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Two Baptist Churches in the South Discuss the Issues Related to Christian LGBTQ Persons...Differently: As Expressed by Their Pastors in Recent Books

By Cody J. Sanders

***Editor's Note:** Two very respected Baptist pastors have recently published books describing the process they led their congregations through and the conclusions they made regarding how to apply biblical teachings in consideration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons who attend their churches. Both southern churches exist in enclaves of the "bible belt" where strident opinions are often expressed on matters of politics, sexuality, biblical interpretation, and the proper role of religion in public life. These two pastors and the churches they serve determined to conduct a civil, thorough, and thoughtful examination of the issues and to set a course for their congregations' faith and practice. The two churches arrived at different conclusions while exhibiting, as best they could, their own understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I asked a pastor friend, Dr. Cody Sanders, to review each book and compare the different conclusions for our readers.*

Travis Collins, *What Does It Mean to be Welcoming? Navigating LGBT Questions in Your Church*

(Downers Grover, IL: IVP Books, 2018)

No church is exempt from serious discussions about sexuality and faith. This book is evidence of that new reality. Even a big steeple Baptist church in the heart of Alabama cannot skirt the subject--either by relying on the false assumption that everyone in the church agrees on the matter, or by subscribing to simple position statements from denominational bodies without a full engagement of the multivalent concerns bound up in this lived human experience. But the fact remains that churches too often *have* avoided a robust, prayerful and humane process of discernment about sexuality and faith. This book is an attempt to change that.

Travis Collins, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, first wrote this text as an internal document to resource his own congregation's discussions of same-sex sexuality. Collins agrees that churches can no longer avoid what might be a difficult conversation, arguing, "Even difficult conversation... is better than having a statement handed down by authoritarian church leaders, or having church leaders assume (often incorrectly) what members of the congregation think" (p. 123).

The simplest statement of Collins' theological and pastoral commitments on same-sex sexuality and faith comes on pages 128-9 where he states:

Simply put, I believe we should welcome all fol-

lowers of Jesus who want to be part of our church families...I also believe we are to make clear the biblical message about sexual intimacy—that it is to be expressed only within the marriage between a man and a woman. I further believe that spiritual leadership should be reserved for those whose life choices reflect biblical values.

More simply put: Collins and his congregation are *welcoming but not affirming*. There is nothing especially new or unique about this book that sets it apart from all of the "welcoming but not affirming" texts that have come before it except, perhaps, its more conciliatory tone. For example, Collins does not disparage churches that come to affirming positions, though he disagrees with them. And he doesn't question the faithfulness or striving toward Christ-likeness of LGBT persons in loving relationships and those who support them, though he questions the validity of their biblical interpretation and believes same-sex couples are practicing sin.

Collins and his church *do* welcome gay people in same-sex relationships to be church members. Seeing no biblical teaching for "membership" as we've typically practiced it in modern churches, he sees no theological rationale for making sexuality a litmus test for church members (p. 129). The stipulation, of course, is that members engaged in same-sex sexual

relationships will necessarily be second-class members cut off from church leadership positions because of their unbiblical behavioral choices. And, ultimately, embracing gay people into church membership is in service of their potential “transformation” from their sinful choices (p. 130).

Surprisingly, outside of church contexts, Collins *opposes* a second-class citizenship for LGBT people. He states without equivocation, “From what I know... it seems only fair and prudent to extend the legal privileges that straight people enjoy to those people who are in same-sex relationships” – a conviction rooted in his belief that discrimination in society is unchristian, leading us *all* (and he does say “all”!) to “support the full recognition of a gay person’s legal rights” (p. 27). This is indicative of a new generation of “welcoming but not affirming” texts that address LGBT concerns within churches differently from LGBT equality in society.

Collins attempts to honor the complexity of the intersection of sexuality and faith for churches by acknowledging arguments and perspectives from multiple sides. He even includes a brief (14- page) chapter on “the affirming position” in which he lays out what he understands as the best arguments from those who affirm LGBT people in same-sex relationships. Unfortunately, this chapter is quite light on its treatment of the substantive scholarship in this area. While he quotes a few affirming biblical scholars and ethicists (e.g., James V. Brownson, David Gushee, etc.), the arguments he engages from an “affirming” perspective are largely less scholarly and more colloquial. For example, “The church’s reputation and future are in jeopardy if we don’t change our views on sexuality,” or, “It’s hypocritical to oppose same-sex relationships but be soft on divorce.” For those truly desiring to engage a biblical exploration of the topic from an affirming perspective, one should engage a text like James Brownson’s *Bible, Gender, and Sexuality* (Eerdmans, 2013) or Matthew Vines’ helpful summary of the affirming scholarly corpus in *God and the Gay Christian* (Penguin Random House, 2014).

Collins then moves into a much more substantive treatment of what he calls “the traditional position” on

the subject in which he does engage in more scholarly arguments that he, unfortunately, failed to provide in great detail for “the affirming position.” Collins holds a Ph.D. in Christian mission from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and served for 25 years as a missionary, including in Nigeria. His expertise on the subject of sexuality and faith is that of a pastor. He is clearly concerned to walk his church – and now others – through this intersection in ways that exhibit fidelity to the biblical witness. But as a pastor and missiologist, his biblical and historical scholarship is derived from other established texts in this area of inquiry. The notes turn up the typical names of prominent non-affirming scholars like Robert Gagnon and Stanley Grenz.

Collins ends the chapter on the “traditional position” with another statement that caught me off guard when I read it, speaking again to his generosity toward those with whom he disagrees: “I hope anyone who has said, ‘No true Christian could advocate for same-sex marriage’ will say that no longer” (p. 63). And this

speaks to the single greatest strength of Collins’ text: the tone he sets at the beginning of the book and strives to maintain throughout is one of humility-in-conviction. One gets the sense throughout the text that Collins firmly believes he is right about his perspective, but never to the point of believing that he couldn’t possibly be wrong. And on the subject of same-sex relationships – which he believes is

“not central to the gospel” (p. 23) – he is unwilling to alienate his Christian siblings who disagree with him on the matter.

But even in his humility and desire for relationship across lines of difference, Collins has room to grow. For example, in imagining someone in his “traditional position” making a loving overture toward a gay person, he poses the simple question he would ask to them: “How do I represent Jesus to the LGBT community?” (p. 142). Fine question. But it doesn’t seem to occur to him – even amid his desire for his own ongoing spiritual transformation – to ask how the gay person across the table from him, or the LGBT community more broadly, represents Jesus *to him*. A further step of Christian theological humility would

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be for Collins, and others in his circles, to acknowledge that they may have something to learn about being Christian *from those LGBT people* who have tenaciously practiced their faith at the margins of their families, communities, and churches for ages – even if they believe those LGBT people are falling short of Christian standards of morality. These lessons are the subject of my own book, *Queer Lessons for Churches on the Straight and Narrow* (Faithlab, 2013).

Additionally, there are some inconsistencies in the book that are indicative of inconsistencies that pervade Collins' "traditional position" more broadly. For example, he says at one point, "What seems absolutely clear is that the attraction is not the choice of the person. The behavior is a choice, but not the attraction" (p. 15). Yet later in the text he makes the typical argument that "same-sex sexual behavior is 'unnatural,' meaning it violates the divine design" (p. 93). What, then, is the theological anthropology behind an embrace of a perspective on sexuality as a feature of one's lived experience that isn't "chosen," and the theological claim that same-sex behavior is "unnatural" and violates the divine design? How does one understand the relationship between the morally charged category of "natural" and what actually does occur in nature? What part of LGBT persons' embodiment and human experience is made in the *imago Dei* and how does that correspond to a presumed created order that includes non-chosen, presumably naturally occurring, same-sex attraction? All questions that remain unaddressed.

At one point Collins even slips back into a more typical tone for those in the presumed "traditional" camp when he states his belief that "giving approval to same-sex sexual behavior, no matter how loving our motives, is not healthy for the church and not healthy for a society" (p. 95). This may be evidence of a paucity of thought for "traditionalists" on the relationship between church and society, when earlier he claimed full support for the rights of LGBT people in wider society. It is also indicative of a typical feeling of bait-and-switch on behalf of those espousing loving, welcoming tolerance of LGBT people, but who still hold that these people they "love" are unnatural and engaging in behavior that is corrupting to society. Collins laments the fact that LGBT people so often don't see his position as loving or embracing, unsure why such a dynamic must exist, but this is a clear reason why.

Further, while Collins believes that "people on both sides are driven by admirable motives" (p. 11), he too

often equates coming to an affirming position with throwing up one's hands and proclaiming, "Anything goes!" (p. 154). Similarly, he often conflates an affirming position with the *confusion of love and morality* as well. This strain of thought that shows up here and there throughout the book misses the the point that serious moral/ethical, theological, pastoral, and biblical works have been undertaken for many decades now to move Christian communities toward a practice of love and justice that is affirming of LGBT people. Collins portrays the divide to be one between those who are *simply* moved by their love and compassion toward affirmation, and those who are lovingly and compassionately engaging in serious biblical hermeneutics toward a "traditional" position. This is simply sloppy scholarship.

One further limitation that needs to be mentioned to potential readers is one with the title itself: While the book purportedly addresses "LGBT questions" there is actually no substantive grappling of gender identity (the "T" in "LGBT") whatsoever. Readers looking for help navigating questions related to gender identity – a person's social, psychological, spiritual and behavioral experience and expression of "gender" as male or female, both, neither, or those for whom gender is experienced in a more fluid state not captured by the male/female binary – need to look elsewhere. See, for example, Justin Sabia-Tanis, *Trans-Gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

I heartily agree with Collins that "avoidance of a decision and position on this matter is no longer an option for churches" and that "a proactive conversation is much less emotional and much less divisive than a reactive conversation" (pp. 119-20). However, if one decides to read this book to enable conversational dialogue on sexuality and faith, I would highly recommend reading it alongside an equally pastoral and evangelical text that truly engages an affirming perspective more robustly like Ken Wilson's text, *A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor's Path to Embracing People Who Are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender into the Company of Jesus* (Ann Arbor, MI: Front Edge, 2014). Collins' book is a slightly more hopeful addition to the welcoming but not affirming corpus, but needs serious augmentation from other texts to enable the robust, prayerful, and humane process of discernment about sexuality and faith that he hopes for congregations to have.

Jim Dant, *This I Know: A Simple Biblical Defense for LGBTQ Christians*

This I Know is a different kind of book from the LGBTQ affirming texts that have come before it. I should be forthright in stating that it is also a book that I endorsed when it came to me to review in draft form. Neither a thorough theological discussion nor a complex biblical defense, it is, rather, “a survival manual for those on the firing line” (p. 5). There really is no other book quite like it.

Jim Dant, senior minister of the First Baptist Church of Greenville, SC, writes this book out of pastoral concern for LGBTQ people for whom “someone in the church turned the Bible into a weapon and Jesus into an inaccessible friend” (p. 2). Throughout, Dant’s style and tone are both pastoral and colloquial. Readers are invited into what feels

like a conversation. Dant’s premise is stated at the outset: “There is no valid, Christian, biblical argument against same-sex relationships between consenting adults” (p. 2). Every subsequent chapter follows that premise by tackling the most prevalent arguments made against LGBTQ people, their committed same-sex relationships, and their place of equality within churches. Though

his main arguments are about same-sex relationships, Dant also tackles transgender concerns in a few places as well.

Each chapter is laid out in a simple format: First, a typical challenge to LGBTQ affirmation is presented in a sentence. Then a simple response to this challenge is presented in a sentence or two. Following this, Dant offers a slightly longer (two to four paragraphs) explanation to substantiate his response. And each ends with a “just for fun” section in which Dant tells a story from his personal or ministerial experience related to the challenge at hand – often with great humor.

The biblical scholarship represented in the “explanation” sections of each chapter is up-to-date and congruent with the scholarly literature on the subject,

though you won’t find sources footnoted or a bibliography for further reading. Readers are left to find these sources on their own, should they so desire. Though I am not certain that the book is really an entrée into more scholarly texts for most of its readers, I believe what Dant has done with this text is to tap into a cultural propensity for engaging difficult and complex concerns with ever-briefer messaging. And whatever problems are inherent in that tendency toward sound bite theology and Twitter-length critique, Dant has used it for good.

The gift of this text is that most LGBTQ people and those who love them will not be presented with a lengthy biblical treatise against them in the course of their daily lives. They will be confronted by the little

barbs and bumper sticker challenges presented and refuted in this little book. And make no mistake: The length or sophistication of a message of derision meant to cut you down, invalidate your love, or question your relationship to the Divine is no measure of its potential to harm.

During my dissertation research on suicide among LGBTQ people, I discovered time and again that the messages that really

stuck with my interview participants – sometimes decades after they encountered them – were messages that could be contained in a word (e.g., “abomination”) or a simple phrase (e.g., “Your feelings are wrong before God.”). For many in similar situations, a little book like this one can serve as an accessible shield in the midst of a barrage of injurious speech – “a survival manual for those on the firing line,” as Dant says.

The weakness of this book will come for those wishing for a more typical treatment of the subject at hand. There are no footnotes, no bibliography, and no parsing of the Greek text. But it’s just not that kind of book. And those books are, frankly, plentiful. This book is one of a kind. LGBTQ-affirming churches would do well to invest in a few dozen of these little

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books to give away liberally to those in their congregation in need of a little support on their journey toward LGBTQ affirmation.

So what is the critical difference between the journeys of Jim Dant's First Baptist Church of Greenville, SC, and that of Travis Collins' First Baptist Church of Huntsville, AL? Both are big-steeple churches in the socially and politically conservative south. Neither is an "early arriver" at the conversation on LGBTQ inclusivity and justice in the church. Both have pastors who willingly led the way into a process of congregational discernment on LGBTQ concerns. Both engaged in long processes of prayerful study and conversation and eschewed pastoral pronouncements on the matter. And each one came out of the process in a very different place: Huntsville as welcoming but not affirming, Greenville as fully welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ people in the life of the church. So what are the critical differences that got each church to where they are today?

It's hard to say with certainty (though this question would make a good doctoral research project for someone), but after studying the two texts and their approaches, here are a few observations that may be clues to these two churches' divergent pathways:

Firstly, I suspect that the role of LGBTQ voices played very different roles in the process of discernment. Churches can choose to have conversations "about" LGBTQ issues, or churches can choose to have conversations about and *with* and among LGBTQ people. Baptists have a rich history of testimony – bearing witness to that which God has done in one's life. And it is always surprising to me when churches engage in discernment about LGBTQ inclusion without hearing the rich testimony of LGBTQ Christians who tenaciously practice their faith in the midst of severe rejection and even attack from the communities of faith to which they've historically belonged.

I can't say for sure what role the voices of LGBTQ people held in the process of discernment for Huntsville, but I know that Greenville invited LGBTQ Christians to speak of their own experience of the Divine in their lives. I was one of them invited into such a role one Sunday morning in an all-church

Sunday school class followed by my preaching in the worship service. This was before any final point of welcome and affirmation in the process was reached. But, importantly, they were open to hearing how God might be speaking and moving in the lives of queer folk before they got to any point of "decision."

Today, Huntsville won't allow LGBTQ people to take leadership roles in the congregation, presumably including preaching, teaching, worship leadership, etc. Greenville, in contrast, invited the 250 member San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus to perform a standing-room-only concert in their sanctuary. What gifts of beauty and goodness and grace do we forfeit when we exclude the voices of LGBTQ people from our sacred communities? This is a critical question for churches believing in the power of testimony as evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives.

Secondly, it is important to set this conversation on LGBTQ concerns within the larger narrative arc of each congregation. No congregation comes to the question of LGBTQ inclusion and justice out of the

blue. It never shows up as a question that no one was expecting. There are always conversational antecedents that make this conversation a sensible next narrative move in the ongoing story of the congregation. And there are always clues in our congregation's historic narrative that help inform each critical conversation of discernment that arises in our present.

If I were going to undertake a research project

studying the processes of these two congregations, I would want to know the history of other critical conversations in the life of the church that necessitated the tightening, maintenance or loosening of boundaries. From my experience working with many churches on this question, my guess is that many of these historic questions, whether about baptism, or the ordination of women, or a church's relationship to the community's homeless, or their interaction other religious traditions, would suggest something about how the conversation on LGBTQ inclusion is undertaken. Did those questions end in a closed-off stance, a moderated position of partial embrace, or a full, albeit risky, relational embrace of those deemed "other" at the time?

The good news is this: Our historical narratives don't

Finally, both Dant and Collins – and presumably their churches, too – take the Bible very seriously, prioritizing its message in the life of the church. But each of us has multiple lenses through which we read the text of scripture, whether or not we're willing to own up to and question their influence on our vision.

bind us, but we are strongly influenced by them and we need to look carefully at how we can make sense of current decisions in light of our past.

Finally, both Dant and Collins – and presumably their churches, too – take the Bible very seriously, prioritizing its message in the life of the church. But each of us has multiple lenses through which we read the text of scripture, whether or not we’re willing to own up to and question their influence on our vision. Dant says, “It is important (particularly when attacking or critiquing the life of another) that we dig beneath the surface of Scripture, beneath the English translation of obscure words, and beneath the biases of our own culture to find the true intent of the text” (p. 62). And it is the question of the text’s intent that seems most at issue in how Collins and Dant approach the Bible.

For Collins, too much is risked by mistakenly reading the text of scripture as affirming the life and love of LGBTQ people, even to the point of having a corrupting influence on society. For Dant, too much is risked by mistakenly reading the text of scripture as excluding LGBTQ people from the life of the church and the love shared between partners. Dant explains his position, stating:

“God is not looking down from God’s heaven and nullifying our baptisms when we are nice to homosexuals. In fact, if John is correct (and most of our critics believe the

Bible), the opposite may be true. The merciless rejection of LGBTQ persons may impede access to our heavenly abode...I would rather stand before God one day and be told, ‘You loved too much. You shared love with too many people.

You were too liberal in your love and mercy and grace,’ rather than, ‘You did not love enough.

You did not love the people I loved. You withheld love from those who needed it most” (p. 67).

For many readers of the text, the intent of the sacred text is to help us continually broaden our vision and practice of love for those whom God so loved, beyond our culture’s imposed strictures and prejudices. For other readers, the intent of the text is to help us remain pure of doctrine and practice, draw the proper boundary lines of inclusion and exclusion in the church, and defend ourselves from corrupting influences. And you can get both of these messages of intent from within

the text itself. Each lens on intent has an influence on how churches read the text of scripture in relation to questions of LGBTQ inclusion and justice.

So, in addition to all of the typical questions of theology and biblical interpretation we ask in relation to LGBTQ inclusivity, further questions for churches engaging in these complex concerns in the life of the congregation today are these: Whose voices are heard and whose testimonies are taken seriously in the process of discernment? What does our historical narrative as a congregation suggest to us about why this conversation makes sense as a next narrative move in our ongoing story, and what can we learn from our past that will help guide us into our future? What are we willing to stake our church’s life on? And, if we’re going to err, in what direction are we willing to err more egregiously: too great an inclusivity in the house of God, or too little?

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The Key to the Future of Evangelicals May Be in the Past

By Molly Worthen

I would like to start with a story that happened at L'Abri, the famous Christian commune in the Swiss Alps founded by Francis Schaeffer in the 1950s. I had the opportunity to visit there for a couple of weeks. One person who made a real impression on me there was a girl named Amelia, the daughter of a PCA [Presbyterian Church in America] minister. She had just graduated from the University of Tennessee and told me that she considered herself “a poster child for the church” – that was her phrase. But she had become increasingly uncomfortable attaching the label “evangelical” to herself--especially because she felt it led people to assume they knew all about her politics when she herself wasn't even really sure yet what her politics were.

Amelia told me that in her last couple of years of college she took a job at the local coffee shop, and ended up making friends with all kinds of people who were not like her – non-Christians, gay students, pot smokers, the whole gamut. And this experience really caused her to begin to question a Christian tradition that – at least as she had grown up understanding it – said that all of these people were going to some place at the end of it all that was not very nice.

So, she asked her father if she could go to L'Abri. When he asked her what she planned to study, she told him she wanted to get back to the fundamentals; but he didn't really seem to get what she meant. She told me, “If Christianity is a tree, I'm after the trunk. And I really think he thinks I want the branches.” She told me that she wished more atheists would come to L'Abri, because she was really hungry to get into it, to hash it out and be forced to think through everything. She told me, “I want to be assured of my faith. I want to feel the presence of God.”

I think there are three things to note about this story. First, Amelia, like so many of the young evangelicals I've talked to, is frustrated with what I'll call “evangelicalism's public political face,” her sense that outsiders

automatically assume that all white evangelicals have the same politics.

Second, she grew up learning a very rationalistic, head-focused approach to God that seems to have not quite equipped her for the problems she's trying to sort out now – her relationship with non-Christians and her sense of purpose in a multicultural and kind of unpredictable world.

And here's the last point: My conversation with Amelia happened more than 10 years ago. I think this is important, because it seems that each week I read another article about how we are living through an unprecedented moment for traditional Christians in

this country: a time of crisis unlike anything we've seen before with unprecedented numbers of young people leaving the Church in droves; talking heads pronouncing the label “evangelicalism” just too corrupted and too politicized to be useful.

And so often all of this is

tied to the outcome of the last presidential election.

Don't get me wrong; the 2016 election was a moment of historical significance, absolutely. But I think that our current political situation has simply shed more light on long-standing debates and divides among evangelicals, and on the struggle of Christian educators to prepare students for modern challenges. That goes back at least a half-century. In my archive work at places like Biola and Wheaton, I read through the worried letters of educators from across the Christian tradition, about – and this is in the 1940s and '50s – how their students are just too focused on their salary and don't have a sense of ministry. My job as a historian is to tell you that it has deep roots. We can recognize this broader context – and I guess it's a matter of judgment whether the broader context is depressing or kind of heartening – while also taking stock of the way this generation of Christian students is absolutely different from the kinds of students who would have attended your schools in the '40s and '50s.

I'll sum it up this way: The thing students seek

I'll sum it up this way: The thing students seek more than anything is not really a quest for the perfect watertight rational case for believing the Bible.

more than anything is not really a quest for the perfect watertight rational case for believing the Bible. Certainly, there are some students who are still very much preoccupied with these traditional questions of apologetics. But I think the thing they really crave – and it’s the same thing most of my students at the University of North Carolina crave – is a sense of authenticity. They want a sense of knowing who they truly are in the world, of being part of a human and humane community that is rooted in place and time and can occasionally persuade them to put down their smart phones and interact as real, living, breathing individuals.

I want to tell you one thing that you as Christian educators can do for these students that I think very few people are in a position to do: that is to give them a sense of their own history, of where they stand in the broad sweep of Christianity. I think the study of church history has a huge role to play in the future of Christian higher education.

Occasionally, I have the opportunity to lecture on Christian campuses and, whenever I do, I always end up talking with faculty about their college’s particular history, its relationship with a particular denomination, with missionary organizations and how that history does and does not shape campus life. I’ve talked to Nazarene professors who are really proud of the way many churches in their denomination historically held mainstream fundamentalism at arm’s length and found ways to make room for a different relationship with science and to approach gender roles differently, in a way that they would call progressive within the bounds of orthodoxy. I’ve spoken to Anabaptists who want their students to understand the long Christian tradition of critiquing state power rather than necessarily seeking to accrue more power. I’ve spoken to Anglicans at Wheaton who are rethinking worship and who wouldn’t mind a whiff of incense in the Billy Graham Center now and then.

My impression is that on many campuses, the quest for historical consciousness is experiencing a renaissance. There is a new generation of faculty and administrators who want to root themselves in the long sweep of Christian history and transmit a sense of that to their students. Students are hungry for it--especially the huge numbers who grew up in nondenominational or denominationally indifferent churches with a sort of implied myth that all there is to Christian history is: Chapter One, Jesus and the apostles; Chapter Two, the papist dark ages; Chapter Three, that Martin Luther guy; and then Chapter Four, the founding of their own church when Pastor Randy started holding Bible stud-

ies in his living room 20 years ago.

Now those are great stories; but I think that learning their own longer, much more complicated history can give students the tools to see how varied and rich evangelicalism really is; to see these supposedly unprecedented challenges of post-Christian society in a richer context; and to see that, if they object to this or that particular evangelical self-appointed spokesperson, no single person can speak for the whole tradition – it’s far too messy. And they’ll see that if you grasp the breadth of evangelical history – if you even just get a taste of it – you quickly start to see that the labels “conservative” or “progressive” fall apart, and there are standards other than the political check boxes of 2018 for thinking about faith and evaluating faith’s relationship to a pluralistic culture.

When I sat down to prepare these remarks, I got the idea to look up Amelia for the first time since I interviewed her many years ago. She’s married with kids, according to Facebook and, from what I can tell, she has not left the Church. She is pretty active in a Reformed evangelical congregation embedded in the University neighborhood in Knoxville – the sort of church that has been holding prayer services to protest white supremacy and very enthusiastically welcomes religious skeptics on its website in big letters. I immediately had the image of Amelia buttonholing some poor atheist who somehow ended up at coffee hour and finally having those passionate debates that she so craved at L’Abri.

I think so many young evangelicals are a lot like her. They’re not looking for reasons to leave Christianity. In fact, they really want to stay. The trouble is that they have so often inherited a pinched, narrow understanding of what Christianity is. So, consider [having] a discussion about how to restore the broad, varied history of what it means to be Christian in the 21st century.

Molly Worthen, an assistant professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has focused her research on North American religious and intellectual history, particularly conservative Christianity in the 20th century, and is author of Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism. This article is the text of a talk Worthen gave from the main stage at the 2018 Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) International Forum. This article first appeared in print in the Spring 2018 issue of Advance, a publication of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, and is reprinted here with permission.

How Christians Began to Stand Against the Emperor: From Romans to Revelation

By David Jordan

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God ...” (Romans 13:1).

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird ... for all the nations have drunk the wine of her fornication ...” (Revelation 18:2-3).

Context matters. History is important. Careful biblical interpretation is essential – especially for today’s world. Let’s take a closer look at these two pertinent passages above. Together, they provide bookends to probably the four most formative decades in early Christian Church.

Primarily, they illustrate a stark contrast in the early church’s understanding of political officials and the system those officials represented. The first from Romans calls upon Christians to “be subject to the governing authorities” saying clearly that those in power are placed there by God.

The second, however, offers an amazing change. No longer a call to respect those in office as officials “instituted by God,” Rome is now “Babylon.” This is a term of derision, followed by frightening imagery and scornful descriptions of wicked, rotting leadership disseminating widespread “wine of her fornication.”

Something has happened.

Today, this Romans passage is quoted by prominent preachers, even advisors to the current president, as justification for unyielding, unquestioning support. Evangelical, well-meaning Christian friends, neighbors and fellow church members hear Romans 13 and

understand the meaning for what it appears to say. But context matters.

Paul probably composed Romans sometime between 57-58 AD during the reign of Nero (ruled 54-68 AD). Revelation was composed probably between 93-95 AD. during the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD).

While Paul was preparing his letter to the Romans and advocating holy respect for ruling authorities, the Roman world was relatively calm. Paul’s primary concerns to this point had come from Jewish religious leaders arguing with him over the nature of Jesus, the

primacy of the law and the status of Gentiles. Roman soldiers and government officials had often been his allies (he was a Roman citizen after all, as were other early Christians like Silas).

Nero, for his part, had remained a kind of odd sideshow. He was narcissistic, immature, unconcerned with the broader world, unaware of what he didn’t know, incompetent, impulsive and mostly distracted in his

early years of being emperor. He viewed himself as an artist, singer and composer. He wanted and got large crowds of “adoring” spectators. The subsequent rave reviews expected by Nero barely hid the truth. He was mediocre at best but so taken with pretended responses he began to broaden his exploits to athletic contests. We are told he won races he wasn’t even in. He reveled in the fawning, awards – and pretense.

Yet, up to the point when Paul composed Romans, Nero had a been a strange, emperor-clown most laughed at behind his back. Few took him seriously. The wise and highly competent philosopher Seneca (who tutored Nero and ran the affairs of state from 54-65 AD) was the real power behind the throne. And the empire was run by enough other competent

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officials, few needed to heed anything Nero thought or said. Life went on, the economy thrived and the Christian church continued to grow. Until everything changed.

It was in the summer of 64 A.D. Fire raged through Rome. Dry weather and hot winds carried embers, ash and flames over two thirds of the famous city. Countless lives, priceless works of art, vital historical documents and untold architectural wonders were lost in the conflagration. Suspicions leaned in the direction of Nero. His desire for expanding his palace fanned rumors. A quick move to construct the palatial “golden house” in an area close to where the fire began led many to believe he had the fire set as a prelude to his personal urban renewal. Anger grew. Nero, never one to admit to mistakes, quickly looked for distractions and for others to blame.

It was the Christians, he declared, this growing rabble of unpatriotic, potentially seditious underclass. Tacitus, the famous Roman historian, shares what came next:

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called “Chrestians” by the populace ...

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every

sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired (Tacitus, Annals).

From these horrors, Christians understandably began to view the empire and those who ran it with far more

concern. Though Nero’s persecution was localized to the areas right around Rome, the ramifications for Christians across the empire were profound. At the time of the fire, both Paul and Peter were in Rome. Both are believed to have been martyred soon after. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down. Would Paul’s perspectives in Romans 13 have been different had they been written after 64? We’ll never know. But we do know history.

Nero was forced to commit suicide in 68. The oddities and tragedies of his bizarre reign eventually yielded to the more competent, professional leadership of Vespasian (ruled 69-79) and Titus (ruled 79-81). Both died natural deaths after successful reigns. Then came Titus’ brother, Vespasian’s other son, Domitian (ruled 81-96).

For Christians, Domitian becomes the new Nero, a chilling reminder of how quickly things can change. Narcissistic playboy emperors are no joke. They can quickly morph into wicked, demented rulers. Those early Christians concluded he and the broader empire

might be controlled by “The Beast” so vividly described by John in Revelation.

In the years from Romans to Revelation, Christians came to understand the world differently than when Paul first wrote his hopeful words in Romans 13. Context remains vitally important. And so does our application of the Bible. Never should we use Romans 13

to acquiesce. When necessary, Christians can and must stand against imperial power. Taking scripture seriously, let us also learn from our history. May God give us wisdom.

David Jordan is Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia

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If you wish to add someone to our mailing list to receive **Christian Ethics Today**, please let us know.

Two Old Christian and Muslim Wealth Managers Provide Enriching Counsel About the Abrahamic Faiths, World Peace, Trumpism & Your Financial Well-Being

By Yaqub Mirza and Gary Moore

The central premise of this (forthcoming) book is that you, and especially your grandchildren, will likely grow richer, financially and/or spiritually, if the three great faiths of Abraham (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) cease fighting each other and join in Love. We might then battle that great idol of Mammon that has been unleashed during recent decades by traditional morality no longer bridling the making of money.

With due respect to the millions of Buddhists, Hindus and people of other faiths around our world, our cover depicts what we believe are the four major religions of the West. Three have been in distinct tension with the fourth for centuries. But it appears the fourth (money) has won the hearts and minds of most during recent decades.

Even most Christian sociologists and pastors lament that America is now a “post-Christian” nation. But few suggest what it now is. We will. America is a capitalistic nation. One that has increasingly abandoned traditional religion in the questionable belief, or at least practice, that making money is the moral purpose of life on earth. It might seem odd to suggest money is the world’s new religion. And while we know most Americans have been taught communism was the worship of government, very few now worship it! But as professional money managers, we believe there is more than abundant evidence for us to suggest the making of money is now our new age religion.

That was clearly the intent of atheistic pop philosopher Ayn Rand, about whom I’ve cautioned for decades. She once wrote to a friend that she’d make capitalism unbridled by Judeo-Christian morality into a new religion for Americans who’d lost faith in traditional Judeo-Christianity. She even called such

capitalism the “unknown ideal,” words the children of Abraham used to ascribe to God. Her book *Atlas Shrugged* has been judged by the Library of Congress as the second most influential book in America, right after the Bible. We’d suggest it is more influential, at least in practice.

Even *Christianity Today* has referred to the Bible in a feature story as “The Greatest Book Never Read.” Tens of millions of professing Christians therefore

now work where they can make the most money, rather than where they can love God and neighbor as self. They have increasingly voted for politicians who simply promised the most money, probably paving the way for the gilded businessman turned poli-

tician Donald Trump. They save and invest where they can simply make the most money. They even go to “Christian” churches that teach so-called “prosperity theology” so they can make the most money. While there, they often hear they should give generously so the money given will be multiplied with the most money!

Atlas Shrugged is tremendously influential on Wall Street and in Washington, largely due to unwitting believers who have never heard of Rand. But years ago, *The Economist* magazine said Rand was the world’s most influential female economic philosopher. That was due to her closest disciple Alan Greenspan, the former head of the Federal Reserve Board (Fed). Like Moses, Jesus and Muhammed, the first thing she did was create a few close disciples, which she ironically termed “the collective,” and insisted they never deviate from her teachings.

The Economist added Rand’s teachings influenced Greenspan and other disciples--leaders from former

That turned the teaching of wise old Salomon that the easier we get our money, the less good it will do us (Proverbs 13:11), upside-down, as she did most biblical virtues.

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan to judges on the Supreme Court--to make "easy money" the foundation of Reaganomics. That turned the teaching of wise old Salomon that the easier we get our money, the less good it will do us (Proverbs 13:11), upside-down, as she did most biblical virtues. Still, Greenspan's successors at the Fed have continued his easy money policies, first by huge government borrowing and more recently by "quantum easing," or the Fed buying government bonds by the trillions, thereby putting even easier money into our economy.

That easy money has caused the stock market and housing prices in our richest areas to boom as affluent Americans have thrown money at assets they thought would make even more money. Unfortunately, it has done little good, and probably harm, for anyone but the richest ten percent of Americans, of which I've long been one, as the percentage of our nation's output going to workers has declined. That too is likely an intended by-product of Rand's gospel. She thought we ten percenters, primarily CEO-types who she called "producers," would one day gather in "Galt's Gulch," her ultimate guarded-gate community, so we can avoid the "moochers" of the world.

Yet as we edit this book manuscript in the summer of 2018, an increasing number of economists and wealth managers are deeply concerned such elitist economic practices have left American economic policy handcuffed, seriously threatening our economy...and perhaps validating the ancient wisdom. As often happens, biblical "sin" is quite intoxicating when the Fed "spikes the punch-bowl" in the short-run but often hurts quite badly when the hang-over arrives. More concerning, the moral hang-over can hurt even worse, causing pain in the body politic.

Due to Rand's new-age philosophy regarding the centrality of money to our moral lives, it was as likely Mr. Greenspan would stop printing money as it was that the Gideons would make it hard to find a Bible by stop printing them. It was just as likely that most Americans would grow deeply skeptical, even cynical, of government, as Rand also taught that despite traditional morality. She understood that while governments can certainly over-reach as the Bible teaches, they also prevent many business people from harming others, the environment, and so on, for money,

as Romans 13 also teaches. Google the Ayn Rand Institute or other "libertarian" think tanks and see how many morally questionable businesses, from tobacco companies on, are major donors.

Atlas Shrugged therefore ended with Rand making a new symbol over the world that she hoped would replace the Cross, Star of David and the Crescent, as well as the hammer and sickle, particularly in America, her promised land of unbridled capitalism. It was the dollar sign, which was reportedly at the head of her casket. Ironically, many conservative Christians unwittingly helping to make her vision a reality also consider a universal sign needed to buy things to be a sign Armageddon is rapidly approaching. Few understand the dollar has long been the "reserve currency" of the world, meaning it is required for most international trade around the world, as well as purchases at home.

One might therefore wonder if these Christians--usually economically ignorant as their leaders have been myopically focused on human sexual for decades--aren't unconsciously helping to destroy the better world future generations should inherit in the false hope they will be "raptured" anyway. They too often seem to believe religion is simply about "saving sinners" by talking them onto a train that will get the evangelized to the right station after death. They too rarely

seem to understand Jesus clearly said he had come so that he might be an example to all his disciples of how to make the train ride more abundant for everyone during this life.

That too is supported empirically. During the Reagan years, the conservative Heritage Foundation, Reagan's favorite think tank, sought to prove the social benefits of religion. It had to conclude the "extrinsic" religion of simply wearing necklaces with a cross and WWJD bracelets, while placing fish symbols on their cars, the type of religion seemingly preferred by most conservative Christians, is the even more socially harmful than is atheism. Fortunately, Heritage also concluded "intrinsic" religion, where the heart, soul and mind are transformed, is the most socially beneficial of all.

While intrinsic religionists seem preoccupied with finding the anti-Christ, very, very few seem to have noticed the words Ronald Wilson Reagan contain six letters each (666!), and the Reagans reportedly lived at a 666 address until they changed it for political pur-

Google the Ayn Rand Institute or other "libertarian" think tanks and see how many morally questionable businesses, from tobacco companies on, are major donors.

poses. To be very clear, I doubt the nominally Christian Reagan, who like Trump was an actor turned politician, was the anti-Christ. I simply state the possibility to suggest conservative Christians might do well to look for the demonic within ourselves rather than exclusively among others, as Jesus clearly demanded when he said we must take the spec out of our eyes before we can remove the log from the eyes of others. For the Bible is also quite clear than many, many professing Christians will be fooled as Armageddon and Judgment Day approaches.

Yet Peggy Noonan, President Reagan's favorite speech writer and now a featured writer for The Wall Street Journal, has written:
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Yet Peggy Noonan, President Reagan's favorite speech writer and now a featured writer for The Wall Street Journal, has written:

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Yaqub Mirza is Chairman of the Amana Mutual Funds; Gary Moore is Founder of The Financial Seminary. Their forthcoming book, Heavenly Returns...Even on Earth!,

is reviewed elsewhere in this journal and will be available in the fall of 2018.

"Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
And all I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Lord unto me."

— by William M. Runyan, 1923

A time for Thanksgiving is upon us. True, all of the time is a time for thanksgiving. But at this time of year between the Autumn's colorful transition culminating in the Thanksgiving Holiday, then Christmas, and the New Year's beginning...Remember how much we have to be thankful for.

Christian Ethics Today is thankful for each and every person who reads the pages of our journal, for every encouraging thought shared with us, and for every gift to help keep the candle lit.

— Pat Anderson, editor

The Importance of Standing with Those Who Suffer

By Susan Rogers

For some 2,000 years, Christ-followers have been formed by a story or rather a collection of stories, poems, letters and writings. And, in recent days, it has become very clear that we have forgotten what's at the core of these sacred texts we call Scripture. Two stories in particular stand at the center.

The first is found in our Hebrew scriptures and is the story of the Hebrew or Israelite people. Descendants of Abraham and his elderly wife, Sarah, are chosen to live out God's intentions for all of creation. And, for a season, they are held captive. They are forced to live as slaves to an Egyptian empire until the day that Yahweh rescues them from slavery. As part of their liberation, they journey through the desert for 40 years, searching for home and learning a new way of life. They are rescued in order to bless other nations.

And one of the ways they are to bless is by welcoming and caring for and sharing with the stranger, the traveler and the foreigner in their midst. See, the Hebrew people were never to forget that they too were once strangers in a foreign land; that they too were in need; that they too were hungry and thirsty. When they forgot, there were always consequences.

The other story that is instrumental to our Christian identity also involves a journey — this one is about God's journey to be with us. God could have come to us in a million different ways. He could have come in the form of a wealthy politician or a warrior king. The gospel stories of our Christian scriptures tell us instead that God chose to come to us through the fragility of birth and in the body of a helpless child. Jesus came as a vulnerable servant, a compassionate healer and

teacher — one who ultimately died a criminal's death.

God chose to be revealed in Jesus and he warned his followers to be on the lookout because he would still be coming to us in this same way. He knew we would forget. So, he warned: "Truly I tell you, just as you do it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you do it to me."

These are not just stories meant to guide the Christian church. They are stories about what it means to be human — stories that warn us against forgetting what's at the heart of our humanity.

When we forget who we are and where we come from and what we were created for, we are standing on dangerous ground. Friends, we are at that point.

The practices of separating families at our borders

and of criminalizing those seeking refuge here are evidence of our forgetfulness. The pathetic number of refugees we are willing to accept into this country is proof of our lack of memory. And we *must* remember. We must remember that we have a responsibility to care for the stranger and to provide safety for the sojourner. We must

We must remember that we have a responsibility to care for the stranger and to provide safety for the sojourner. We must remember that we are measured not by how much wealth we accrue, but how we treat the outsider and the vulnerable.

remember that we are measured not by how much wealth we accrue, but how we treat the outsider and the vulnerable.

Our liberation, our healing, our future are dependent on our willingness to remember and on our daring, as Jesus did, to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering.

Susan Rogers is pastor of The Well at Springfield in Jacksonville, Florida

Christianity and Trumpism

By Lavonn Brown

What is the Christian to think or do about the personal life and policies of President Donald Trump? Pray for him? Yes. Wish him well? Within limits. Be aware of his dishonesty, narcissism, hedonism, misogyny, racism, and lack of compassion? With frustration, to be sure.

While working on this article I was reading (again) Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and came across this description of one of his countrymen from the mid-1800s:

"(He) had made his way up from insignificance, was morbidly given to self-admiration, had the highest opinion of his intelligence and capacities, and sometimes even gloated in solitude over his image in the glass. But what he loved

and valued above all was the money he had amassed by his labour, and all sorts of devices: that money made him equal of all who had been his superiors."

So we are not dealing with a new problem.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Recently Trump, in speaking to a Minnesota rally (June 2018) said,

"Other people are called the Elite . . . the Elite.

When I have a much better apartment.

I'm richer than they are.

I'm smarter than they are.

I became president and they didn't."

Further examples were gleaned from the book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*, edited by Brandy Lee (pp. 25-47). This book is based on the observations of 27 psychiatrists and mental health experts. The general conclusion is that Trump is "an unbridled, or extreme present hedonist" (p. 27).

Consider the following direct quotes of Trump's estimation of himself.

"I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally" (Twitter Nov 27, 2016).

"When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do

anything" (Washington Post, Oct 2016).

"My motto is hire the best people, and don't trust anything" (Washington Post, October 2016).

"I'm like a really smart person" (Interview July 11, 2015).

"It's very hard for them to attack me on my looks, because I'm so good looking" (Meet the Press Aug 7, 2015).

"I'm speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very great brain . . . my primary Consultant is myself". (Interview, Mar 16, 2016).

"I alone can fix it" (Republican Convention, (July, 2016).

"I'm going to bomb the s.... out of them" (Fort Dodge Rally, Nov 13, 2011)

"My motto is, hire the best people and don't trust them" (Think Big 2007)

Finally, while discussing tyrants Elizabeth Mika says, "Tyrants identify with other tyrants and find Inspiration in their successes . . . they recognize and respect power . . ." (p. 304).

The Christian is left with the responsibility of weighing all these observations in the light of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Thus, our frustration!

Although its authorship is uncertain, the following truth has been widely quoted, "America is great because she is good, and if she ceases to be good, she will cease to be great" (quoted by Eisenhower, Buchanan, Reagan, Clinton, etc.).

This sounds like the America I grew up in. It could have been written by a farmer, rancher, butcher, baker, candlestick maker. Wisdom literature put it this way, "Righteousness (being and doing right) exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

Lavonn D. Brown is Minister Emeritus of First Baptist Church in Norman, Oklahoma

Book Reviews

The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels

by Jon Meacham (New York, New York: Random House, 2018, 402 pages).

Reviewed by **Walter B. Shurden**

A huge billboard on Hillcrest Avenue in a minority section of Macon, GA, blares the faded words: “FEAR IS CONTAGIOUS. SO IS HOPE.” That is the theme of Meacham’s passionately written, beautifully crafted book. It is the kind of book that makes you want to run out into the streets and do something great big for equality, for freedom and for justice for all.

And that is why Meacham wrote what is a history of America from the Civil War to the present, with special emphasis on how America triumphed over fear and prevailed with hope. It is a history for us and for our time. The book is sermonic, inspired and inspiring. His final chapter feels like an invitation from a Baptist preacher. “How then,” he asks, “in an hour of anxiety about the future of the country, at a time when a president of the United States appears determined to undermine the rule of law, a free press, and the sense of hope essential to American life, can those with deep concerns about the nation’s future enlist on the side of the angels?” And like the preacher, he answers, and points to what he wants of you and me. He wants us to “enter the arena,” “resist tribalism,” “respect facts and reason,” “find a critical balance,” and “keep history in mind.” He wants us to “witness, protest, and resist.”

Acknowledging that America is not perfect nor is it perfectible, Meacham sees our Republic engaged in the “eternal struggle” between “our better angels” and our worst demons. He teeters very close to saying that American history demonstrates that hope always wins over fear. He teeters, but he does not cave. He knows well the downward spiral is possible. He documents it.

Nevertheless “feared” something in reading this marvelous book. My fear is that some will read of hope triumphing over fear in American history and then wait passively for history to do its work in our time. Meacham will have none of that passivity.

He knows that we have come through the hideous and deplorable dark nights of our civic life only because of somebody’s “witness, protest, and resistance.” I was reminded of Carlyle Marney’s confession: “It has been 40 years since I asked God to fix anything I could fix.” The contemporary political American situation is something that we can fix, roars prophet Meacham. And we must. Even if there has been a radical change in our national character, will and taste, we must engage. This one is ours to win.

A tip: you have to read only the “Introduction” and the “Conclusion” to be able to talk about the book. But what is in between is, as they say in Louisiana, *lagniappe*. And it is knee-slapping good. It is about the fears that have tormented America’s history--fears that expressed themselves in slavery, Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, the Alien and Sedition Act, *Plessey vs Ferguson*, woman’s suffrage, the Red Scare, the Klan’s revival,

Huey Long, Father Charles Coughlin, the internment of Japanese Americans, McCarthyism, and the Civil Rights struggle, among others.

But Meacham is intent on demonstrating that for every villainous fear that raised its dreadful head in America history, a better angel appeared in the form

of presidents, reformers, preachers and organized movements. Here is a treasure of quotations from American presidents that helped to lift us beyond our fears. Good words matter, and they are powerful enough to help us transcend our fears. Again, victory was never easy, automatic, or without blood, sweat and tears at any point in American history.

Ken Burns called Meacham’s book “a beautifully expressed and convincing prayer to summon our ‘better angels’ to meet the obvious challenges of today.” There is a kind of prayer here, but I think it is more fervent sermon, rooted in history, calling us as a nation to be our best selves, reminding us that while fear can drag us down, hope can lift us up. But we have to work at it.

Here, for my money, is history as it ought to be written. I urge it upon you. I hope you will urge it upon others.

Walter B. Shurden is Minister-at-Large Mercer University and lives with his wife, Kay, in Macon, Georgia

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Unified We Are a Force: How Faith and Labor Can Overcome America's Inequalities

Henkel-Rieger.

(St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press) 2017.

Reviewed by Michael D. Royster

The six chapters of *Unified We Are a Force* provide a theological reflection of the structural violence caused by economic inequality and the resulting manner in which those in positions of privilege become desensitized to society's fringed members. When examining forms of inequality, Rieger emphasizes wealth production rather than wealth distribution as a primary root cause for relative and absolute deprivation among the masses.

The co-authors critique the Horatio Alger myth by acknowledging that between productivity from those who labor and the wages which reward them, there lies a collective negative correlation. Traditional communal bonds have weakened in global and local societies due to a shift from communal interests to the proliferation of fierce individualism. This shift has permeated various institutions including political, economic and religious. The cumulative effect of this results in the elevation of social isolation between elites and marginalized populations. They are invisible to each other which, in turn, enhances the dehumanizing effects on the marginalized and the elites.

One's access to resources is based on social cohesiveness and interdependence. In terms of economics, "the problem is that profits are valued over people" (p. 35). The authors stress that in the absence of solidarity, people function as mere tools for potential labor value. Nevertheless, workers exist in a numerical majority compared to the relatively small population of elites; so they are pitted against one another with limited means to solve their own problems that relate to their interests, rather than directing their focus on the elites.

According to the authors, U.S. culture wars derive from the dominant powers' practices that are ultimately manifested through structural and overt racism,

sexism and class divisions. This is a systemic form of divide and conquer tactics. Although the book was written during a time of national economic recovery in the aftermath of the Great Recession, the authors demonstrate the significant economic harm endured by sectors of society through the devaluation of labor by wage depression and wage theft.

The authors challenge that branch of the religious community which dismisses the realities experienced by the working poor and engages in apolitical theological discourse that ignores the construction of a society without regard to justice. The authors write:

"One-sided solidarity, while well meaning and sincerely trying to help, creates several problems. One is those who consider themselves privileged are calling the shots, acting as if they had the ability to fix the problems alone" (p. 59-60).

However, the underprivileged have a keen sense of their collective lack of power and have grown somewhat accustomed to the narrative which blames them for the effects which accompany their powerlessness.

The book potentially has a broad audience beyond academia and clergy which includes laity interested in the intersection between economic justice and the Christian faith. *Unified We Are a Force* especially bridges working class studies with political theology with discipline-specific jargon used sparingly.

As the U.S. has a tradition of ideological division, so does Christianity in America. The co-authors demonstrate how Western Christianity contains a dysfunction not in doctrine or polity but in *praxis*, as its factions align with neo-classical economic beliefs and the inevitable "invisible hand," Keynesianism, and neo-Marxism as a basis of their collective disunity.

Some theological and socially conservative readers may dismiss the book as leftist and secular. Yet, the book's central focus is on that branch of religion that promotes otherworldliness, a rigid top-down hierarchical approach to power, and the prosperity gospel. It demonstrates the way elites have aristocratically constructed antagonism against the worker.

However, readers must read the book in its entirety to recognize the argument which supports religion as a potential means for producing deep solidarity that heals the wounds of alienation and inhumanity. Without a careful reading, one could misinterpret

According to the authors, U.S. culture wars derive from the dominant powers' practices that are ultimately manifested through structural and overt racism, sexism and class divisions.

Rieger as dismissing religion altogether in the likes of Marx, while overlooking his background as a trained systematic theologian, a devout Christian and United Methodist clergy.

Throughout the volume, the co-authors provide a critique of portrayals of Christianity drawn from human experience which views morality through the eyes of those in positions of power. Readers familiar with Rieger's previous work such as *Remembering the Poor* (1998), *God and the Excluded* (2001), and *Occupy Religion* (2012) will likely recognize the consistent argument that "religion appears to be at its best when it is located in the communal struggles of everyday life, where God is found to be at work" (p. 84). The book's emphasis on labor rests in the idea that work plays a significant role in individual and collective religious formation because one's faith reflects one's occupational experiences.

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Heavenly Returns...Even On Earth!

By Yaqub Mirza and Gary Moore

Reviewed and introduced by David Miller

A close acquaintance of my good friend, Gary Moore, has often said Gary "connects dots that aren't on the same page," meaning he makes the usually unseen connections among faith, politics, economics and our personal finances.

He has made such connections pretty well over the years. The newsletter of a major ministry has even called him "a prophet," which is still surely a classic case of religious exaggeration! Gary readily confesses the many mistakes he made during his career, mistakes that render him unqualified for prophethood! Still, when recommending this very unusual but fascinating and most timely new book to your attention, it would be difficult to elaborate more clearly than these words from the opening of Gary's most recent previous book:

During the early 1980's, Gary Moore wrote an article for the New York Times newspaper group about why the Dow might triple from the 1000 level to the 3000 level despite the predictions of best-selling doom-and-gloom authors. During the late 1980's, he wrote what Christianity Today called "the first book outlin-

ing a comprehensive scriptural basis for an evangelical embrace of ethical investing." During the early 1990's, he wrote a book about why the federal debt was political illusion rather than a major economic concern. [Unfortunately, he now believes the debt will likely become a major concern during the coming decade to end in 2028 due to President Trump's tax cuts and defense spending, a la the Reagan years]. At the request of the Church of England, he then taught biblical economics to the leadership of Uganda to demonstrate that Christianity can enrich this life at least as abundantly as Islamic economics. During the late 1990s, his writings explained why Y2K was media hype but stock market speculation and questionable corporate ethics [like the new age morality of the pursuit of so-called "shareholder maximization" at the imploded Enron] were the true dangers to our finances.

Gary was shunned, even disparaged, by conservative Christian financial leaders for all those views—views that would have enriched anyone both spiritually and financially who considered them. Just imagine how the lives of millions—Christian and non-Christian alike—might have been enriched, first spiritually and then financially, had they known Donald Trump would estimate in 2011 that America's net assets, meaning after all debts were retired, as being over \$250 trillion—exaggerated but still astounding blessings that Gary had counted for us for decades, even though conservatively suggesting they were half that amount.

As Gary relates and, for what it's worth, *Forbes* magazine has long employed the "Trump rule," which cut in half the amount Mr. Trump's estimate of his personal wealth. It was only as a candidate that Mr. Trump began deploring the American economy, which he again began lauding once he was president. In other words, America's economy has long been "great," if greatly and still increasingly unequal, as Gary has suggested. Our true discontents are moral and spiritual.

Now Gary and his friend, co-author and pioneer of Islamic investing, Dr. Yaqub Mirza suggest, the Islamophobia and prosperity theology of President Trump and his many evangelical and media supporters are the next imagined dangers that could impoverish your spiritual peace and financial prosperity. As a wise manager of God's wealth, Dr. Mirza even counsels us to stop wasting valuable resources on buildings that sit empty most of the week and invest instead in the spiritual development of tens of millions by sharing sanctuaries where Muslims can worship on Fridays, Jews can worship on Saturdays, Christians can worship on Sundays and all can get to know one another at least one day a week!

Even if you disagree with some of Gary's and Dr. Mirza's perspectives (and it's okay if you do, as Gary readily confesses to having made many mistakes during his career—mistakes that would disqualify him for prophethood), history and the common but rare vision of these authors suggest you will do well to consider the basic premises of this book. I pray you might do so before you conclude the supposed war between true Islam and Judeo-Christianity is the next “war of the civilizations,” Armageddon or that the West is doomed to secularism and atheism. Very few will prosper, and none will find peace in the future if they continue to have such a hopeless vision of that future. Anyway, the Torah, the Bible and the Koran suggest that Adam and Eve were neither Jewish, Christian or Muslim, but simply God's most beloved creatures, as are all the peoples of the world today.

Dr. David Miller is director of Princeton University's Center for Faith and Culture

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No Small Thing

Thank you for reading glasses...

for bringing words back into focus
and our books closer to us again.

Poetry's plenty hard enough
to decrypt without being
a bit fuzzy on the page.

And I've long needed
more and better focus
anyway.

(So my editors
and two sisters-in-law
keep insisting about me.)

Besides, I'm mostly grateful
for anything I own these days
that doesn't require batteries.

Just some ground up glass
fastened to thin frames
with tiny, tiny screws
that barely qualify
for existing.

Such tiny,
tiny things
solving such
a big problem.

*A poem by Nathan Brown from
An Honest Day's Prayer*

Tribute to Dr. Ghassan Khalaf

By Patrick Anderson

My life has been enriched by friendships with Arabic-speaking Christians. One of these is Dr. Ghassan Khalaf who passed away recently at his home in Beirut. My connection with him was through Maha and Chaouki Boulos, two of my heroes. Ghassan also considered the Bouloses to be his heroes. He told me that Chaouki was the most courageous person he had ever known.

Ghassan described a time when he received a call from Chaouki asking him to meet him near Amman, Jordan, to preach. Upon arriving at the designated place, he discovered that Chaouki had scheduled an open-air evangelistic preaching event in an area most Christians considered to be hostile to Jesus. Ghassan described the stage which was temporarily constructed adjacent to the site of a

mass grave where scores of Christian believers had been slaughtered and buried just a few years prior. Chaouki led the service. A group of young Christians sang fervent songs and Ghassan preached with a conviction and courage he said he did not know he possessed.

Ghassan Khalaf was born on April 16, 1945, to Eliya and Laurice Khalaf.

He had three siblings: Mona, Wissam and May. He married Hannah Atwe on October 20, 1970.

Ghassan was a passionate man who combined his love of Jesus with an academic's mind and intellectual approach to the Bible. He attended the Arab Baptist Seminary in Beirut, graduating in 1969. He continued his education at the Evangelical Seminary in Belgium

where he earned his PhD. The Lord called him to pastor the Hadath Baptist Church – Baabda -- from 1976 until 2008. He was a translator and writer at the Baptist Publications from 1976 to 1981. He was appointed the head of the Baptist Convention many times and was elected to be on many committees with the International Baptist Convention.

He was a lecturing professor in several subject areas such as hermeneutics, ethics, the art of preaching, the Greek language, and New Testament theology. He was widely known and respected in the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, the Middle East Seminary, the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo, the Jesuit University and numerous other universities and seminaries across Europe and America. He led the

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut as president from 1993 to 2008.

The last time I saw him was about two years ago in Beirut when he told me he was still working on a new translation and commentary of the Bible in Arabic--a project he first started in 1981.

In 2012, Rev. Ghassan Khalaf lost his wife, Hannah Atwe, after a

struggle with illness. His deep sorrow was assuaged through God's grace in finding a companion for his last year, Waed Doughman, whom he married in 2017.

He passed away to be with the Lord on August 3, 2018.

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A Tribute to the Rev. Dr. James A. Langley

By George O. Stapleton

I first met Jim Langley in 1954 during a youth-led revival I was leading at Fountain Memorial Baptist Church in SE Washington, D.C. He was the visiting preacher while still a student at Southwestern Seminary in Texas. We were all impressed by his preaching and the depth of his knowledge. That never changed during the 64 years I knew him, and I'm convinced if you took a poll of others who knew him they would agree.

Jim was born in Opelika, Alabama in 1925 and seemed to have been on his way to the ministry at an early age. He entered the U.S. Army 10 days after high school graduation in the middle of World War II and, right after basic training, went to MIT for a six-month study. He was then assigned to the 17th Airborne Division in Marseille, France, to support the Seventh Army drive into Germany.

He later received his BA degree from Baylor University in Texas. He became pastor of the Baptist church in Malone, Texas, while still in college. He must have been a good speaker even then since he was asked to give the keynote speech at the laying of the cornerstone for Baylor's new library.

From Baylor, Jim went on to get his Bachelor of Divinity at Southwestern Seminary, then his M.Div. at Princeton Seminary, and then back to Southwestern for his Doctorate of Theology. While getting well-educated, Jim seemed to excel in preaching, getting involved in the Youth Revival Movement, preaching in many churches in the Southwest. That's where we heard about Jim and his musical friend, Bob Feather, and invited them to Fountain Memorial. We weren't the only ones to hear about him, though, as he was invited to preaching missions in Mexico and Rwanda, Africa, as well as Hong Kong. He did find time to travel around

the world, stopping in Japan, India, Egypt, Israel, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Soviet Union. He also found time in 1951 to get married to a young woman named Eugenia Savage (Jean) from Alexandria, Virginia, who attended Southwestern Seminary with him, while receiving her Masters in Religious Education. They traveled for two months in Europe (some honeymoon!) including visiting wartime friends in France.

Even though he earned a Th.D, Jim was a humble man, always self-deprecating, with a humorous retort when complimented. In fact, humor was very much a part of his life; but his jokes were somewhat intellectual and you could easily miss the punch line if you weren't listening carefully. However, there was

nothing funny about his ministry. It was always serious business, delivered from a loving and sincere heart. And his first metropolitan church was not an easy one, made up of a group of people who had left their mother church down the street because they couldn't get along with the pastor.

Early in his career, when he became pastor of Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church (PABC), a fledgling church started by Fountain Memorial Baptist Church (where I

met my future wife Glenda Faye Overly), he stepped into a challenging situation; but he was more than up to the challenge. One of the best things I think he did was to encourage Faye and me (along with another young couple) to start a young married group that met on Sunday evenings for a time of sharing and learning. (Faye and I were the first couple married by Jim in the new church building.) Our group flourished because we just wouldn't take "no" for an answer as we encouraged visiting young couples to join us; so we soon became a group of 10 couples. With Jim's

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encouragement, we did a lot in the life of the church as well as socially. Some of those Jim inspired and attracted to our group included a young doctor and nurse, two ministers, two CPA's who worked on Capitol Hill, one ambassador, one congressman, two teachers, a lawyer, two very successful businessmen and many very committed and encouraging spouses who were there every step of the way. And our sponsors, Jim and Irene Martin, whom we adored, inspired us all. The amazing thing about the group was that we stayed in touch with each other over the years. We all celebrated 50th anniversaries (including Jim and Jean), and got together (with Jim still preaching to us, sadly without his dear wife Jean who died way too soon in 2002) every few years at mountain retreats, until our last gathering in 2013.

With Jim's counsel, I decided to enter the pastoral ministry after graduating from George Washington University, and Faye and I went off to Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, with my license to preach granted by PABC. We kept the church advised of our seminary progress

with summer visits at Faye's parents' home in Washington. But sometimes plans change as mine did after completing two years of a three-year Master of Divinity program. The impetus for my change of plans was the firing of one of my favorite professors at the seminary for writing a book called the *Message of Genesis* (really impressive to me), the lack of welcome to African-Americans at the seminary, and the seminary's

refusal to ordain women called to the ministry.

Disappointed by these events, Faye and I left the seminary and went back to PABC where we became very active in the church and my new career as a writer at the U.S. Department of Agriculture while moving around the country and being involved in other churches.

By this time, Jim had been selected as executive director of the D.C. Baptist Convention (one of the best things they ever did) and they had affiliated themselves with the American Baptist Convention, of which Faye and I were now members-- thanks to unwelcome

changes in the Southern Baptist Convention. And here again my life was about to change as my mentor and friend Jim called me out of the blue and asked me to become pastor of Fountain Memorial Baptist Church where I had first met both him and Faye. (I guess he just never gave up on me.) I agreed to do so and he arranged for my ordination and installation as pastor there with my promise to go back to the seminary and finish my Master of Divinity, which I did a few years later.

The three years there were a good time for both Jim and me. He was a busy beaver himself, helping form the Inter-Faith Conference of Washington, serving on several commissions of the Baptist World Alliance, being editor of the Capital Baptist Newsletter, serving on the executive boards of both the Southern Baptist and American Baptist Conventions, and serving as a trustee of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In the meantime, my own church membership was an older group made up of half white and half African-

American people; so I was as much a care-giver as pastor. The events there are a whole story in themselves. But the upshot of it all was that it was a dwindling church in a racially sensitive neighborhood that did not have a future as it existed. So, under Jim's guidance, and with a little help from me, we led the church through a process of determining to sell the church building and the two houses on the property to an African-American congregation for one million dollars,

with the funds going to the D.C. Baptist Convention's home missions program. After that, I went back to the seminary, got my degree and became pastor and minister of evangelism at several American Baptist and Episcopal churches in Colorado where I had kept my home.

Jim and I kept in touch even after retirement for both of us--both doing some supply preaching and writing--him, poetry (published regularly in this magazine), and in my case, non-fiction books (with a religious theme). There are now five of them with the latest at my publisher entitled, *Just a Hillbilly*, and Jim's last poem

He was a busy beaver himself, helping form the Inter-Faith Conference of Washington, serving on several commissions of the Baptist World Alliance, being editor of the Capital Baptist Newsletter, serving on the executive boards of both the Southern Baptist and American Baptist Conventions, and serving as a trustee of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

(The Cup) recently published in this magazine.

This is my abbreviated story of Jim and me, but doesn't begin to do justice as a tribute to the greatest preacher I ever knew and one whom I would call the Poet Laureate of Theology in America. But maybe I

can best say that in a comment I made to Jim on more than one occasion -- "I'll bet St. Peter can hardly wait to hear you preach." Or maybe the following poem I wrote on the occasion of his death will speak more appropriately to him and to us.

A Man Called Jim

I first met Jim Langley while still in my
Him in his three piece suit and me in my navy jeans.
Only nine years older and too young to
Still in seminary, but boy could he preach!

The meeting was a revival led by me,
He came to us from a Texas seminary.
I was a hillbilly sailor from Kentucky,
He was from Alabama with an impressive degree.

He impressed me and others too,
And when he left we all knew
We'd meet again down the road of Christian living
In all our lives to others giving.

The place of our meeting was called Fountain Memorial
A thriving church where his sermon was tutorial.
Challenging us to start other meeting places too,
One down the street where Faye and I said I do.

Here young married people found a gathering place
When invited by four of us with a warm embrace.
Thanks to the support of a young man named Jim Langley,
Who encouraged and cheered us on, our pastor, mainly.

And it became a phenomenal growing group
That exists today though somewhat stooped,
With him there preaching each time we meet,
Even though our gatherings number less to greet.

Now that one less greeting includes Jim
Who gave us all more than Jean and him.
Because his persona impacted all our lives
Like bees making honey in their hives.

He was my mentor and personal friend
And I'll miss him mightily until the end
Of my life too,
This man called Jim.

George O. Stapleton

Incoming.....Our Mail Bag

Dear Dr. Anderson,

Thank you for another thought-provoking and challenging edition of Christian Ethics Today. God bless you all.

Pat:

I just got off the phone after talking with you. As I said, I thought this issue of CET (Spring, 2018) is outstanding (as usual). The check I mentioned is enclosed...I will send you a list of people who will be happy receiving additional issues but will also include checks to the Foundation.

Thanks again,

In Christ,

Ed Fernald, Tallahassee, Florida

Dr. Anderson,

I so appreciate your publication, more and more in these dark times that cry out for Christian ethical perspective.

This gift is in honor of my dear friends, Caroline and Fisher Humphries, and our pastor, Sarah Shelton – who gave out an appreciation of your journal in a sermon yesterday!

Keep fighting the good fight.

Roderick Davis, Birmingham, Alabama

Dear Amy,

...I thought this spring issue was particularly good! I read the whole issue the day I received it. Please send a copy to my great nephew...

Phoebe Delamarter, Louisville KY

May your candle stay lit!

Glenn and Gieta Norris, Arkansas

Capital Punishment, Religious Liberty and Justice

By Wendell Griffen

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. Matthew 23:23 (New Revised Standard Version)

On April 14 (Good Friday), 2017, I attended – in my personal rather than judicial capacity – a peaceful rally organized to demonstrate opposition to the death penalty on the steps of the Arkansas Capitol. Later that day, I also attended a prayer vigil with other members of New Millennium Church outside the Arkansas Governor’s Mansion. During the prayer vigil, I lay bound to a cot as an expression of solidarity with Jesus, who was executed by the Roman Empire by order of the Roman governor of Palestine, Pontius Pilate.

Also on April 14, 2017, I granted a temporary restraining order (TRO) in favor of McKesson Medical-Surgical Inc. (“McKesson”) distributor of the drug vercuronium bromide against the State of Arkansas, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, the Arkansas Department of Corrections, and the Director of the Arkansas Department of Corrections in *McKesson Medical-Surgical Inc. v. State of Arkansas, et al.*, Case No. 60CV-17-1921 (*McKesson I*). Vercuronium bromide is one of three pharmaceutical agents used in the lethal injection protocol practiced by the State of Arkansas. In *McKesson I*, McKesson alleged that the defendants obtained vercuronium bromide from McKesson under false pretenses by intentionally failing to disclose that Arkansas intended to use that pharmaceutical agent in upcoming executions of persons who were convicted of committing capital murder in Arkansas.

Based on settled Arkansas property and contract law, I concluded that McKesson’s verified petition for the temporary restraining order (TRO) demonstrated that it was threatened with imminent irreparable harm unless a TRO was issued and that McKesson was likely to succeed on the merits of its claim. So, I issued a TRO that prohibited the defendants from using the vercuronium bromide until otherwise ordered by the Court, and scheduled a hearing for the following

Tuesday, April 18, 2017, the first date the parties indicated they were available.

On Saturday, April 15, 2017, lawyers employed by the Arkansas Attorney General met the Clerk of the Arkansas Supreme Court in a parking lot and delivered an emergency petition for writ of mandamus, writ of certiorari, or supervisory writ with the Arkansas Supreme Court which sought to vacate the TRO and remove me from the *McKesson* case, although no motion for my recusal had been filed at any time. On Monday (the day following Easter), April 17, 2017, without notice to me and in violation of its own rules

concerning *ex parte* proceedings, the Arkansas Supreme Court considered the emergency petition from the Arkansas Attorney General and issued Order No. 17-155 to “immediately reassign all cases in the Fifth Division that involve the death penalty or the

During the prayer vigil, I lay bound to a cot as an expression of solidarity with Jesus, who was executed by the Roman Empire by order of the Roman governor of Palestine, Pontius Pilate.

state’s execution protocol, whether civil or criminal.” Order No. 17-155 is a “permanent reassignment.” When Order No. 17-155 was issued, I was not presiding over or assigned to hear any death penalty cases.

On October 5, 2017, I filed Case No. 4:17CV639 in the Eastern District of Arkansas, a lawsuit against the individual members of the Arkansas Supreme Court in their official capacities, and the Arkansas Supreme Court as an entity of the State of Arkansas. The complaint challenged the deprivation of my First Amendment rights to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of religious expression, my Fourteenth Amendment rights to due process of law and equal protection under the law, and violation of my rights under the Arkansas Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The lawsuit also alleges that the Justices of the Arkansas Supreme Court conspired among themselves and with others for the purpose of depriving my right to equal protec-

tion of the law in violation of 42 U.S.C. Section 1985, to prevent me from being assigned to and preside over civil and criminal cases involving the death penalty or the method of execution in Arkansas.

Case No. 4:17CV639 was assigned to United States District Judge James M. Moody, Jr. After the Defendants moved to dismiss the lawsuit pursuant to Rule 12(b)6 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Judge Moody granted dismissal of my claims against the Arkansas Supreme Court based on sovereign immunity, but denied the motion to dismiss my First, Fourteenth, and civil conspiracy claims against the individual justices based on the conclusion that those claims were factually plausible.

The justices of the Arkansas Supreme Court then filed a petition for mandamus in the Eighth Circuit, seeking to overturn Judge Moody's ruling. A three-judge panel issued a split decision earlier this year which granted the mandamus petition and ordered dismissal of my lawsuit against the justices. My petition for rehearing and rehearing *en banc* was denied on August 29, 2018. On

September 10, 2018, Judge Moody dismissed my federal lawsuit pursuant to the Eighth Circuit's mandate. My legal team is currently preparing to petition the Supreme Court of the United States to review and reverse the Eighth Circuit's decision.

Based on a referral by the Arkansas Supreme Court when it issued the April 17, 2017, order permanently banning me from hearing and deciding civil and criminal cases involving the death penalty, capital punishment, and the method of execution in Arkansas, the Arkansas Judicial Discipline and Disability Commission (JDDC) formally charged me in June of this year with judicial misconduct because I granted the temporary restraining order in the *McKesson* case and engaged in my religious-based opposition to capital punishment on Good Friday 2017. My legal team is also defending me against those charges. No trial date has been set yet.

Despite my personal moral and religious objections to capital punishment, I have fulfilled my sworn duty to follow Arkansas law concerning capital punishment, the death penalty and the method of execution. However, I have been banned since April 17, 2017, from assignment to civil and criminal cases involving capital punishment, the death penalty and the method of execution in retaliation for my known and publicized opposition to capital punishment.

The permanent ban was imposed and is enforced despite the 1968 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Witherspoon v. Illinois* which outlawed excluding persons with moral and religious objections to capital punishment from being automatically excluded as jurors in murder trials. And the permanent ban was imposed and is being enforced despite the 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Republican Party of Minnesota v. White* which struck down judicial ethics rules against judges and judicial candidates engaging in off-the-bench speech and conduct about controversial social and legal subjects.

I am the only judge in Arkansas to be permanently banned from hearing and deciding civil or criminal cases involving capital punishment, the death penalty and the lethal injection protocol practiced in Arkansas. Justice is being perverted to prevent me from judging cases involving capital punishment despite my willingness to follow the law even when the law runs counter to my moral

and religious objections to capital punishment.

If a judge can be permanently banned from hearing and deciding cases involving capital punishment, the death penalty and the method of execution because of personal moral and religious opposition to capital punishment, then courts will be able to ban people opposed to capital punishment from serving as jurors. That is a blatant travesty of justice and violation of religious liberty.

Despite my personal moral and religious objections to capital punishment, I have fulfilled my sworn duty to follow Arkansas law concerning capital punishment, the death penalty and the method of execution. However, I have been banned since April 17, 2017.

How Evangelical Theology Supports a Culture of Sexual Abuse

By Susan Shaw

Most people scoffed when Bill Clinton famously proclaimed that he “did not have sexual relations with that woman” when his relationship with Monica Lewinsky became public. Now, evangelist Franklin Graham is asserting that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh actually showed Dr. Christine Blasey Ford respect by not “finishing” what she alleges was an attempted rape in high school that left her traumatized for decades.

White evangelicals continue to support Donald Trump and his nominee, both of whom have faced multiple allegations of sexual assault. While we might expect that a religious tradition that calls for moral clarity and sexual purity would

resoundingly criticize sexual harassment and assault, instead certain aspects of evangelical belief actually perpetuate the culture of abuse that justifies and apologizes for such crimes.

Within a certain framework familiar to evangelicals, these responses make sense. For many in the faith, only intercourse is actually considered sex—which means that oral sex

is not sex, grinding a pelvis against a woman’s body is not sex and holding a girl down with your hand on her mouth is not sex. While these actions exist in a morally gray area of evangelical thinking about sin, they are not the Big Sin, outside of heterosexual marriage, of “real” sex—intercourse.

Evangelical notions of salvation and forgiveness also weigh heavily in perpetuating a culture of abuse. In evangelical thinking, one needs only to ask God for forgiveness to be forgiven—and while one should be genuinely sorry and have intentions never to commit a sin again, salvation and forgiveness do not require any kind of apology or reparation to wronged persons.

In other words, God will forgive even if the perpetrator never makes anything right with the victim. In that case, evangelicals can easily accept that, even if Brett

Kavanaugh committed acts of sexual assault as a young man, if he asked God for forgiveness, all is forgiven—and there’s no need for further action.

This kind of theological forgiveness means perpetrators can move on without any accountability or concern for the people victimized by their actions. That, according to many of Kavanaugh’s defenders, he is a good man who has lived an upstanding life since such high school misdeeds is evidence enough that he is forgiven and has no need to account for, much less atone for, what he did—despite its ongoing effects on the life of Blasey Ford, and the survivors who have now joined her in alleging him guilty of assault and even rape. The perfect

example of this theology of forgiveness shows up in mega-church pastor Andy Savage’s apology to his parish after an incident of his own sexual misconduct became public earlier this year.

Twenty years ago, Savage drove a high school student home from church; along the way, he stopped and pressured her to perform oral sex. When she reported the incident,

the pastor of the church allowed Savage to resign his youth minister position without public accountability—and so, Savage moved on in his career with no real consequences. The incident only became public when his victim, motivated by Matt Lauer’s removal from NBC, emailed him to ask if he remembered what he did. When Savage didn’t respond, the woman went public. When Savage addressed the issue on a Sunday morning in front of his church, he offered an apology to his victim and to the church; and the congregation stood and applauded him.

In evangelical culture, women are also often pressured to forgive their abusers, furthering a cycle in which accountability evades men like Savage. Once someone has repented and been forgiven by God, no one should continue to hold something against him—and, in fact, the

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woman may herself be sinning by refusing to forgive.

Forgiveness, of course, means there's no need for any kind of restitution, which helps explain why most of the concern we hear surrounding Brett Kavanaugh and other men accused of abuse and assault is about them—the damage to their careers, the tarnishing of their reputations, the stress they must be feeling. Where is evangelical concern for the years of suffering experienced by these women—the effects of abuse on their lives and the damage to their careers, reputations, families and psyches?

Those things are unimportant, because what happened is in the past and should be covered by forgiveness. Men should be able to move on as if nothing happened. Women should get over it. All is forgiven, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

Evangelical belief in women's submission also reinforces a secondary status that gives men much greater authority and credibility than their accusers when they allege harassment, abuse and assault. When beloved women's evangelical leader Beth Moore, who herself believes in women's submission, dared to challenge evangelical sexism and support for Trump in light of his mistreatment of women, evangelicals turned on her. Complementarians claim to believe in women's equal worth with men, but maintain that God has ordained gender roles that involve women's submission. Yet, when Southern Baptists passed a resolution opposing women in ordained ministry, part of their reasoning was that Eve was "first in the Edenic fall," thereby sentencing all women to subordination because of her sin, her unreliability and her sexuality.

Evangelical leader Paige Patterson once told the story of a woman he sent back home to her abuser who, after she showed up at church battered and bruised, asked Patterson if he was happy now. He saw her husband was also at church, for the first time, and so he said he was happy—because now her husband had come to the community. A female evangelical leader once told me that she had counseled an abused woman to go back to her abuser, commenting that if he killed her, which she admitted would be sad, it would be okay because this woman would go to heaven, and her faithful witness

might convince her husband to be saved.

In evangelical thinking, the only thing that really matters is if someone is "saved." Everything else can be sacrificed to this end—including and especially women.

This salvation comes with only saying the magic formula. It goes something like this: "I know I have sinned against God. I am truly sorry. I repent of my sinfulness and ask Your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and was resurrected from the dead. I ask Jesus to come into my heart as my Lord and Savior. Amen." And then: Presto! Salvation! No accountability for past wrongs. No demand to make things right. No need for reparations. From there on out, over and over again, simply praying for forgiveness will take care of any sins one has committed, and the sinner will never actually have to deal with the consequences.

Of course, not all accountability is ordained. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, evangelical men who have harassed and assaulted women have lost positions of prominence: Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek, resigned despite having denied allegations of years

of sexual harassment and misconduct; Paige Patterson, though now making an offensive return to the pulpit, was fired as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary when trustees learned that he had twice prevented women students from reporting sexual assault to the police, including telling a campus security guard to leave him alone with one student so he could "break her down" so she wouldn't report.

And then: Presto! Salvation! No accountability for past wrongs. No demand to make things right. No need for reparations. From there on out, over and over again, simply praying for forgiveness will take care of any sins one has committed, and the sinner will never actually have to deal with the consequences.

Those who have not been part of the evangelical subculture often seem utterly confused by evangelical responses to sexual abuse and assault. But within particular evangelical frameworks, the ability to look past sexual aggression toward women makes perfectly good sense. A theology that subordinates women and embraces forgiveness without restitution or atonement fuels congregations eager to absolve abuse in order to uphold it.

Susan M. Shaw, Ph.D., is a Professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. She holds an MA and PhD in Religious Education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Tables Turned

By Nathan Brown

Bless the refuge...
and her child.
may they find pillows
and a blanket, and may
they find a place to lay
them down for tonight.

And may she see a star —
one her child is too young
to understand, but that she
knows represents her hope.

And, under that same star,
may we treat them the way
we'd hope to be treated by
those like her when the U.S.

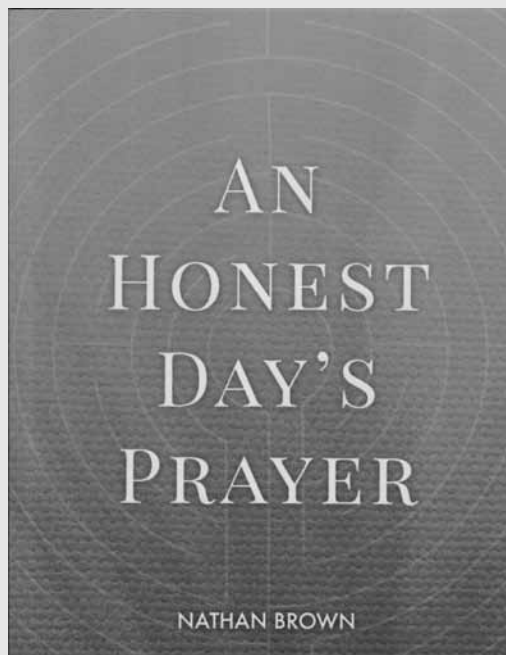
turns to a string of Walmarts
with big bomb craters all over
their parking lots that we burn
trash and tires in to stay warm.

May we find it in our pantries
to scrounge her up some food,
since we are indeed getting a little
pudgy around the edges anyway.

And if the nights become too cold,
may we take down our starry flag
and drape it over their blankets

since — even though it took us
a while — we've finally begun
to understand what matters.

— By Nathan Brown. This poem is from a book of his poems, *An Honest Day's Prayer*. Nathan Brown is a singer-songwriter, award winning poet, and author of roughly sixteen books. He served as the Oklahoma Poet Laureate from 2013 to 2014. He now lives with his wife, Ashley, in Wimberley, Texas from whence he travels for readings, performances, and creativity workshops. He can be reached at nub@ou.edu



—A note from the editor, Pat Anderson:

Christian Ethics Today would like to send you a copy of Nathan Brown's book of poems, *An Honest Day's Prayer* in appreciation for your gift to help support the journal. Also, if you are like me and would like to purchase additional copies of this or other books of Nathan's to give as Christmas gifts to friends and family, go to www.mezpress.com/nathanbrown.

Incoming.....continued

Dear CET,

Over the years I've asked you to add so many to your mailing list. This is a small check to help you keep up the good work.

I'm not sure if I asked you to include the address below. If not, please do.

...Finding trained pastors who don't have immigration problems or aren't fundamentalists is a challenge. They would find CET refreshing and encouraging.

Thank you,

Maxine King, California

Dear Christian Ethics Friends, Attention Pat Anderson, editor:

Having read this latest edition of Christian Ethics, I am responding with gratitude for the encouragement and clarity of so many issues.

Standing firm and strong in our faith is critical and the "Confession ...in a time of Crisis" was so needed. As someone has said, "We can't do everything, but we can do something."

It is so important that our words and actions are in line with the teachings of Christ.

Here in North Georgia, we have a strong following of far right but we also have many who are working toward a better way.

One thing I have done in the past month was to write a letter to our local newspaper, addressing the need to show kindness and respect in those weekly letters, which had become a battleground with attacks on the other side of issues. It was so ugly and demeaning that I was moved to do something.

I wrote, and it was printed, addressing the need to show respect and addressing the need to show respect and suggesting adults should be demonstrating what we teach our children: "to be kind to one another."

So far the letters to the editor have been more civil. Small victory!

Thank you,

Anne Green, Dahlonga, Georgia

Dear Pat Anderson,

Enclosed is a check for Christian Ethics Today Foundation.

We have enjoyed it many years – it has kept us up to date with current beliefs, as time goes by.

We have appreciated the many inspiring articles as well as some with which we did not fully agree with or understand – you made us think.

Blessings,

Dixie and Rufus Fisher, Arden, NC

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.”

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

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