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White Baptists and Racial Reconciliation: There's a Difference between Lament and Repentance

By Wendell Griffen

Recently, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), the oldest and most prestigious theological institution affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention – the largest Baptist body in the United States – issued a document titled "Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary." The 71-page report is a concise history written by current an d former SBTS faculty members about how racism, slavery and other aspects of racial injustice were accepted, practiced, excused, championed and otherwise tolerated from the seminary's founding in 1859 through the civil rights era of the mid-1960s.

Reactions have been mixed, as one might expect. A sense of the varied responses to the report is apparent from news accounts such as "Slavery and Racism Report Stirs Media Flurry" (Baptist Press), "Report Laments History of Slavery and Racism at SBC Seminary" (Baptist News Global) and "Southern Baptist Seminary Confronts History of Slaveholding and Deep Racism" (NPR). BNG also published an opinion article by university professor Susan Shaw, "The Irony of a Southern Baptist Seminary's Report on Slavery and Racism," and a related commentary by Bill Leonard, "American Racism, 1619-2019: Exorcism of this Demon is Needed – Now."

Surely, leaders of the oldest and most prestigious of the Southern Baptist seminaries know that repentance involves much more than mere remorse (lament).

My immediate reaction after reading the report was that SBTS appears more interested in – and hopes to be commended for – detailing its sinfulness about racial justice than repenting from it. Like others, I noticed how the report conveniently and inexcusably fails to include the last half century of racism practiced by school's faculty, trustees and other stakeholders. Surely the distinguished authors of the report could have included details of that injustice if they intended to produce an honest and complete history.

However, doing so would have required them to speak truth to and about people who have wielded power at and over SBTS during its more recent past and currently. However the authors of the report and current SBTS President Albert Mohler may think otherwise, some people (myself included) know the difference between a full confession and an announcement that deliberately omits mention of the most recent instances of racism, white supremacy and white religious nationalism practiced and perpetrated at and by SBTS.

Furthermore, not a sentence can be found by Mohler (who commissioned the report and wrote its introduction) or anyone else among the seminary's power structure indicating that SBTS is committed to doing anything to repair the harms of white supremacy and racism. Surely, leaders of the oldest and most prestigious of the Southern Baptist seminaries know that repentance involves much more than mere remorse (lament).

Remorsefulness alone is a far cry from repairing damage done by conduct that harms others. We should hope SBTS faculty make that clear to students studying the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) and the doctrine of sin (harmartiology). Regardless as to whether that happens, the rest of us know the big difference between remorse (regret about sinfulness) and repentance (changing from sinful ways and thinking to righteous ways and thinking). Remorsefulness, however sincerely and openly expressed, does not require a commitment to change. That is why the refusal of the report's authors to include the last half century of the seminary's endorsement of racism, white supremacy and white religious nationalism should not be ignored or excused.

We should also not ignore or excuse the seminary's refusal to commit to engage in reparations and restitution for more than 150 years of systemic racial injustice practiced, preached and taught under the guise of preparing people for careers in pastoral ministry, religious education, missions and theological study as followers of Jesus. A robber who will not at least promise to make reparations does not deserve credit for publishing an announcement about having engaged in a career of robbery.

Rather than commend Mohler and the authors of the study, we should remind them what John the Baptist said about the need to "bear fruits worthy of repentance"

(Luke 3:8). An incomplete report that expressed remorse about systemic racism, white supremacy and white religious nationalism at SBTS is not good fruit "worthy of repentance." Neither is the refusal to attempt to quantify and repair harm done through racial injustice over the course of the school's history.

What then should SBTS do? If we can trust what John the Baptist said to the crowds he addressed, the answer involves at least two obligations.

First, the seminary must change from being self-righteous and self-serving about its wealth and prestige. That would be consistent with what John the Baptist said about whoever had two coats being obligated to share with anyone who had none, and that whoever had food being obligated to share with anyone who had none (Luke 3:11).

Repentance will require the seminary's leaders and other stakeholders to do much more than admit a history of racism, white supremacy and white religious nationalism. SBTS must – in obedience to what John the Baptist said as well as the example of the tax collector from Jericho named Zacchaeus whom Jesus confronted (Luke 19:5-9) – pledge to give up the ill-gotten wealth it gained and now enjoys in part because of that wicked history. It is telling that Mohler hasn't shown any sign that he even considered doing that, let alone that he urged the seminary's trustees to do it.

Rather than commend Mohler and the authors of the study, we should remind them what John the Baptist said about the need to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8).

Second, SBTS must start using its power to produce justice, rather than using it to maintain longstanding systems of injustice. John the Baptist told soldiers and tax collectors to stop using official authority for personal benefit. For SBTS, that should involve rejecting the slaveholder theology and hermeneutic and heresies of white supremacy, white religious nationalism, materialism, patriarchy, sexism (including homophobia and misogyny), imperialism, militarism, techno-centrism and xenophobia.

Imagine what the Holy Spirit might accomplish if instead this prominent seminary spent the next 150 years intentionally preparing people for ministry careers based on the gospel of liberation and justice!

None of this can be done in the echo chamber of the SBC. After all, the seminary's racism, white supremacy and white religious nationalism are part of the original sin of the SBC, and have always been endorsed and extolled (directly or indirectly) by SBC congregations, pastors, mission workers and religious educators (at SBTS and the other SBC-affiliated seminaries). SBTS needs to hear from and be led by followers of Jesus who are not SBC-affiliated, not white supremacists, not patriarchal and not religious nationalists.

I suggest that Mohler and other SBC leaders seek help and guidance from a number of respected and reputable sources. One starting point could be Vanderbilt University Divinity School, including Dean Emile Towne, the Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative, and Forrest Harris, director of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on the African American Church at the divinity school and president of American Baptist College in Nashville. Even closer to home, Mohler might drive a few miles across Louisville to seek prophetic insight and guidance about reparations and restitution from Kevin Cosby, a black SBTS alumnus and president of Simmons College, whose ministry is a shining example of what the Holy Spirit will accomplish when followers of Jesus reject slaveholder theology, hermeneutic and ethics.

Alert readers will notice that I have not mentioned reconciliation. That is an intentional omission. White religionists and others seem blind to the truth that reconciliation is impossible without repentance, and that repentance is impossible concerning racial injustice (including racism, slavery, white supremacy and white religious nationalism) without reparations and restitution. Until Mohler, SBTS, the SBC and other white Baptists "bear fruits worthy of repentance," their appeals for racial reconciliation are "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1), and worth "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2-3).

So, despite the publicity surrounding Southern Seminary's recent report, the words of a Stevie Wonder song seem to apply: "You haven't done 'nothin.'"

The authors of the report, Mohler and other SBC leaders need to know why followers of Jesus who reject slaveholder theology, hermeneutic and ethics are not impressed. And they need to be reminded to "bear fruits worthy of repentance." I don't expect they will respond favorably to that input. As my father often said, "that would be too much like right."

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Life, Love and Loss: Reflections for Old People like Me and for Younger People Too

By Robert Baird

I almost always ask my wife, Alice, to read in advance anything I have written for publication or presentation. For well over 50 years, she has been my honest, insightful and cherished critic. I confess that I did not run the title of this essay by her though, as I was afraid she would object to the "being old" part. But she saw it anyway. Not surprisingly though she did not object, agreeing that I was old. In fact, I am now in my 80s and, no matter how you mark time, that is old.

The reality of that was soberly brought home to me when I attended my most recent high school reunion. At the Friday night banquet, I surveyed the crowd. We had almost 600 in our graduating class, so even 60-plus years later we had a good group. As I looked around, I wondered: Who are these old people? Answer: They were the people I grew up with, spent a remarkable period of my life with, individuals with many of whom I went all the way back to elementary school or grammar school as we called it then. Who are all of these old people--my classmates and I.

One of the most ecstatically happy experiences of my life was the moment I laid eyes on Kathy, our first-born. The moment of my deepest sadness (nothing else comes close), was her death.

That did not keep us from celebrating. We reminisced, laughed and even talked about the future. But somehow underneath it all was the awareness of loss.

Metaphorically speaking, there were empty chairs all around—empty spaces once filled by classmates now gone, more now gone than remaining. The loss was palpable. In addition to the loss of classmates, most (perhaps all) had lost both parents; many had lost spouses; several had lost siblings; a few, like Alice and me, had lost a child. And at least one of our classmates had lost a grandchild. There were empty seats; but hearts, while not empty, were not as full as they once had been.

Life is like that, increasingly filled with loss. But life is also filled with love. And nothing in life is more intimately connected than love and loss with the depth of loss directly related to the depth of love. That depth of love is also related to the fear of loss. What we love most, we most fear losing. That which we don't mind losing, we don't really love. It is part of the metaphysics of love, the nature of love, the character of love, to love most deeply the loss of that which would create the most pain, sometimes agonizing pain.

One of the most ecstatically happy experiences of my life was the moment I laid eyes on Kathy, our first-born. The moment of my deepest sadness (nothing else comes close), was her death.

We had gone to the hospital the night before Halloween, 1964. Alice went into a labor that was to last for hours, and in that Atlanta hospital, back in "ancient times," husbands were left very much in the dark. Once Alice was admitted, I never saw her again until Kathy was born 20 hours later. Communication virtually nil, I had never experienced such anxiety. And then, I remember it as if it were last night, the first time ever I laid eyes on our new baby. Wrapped in a blanket, in a bassinet, behind a glass window, there she was, so beautiful, so peaceful, the stuff of which dreams are built. All who are parents understand.

Many of those dreams were realized. She grew from a baby to a little girl, and we loved her. She grew from a little girl to a teenager, and we loved her. Alice and I loved her teen-age years. She moved through college and law school, and we loved her. She became a prosecuting attorney and eventually joined a law school faculty, and we loved her. She married and became a mother herself and added more love into our lives.

In addition to all that love, for me, there was the remarkable pleasure of working with her professionally. We edited three books together. What a loving and joyful life we had with Kathy. And then we lost her.

For the first time in her life at the age of 45, she went into a depression. She came out of that depression once, but the remission did not last; and at the age of 47, in a depression so deep she could not bear it, we lost her--a loss that is and always will be very

much a part of who I am, who Alice is, who we are as a couple.

Survey almost any community, and I think of my own community of faith, the loss and abiding pain over the loss will be pervasive. The loss, of course, is intimately tied to love and the greater the love, the greater the loss. The apostle Paul said: There is faith and hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. That is right. But also from the greatest of our loves, comes the greatest of our losses, our pains.

One of the oldest of all philosophical and theological problems is so old that it predates the advent of Christ. Thoughtful Greeks, hundreds of years before the Christian era, puzzled: If God the Creator is all good and all powerful, why is there so much pain and suffering in life?

Despite the best and the brightest struggling to answer that question, the question remains. And the God who speaks in so many ways, including the way of Christ, often seems silent. But maybe that is not altogether so. Sometimes in my struggles over the truth of the matter with regard to loss and suffering, there is a dimension of the Christian story that for me has depth and power.

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We Christians speak of God the Creator, God the Redeemer; we even speak at times of Christ the King. But the dimension of the Christian story that seems most authentic to me is not God the Creator, Redeemer or King (as important as those ideas are), but the remarkable picture of a God who so loves us that he shares in and thus understands our pain and loss. For at the heart of the New Testament is an amazing image, the picture of the Holy One suffering and thus identifying with our suffering.

A passage from the Gospel of John, the familiar story of the raising of Lazarus, contains right in the middle of the story, almost buried, two powerful sentences. "Jesus wept. He cried because his friend Lazarus, whom he loved so, had died" (John 11:1-44). Maybe the deepest truth is that love IS the greatest of all experiences, but that there cannot be love without the possibility of loss.

Recall the opening lines of that moving poem by James Weldon Johnson, *The Creation!*

And God stepped out on space
And he looked around and said
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world

We can imagine this God wanting to create a world that contained faith, hope and love; but maybe there is no way to create the greatest of these (love) without permitting the most painful of these: the loss of what is loved. Maybe, just maybe, you cannot have the wonder of love without the darkness of loss. Maybe the connection between love and loss is so intimate that even God cannot pull them apart.

So, James Weldon Johnson, rewrite it a bit:

I'm lonely. I'll make me a world
A world with love.
But love without loss is not possible.
So it will be a world with pain
But I will so love this world that I too will experience the losses
I too will share the pain.

Alice recently came across the reflections of an old person, reflections about loss and grief which were filled with wisdom and hope. It appeared anonymously. Here it is, with a few additions. If you have suffered loss, perhaps it reflects your experience. If you have not suffered deep loss, consider it anyway. There is wisdom here:

I am old [the writer says.] What that means is that I've survived, so far, and a lot of people I've known and loved have not. I've lost best friends, acquaintances, co-workers, grandparents, mom, other relatives, teachers, mentors, students, neighbors, and a host of other folks.

I've never gotten used to people dying, never have, but here's my two cents about losing those whom we love. It tears a hole through me whenever somebody I love dies, no matter the circumstances. But I don't want it to "not matter". I don't want it to be something that just passes. My scars are a testament to the love that I had for that person. And if the scar is deep, so was the love.

Scars are a testament to life. Scars are a testament that I can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that I can heal and continue to live and continue to love.

As for grief [he continues], you'll find it comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was and is no more. And all you can do is float.

You find some piece of the wreckage and you

hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating along side you [and you hang on to one another, floating together so that neither of you sinks]. For a while, all you can do is float. [All you can do is keep on keeping on. All you can do is walk and not faint.]

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come farther apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function.

You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, or the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything . . . and the wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is life.

Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall; or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come farther apart. You can see them coming: an anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas . . . . You can see the pain coming, and for the most part, you can prepare yourself. And when the wave washes over you, you know that somehow you will again come out on the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.

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[This writer concludes:]

Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. Other waves will come and you'll survive them too.

If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars because you will have had lots of loves.

The scripture says "Jesus wept." Jesus cried because his friend, Lazarus, whom he loved so much, had died (John 11:1-44). Alice and I have also cried because one we loved with all our hearts died. And each of you reading this essay have cried because one you loved so much died. And if you have not cried, you will because you love. And despite the pain, nothing is greater than love.

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"Billionaire fortunes grew by $2.5 billion a day last year as poorest saw their wealth fall"

Source: Oxfam International, Published January 21, 2019

The Contentious Legacy of George H.W. Bush as Mirror of Our Conflicted National Soul

by Ken Sehested

"I've slept since then." That's my Mom's go-to line when trying, unsuccessfully, to remember something. After 90 trips around the sun, she says it more frequently.

"I've slept since then" also describes much of the public's waning attention to the life and legacy of President George H.W. Bush. Given the information overload of our 24/7 news cycles and multiplicity of sources, that marker in our nation's history is just *so yesterday*.

By and large, media arbiters were flush with floral bouquets in their remembrance of the elder Bush. By large consensus, he was a genuinely kind, honest, generous and loyal man in his interpersonal affairs.

I understand why heaps of praise were showered. Psychologically, the occasion virtually demanded it be so, given the extreme contrast of past and present political regencies—not to mention the longstanding cultural norm, *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum:* "Of the dead, [say] nothing but good."

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I haven't the slightest reason to doubt the witnesses to Bush's kindly habits. Much has been made of his reluctance to speak in first-person pronouns. You can't get a more dramatic contrast between this feature of public humility and that of the first-person obsessiveness of the present West Wing occupant, for whom everything is first filtered through his relentless ego and self-preserving interests. He is a man incapable of shame and, in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, does "not know how to blush" (6:15).

"Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor" Ezekiel 28:16-19. (See also Isaiah 24:4-6)

Rabbi A. James Rudin has written https://religionnews.com/2018/12/01/in-quiet-moments-george-h-w-bush-showed-that-faith-mattered/ about his experience of the elder Bush's kindness at an interfaith gathering of religious leaders at the Camp David presidential retreat center, convened by the 41st president. "Just as we began our picnic lunch, the president walked into the room carrying his cheeseburger and a glass of milk. By chance, there was one open chair remaining at the large table. The president eyed the empty chair before asking the rest of us, 'Do you mind if I sit here? It seems to be the only vacant seat.' Again, I was tickled that the most powerful person in the world would seek permission to sit at the table with the rest of us."

This is an endearing anecdote. Yet something more must also be said.

Being kind is not enough. Personal magnanimity—including qualities like civility and politeness—has a way of being manipulated for partisan gain. As an analogy, think of the demand for "patience" made in 1963 by white clergy of eight prominent churches in Birmingham, Alabama, calling on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the city's civil rights movement to be patient in their quest for racial equity. King's "Letters from a Birmingham Jail" was an eloquent exposé on the incredulous use of such calls for civility.*

The biographies of history's more ruthless leaders reveal numerous accounts of their being generous hosts (to their peers), nice to children and not kicking their dogs.

To say it another way, can kindness be segregated from doing justice and walking humbly with God, as the Prophet Micah (6:8) insisted? Or, as Robert McAfee Brown noted, maybe *doing* justice, *loving* kindness, and *walking humbly* are not three separate statements but one statement said in three different ways. Or, why do we effectively embody a reverse of the order of the first two elements in this triad: *doing* (active tense) kindness, but merely *loving* (passive tense) justice?

Do gracious personal habits exempt any—especially elected officials—from public pursuit of justice?

I ask this of people of faith, of any faith, or of no explicit faith at all. The governance of any public polity even vaguely resembling democracy requires a commonweal commitment embedded in a commonwealth vision. It requires integrity—a correspondence and coherence—between personal and public virtue. "Give rulers your justice, O God. May they defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. For your glory, O God, shall encompass the earth." —selected from Psalm 72, slightly adapted.

There are more than a few laudatory achievements in George H. W. Bush's public life, including his four years as president—the first of which was his persevering commitment to public service in various forms. His presidential campaign likely represents for generations to come the apex, of "kinder, gentler" conservatism. His "thousand points of light" campaign to celebrate small benevolent achievements deserves high regard more than cynical lampooning.

While a U.S. congressman, Bush's vote for the 1968 Fair Housing Act cost him considerable political capital among his Texas constituents. As president, the Clean Air Act, the 1991 Civil Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act were distinguishing accomplishments of his administration.

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He deserves credit for successfully engaging U.S. leadership in navigating the tense, and globally very dangerous, dismembering of the Berlin Wall, with its far-reaching implications for global restructuring. At Bush's funeral, retired Senator Alan Simpson reminded us that Bush made the hugely unpopular decision to accept a budget deal with Democrats that reversed his campaign signature pledge—"read my lips, no new taxes"—for the sake of the country's wellbeing (given the massive deficits run up by President Reagan) even though it may have later cost his reelection.

"By justice a ruler gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down" Proverbs 29:4. Yet there is much in the public record that belies his kindly personal reputation.

•While campaigning for a senate seat, he railed against the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act, saying, "The new civil rights act was passed to protect 14% of the people. I'm also worried about the other 86%."

•Later, in his 1988 presidential campaign, he paved the way for today's deluge of racist memes with the infamous "Willie Horton" ad, a sin for which Lee Atwater, Bush's campaign manager, apologized before his death. Bush never did.

•In July 1988, the guided missile cruiser USS Vincennes shot down Iran Air Flight 655, killing 290 passengers and crew, before realizing it was a commercial flight. Bush said that he would "never apologize for the United States of America. Ever. I don't care what the facts are."

•One year into his presidency, Bush ordered an invasion of Panama to capture one man: the country's dictator, Manuel Noriega, who, ironically, had been on the CIA payroll under Bush's tenure as the agency's director. The U.S. invasion killed hundreds, according to the Pentagon . . . or thousands, according to human rights groups, mostly due to the bombing of poor neighborhoods adjacent to Noriega's headquarters. Twenty-three U.S. troops and three U.S. civilian contractors died in the invasion.

•While president, Bush pardoned six senior Reagan administration officials, most notably former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, for illegally selling arms to Iran (then as now, a ranking national enemy) in order to fund a congressionally forbidden "Contra" war against the democratically elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The pardons likely prevented discovery of Bush's own knowledge of, and/or participation in, the scandal.

The list could go on: Bush's callous disregard during the initial AIDS crisis, helping establish the disease-as-homosexual-sin narrative; inaugurating the notorious Guantanamo Bay prison to keep refugees from Haiti's military coup out of the U.S.; greatly escalating the so-called War on Drugs and its concomitant splurge in prison construction, inflating prison sentences, resulting in what we now know as the New Jim Crow era of mass incarceration.

Last on my short list of Bush's political iniquities was the Persian Gulf War, beginning with the August 1990 deployment of some 650,000 troops (the largest since World War II) to the Arabian Peninsula. Beginning in the wee hours of 17 January and continuing for the next 42 days, the goal was to destroy Iraq's military capacity, especially in and around Baghdad, and to expel Iraq's invading army from Kuwait. On average, the US and its allies flew one bombing mission per minute during the war.

That campaign was brokered on lies and half-truths. The worst hawked the war based on the non-scrutinized testimony of a Kuwaiti teen who testified before Congress, saying Iraqi troops had yanked infants from incubators and left them on the floor to die. Only later did journalists uncover the ruse: The testifier was the daughter of Kuwait's ambassador to the U.S., and her fabricated testimony had been coached by a major U.S. public relations firm.**

Then began a cascade of unintended consequences, resulting in large part in the crippling of Iraq's infrastructure—water purification, sanitation, power grid, food distribution—all of which is illegal in international law. Coupled with the U.S.-enforced sanctions, the civilian mortality rate, especially for the young and the old, spiked dramatically. No one can say for sure how many civilians died as a result of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, followed by the sanctions regime, and then the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq (which continues to this day). At a bare minimum, it was in the hundreds of thousands and quite likely over one million.

Saudi citizen Osama bin Laden (an indirect recipient of CIA aid while fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan), outraged at the desecration of Islamic holy land by his native country's hosting of foreign troops prior to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, founded Al Qaeda to wage war on the West. His most notorious victory was the terror attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, which led the U.S. to invade Afghanistan and, shortly after, Iraq, and Pakistan, and Yemen, and Somalia, and a Muslim majority region of the Philippines, and Syria. U.S. special operations forces are currently active in 137 countries worldwide, supported by some 800 U.S. military bases outside the United States.

Congressional authorization of the war in Afghanistan, approved three days after 9/11, has now been used 37 times since then. Last fall, when four U.S. troops were killed in an ambush in the West African country of Niger, many in Congress had no idea our military was operative there.

The thrashing of Al Qaida forces by U.S. troops led to the forming of a vicious splinter group, the Islamic State (aka ISIS, ISIL). The Afghan war is now a generational conflict: Those born after 9/11 are now being commissioned for deployment to continue America's longest war. Speaking against Judah's King Jehoiakim, son of King Josiah:

Your father "judged the cause of the poor and needy. Is not this to know me? says the Lord. But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence" (Jeremiah 22:16).

I didn't watch all of the funeral service for President Bush at the Washington National Cathedral. I watched half the eulogies, through the recessional. I was genuinely moved by most of what was said. I especially appreciated the younger President Bush's use of humor—that's probably what enabled him to (mostly) keep his composure. I went from chuckling to teary-eyed in a brief period of time.

When I learned afterwards that President Trump refused to join the unison reading of the Apostle's Creed, I was neither surprised nor concerned. The root of "creed"—*credo*—means "I give my heart to." The only thing to which Trump gives his heart is mercantile exchange. Besides this, though, I also believe that many of the church's troubles began when we first started asking state operatives to say the creed--any creed--alongside us in our sanctuaries.

It was the funeral's closing recessional that was shockingly symptomatic of our crisis within the believing community... Altogether, uniformed troops outnumbered vested clergy by at least one hundred to one. Military choruses and orchestras far and away exceeded Cathedral choir members.

I've read commentary more than once in the past weeks—from those, like me, naturally suspicious of national churches—as one friend put it: "The idea of a 'national cathedral' also 'blurs the lines' [between church and state], but at shared moments of our national psyche I somehow don't find it quite so offensive."

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Three young acolytes led the exit, hoisting a cross (in the middle) and two torches (candles). They were followed by the armed forces pallbearers, the flag-carrying honor guard, then the royal families (of current and former presidents).

The line then was met by an honor guard cordon, composed of members of all branches of the military, standing on either side as the casket slowly, rhythmically, step-by-slow-step in military precision, was carried down the lengthy stairs leading to the waiting hearse.

At street level, a military band was playing. Three robed clergy, including Presiding Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry, stood beyond the hearse, barely on the camera's screen, out of the way.

Altogether, uniformed troops outnumbered vested clergy by at least one hundred to one. Military choruses and orchestras far and away exceeded Cathedral choir members. The attendees were largely of the class who guide and/or underwrite our military's prominence.

*"Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statues, to turn aside the needy from justice and to robe the poor of my people. What will you do on the days of judgment?" (*Isaiah 10:1-3)

This, I am arguing, is what empires do: Soliciting the authorization of whatever divinity is ascendant, and the succor of that divinity's early solicitors, to participate in violent engagement which is always identified with redemptive purpose and national/tribal/ethnic salvation.

As Chief Dan George, of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (a Coast Salish band in what is now named British Columbia), put it: "When the white man came we had the land and they had the Bibles; now they have the land and we have the Bibles."

Righteousness—whether conceived in religious or secular terms—cannot be had short of a commitment to truth-telling. The habit of severing personal kindness from public justice is a delusion.

There's no way around the fact that truth-telling will be impolite. Our history as a nation contains both humane and heinous impulses. Because our virtues as a nation are considerable, we tend to think our vices unremarkable. Such is not the case. And if we are to rightly interpret our condition, we simply must take seriously the whole story.

Gratefully, mercy remains a trustworthy promise, for none would otherwise survive. But mercy's demands transcend personal kindliness. There is a certain misery that must be faced, a penitential journey undertaken, regarding our nation's life and legacy. It will involve not only unpleasantness, but the tiresome work of repair.

But as Galadriel, in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* reminds: "Hope remains while the Company is true."

How then to live in the shelter of such hope? Find a visionary community that does not segregate personal and public virtue. Invest in its welfare. Practice justice, kindness and humility in small ways, all the while attending to opportunities for bolder initiatives. Only then will what you need to do be revealed.

Ken Sehested is curator of prayerandpolitiks.org, an online journal at the intersection of spiritual formation and prophetic action.

*For more on the "civility" debate, see Thomas J. Sugrue, "White America's Age-Old, Misguided Obsession with Civility," New York Times. https://tinyurl.com/yat4wm6c

**For more, see "How False Testimony and a Massive U.S. Propaganda Machine Bolstered George H.W. Bush's War on Iraq" —Democracy Now https://www.democracynow.org/2018/12/5/how_false_testimony_and_a_massive?fbclid=IwAR2FocTNqAYr8bpOv8bBLOtbC7IvVV-oQxId7QSsKrZWDbRZIXkDP3KpQ38

Civility is good, and kindness is infectious. All of us work hard at practicing these virtues and nurturing them in our children. "Please and thank you" were the watchwords I grew up with, under the televised tutelage of Captain Kangaroo (the precursor of Mr. Rogers). "Yes, ma'am/sir" were requisite behavior in my house. And everyone knows that "you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar."

In Scripture, kindness is on par with doing justice and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8); leads to life and honor (Proverbs 21:21); is paired with legislating justice (Zechariah 7:9); is an essential attribute of the faithful (Colossians 3:12-13); is an imperative element of love (1 Corinthians 13:4); is an explicit fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Kindness is a universally recognized social lubricant.

- "The mouth should have three gatekeepers. Is it true? Is it kind? And is it necessary?" *—Arab proverb*
- "One kind word can warm three winter months." *—Japanese proverb*
- "Kind words will unlock an iron door." *—Turkish proverb*
- *"*Kindness is a language the blind can see and the deaf can hear." *—African proverb*

And of course there's the modern bumper sticker: "Practice random acts of kindness and senseless beauty." —Ken Sehested

The Polemics of the Cross

By Matthew J. Dodrill

Not in what conquers, not in glory, but in what's fragile and what suffers – there lies sanity. And salvation
– John Jeremiah Sullivan

A few years ago, my wife gave me a Christmas mug with the words "Bah Humbug" inscribed across its curved ceramic.

She knows me well.

It's not that I dislike Christmas. It's just that I prefer Advent for its penitential zeal and imperviousness to cultural elitism. There's a part of me that revels in the irony of watching rich people recite the Magnificat, what with its stern indictments against wealth and imperial clout.

But Christmas seldom eludes the snares of bourgeois spirituality, not because of anything inherent in Christmas itself, but because of our tendency to associate triumphant church seasons with triumphant systems. Advent and Lent belong to the poor and lowly, the reasoning goes, but Christmas and Easter are readily mapped onto the narratives of victory and conquest. The logic here is almost never overt, yet it's not hard to detect: An executive at Goldman Sachs naturally gravitates away from the uncivil rhetoric of John the Baptist (the quintessential Advent figure), and the petition to "ransom captive Israel" is unlikely to tug at his heartstrings. But whereas Mary's pronouncement against the rich makes the executive shudder, the words of "Away in a Manger" tickle his ears as much as the belligerent appeal to put Christ back in Christmas.

An executive at Goldman Sachs naturally gravitates away from the uncivil rhetoric of John the Baptist (the quintessential Advent figure), and the petition to "ransom captive Israel" is unlikely to tug at his heartstrings. But whereas Mary's pronouncement against the rich makes the executive shudder, the words of "Away in a Manger" tickle his ears as much as the belligerent appeal to put Christ back in Christmas.

How do we account for this unfortunate correlation between high festivals and socio-economic triumphalism? I suspect that a strictly linear understanding of the church calendar has something to do with it. That is to say, when we treat each liturgical season like a single link in a chain of events, we start imagining that Christmas and Easter supersede or "cancel out" the struggles of Advent and Lent. Could anything be more consoling to the opulent Wall Street banker? If the resurrection "moves beyond" the cross, we become detached from the moorings of creation and its travails, free to float thirty-thousand feet above the ground in a gnostic paradise full of mansions and golden chifforobes. Indeed, such an over-realized, pie-in-the-sky eschatology insulates us from the poor, the wretched, and the outcast.

So, rather than separating the cross and resurrection into respective compartments on a linear time spectrum, I suggest we recover the interplay between these two movements: The cross doesn't just lead to resurrection. The resurrection vindicates the cross.

Ernst Käsemann, the late German theologian who had much to say about the Apostle Paul, addressed this issue in an essay titled "For and Against a Theology of Resurrection." There he provides commentary on Paul's contest with the hyper-spiritual "enthusiasts" of the Corinthian church, a rival group with whom the Apostle disagrees sharply on what it means to possess "spiritual knowledge" verses "unspiritual knowledge" (1 Cor. 2:6-16). For the enthusiasts, spiritual knowledge is attained by those who live totally in the new age, whereas for Paul spiritual knowledge is manifested at the juncture of *two* ages, namely the age that's passing away and the age that's dawning in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 2:14-17).

According to Käsemann, the enthusiasts were deluded by a linear understanding of the cross and resurrection, reducing the former to a single "historical event"

that's traversed by the forward movement of time into the future. This way of framing Christ's passion renders the cross a purely transitional stage on the path to resurrection, an instrument of atonement that becomes expendable as a model of discipleship once the stone is rolled away.

To the enthusiasts, therefore, the cross had nothing to do with "spiritual knowledge," for in their estimation, the cross is a mere artifact of salvation history, a diminishing speck in the rearview mirror. Indeed, they saw themselves standing at the terminus of history with the risen Lord, their faces shining with the radiance of the sun (2 Cor. 5:12[1]) while their earthbound, smudgy-faced interlocutor Paul – bless his heart[2] – claimed to embody the glory of Christ *in his weakness* (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). One might imagine the enthusiasts scoffing at Paul's unapologetic theology of the cross: "Why does this fool persist in weakness and lowliness? Doesn't he understand that the cross was overcome by the resurrection of our Lord, and that he can abide with us in the fullness of God's new creation? What does it profit a man to live in the past?"

What Paul understood, however, is that the new creation had not yet reached its culmination. This mysterious delay was the impetus for thinking about a *second* coming, and Paul's entire missional program was anchored to a vision of what occurs between the two advents. Bernard of Clairvaux, the twelfth-century Benedictine monk, referred to this intermediate space as the site of God's *adventus medius*, the "middle (and third) advent" of Christ, where, for Paul, the Spirit of resurrection is manifested in the mode of cruciform witness. In other words, we inhabit a threshold space where the two ages overlap and the powers of darkness are put on notice, heightening their anxiety and hunger for dominion. The Spirit of the risen One is therefore met with resistance, and disciples of Jesus are called upon to embody resurrection life by engaging in the struggle. At the juncture of the ages, then, bearing the cross is nothing less than the spiritual manifestation of the resurrection (1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 6:3-10; 13:4).

A theology of the cross grounds us firmly in the muck and mire of creation gone awry, where the birth pangs of resurrection are felt most vividly at the sites of crucifixion (Mt. 24:3-9).

This is precisely what the enthusiasts failed to grasp. For Paul, knowledge "according to the Spirit" and knowledge "according to the cross"[3] are not mutually exclusive categories separated on a linear time spectrum. On the contrary, knowledge according to the Spirit *is* knowledge according to the cross; so, despite their ostensibly holy lifestyle, these enthusiasts proved to possess unspiritual, "fleshy" knowledge when they rejected the cross as the primary mode of knowing (2 Cor. 5:16[4]).

William Stringfellow, the radical attorney and lay theologian who sheltered Daniel Berrigan when he was on the run for destroying Vietnam draft files, was like a modern-day Paul railing against America's hyper-spiritualized Christianity. He lived his faith by defending the legal rights of poor people in Harlem, as well as defending the first women priests of the Episcopal Church. He participated in the first Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago ('63), where he stirred controversy for identifying racism with demonic power and excoriating the assembly as "too little, too late, and too lily white." And of course, he was a harsh critic of the war in Vietnam.

Stringfellow never divorced his political activity from his spiritual formation. In his small volume *The Politics of Spirituality*, he reiterates Paul's argument against the enthusiasts:

> Commercialized or religiose or other ersatz forms of spirituality typically require conformity to the world and avail no freedom from conformity to the regime of the world, even though they boast their own spiritual jargon or assert transcendental goals.[5]

Indeed, just as Paul exposed the unspiritual nature of the enthusiasts' faith, Stringfellow bristled at *The 700 Club*'s euphoric gnosticism, which betrayed its conformity to the world. Both groups were awed to heaven but hardly rooted in earth, presenting a flimsy gospel that eschewed the politics of the cross.

And that's exactly what was at stake for Käsemann and Stringfellow. Their cultural moment, much like ours today, called for nothing less than the polemical message of the cross.

Far from being a mere symbol of devotion, the cross is the one and only mode of Christian discipleship at the turn of the ages. A theology of the cross grounds us firmly in the muck and mire of creation gone awry, where the birth pangs of resurrection are felt most vividly at the sites of crucifixion (Mt. 24:3-9). The point bears repeating: These are the birth pangs *of resurrection*, not just in the sense of coming before the end, but in the sense of *manifesting* the end. We must proceed with caution, however, if we wish to avoid the enthusiast error. The end has not arrived in its totality, so we

must disillusion ourselves of the notion that we presently share in Christ's glorification, a view that lends itself to all manner of gross projections: Maybe ostentatious wealth inheres in God's glory; maybe upward mobility is a sign of faithfulness; perhaps military dominance is a mark of divine favor. This is not how resurrection life is manifested.

Indeed, a doctrine of resurrection that isolates us from the cross – and from the people most likely to bear it – is a doctrine that maintains the current order of things. By contrast, a proper doctrine of resurrection throws us back onto the cross, thereby demonstrating God's commitment to rectifying what is wrong in this world. This gospel is polemical because it's unapologetically this-worldly, delegitimizing the sentimentality and ethereal moralism that pervade evangelical and mainline Christianity today.

It's polemical because it calls us away from triumphalism and back to justice.

Going back to my "Bah humbug" moment, this is exactly what worries me about presuming that Christmas and Easter transcend Advent and Lent. Neither of them should eclipse the "middle advent" of cruciform witness and leave us floating in the clouds among the rich and powerful (1 Cor. 4:8). As Stringfellow puts it: "Instead of being transported 'out of this world,' the irony in being holy is that one is plunged more fully into the practical existence of this world, as it is, than in any other way."[6] It involves sinking our feet into the soil of injustice where practicing resurrection among the poor and destitute might get us nailed to a cross. The Dominican priest Herbert McCabe said it best:

> *The Gospels insist upon two antithetical truths which express the tragedy of the human condition: the first is that if you do not love you will not be alive; the second is that if you do love you will be killed. If you cannot love you remain self-enclosed and sterile, unable to create a future for yourself and others, unable to live. If, however, you do effectively love you will be a threat to the structures of domination upon which our human society rests and you will be killed.*[7]

To love is to risk death. To practice resurrection is to embody the cross.

Stringfellow understood this well. He, like the Apostle Paul, knew that Christian spirituality is inherently cross-shaped and political. That's how the Lord appears in his *adventus medius*. For the cross, as Käsemann famously put it, is the signature of the risen One.

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1 The enthusiasts boast on the basis of their changed faces; so, when Paul refers to those who "boast in outward appearance (προσώπῳ) and not in the heart" (2 Cor. 5:12), he's talking about those in the Corinthian congregation who judge each other's spirituality based on whether their faces radiate like Moses' (Deut. 34:10). This might also provide insight into Paul's puzzling statement in 1 Cor. 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see *face to face*."

2 2 Cor. 10:1, 10

3 "according to the cross" (*kata stauron*) is not Paul's phrase, but J. Louis Martyn's. See Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark, 1997), 108.

4 Most English translations of *kata sarka* are rendered "from a human point of view." A better translation would be "according to the flesh."

5 William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 35-6.

6 Ibid., 35.

7 Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 67.

Ageism Is Alive and Well

By Deena Williams Newman

It's not fair; but who said life was fair? A normally upbeat 63-year-old man is devastated when he is laid off with no explanation; he learns he will be replaced by someone much younger the company does not have to pay as much. A 60-year-old woman is not happy at her job and needs to make a move, but finds it difficult to find anything else at her age. A recently divorced woman, age 56, finds it impossible to make ends meet on her low salary, but finds her employment options are limited.

Time and time again, mature adults are getting shafted. Age discrimination is alive and well. Some of the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) have already left or will be leaving the work force in the next several years. Others are doing well, living longer, and do not intend to give up working any time soon. Still others, due to circumstances beyond their control, are forced to step aside.

Congress passed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act in 1967, and it was later amended. Employers with 20 or more employees cannot discriminate against employees who are over 40 years old.[1] Unfortunately, many companies don't seem to be aware of this law or they essentially ignore it.

Author Dana Wilkey wrote an article in 2018 published by the Society for Human Resource Management titled, "Discrimination Against Older Workers May be Common but Hard to Prove." She quoted Laurie McCann, a senior attorney for the AARP Foundation Litigation. McCann said, "The things that employers say, write or intimate about age can be so subtle that they don't provide a smoking gun that can prove discrimination."[2]

Why It Is Wrong

Why is it wrong to ignore mature adults? First, some good, talented people are treated unfairly and become bitter instead of using their skills. Others may take a job for which they are overqualified just to keep some health insurance and retirement benefits. It is a tragic waste of resources.

Second, it is wrong because people should never be discriminated against because of gender, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation or age. Many individuals who are 65 have wisdom and skills they need and want to share. Work environments full of 30- and 40-year-old employees can be boring, lacking the patience and maturity that time and experience bring. Diversity is vital to the health of any organization.

Third, it is wrong because it glorifies the current youth culture, which silently broadcasts that everything young is good and everything old is bad. New blood and talents are seen as necessary to progress and move ahead. Older employers are sometimes viewed as simply holding the organization back.

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What Can Churches Do?

What can and should churches do? Christians should reach out to older employees in their congregation, wrap their arms around them, and offer support and encouragement. They can offer skills training, resume writing help, computer classes and other services.

One big hurdle for mature adults is technology, which seems to change almost daily. Computer skills are essential for mature adults to search for a new job or to keep their current job. Some employers have complained unfairly that older adults are slower to catch on and have difficulty with rapidly changing programs and systems. This may be expected for individuals who came of age before widespread computer use.

Churches should provide retirement advice for those who are considering leaving the workplace. Many have debated the best age for retirement. Financial guru Suze Orman has suggested 70 as the ideal age to retire, while others have indicated that a person's life situation, such as health issues, caregiving responsibilities and financial circumstances should determine the best age to retire.[3]

Churches should also lead by example in their pas-

tor and staff searches. While older ministers have many years of experience, they are often overlooked in job searches. Often the attitudes of church personnel committee members are just as bad --- if not worse than --- those in the corporate world. Churches should consider a 60-year-old person with 35 years of experience instead of a 35-year-old with perhaps 10 years of experience. They should at least take a second look at someone who is more seasoned instead of settling for someone who has likely never handled tough circumstances before.

Researcher and author Tom Rainer states, "The age of 55 is a psychological barrier for many churches when hiring, and it's a shame." He admits, however, that all age discrimination is not malicious.[4]

Churches can also provide coordinated volunteer opportunities to match the skills of their retired population. Household maintenance, quilting, knitting, sewing, tutoring, landscape work, caregiving and auto repair are just a few examples.

I have observed numerous examples of mature individuals who have spread the love of God while in their later years. One couple, then in their 70s, grew turnip greens and distributed them to people in need in their community. An 80-year-old woman in a former church used the wordless book to spread the gospel on a mission trip to Brazil. Yet another woman in her 80s told the Bible story to children during Vacation Bible School each year, in spite of her blindness. A retired Navy man in his 70s shared God's love with toddlers each Sunday. A woman in her 70s in another state faithfully sent cards of cheer and greetings for many years until her health declined.

From what I can tell, God does not give us a date for retirement or a time limit for Christians to serve, whether in paid or volunteer positions. We are to show respect for the elderly and are to carry out God's mission for as long as we can.

From what I can tell, God does not give us a date for retirement or a time limit for Christians to serve, whether in paid or volunteer positions.

1 Richard Hammer. "*Pastor, Church & &Law.* Volume 3. Chapter 8. https://www.churchlawandtax.com/library/employment-law/chapter-8-part-3-employment.

2 Wilkey, Dana. "Discrimination against Older Workers May be Common but Hard to Prove." Society for Human Resource Management. May 3, 2018. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/age-discrimination.

3 Orman, Suze. "Suze Orman Says This is the Age You Should Retire – Not a Month or Year Before." *Money.* October 23, 2017. https://time.com/money/4989314/suze-orman-new-retirement-rule/.

4 Howe, Jonathan, host. "Age Discrimination and Church Hiring" - Rainer on Leadership #158. September 11, 2015. https://thomrainer.com/2015/09/age-discrimination-and-church-hiring-rainer-on-leadership.

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Declaring America's Real 'National Emergency' – and Hearing and Heeding the Prophets Among Us

By Molly T. Marshall

Without constitutional power to do so, I am declaring a national emergency.

It is not about "The Wall"; it is about a governing system so broken that underpaid government employees are facing eviction, collection agencies, family discord, mental health issues and anxious unknowing. They are paying the price – not the "essential personnel," which I guess includes Congress, the military and the judicial and executive branches of government – for this irresponsible government shutdown. These sidelined workers are forced to choose what is most urgent to pay: utilities, mortgage or rent, school fees, medicines, child care, ad nauseum. That, in my judgment, is a national emergency, not to mention a national disgrace, as we enter the third week of this travesty.

Another part of the real national emergency is the exhaustion most Americans feel as we try to exegete varied sources of information, including the news cycles, threatening presidential rants and political interlocutors. This exhaustion is intellectual, emotional and spiritual. We try to put it into historical perspective, seeking not to conclude that it is "the worst of times," yet we wonder. The connectivity we all participate in, however, makes it all more ubiquitous and unrelenting. As we become even more weary with the day-to-day heated rhetoric and lack of principled and nuanced governing, we are tempted to throw up our hands in disgust and abdicate our role as "we the people."

In a January 13 opinion piece in *New York Times*, two professors of government warn that "autocrats love emergencies." Corrupt leaders, they suggest, fabricate a crisis "in order to justify an abuse of power." That way they can avoid the labor intensive work of negotiation and concession that the democratic process requires. The constitutional balance is intended to foster each aspect of our government having its own domain of power and working collaboratively with the others. When the president declares a national emergency, he effectively bypasses the legislative and judicial branches. In their article, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt contend that our president may be joining the company of Vargas of Brazil, Hitler of Germany, Marcos of the Philippines and Putin of Russian, who grabbed power for self-preservation rather than national threat.

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One of the lectionary's scripture lessons for this coming Sunday is Isaiah 62:1-5. The prophets, those who keep watch on behalf of the well-being of others, cannot be silent when there is a threat to their people. Not only must they speak forthrightly of the dangers at hand, but they must give God no rest until the fulfillment of divine promises. Of course, those called to the prophetic vocation in this text are speaking for Zion's sake, for the sake of beloved Jerusalem.

People of good will are their heirs today, and we must be no less outspoken in our warning and our petition to God. As the prophet writes, "You who invoked the LORD'S name, take no rest, give God no rest, until the Holy One makes Jerusalem a theme of endless praise on the earth" (Isaiah 62:6b).

"These insights summon dissent, resistance and actions borne of good conscience."

I am not making any easy equation of the state of things in America with those in

Jerusalem as it recovered after destruction and prepared for many returning from exile; rather, I am suggesting that our time requires the same kind of perseverance in calling humanity and the divine to justice. Indeed, I imagine that the Author of Life wonders why we do not turn more frequently toward divine spiritual resources and why we fall silent. Refusing to "take rest" or "give God rest" expresses the energetic will to join God in bringing justice in the midst of desolation.

God may also wonder why we do not listen better to the prophets among us. There are many who chal-

lenge the racial disparities, economic divide, gender injustice and flawed immigration policies. In the name of all that is just, they call for mercy rather than judgment. They do not suggest that furloughed workers have bake sales, walk dogs and take on child care (all honorable, but with slim economic benefit) to supply the funds their families need. They call powers and principalities to repent and do their jobs.

God may also wonder why we do not listen better to the prophets among us. There are many who challenge the racial disparities, economic divide, gender injustice and flawed immigration policies.

Baptists still produce prophets. With fierce urgency they call us to recognize what is really going on around us. I mention only a few: prophetic preachers like Marvin McMickle and Amy Butler; prophetic writers like Wendell Griffen, Susan Shaw and Mark Wingfield; prophetic teachers like Emilie Townes and David Gushee; prophetic leaders like Kevin Cosby and Amanda Tyler; prophetic publishers like the *Christian Citizen* and *Baptist News Global*. These prophets – and articulators of an authentic Baptist witness to the Gospel – offer perceptive insights into the shifting landscape of American culture. In turn, these insights summon dissent, resistance and actions borne of good conscience.

I pray that the real national emergency will find resolution, and soon. Too many are suffering, and we must not fall silent. Our efforts can make a difference. As our Jewish colleagues put it, God calls us to help mend the world.

Molly T. Marshall is President of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. This article is used with permission after first appearing in Baptist News Global on January 14, 2019 which holds its copyright.

YOU ARE INVITED TO INCLUDE OTHERS IN RECEIVING *CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY*. SHARE NAMES AND MAILING ADDRESSES OF YOUR FRIENDS OR RELATIVES YOU BELIEVE WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE THE JOURNAL.

Lessons Learned From My Muslim Friends

by John Rich Dorean

I recently had this rather remarkable conversation with a young man from Norman, Oklahoma - a good friend of my daughter and her husband - who, along with his wife and two children, has been a missionary in Lebanon for the last ten years. His wife spends about 80% of her time working in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon trying to help women earn a living through sewing projects using micro loans to give them a start, while he teaches at American University in Beirut. But they are in Lebanon for a very simple reason: to lead Muslims to an eternity altering relationship with Jesus Christ.

Not wanting to waste such an opportunity with idle chatter about what they were doing for Christmas, I asked something like: so what life lessons have you learned from your time in Lebanon? With barely a pause to gather his thoughts, he launched into a three point sermon - that's how I received it - that would preach well in any church on the planet. His opening phrase sucked me right in. "Here are some things I have learned from my Muslim friends." Feel free to correct me if I am wrong, but that phrase in itself shattered my "lived all my life in America" thinking. That a devout, Gospel-driven missionary could talk about his Muslim friends was a "this is something new" thought in a nation where we are trained to think of all Muslims as terrorists. And that that same devout, Gospel driven missionary could talk about life lessons learned from Muslims was an even more "pay attention to what follows" headline grabber for me. So here were his three thoughts.

"Here are some things I have learned from my Muslim friends." Feel free to correct me if I am wrong, but that phrase in itself shattered my "lived all my life in America" thinking.

First, the Bedouin culture (the nomadic Arab people whose life stories fill the pages of Scripture and remain a vital part of Middle Eastern life still today) has so incredibly much to teach American Christians about the central role of hospitality to our faith experience. We are traumatized by strangers at our borders whose intentions leave us filled with fear and trepidation, as well as by the unknown person who knocks on our door or speaks to us on the street. And so we fail to practice hospitality in a fashion that was assumed to be a way of life for our forefathers like Abraham and that is a clearly expressed command of the writers of the New Testament.

We, who are lucky if we get out a polite, "What do you want?" from the stranger at the door - more often refusing to even open the door to someone we don't know - have much to learn from the Bedouin whose first response is to invite the stranger into their space (tent, home, apartment). After that, expected hospitality requires that food be provided and overnight lodging be offered. In fact, not till three and a half days have passed is it deemed proper to ask the stranger's business - "What can I do for you?" This seems so radical as to be absurd to us. But if you are familiar with the Old Testament stories of Abraham greeting the three visitors who later turn out to be angels, or the story of Lot's welcoming the strangers who also turn out to be angels, or the story of the Levite who has a concubine who he ends up offering up to some marauders looking to fulfill their sexual lust, you realize it is a way of life at the heart of the culture of the Bible. And my missionary friend's point was simply this: we who claim to be a Biblical people need to get serious about this vitally important aspect of what it means to be a God follower today.

His second point was just as convicting and that had to do with the centrality of the life of prayer to the Muslim believer - which he described by the ubiquitous call to prayer five times a day in the Muslim world. As someone who has been awakened in Jerusalem by these calls to prayer being blasted through loud speakers that can be heard everywhere in the city, I admit that they can be invasive and more than a bit "in your face." And sure we can complain that it is rote or forced or less than spontaneous. But as a people who are ourselves Christian and who speak casually of living in a "Christian nation," how many of us consciously stop five times a day to pray? In the midst of the hectic pace of life, how many of us every single day stop what we are doing and go to God in prayer multiple times every single day. Yet that prayer centered life is essential and an assumed pattern of daily existence in the Muslim world - as it is certainly meant to be for all who bear the name of Jesus.

Finally, my new friend said, he was deeply impressed by Muslims' commitment to obedience to the Koran. While disdainful of the Muslim scriptures,

he is nonetheless impressed by what he regards as the typical Muslim's response to its authority: doing what it says. That would not, perhaps, be as impressive if it were not viewed in comparison with the typical Christian's response to the Bible, what we believe to be the Word of God. Rather than first asking, how can I obey or what does obedience look like in my particular situation, we tend to waffle on obedience by questioning the meaning or relevance or cultural datedness of the text. In short, we are forever looking for ways to avoid the very real demands of Scripture - like the importance of being hospitable to echo an earlier point - rather than looking for ways to be faithful to the core commands of God's Word. (If you doubt the truth of that statement let me ask this: what was your response to my comments on hospitality. Was I being unrealistic, idealistic, absurdly liberal? Or was your first response to ask: how can I practice greater hospitality?)

For me, seven months into retirement -where I am not preaching or leading Bible study or serving on a host of boards of charitable foundations as was my way of life for thirty-six years - I find myself struggling with all the rest of you to figure out what does it mean, what does it look like to be a Jesus follower in this place I am planted. My new friend challenged the socks off of me in these key areas of faithful living. I hope they in some way speak to your heart as well.

John Rich Dorean is a graduate of Dickinson College, served more than 6 years as a Resident Partner of Koinonia Partners in Americus, GA. For 36 years he was pastor of the Jefferson Baptist Church, Jefferson, PA. He and his wife of 42 years have 4 daughters and 10 grandchildren and live in Norman, OK.

A Tap on the Window *(excerpted) By Enedina Vasquez*

Many years ago, after traveling in Mexico, I was on the International Bridge, in my car, returning to the US. I had just paid the toll, sweating, waiting in a long line of vehicles when this little girl taps on my window. She was tiny, and her eyes were red from the sting of the sweat draining down her brow. She showed me some rosaries she was selling. I looked at her and I saw God looking back at me, with little fingers grasping the dollar I offered.

I asked her why she was here in the hot sun. Where is your mother or father? She said, my father is over there. She pointed behind her. I turned – and saw God there in the hot sun, a young father entertaining people for donations, earning a living together with his little girl. I later wrote a poem about it, which says in part:

"Compreme un Rosario, Senora,"
She says in a voice that sounds like an apology.
I look into her eyes and Christ looks back
Wondering why He is crucified daily
In this girl's eyes
By the indifference of people passing by.
I see the blood of Christ
In her dirty fingernails
As they help her hands grab
At the dollar I give her.
And I am just passing through.
I'm just passing through.

I felt so helpless, so sad, and then the car behind me honked and the officials were waving me to move up. So I left God there in the blazing heat, and I have carried the memory of that day ever since: The poor, the hungry, men, women, children, the marginalized are for me the image of God asking me to help, to pray and see them, to really see and feel them in my heart because I cannot help everyone, but I can pray and reach out and notice them and see God looking back at me.

Born in San Antonio, Enedina Vasquez is a visual artist, writer, and the co-founder of the ecumenical ministry Platicas, which gathers Latina women for prayer and communion meeting at two San Antonio Lutheran churches. A graduate of the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, she is now Vicar of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in San Antonio.

American Racism, 1619-2019: Exorcism of this Demon Is Needed – Now

By Bill J. Leonard

The year 2019 ahead of us marks a traumatic moment in American life – the 400th anniversary of the first slave ship's arrival on these shores in August 1619. In his classic text, *Before the Mayflower*, Leone Bennett, Jr. wrote:

She came out of a violent storm with a story no one believed, a name no one recorded and a past no one investigated. Her captain was a mystery man named Jope, her pilot an Englishman named Marmaduke, her cargo an assortment of Africans with sonorous Spanish names – Anthony, Isabella, Pedro.

A year before the arrival of the celebrated "Mayflower," 113 years before the birth of George Washington, 244 years before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, this ship sailed into the harbor at Jamestown, Virginia, and dropped anchor into the muddy waters of history. . . . What seems unusual today is that no one sensed how extraordinary she really was. Few ships, before or since, have unloaded a more momentous cargo.

> *"The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people." W.E.B. DuBois, 1903*

The arrival of that ship is an event we ignore at our peril, particularly at this moment in the nation's history. Its implications impact us yet. Have you seen the recent video in which an African-American high school wrestler named Andrew Johnson has his dreadlocks cut off in front of everyone at the New Jersey state tournament? Seems the referee arrived late and missed the weigh-in when wrestlers are evaluated for conformity to regulations. It wasn't until his match was about to begin that Johnson was told his long hair violated state rules for the sport. The ref gave him a choice – cut his hair on the spot or forfeit the match. When Johnson's coaches protested, the ref started the "injury clock" that gives wrestlers 90 seconds to receive "medical treatment" before being disqualified.

The young wrestler acquiesced and, with only seconds to spare, his hair was cut with the crowd watching, a 41-second eternity now viewed on social media over 15 million times. Johnson won the match in overtime, but there was no joy in him. It wasn't about hair; it was about humiliation, and, yes, race.

Johnson's case is not trivial. What some might dismiss as merely a rules issue poorly managed has now become a racial issue, yet another public symbol of the continuing realities of race and racism in American culture. The referee has been suspended pending an investigation by the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights.

Watching the video of those New Jersey events reminded me of the warnings that African-American parents give their children, particularly their male children, on being young and black in the U.S.A. It brought to mind the cautionary advice that our African-American former pastor and up-the-street-neighbor gave his then high school-age son, now a first-year student at Yale: "Don't ride your bike in the neighborhood after dark; don't run through people's yards, even if your friends are doing so; and if the police stop you, don't argue with them."

I also went back to this passage from W.E.B. DuBois' great work, *The Souls of Black Folk,* published in 1903, 40 years after the Emancipation Proclamation: *"The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people."*

Today, 115 years after DuBois wrote those words, the nation is still searching for peace from the sins of its racist past and present. In December 2018, as the New Jersey wrestling incident went viral, the Southern Baptist seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, issued a 72-page document titled *"Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary"* (SBTS), detailing the school's

ties to the South's slave culture and charting its own contemporary exorcism.

The well-documented study extends from the seminary's founding by Southern Baptists in 1859, through the Civil Rights movement, and ending with efforts of its board of trustees to distance the institution from a lecture given by Martin Luther King, Jr., on the seminary campus in 1961.

With this important study, SBTS joins such institutions as Georgetown University and the University of Virginia, along with Baptist-founded schools like Wake Forest and Furman Universities, in exploring the advocacy of chattel slavery, Jim Crow legislation and white supremacy by earlier generations of faculty, trustees, donors, graduates and ecclesiastical leaders. They and other schools with similar histories are struggling to respond to the racist elements in their origins, and what they mean to institutional identity for the future.

The SBTS report illustrates that reality. It begins by asserting that while *"the seminary leaders . . . labored to save the eternal souls of blacks no less than whites,"* they *"contradicted these commitments . . . by asserting white superiority and defending racial inequality. . . . The seminary's leaders long shared that belief and therefore failed to combat effectively the injustices stemming from it."*

The study documents that the school's four founding faculty, ensconced in the orthodoxy of Reformed theology, were all slaveholders who *"defended the righteousness of slaveholding"* and *"supported the Confederacy's cause to preserve slavery."* Later, *"after emancipation, the seminary faculty opposed racial equality,"* supporting *"the restoration of white rule in the South"* and *"Lost Cause mythology"* during Reconstruction and beyond.

Before any of us white folks cast the first self-righteous stone, we'd best take stock of ourselves, past and present. Indeed, the SBTS study and others like it compel us to ask: When do our current assertions and actions toward racial or any other kind of inequality contradict our deepest claims to Christian commitment? In her most recent column for Baptist News Global, Susan Shaw insightfully warns of the dangers we all face in condemning the hermeneutical-interpretive method of one era, as we perpetuate it in our own times.

As a student of Baptist history, as well as a member of the SBTS faculty, 1975-1992, I'm forced to ask: What am I promoting as gospel right now that later generations will document, repudiate and apologize for? I can't repent of the racism of my Baptist ancestors if I won't repent of racism in myself and my own segment of American culture right now.

What am I promoting as gospel right now that later generations will document, repudiate and apologize for? I can't repent of the racism of my Baptist ancestors if I won't repent of racism in myself and my own segment of American culture right now.

That's why we must confront this terrible, teachable anniversary, 1619-2019. Unless we exorcise demon racism, and any biblical or theological means of supporting it, this "one Nation, under God, indivisible" won't (maybe shouldn't) last another 400 years.

Bill Leonard is James and Marilyn Dunn Professor of Baptist Studies and Professor of Church History at Wake Forest University. *This essay was first published by and copyrighted by Baptist News Global on December 27, 2018 and is used with permission.*

Overheard: from Congressman John Lewis

"Find a way to get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

"Be a headlight, not a brake light."

"To be reconciled was the purpose of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s."

"Be a thermostat, not a thermometer."

Reflecting on a Grandfather I Never Knew

Neil Sherouse

On November 11, 1918, a century ago, the "war to end all wars" drew to a close. With deaths and other horrors heretofore unseen in human history, the November 11, 1918 Armistice brought with it a universal hope that the world would never again embark on so ill-conceived a conflict.

Among the over-four-million Americans who served in that war was Captain George W. Sherouse, a 1905 graduate of Emory University's medical school. Doctor Sherouse was my paternal grandfather. Through the tireless research of my brother, Craig, we know something of his service record. In summary, World War I saw him serving with the US Army's Third Infantry Division as a medical officer. In July, 1918, he and his division were in France in the trenches of the Second Battle of the Marne. There he tended the wounded and dying in some of the bloodiest fighting American troops experienced. Later, he was transferred to the division's medical headquarters, and became a regimental surgeon. After the war ended, he went with the Army of Occupation to Luxembourg. He returned to the States in August of 1919. Thereafter, he settled with his little family in Campville, Florida, the town where he had grown up, and became a beloved small-town physician.

In short, my grandfather became for me an ancestor of mythical proportions. What I did not hear about, until much later in life, were the demons that had inhabited him in the blood-soaked trenches of France, and traveled home with him after the Great War.

From my earliest years, I heard stories of the care and devotion my grandfather extended to his patients – how he went to their homes in the dark of night by buggy to attend them or deliver their babies, how his diagnostic skills became legendary, and how he had once treated the author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. In short, my grandfather became for me an ancestor of mythical proportions. What I did not hear about, until much later in life, were the demons that had inhabited him in the blood-soaked trenches of France, and traveled home with him after the Great War.

My grandfather died at the age of 63, several years before I was born. It was an early death most certainly hastened by those demons of war that never fully left him. These days, we understand the oft-debilitating impact of trauma on the human psyche. But a century ago, victims – and soldiers in particular – were expected to put the horrors of combat behind them, like shucking their threadbare uniforms -- and move forward in life, with no outward display of the lasting effects of what they had experienced. My mother, who often seemed to me to be more fond of Doctor George than my father, remembered how much he wanted to have grandchildren. Perhaps we would have been for him an assurance that his service had secured for his progeny a life and a world better than that in which he had come of age. Regrettably, his death preceded the birth of any of his four grandsons.

Despite the fact that I never met my grandfather – never sat in his lap and rocked on the rickety porch of his home, never observed him caring for his patients, and never smelled on his breath the liquor that dulled the memories of war – he still played a significant role in my life. From a very young age – soon after I decided I no longer wished to become a cowboy – I determined that I would be a physician and advance his legacy of selfless patient care. For me, this was much more than a passing thought. It became a driving force throughout my school years and into my first year of college. My obsession with preparations for medical school led me to take every high school course offered in the sciences – biology, zoology, human physiology, chemistry and, my nemesis, physics. When I called my parents well into my freshman year of pre-med at the University of Florida to gently break to them the news that I had decided to change my major to, of all things, music, I felt in every fiber of my being that I had somehow failed Doctor George.

To my knowledge, my grandfather left no written record, no letters or journals. If he did, they have been

lost to our family. All that appears to have survived is his medical bag containing a few implements and his state medical license from the final year of his life. My impression has always been that he was a man who kept his thoughts, and his demons to himself. Nonetheless, it always seemed to me that my father was very reserved in the things he shared about growing up in the doctor's household. I always had the sense that there were secrets kept, and that my father felt my uninformed admiration for the grandfather I had never known was somehow misplaced or undeserved. Still, well into my adulthood, I would from time-to-time cross paths with someone whom he had treated or whose relative was saved through his care. In all cases, they spoke with near-reverence of Doctor George.

Now that I have lived some years beyond my grandfather's lifespan, I realize that most of us are, to some extent, flawed. Most of us carry around some demon or other of some size or influence that in some way alters the paths our lives take.

Now that I have lived some years beyond my grandfather's lifespan, I realize that most of us are, to some extent, flawed. Most of us carry around some demon or other of some size or influence that in some way alters the paths our lives take. So I revere the good Doctor George for the selfless service he rendered to the sick, wounded and dying and the determination he mustered to serve despite his brokenness, and the fact that his sacrifice and the sacrifices of millions of others who have fought in the great wars of our nation have preserved for us a union that, though certainly imperfect, continues to strive in fits and spurts, to cast off its own demons in order to be better than it has been in the past.

Neil Sherouse is a musician, writer, and churchman living in Lakeland, Florida.

What Makes a Man a Man? *(excerpted) by David Teel*

Life made me a feminist before I knew the meaning of the word. I didn't have to be convinced that the world was hostile to women, girls, and vulnerable boys and men (though grad school helped me clarify some of that). I was raised by a single mom who fled a suburban home and "security" with an abusive husband in Texas for a safer, albeit impoverished, life with me and my sister in rural Arkansas.

Former NFL lineman Joe Ehrmann…champions a thoughtful and simple strategy for how the lives of boys and men might be re-written in ways that set atremble popular myths of manhood. (See Joe Ehrmann, *InSideOut Coaching: How Sports Can Transform Lives* (Simon and Schuster, 2011).

In his 2013 TEDx talk in Baltimore, Ehrmann identifies three cultural lies of toxic masculinity that shape young men from elementary school through the marketing machinery of consumer adulthood: the myths of ballfields (athletic prowess), bedrooms ("sexual conquest"), and billfolds (financial success).

When someone says "be a man," they are appealing to these myths and the distorted emotional landscape and violence they create.

Ehrmann counters with two new codes to guide male life, indeed, all human life: the emotional depth and respect found in quality relationships and a cause bigger than oneself, one that betters the world by helping others… Borrowing from Bonhoeffer, Ehrmann calls for a seismic change in our culture, one that forms boys into "men built for others."

David C. Teel is a writer, editor, and educator in Nashville, serving United Methodist churches and editing academic books since 1997.

I Read Sermon Books

By Walter B. Shurden

The siren warning blasted in seminary from all fronts: "Don't read books of sermons." I never believed them. So I never followed their advice. I thought it stark tomfoolery then and I do now 60 years later.

I know the temptation of plagiarism they feared. But I came to believe that all originality and no plagiarism, openly confessed, made for poor preaching. I also know that once someone gets a unique bead on a text that it is hard for me to tear myself away from that interpretation. But I ask: Why should I?

I am glad they required me in those late 50s and early 60s to drink from the deep theology of Tillich, Barth, Augustine, Anselm, Athanasius and Aquinas. But when they were not looking, I feasted on *Riverside Sermons* by Harry Emerson Fosdick, and books of sermons by Leslie Weatherhead (conservatives called him "Wesley Leatherhead"), and Carlyle Marney, among others.

I am an unapologetic and unrepentant connoisseur of sermon books. Any serious Christian, pew-sitter or preacher, layperson or theologian, who wants to grow her soul, should devour the two volumes of The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin.

As far as any of us knew in my generation, Don Harbuck, too soon taken from us by cancer, was the brainiest who ever graduated from New Orleans Seminary. He wrote his dissertation on Paul Tillich; but one day he whispered secretly in my ear the name of J. Wallace Hamilton. I eventually bought all of Hamilton's books of sermons. What a preacher! Harbuck also pointed out to me that Tillich and Barth each had some good sermon books that no preacher should overlook.

As a 29-year-old pastor, I received weekly sermons from John Claypool at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and Ernest T. Campbell from The Riverside Church in New York City. In addition to teaching me about sermon-making and preaching (something they did not do a good job teaching or I did not do a good job of learning in seminary), they, along with sermons from Fred Craddock, kept my soul afloat and my mind alert. They were and still are prized possessions in my library, most of which I have given away.

I am an unapologetic and unrepentant connoisseur of sermon books. Any serious Christian, pew-sitter or preacher, layperson or theologian, who wants to grow her soul, should devour the two volumes of *The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin*.

I listened with amazement to Chuck Poole for nine years while he was my pastor. When he began publishing what I had already heard on Sunday mornings, I gobbled up his books, "Chuckology" we still call it at our church. To this day, I go online and read his sermons. Renewing and forceful, beautiful and challenging, Chuck Poole's sermons lift and liberate. So do the sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the incomparable Howard Thurman.

As my foregoing list would indicate, I have been highly selective in the sermon books I read. My sermon books are from theologians in the trenches--preachers who could have taught in anybody's seminary, but who chose the pulpit for their outlet. They could talk theology in the classroom with the best of them; but they excelled at interpreting the ambiguities of the Christian life in the courtroom, the counseling room, the funeral room, the emergency room and the boardroom. Unless one can do that effectively, I have concluded, one's theology may be little more than a head-trip aiming for tenure. It is difficult to find a better place to deepen devotion, hone theology or sharpen your ethical conscience than a good book of sermons.

All of this is to introduce you to Daniel Whitaker's *The Way of Christ: Its Toils and Its Joys*. I once asked Roland Bainton, celebrated church historian at Yale Divinity School, to name his most successful students. "Oh, these Nobel prizes people want me to hand out," he complained. "Who knows? It may be an unknown pastor who labored for 35 years in the small parish in

some out-of-the-way village in New Hampshire."

Dan Whitaker never served as an archbishop in Baptist life, presiding over some big-steeple church and owning a television ministry of regional influence. Rather, he faithfully served as pastor at Westside Baptist Church in Gainesville, FL, First Baptist Church, Ringgold, GA, and First Baptist Church, Forsyth, GA. But how fortunate those three churches!

Read these 14 sermons and you can easily guess that he majored in literature at Stetson University. Note his biblical and theological sources, never ostentatiously worn on his sleeves, and you will not be surprised that he paid close attention at both Southeastern and Southern seminaries as he wound his way through all the theological disciplines toward a Ph.D. in New Testament. His well runs very, very deep, exceedingly wide, and every pail you bring up offers fresh, living water, slaking the thirst of the parched heart.

Of these14 sermons, "All's Lost" and "All's Found," chapters two and three of the book, come closest to "Whitakerology." But others such as "Gratitude Is a Choice," "Interrupted by Praise," "Heaven's Gate Was Open Wide," and "She Has Done What She Could" made me wish I had said that.

His well runs very, very deep, exceedingly wide, and every pail you bring up offers fresh, living water, slaking the thirst of the parched heart.

Several features of Whitaker's sermons arrest me. First, his theology, rather than slapping you down, slips upon you. In speaking of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem and human freedom, he says, "I know of no doctrine of predestination that spans the distance between Jesus' 'I would' and Jerusalem's 'would not'." And of our sin, he concludes, "Paul sees all mankind caught in a mysterious, dark undertow that sucks us, even against our will, into our own individual renditions of Adam's trespass."

Of the literary nature of Genesis: "It never poses as empirical historical research, like some modern epidemiologist seeking to track down the actual spinach farm that triggered a national outbreak of E-coli."

Second, he lets his illustrative material, voluminous and valuable, carry the weight of his affirmations. He makes his point quickly, and rather than continuing in didactic, philosophical fashion, he lets his stories, some of which are gorgeously corn-pone and his apt literary quotations, perform the exposition. Here is a golden lesson for all preachers, young and old. Transform spiritual insights into stories. Make your point. Tell a good story. Move on. People listen to that kind of preaching.

Third, he almost always keeps in mind that another sermon exists on the other side of the one he is preaching. Though celebrating our newfound and glorious humanity in Christ by saying, "All's Found," he reminds us that, "Becoming what we are is the painful, laborious work of a lifetime." Affirming Jeremiah's belief in a new beginning for all of us in the story of the potter who remade a piece of marred pottery, he notes that the analogy breaks down with human beings. The clay has no choice in being remade, but the human must consent.

Four, he has a doxological way of bringing some of his sermons to a conclusion. In a most practical sermon titled, "A Call to Kindness," he ends by claiming that our kindness comes from God's measureless reserves of grace and kindness. His last line: "All hail to heaven's bank!" In a clever reading of Romans, he spots Paul interrupting his theological and ethical letter with several outbursts of praise. Whitaker closes his sermon with this admonition: "In the gray humdrum, in the monotony of days without lift or lilt, who knows? Maybe praise lies hidden somewhere. Let it break in!"

There is a poet here. Whitaker is also a theologian, a biblical expositor, a church historian, a Christian ethicist, and a savvy reader of human nature. Novelist Gustave Flaubert advised a friend about how to read Montaigne, the essayist: "Don't read him as children do, for amusement, nor as the ambitious do, to be instructed. No, read him *in order to live.*"

I have read the sermons of Fosdick, Weatherhead, Marney, Campbell, Claypool, Craddock, Coffin, Tillich, Barth, Poole, King, Thurman and now Whitaker that way. They help me live.

Non-celebrity that he is, Whitaker's book will not be found at Harper's, John Knox, or even Smyth-Helwys. It came from Rocky Comfort Press. You are able to order from Amazon.com by typing in "Whitaker, *The Way of Christ."* Cost is $9.95, plus shipping. If you enjoy it half as much as I, you will get your money's worth.

Walter B. Shurden is Minister at Large at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.

From Our Bookshelves…

Recommended Reading

God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942–1976

By Ansley L. Quiros, University of North Carolina Press, November 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4696-4675-6

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

My father was the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Gaffney, South Carolina, from 1962 to 1978. The church. a mission of FBC Gaffney, was only six years old when my Dad arrived,. I graduated high school there in 1971, the third year of integration of a school roughly 60/40 white to black and was on the bi-racial committee my senior year.

The last four years of our family's stay got a little dicey over matters of race. To make a long story short, several families were disgruntled over the fact that my family pretty much had an open door policy at the pastorium with a paved driveway and basketball goal to which anybody of any color was welcome at any reasonable hours. I am proud to have played with the cousins of the great David Thompson, who were later the uncles of Southern Conference Basketball player of the Year, Donald Simms, the mixed race grandson of future South Carolina Governor Richard Riley's best friend in Greenville, Don Gannt. Riley became President Clinton's Secretary of Education.

My sister came home from Mars Hill College in the fall of 1976 with a group who had recently returned from a mission trip with her to Baltimore. One was a missionary's son, a black basketball player. Things got more tense for the Fox family after that and soon we were headed to Knoxville, Tennessee, by the summer of 1978.

I was writing some provocative unsolicited opinion pieces in the local paper and it got to the point where a relative of an outspoken resistor to the "Fox agenda" came looking for me late one afternoon. I was out of the neighborhood when this former "freedom of choice" school board member came calling at our home, but I placed a phone call to him when I got home. The upshot was that if I didn't quiet down and let his sister and her group have their way in the church, he would "stand on my toes and beat my ass into the ground."

One other memorable quote of that late spring of 1978 came from a former leader in the local Klan who had donated the land for the pastorium right behind Bethany Baptist Church, the house our family lived in 14 of the 16 years my father was pastor. I asked Mr. McCluney, "Joe, if my Daddy had tried to integrate Bethany in 1965, what would you have done?" He said, "I woulda' shot him."

I said "What do you think about him now?" He said, "I love the damn preacher. If somebody tried to harm him now, they would have to go through my ass to get to him."

Quiros takes a deep dive into the Civil Rights struggle of 1965 in Americus, Georgia, home of Martin England and Clarence Jordan's Koinonia Farms.

So it is with some existential understanding that I come to the wonderful new book, *God with Us,* by my fellow Furman alumnus, Ansley Quiros.

Quiros takes a deep dive into the Civil Rights struggle of 1965 in Americus, Georgia, home of Martin England and Clarence Jordan's Koinonia Farms. Just seven miles from President Carter's Plains, Georgia, it is also the place the Baptist preacher's son, Marshall Frady, highlighted in a piece white race progressive Warren Fortson, an attorney and Sunday School teacher at First Methodist Church who was run out of town for taking a moderate stance on the upheaval in 1965.

In her provocatively titled introduction, "Sweet Jesus and the Unbearable Madness," Quiros does a magificent job covering the territory of Civil Rights era studies to date. She cites Dorothy Sayers' 1931 effort, *The Dogma is the Drama,* to get at what Flannery O'Connor described as the underbelly of forces that motivate people into action when communities are in conflict. Conceding her debt to Charles Marsh of the University of Virginia's *Project on Lived Theology*,

she takes his prescription for reckoning and reconciliation as the thesis of her book. At the same time, she tells the historical story in a manner akin to a John Grisham southern drama. Here she is in the guts of her book in her own words:

"Marsh describes lived theology as a probing and careful narration of life inside the movement of God in the social world....Lived theology effectively expands what can be categorized as theological, and who can be a "theologian". Theology belongs not only to Barth and Aquinas but also to a more 'varied cast of everyday sinners and saints.'"

In a chapter on the white churches of Lee Street in Americus in 1965, she drives home the point of just how much the laity masterfully used the concept of local church autonomy to control their whites-only policy to the frustration of the pastor, Harold Collins. Collins, who at one time was called a coward by Koinonia founder, Clarence Jordan, moderated his ideals of equality on the altar of Baptist church polity of majority rule. The Methodists weren't any better and got international condemnation after a famous picture of several men with locked arms standing on the steps of the church, forbidding a kneel-in demonstration of folks from entering their house of worship one Sunday morning. That picture evoked a cartoon In the *Los Angeles Times* that caricatured these church leaders as hooded Klansman.

Most White Citizen Council members were recruited in churches and civic clubs, like the Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis organizations, where the deacons and elders in the influential congregations gathered in those days.

Collins left the First Baptist Church in frustration and defeat but was called back as pastor about 15 years later when the church adopted an open door policy.

The Lee Street Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians--those "tall steeple" congregations, as all readers of this essay are well aware of--were characteristic of white churches across the south. Their laity members were of a type. The Duke Civil Rights narrator and historian, Tim Tyson, in his *Blood of Emmett Till,* published in 2018, has a startling segment on just how fast White Citizens Councils spread across the Deep South after *Brown v Board of Education.* It started with just several hundred people in a small province of Mississippi in 1954 and grew to almost a quarter million members in two years. Most White Citizen Council members were recruited in churches and civic clubs, like the Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis organizations, where the deacons and elders in the influential congregations gathered in those days.

One reverberating element of this book, which I believe will have legs, entangles the chatter in the wake of Furman University's and Southern Baptist Seminary's recent examinations of the slave-holding founders and other early supporters. Both Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Furman University were recipients of the largesse of the same slave-holding men. Today, some at Furman are convinced the school is currently in the throes of a headlong dash toward secularism just a few decades after the university's official break with the South Carolina chapter of the Southern Baptist Convention. This dash is also fueled by the threat they feel from fundamentalism, which is chronicled in *Seeking Abraham*, a 40-page report available online.

In her book's introduction, Quiros has some words of advice for those at Furman who may be caught up in identity politics and too much political correctness. Speaking to "secular snobbery" in academic studies of the Civil Rights era, she says early on:

"Besides being poor scholarship, historian's marginalization of unsavory religious views has perpetuated an overly simplistic, triumphalist narrative of the civil rights movement, one that misses the heart of the struggle."

Quiros, now in her early 30s, shows promise for many conversations in the center and the margins of the progressive Baptist movement for some time to come. In the fall of 2018, she wrote a major piece published in the *Washington Post* about fundamentalist Southern Baptists in the town of Luverne, Alabama, and how they were preternaturally disposed to be stalwarts of the Trump Base. In the fall of 2017, she made a presentation at Furman on three "Paladins" key to the Civil Rights milieu of Americus: Marshall Frady, Martin England and Harold Collins.

Other than England, there is only incidental coverage of Frady and Collins in *God with Us*. If there is a reprint, I hope publishers can find a way to include her Furman presentation. Speaking as a crusade of one, I am adamant that Frady and England deserve notice on what I hope is a third pole celebrating Furman greats at Fluor Field--home of single A Red Sox minor league baseball—in downtown Greenville, South Carolina. And in 15 to 20 years, it would not surprise me if Dr. Quiros is on a fourth pole or added to one of the three that I hope by that time continues to stand.

This book is deserving of the attention of every Southerner and anyone wishing to understand the role, or the lack thereof, of the mainline white Protestant churches in the small town South during the days of the Civil Rights Movement. As of early January you can read the introduction of Quiros' book online by entering: yurl.com/ybb2fzy7

Steven Fox (class of 1975) is, like Quiros, England, Frady and Collins, a graduate of Furman University. He is a blogger and freelance writer currently living in Collinsville, Alabama. A longer version of this essay and other writings can be found online at: www.foxof-bama.blogspot.com

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism

by Robin DiAngelo.
Beacon Press, 2018.
Reviewed by Chris Caldwell

Which Bible verse you read often matters more than how you read it. Consider us white folks and racism. For most of my former pastoral career, I would have said that key verses on racism are, "For all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), or "As you did it to one of the least of these" (Matt. 25:40).

Over the past few years my African-American colleagues have taught me to look instead to the story of Zacchaeus: "[I]f I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much" (Luke 19:8). As Clay Calloway once said to our Louisville Empower West weekly pastors gathering, "Reconciliation is an accounting term." Salvation came to Zacchaeus' house not when he saw his sin, but after he owned up to his sin by promising to sacrifice some of the privilege he had acquired.

Racism is about hateful words and callous interactions, to be sure. But even more than that, it is about power and privilege. I have found, among white friends, that it often goes poorly when this idea is unpacked. Denounce the Charlottesville White Nationalists, and whites say "Amen." Point out that by 2020, median white household wealth will likely be 86 times that of African-Americans, thanks in no small measure to the present-day legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, and the congregation often falls silent. (For more, see Brian Thompson's *Forbes* post, Feb. 18, 2018.)

Robin DiAngelo has made a career of walking into this lion's den. A professor, consultant and trainer on racial justice, she regularly challenges whites to take an honest look at our privilege, the lifelong wind at our backs. Her intended audience is not White Nationalists and those who claim the racist mantle; it is instead those of us who denounce racists while at the same time overlooking the privileges we enjoy due to racist systems.

As "white progressives" (DiAngelo's term), our failure to take account of "our investment in a system that serves us" leads to a culture where "white progressives cause the most daily damage for people of color." The real problem, she argues, is not people who hate on the basis of color, but rather "color-blind racism" that says "if we pretend not to notice race, then there can be no racism." For example, someone once said to DiAngelo's African-American co-trainer, "I don't see race; I don't see you as black." Her co-trainer's response was, "Then how will you see racism?"

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DiAngelo says that beneath the surface of white progressivism, we find the "massive depth of racist socialization: messages, beliefs, images, associations, internalized superiority and entitlement, perceptions and emotions. Color-blind ideology makes it difficult for us to address these unconscious beliefs. While the idea of color blindness may have started out as a well-intentioned strategy for interrupting racism, in practice it has served to deny the reality."

Medical researchers warn us that infections are adapting to antibiotics. Likewise, DiAngelo and others (such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva) warn us of more sinister modern strands of racism that are harder to detect and to root out. Bonilla-Silva warns, for example, in his *Racism without Racists*, that recent surveys on racism, if they ask the same questions about racism that were asked in the 1960's, will give us a false sense of progress. Yes, avowed prejudice is on the decline. But segregated neighborhoods, struggling black schools, and profound health and wealth inequalities persist at

rates not that different from the 1960's. I know of only two explanations for this: Either black people are inferior, or racism is alive and well, even though few will salute its flag. Most whites I know reject the explicit racism of black inferiority yet struggle to see the racist structures still resulting in profound racial inequalities. As DiAngelo puts it, "What is particularly problematic about this contradiction is that white people's moral objection to racism increases their resistance to acknowledging their complicity with it."

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What then does she propose? To begin, step outside the "white equilibrium [that] is a cocoon of racial comfort, centrality, superiority, entitlement, racial apathy, and obliviousness, all rooted in an identity of being good people free of racism." In short, we must move beyond our white fragility and "build up our stamina to bear witness to the pain of racism that we cause. It is the responsibility of white people to be less fragile; people of color don't need to twist themselves into knots trying to navigate us as painlessly as possible."

She offers additional steps and strategies, most of which stem from insights gained through interactions with fragile white people in her role as a presenter. Out of her years of experience, DiAngelo helps us see the dynamics at play and offers concrete suggestions for how we can frame difficult conversations. DiAngelo is quick to credit the African-Americans with whom she leads these training events. Clearly, she has learned and is learning much from them; but it also would have been good to have found a way to credit more of these co-presenters by name when relating their insights. In addition to practical suggestions, another strength of the book is the list of books and video presentations found at the end.

Having made a transition from a career serving white churches to now teaching at a black college, I've read many books on racism over the past few years. I don't know of one that I can say has taught me more than *White Fragility*, and which has shown me how far I still have to go.

Chris Caldwell is a professor at Simmons College of Kentucky, a historic black college founded in 1879, and was one of the founders of Empower West, a coalition of African- American and white pastors in Louisville.

Prayer, not Politics, on Wednesday Mornings

by Sen. Chris Coons

When I appear on TV for an interview, a small banner typically appears across the screen, identifying me as US Sen. Chris Coons, a Democrat, from Delaware.

Sometimes, the banner will include that I'm a member of one committee or another, that I'm the sponsor of this bill or that one, or that I've just voted for or against a particular piece of legislation.

But that's it.

That's all the viewer, whether they're a Delawarean watching the news after dinner or a student in New Haven keeping up with current events, is told about the person who's speaking on the screen.

It doesn't say anything about my family or my values, my strengths or my weaknesses. As far as I'm concerned, describing me as just "a Democrat from Delaware" doesn't scratch the surface of who I am and what I believe in, but anyone, including my colleagues, could be forgiven for assuming I'm little more than what's listed on the screen: Senator, Democrat, Delawarean.

As Americans, we're viewing each other more and more through overly simplified, inadequate, and divisive indicators – as urban or rural, white collar or blue collar, religious or agnostic. The list goes on.

Because of that, we're missing the more difficult, more complicated, and more accurate pictures of people who aren't just our political allies or enemies, but our fellow citizens.

In the Senate, we've found one small way to try and counteract that.

It isn't the product of a bill, a commission, or a committee. It's actually pretty simple: Once a week, a bipartisan group of two dozen of us get together, pray together, sing together, and most importantly, listen to each other at something called the Senate Prayer Breakfast.

It takes place on Wednesday mornings in a small, tucked-away room on the first floor of the Capitol. We don't talk about policy, and we definitely don't talk about politics. Instead, we talk about who we are beyond the clipped, cable news biographies written about us. We talk about our fears, our hopes, our challenges, and our families, not as legislators or politicians, but as people. The Senate Prayer Breakfast is about seeing each other as more than a Democrat from Delaware or a Republican from Oklahoma (as my breakfast co-chair, Sen. James Lankford, might be described on cable TV).

What we do every Wednesday morning is seek out the real people behind those simplistic labels, the man or woman with whom we'll have to have difficult conversations on the Senate floor or the committee room later that day. That can be hard for anyone, and it's only possible through a willingness to be truly honest and even vulnerable not only to friends, but also rivals and enemies. That's what makes the Senate Prayer Breakfast different from a congressional delegation trip or running into a colleague in the Senate gym: the attitude of humility and trust with which we open our hearts to the work of the spirit.

The point is that a difficult conversation with a stranger, or even worse, someone about whom you know nothing more than their political affiliation, isn't likely to go well. If instead, that difficult conversation is with someone you've prayed with, confided in, and trusted with your own challenges and worries, I'll submit that you're more likely to find a way forward, to compromise, or at the very least, to amicably agree to disagree.

So, as a member of Congress, a famously dysfunctional organization with approval ratings in the teens, allow me to suggest that much of the important work that goes into successful "difficult conversations" is actually done before the conversation itself. They often don't need to be as difficult as they are.

If we actively choose to seek out those that we're likely to disagree with, whose backgrounds and profiles are different than our own, we're more likely to see our assumptions about them proven wrong than confirmed. We're more likely to find a person not so dissimilar from ourselves, with their own perspective but a shared humanity.

If we, as Hebrews 10:24-25 suggests, "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another," we might find that our difficult conversations are more about our ignorance of one another than the divisions between us.

Most weeknights, after busy days of meetings, hearings, and votes, I take the train home from Washington to Wilmington to be with my family, sleep in my own bed, and get ready to do it all over again in the morning.

On Tuesday nights, though, I usually stay overnight in Washington, so that I can be at the Capitol at 8 a.m. to see my colleagues, hold their hands in prayer, and try to see them for who they truly are.

Senator Chris Coons of Delaware is a member of the Senate Appropriations, Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Ethics committees. He is known for his bipartisan efforts in the Senate to solve national problems. He is a graduate of Yale University with a Masters of Arts in Religion 1992, and Juris Doctorate 1992.

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Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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