great soul, I had been enabled, as a white man, to do more than anything else I could imagine to fight white supremacy.

Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody will be published this fall…The last piece he sent me was the conclusion. It was obviously written with his last ounce of blood, sweat and tears. I tried to read it aloud but couldn't get through it for my own tears. He had said: "This is the last thing I will write." He had left it all on the page. There was nothing left to say.

It was obvious from his appearance that something was the matter."Are you O.K.?" I asked."Well, I have cancer," he said matter-of-factly.

He wrote: "I write because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist, doing what I can to subvert white supremacy."

…God bless you, James: author, teacher, wrestling partner, spiritual godfather, beloved friend…As we parted for the last time, he said, "I've enjoyed our conversations, Robert."

Robert Ellsberg is the editor in chief and publisher of Orbis Books. He is the author of Blessed Among Us: Day by Day with Saintly Witnesses (Liturgical Press). The full essay can be found at American Magazine, April 30, 2018.

A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

By The Undersigned

We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.

It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else—nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography—our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. We pray that our nation will see Jesus' words in us. *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35).

When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics. The church's role is to change the world through the life and love of Jesus Christ. The government's role is to serve the common good by protecting justice and peace, rewarding good behavior while restraining bad behavior (Romans 13). When that role is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

The question we face is this: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does our loyalty to Christ, as disciples, require at this moment in our history? We believe it is time to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness.

It is often the duty of Christian leaders, especially elders, to speak the truth in love to our churches and to name and warn against temptations, racial and cultural captivities, false doctrines, and political idolatries—and even our complicity in them. We do so here with humility, prayer, and a deep dependency on the grace and Holy Spirit of God.

This letter comes from a retreat on Ash Wednesday, 2018. In this season of Lent, we feel deep lamentations for the state of our nation, and our own hearts are filled with confession for the sins we feel called to address. The true meaning of the word repentance is to turn around. It is time to lament, confess, repent, and turn. In times of crisis, the church has historically learned to return to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Lord. That is our foundational confession. It was central for the early church and needs to again become central to us. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar was not—nor any other political ruler since. If Jesus is Lord, no other authority is absolute. Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God he announced, is the Christian's first loyalty, above all others. We pray, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10). Our faith is personal but never private, meant not only for heaven but for this earth.

The question we face is this: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does our loyalty to Christ, as disciples, require at this moment in our history? We believe it is time to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness. Applying what "Jesus is Lord" means today is the message we commend as elders to our churches.

What we believe leads us to what we must reject. Our "Yes" is the foundation for our "No." What we confess as our faith leads to what we confront. Therefore, we offer the following six affirmations of what we believe, and the resulting rejections of practices and policies by political leaders which dangerously corrode the soul of the nation and deeply threaten the public integrity of our faith. We pray that we, as followers of Jesus, will find the depth of faith to match the danger of our political crisis.

I. WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God-given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the Creator of all things. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God (the *imago dei*) in some of the children of God. Our participation in the global community of Christ absolutely prevents any toleration of racial bigotry. Racial justice and healing are biblical and theological issues for us, and are central to the mission of the body of Christ in the world.

We give thanks for the prophetic role of the historic black churches in America when they have called for a more faithful gospel.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation on many fronts, including the highest levels of political leadership. We, as followers of Jesus, must clearly reject the use of racial bigotry for political gain that we have seen. In the face of such bigotry, silence is complicity. In particular, we reject white supremacy and commit ourselves to help dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate white preference and advantage. Further, any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin—one that goes back to the foundation of our nation and lingers on. Racial bigotry must be antithetical for those belonging to the body of Christ, because it denies the truth of the gospel we profess.

II. WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world—to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognize these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.

III. WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. (Matthew 25: 31-46) *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."* God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are "oppressed," "strangers," "outsiders," or otherwise considered "marginal" is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love. Our proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ is at stake in our solidarity with the most vulnerable. If our gospel is not "good news to the poor," it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are being made into cultural and political targets, and we need to remind our churches that God makes the treatment of the "strangers" among us a test of faith (Leviticus 19:33-34). We won't accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children, and we will resist repeated attempts to deny health care to those who most need it. We confess our growing national sin of putting the rich over the poor. We reject the immoral logic of cutting services and programs for the poor while cutting taxes for the rich. Budgets are moral documents. We commit ourselves to opposing and reversing those policies and finding solutions that reflect the wisdom of people from different political parties and philosophies to seek the common good. Protecting the poor is a central commitment of Christian discipleship, to which 2,000 verses in the Bible attest.

Protecting the poor is a central commitment of Christian discipleship, to which 2,000 verses in the Bible attest.

IV. WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. A commitment to speaking truth, the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, *"You shall not bear false witness"* (Exodus 20:16), is foundational to shared trust in society. Falsehood can enslave us, but Jesus promises, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32). The search and respect for truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined. The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation's highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behavior of families and children. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral

danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

V. WE BELIEVE that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. Jesus said, *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (the world) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant"* (Matthew 20:25-26). We believe our elected officials are called to public service, not public tyranny, so we must protect the limits, checks, and balances of democracy and encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not. The authority of government is instituted by God to order an unredeemed society for the sake of justice and peace, but ultimate authority belongs only to God.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger that threatens democracy and the common good—and we will resist it. Disrespect for the rule of law, not recognizing the equal importance of our three branches of government, and replacing civility with dehumanizing hostility toward opponents are of great concern to us. Neglecting the ethic of public service and accountability, in favor of personal recognition and gain often characterized by offensive arrogance, are not just political issues for us. They raise deeper concerns about political idolatry, accompanied by false and unconstitutional notions of authority.

VI. WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples (Matthew 28:18). Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with *"For God so loved the world"* (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT "America first" as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal. We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth's resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God's children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these.

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper—deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

The church is always subject to temptations to power, to cultural conformity, and to racial, class, and gender divides, as Galatians 3:28 teaches us. But our answer is to be "in Christ," and to *"not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable, and perfect."* (Romans 12:1-2)

We commend this letter to pastors, local churches, and young people who are watching and waiting to see what the churches will say and do at such a time as this.

The best response to our political, material, cultural, racial, or national idolatries is the First Commandment: *"You shall have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:3). Jesus summarizes the Greatest Commandment: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:38). As to loving our neighbors, we would add "no exceptions."

We commend this letter to pastors, local churches, and young people who are watching and waiting to see what the churches will say and do at such a time as this.

Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ—to whom be all authority, honor, and glory. It is time for a fresh confession of faith. Jesus is Lord. He is the light in our darkness. *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

THE UNDERSIGNED

Bishop Carroll A. Baltimore, *President and CEO, Global Alliance Interfaith Networks*

Rev. Dr. Peter Borgdorff, *Executive Director Emeritus, Christian Reformed Church in North America*

Dr. Amos Brown, Chair, *Social Justice Commission, National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.*

Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggemann, *Professor Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary*

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Rev. Dr. Joel C. Hunter, *Faith Community Organizer and Chairman, Community Resource Network*

Rev. Dr. Jo Anne Lyon, *General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan Church*

Bishop Vashti McKenzie, *117th Elected and Consecrated Bishop, AME Church*

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, *Jr., Co-Convener National African American Clergy Network*

Dr. John Perkins, *Chair Emeritus and Founding Member, Christian Community Development Association*

Bishop Lawrence Reddick, *CEO, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*

Fr. Richard Rohr, *Founder, Center for Action and Contemplation*

Dr. Ron Sider, *President Emeritus, Evangelicals for Social Action*

Rev. Jim Wallis, *President and Founder, Sojourners*

Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, *Director, NCC Truth and Racial Justice Initiative*

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, *Co-Convener, National African American Clergy Network; President, Skinner Leadership Institute*

Bishop Will Willimon, *Bishop, The United Methodist Church, retired, Professor of the Practice of Ministry, Duke Divinity School*

"In spite of everything, I still believe people are really good at heart."
—Anne Frank, The Diary of Anne Frank

"Tomorrow is always fresh, with no mistakes in it yet."
—L. M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

Incoming.....Our Mail Bag

Dear Staff of Christian Ethics Today,

It was probably twenty years ago when dad called and said he bought me a subscription to Christian Ethics Today. I loved the gift, but as we approach dad's 90th birthday, I am reflecting on his other gifts to me. At 90, my dad, Billy Ables, is the poster man for a rural, conservative evangelical. He was raised Pentecostal, became a Baptist deacon and has never smoked or drank or cursed. He believes that God helps those who help themselves and whatever a man sows he shall also reap. Why would that man be sending me a subscription to Christian Ethics Today? The reason is because Dad has never been afraid to question and read and think. My guess is he doesn't quite agree with a good bit of the CET articles, but I always love it when dad reads a controversial article and calls me and wants to know if I read the article. Our conversation always ends the same way. "I don't know if I believe it, but it sure made me think." Dad believes that God helps those who help themselves, but also believes we need to help those who can't. He believes that we reap what we sow, but he also believes that God's grace is sufficient for all. He also believes that God doesn't mind our questions. I mentioned other gifts. The best gift my father has given me and his grandkids is the assurance that God can be challenged and questioned and that is no threat to faith. I can't wait for my next call making sure I read some CET hot topic article and dad's reassurance that it is OK because it made us think. To you folks at CET, thank you for your commitment to a big God. Writing this note makes me think of the Stuart Hamblyn lyric. "How big is God? He's big enough to rule the mighty universe, but small enough to live within our hearts."

God Bless,
Stephen B. Ables
Presiding Judge
Kerr County Courthouse
Kerrville, Texas

The enclosed check is in memory of my parents, Danna and Preston Whorton, close friends of Foy Valentine.

Penny Whorton Wells

Patrick,

Hope this bit will be of help. Thanks for what you do.
George A. Haile

Dear Friends,

I have enjoyed reading Christian Ethics Today since I learned of you. I was a student of Dr. T.B. Maston at Southwestern in the late 50s and I have appreciated the directions that you have taken concerning today's many ethical dilemmas.
Larry H. Austin

Interesting Opinions

From The Washington Post, April 19, 2018

"Are these evangelicals ready to topple the idol of politics?"

By Michael Gerson Opinion writer

If you look at his words, Jesus did not preach a new religion. He announced the arrival of a kingdom. "The kingdom of God has come near," he said. It is intended to be a message of dawning hope and liberation. "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."

This kingdom — against the messianic expectation of some of Jesus's followers — did not involve a revolt against the Roman Empire. It is, Jesus said, "not of this world." He said that the rule or reign of God had broken into human history in some new and different way. And the evidence is provided by people who will live by the values of this divine kingdom in the midst of every earthly kingdom. Believers are essentially called to be emissaries or ambassadors.

The nature of this kingdom determines how it is properly advanced — not law by law but life by life. You can't advance a vision of liberation by oppressing the conscience of others. You can't advance a vision of human dignity by dehumanizing others. You can't advance a vision of peace with violent and demeaning language.

This involves an entirely different view of power — power for the sake of the powerless. It involves a different definition of influence — bringing a modicum of grace and justice into the world around us, including the political world.

From The New York Times, April 16, 2018

"When Is a Church Not a Church?"

By Katherine Stewart, Opinion Contributor

Last fall…according to forms filed with the Internal Revenue Service, Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian organization that promotes socially conservative views on matters of public and family policy, declared itself a church.

Focus on the Family doesn't have a congregation, doesn't host weddings or funerals and doesn't hold services. What it does do, with its nearly $90 million annual budget, is deliver radio and other programming that is often political to an estimated audience of 38 million listeners in the United States and beyond. It has funded ads against state legislators who support bills intended to prevent discrimination against L.G.B.T. people and it leads programs to combat what it calls "gay activism" in public schools.

Why would such a group want to call itself a church? Short answer: money. Churches can raise

tax-deductible contributions more easily, and with fewer restrictions, than other nonprofits can. They also enjoy additional tax shelters, such as property tax exemptions for clergy members — or was that conservative radio personalities?

Next, churches can also enjoy the benefits of dark money. Unlike other groups, churches are required to disclose essentially nothing about who or what supplies them with their funds. And Focus on the Family, like a number of other groups on the religious right, may worry that its opposition to same-sex relationships will land it on the wrong side of anti-discrimination law. After all, the "moral behavior standards" in their employee guidelines prohibit "homosexual acts."…

The way that Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council see it, the Bible offers specific information about how people ought to vote. Scripture, they say, opposes public assistance on principle ("God has charged believers to help the poor and widows and orphans," the council's culture impact team manual explains). Apparently, the Bible is also against gun control and supports privatization of schools through vouchers. It tells us that same-sex relationships are an abomination.

It does not want women to have access to comprehensive reproductive care. Environmentalism, according to the source the manual recommends to church groups, is a "litany of the Green Dragon" and "one of the greatest threats to society and the church today." Other sources the manual recommends promote the notion that the earth is 6,000 years old.

There is no mystery about which political party the Bible supports, at least as these groups see it… Their claim that they are nonpartisan is laughable…

When challenged about their blatantly partisan activism, these groups invariably cry out that their religious liberty is under attack. It isn't. They are welcome to their opinions and free to expose them to the sunlight of the public square. The real issue here is money and transparency…

Religion has long thrived in America because most religious leaders respected the separation of church and state, an arrangement that has served our country very well. Under our current law, religious groups are exempt from certain tax and reporting burdens. Political groups are not. Churches need to decide which one they are.

Katherine Stewart (@kathsstewart) is the author of "The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children."

This Cup *By James A. Langley*

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Mt. 26:39)

On a mission heaven-sent, amid acclaim and rejection,
The eternal plan keenly rising in His reflection,
Urged to shun Samaritans and call down fire
Upon them, with compassion He countered such ire,
For the Savior has come the despised to redeem,
Showing divine love for the least an ever flowing stream,
Prophetically heralded by the inspired observant,
Reaching its zenith in Isaiah's 'Suffering Servant';
Cognizant of the cost of His Messianic mission,
And committed from eternity to the divine commission,
The Redeemer set His face like flint for Jerusalem,
Undeterred by the sense He would surely be condemned,
Fully knowing the opposition arrayed against Him,
Facing the incalculable burden of man's depravity and sin;
Killing Jesus was the determined plan of Temple authorities,
Rome's self-serving Procurator had only Roman priorities,
All marshalled by demonic forces from the depths of hell,
By earthly reasoning the encounter could not go well;
In this time of greatest need Jesus' disciples failed the Lord,
Denying, and one betraying, Him in deed and word.

Jesus' prelude to Golgotha, Gethsemane's crucible---
Prostrate, praying thrice for this cup to pass if possible,
If He died in *this* way, might not rejection,
A.M. Fairbairn conjectured, mean greater condemnation?
Even so, with pure conviction His Father's will was paramount,
For all time setting the way for us and our account.

Human suffering runs the gamut and is variously viewed,
The agony endured by Christ was of another magnitude,
Bearing the sins of the race, which only God can know,
Is a burden of the soul unknown in any man's woe,
Never a metaphor more pregnant with suffering beyond the pale,
Nor a more perfect storm blowing a cleansing gale,
A deep sense of His affliction by a Durer depiction
We gain, but His burden is beyond our comprehension;
Though scourged and crucified for our transgression,
The Savior was maligned as deserving God's affliction,
Suffering exceeding what we can share or even know,
Enduring misery far greater than a Dantean *Inferno,*

He cried in torment from the Messianic Twenty-Second Psalm,
(Was He abandoned, or only imagining the qualm?),
"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"
Never has the cry of dereliction expressed such agony;

In direst anguish Christ perceived Himself by God bereft,
On the Cross, in His depths of agony, the Rock was cleft.[1]
This cup, for our sake and God's, He would drain,
Suffering as no other for our timely and eternal gain,
The Savior gave Himself in a once-for-all sacrifice,
Making atonement for our sins at infinite price;
For grace upon grace, all glory to our Blessed Redeemer,
My all I owe to the Savior, now and forever.

1 Earlier generations frequently sang Augustus M. Toplady's hymn "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me".

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Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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