

Christian Ethics Today

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"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23

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EthixBytes

A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

*The Once-Ler, from Dr. Seuss’s eco-children classic, **The Lorax.***

“When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why so many people are poor they call me a communist.”

Dom Helder Camara, late archbishop of the diocese of Recife, Brazil.

“We are not just borrowing the earth from our children; we are consuming it, devouring it, and destroying it.”

Rt. Rev. James Jones, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, England.

“I asked [Sen. Kennedy], ‘Where does this rabid concern about poverty come from?’ And he looked at me like I was from Mars. And he said, ‘Have you never read the New Testament?’”

Tom Oliphant, who covered the late Ted Kennedy’s career for four decades for the Boston Globe.

“The U.S. Census Bureau reports that poverty in the U.S. in 2009 has climbed to 39.8 million persons, 13.2% of Americans, up from 12.5% in 2007.”

CNN News.

“After a news report raised questions, evangelist Franklin Graham decided to give up his pay as head of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In 2008, his two salaries, two retirement packages and other payments totaled \$1.2 million (\$669,000 from BGEA, where 55 employees were laid off in February)—he will continue to draw his salary and benefits from Samaritan’s Purse—\$535,000 in 2009.”

McClatchy News (10/11/09).

“They’ve just proven that Jefferson and Madison got it right. It’s a reminder of the difference between religion that’s

state-sponsored and religion that is vital, voluntary and robust.”

*First Amendment scholar **Charles C. Haynes**, on the outpouring of religious speech among Georgia football fans in the bleachers after a high school ended a tradition of Christian banners on the field, fearing a lawsuit (NY Times, 10/27/09).*

“One in 10 U.S. churches employs a woman as senior pastor, double the percentage from a decade ago. Most (58%) work in mainline Protestant churches.”

Barna Group Survey (2009).

“I will not accept health care help from Washington!”

Gov. Rick Perry of Texas, where 1,526,180 children are uninsured (the highest of any state) and 4,214,860 adults 19-64 are uninsured (2nd highest of any state).

“Their behavior was despicable. What they did was wicked (and) when the church does it, you feel God did it.”

*Bible teacher/minister **Anne Graham Lotz**, speaking to believers who have been hurt by the church, who herself left church for a year because of how parishioners treated her and her husband (RNS, 10/09).*

“If you saw a woman struck by a car, would you call an ambulance right away? Or would you first ask for her papers to make sure she was not an illegal immigrant?”

*Washington Post columnist **E. J. Dionne.***

“We’ll rest when all 50 states allow and respect the right of law-abiding citizens to defend themselves from criminal attack.”

NRA spokesman about Tennessee’s new law permitting legal handgun own-

ers to take their weapons onto sports fields.

“Guns do not protect the person carrying them from an assault, but in fact raised the risk by four times or more.”

*University of Pennsylvania researcher **Charles Branas** in a study published in the American Journal of Health.*

“The Pentagon has acknowledged paying a contractor \$1.5 million to monitor journalists’ reporting on the war in Afghanistan . . . to profile journalists and rate their reports as ‘positive,’ ‘negative,’ or ‘neutral’ and then recommend ways to make coverage more positive.”

Stars and Stripes quoted on the DMN editorial page.

“When in the past I’ve raised the ethical implications of these land appropriations [West Bank], Israelis have dismissed me, saying, ‘Hey, you Americans did it to the Indians.’”

Walter Rogers, CNN Bureau Chief in Jerusalem.

“The top ten most peaceful countries in the world: 1. New Zealand; 2. Denmark; 3. Norway; 4. Iceland; 5. Austria; 6. Sweden; 7. Japan; 8. Canada; 9-10. Finland & Slovenia (tied). The U.S. is ranked 83rd out of 144; Iraq is 144th.”

Global Peace Index.

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift; that’s why they call it the present.” ■

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1967)

The Difference Christ Makes: Sex

By David Gushee, McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta, GA

Note: *This article is adapted from the first of three lectures delivered at Missouri Baptist University, October 20-22, 2009.*

When you get invited to give lectures to a college campus, you have to decide right away who you are speaking to—the president, the faculty, or the students. And you have to decide how you are going to speak: academic lecture, sermon, or something other than either one.

Well, with the blessing of your president, I am supposed to speak to you—to students. That's great, because that's what I most like to do anyway.

And as for how to speak to you—well, I think that I want to go for something more like a talk. Just you and me talking, as if we were sitting on the front porch on a Saturday afternoon. More specifically, it will be an intergenerational talk, because by now I am exactly one generation older than you guys. And it will be a talk that each time has three movements. I will begin with some kind of really honest description of what I think is going on in American culture in relation to some subject—the first one being sex. Then I will try to review with you what the Bible and the Christian tradition have said about that subject. Each time we will see an obvious gap between contemporary culture and historic faith. Finally I will offer some practical suggestions about “the Difference Christ Makes” or ought to make, for you in this area of life. In every case I will try to be totally honest and realistic and not hide behind any safe Christian platitudes or religious talk.

Sex and American Culture

America is a country largely liberated from an earlier conservatism, often called “prudishness,” about sex. This came about as a result of the conscious efforts of numerous social reformers during the 20th century, and especially the 1960s and 1970s, who believed

that sex is one of life's highest goods, that the repression of sexual desires was bad for people psychologically, that it was unrealistic to confine sex to marriage, and that it would be a very good thing to use birth control to disentangle sex from the risk of pregnancy.

Certain specific groups were especially committed to sexual liberation. Among these were women who led the feminist movement. Some of these leaders believed that our country's sexual mores were especially repressive for women, taught women to fear sex rather than enjoy it, and saddled women with the risk of pregnancy when it could easily be avoided by regular and easy access to birth control.

Psychologists and psychiatrists were among those who were concerned that sexual repression wreaked havoc on people's emotional lives. Sigmund Freud was merely the first of many when he attributed much personal and social misery to the repression of the sexual drive, in which people often felt guilt and little joy even in having sex in marriage.

Eventually a large community of Christian ministers, theologians, and moral thinkers argued for a rethinking of sex. They wanted it to be seen less as a means to an end—sex makes babies, babies are good, therefore sex must be at least OK—to instead viewing sex as an end in itself. This meant that sex should be viewed as a good gift from a God who must really want us to enjoy ourselves, and also that sex is good in the way it draws us closer to our sexual partner—it makes love grow between sexual partners and this is itself a good thing.

A very different group coalesced around the idea that breaking the sex and marriage connection was an important goal. Some favored the breaking of this connection because they were in favor of anything that weakened the hold of historic Christian

values on a population that they sincerely hoped would become increasingly secular. A growing population of single and divorced people and their advocates increasingly argued that confining sex to marriage was an archaic, old fashioned idea in a society like ours in which marriage was declining. And it wasn't long before the gay rights movement argued either for the legitimacy of sex outside of hetero marriage, or for inclusion in marriage for gays.

And of course there was the discovery of sex by the advertisers and businesses of America, who knew that sex sells. Loosening sexual morals would mean greater tolerance for selling products on the basis of what used to be called sex appeal. Eventually, the dramatic reshaping of American attitudes toward sex meant that sex itself, and not just sex appeal, could increasingly be sold on the open market—as with the marketing of thinly veiled or quite open sexual services on internet sites, like “sensual massage.”

Popular culture certainly got in on the act. In the 1950s, Elvis Presley was seen as shocking for his gyrating hips. By the 1970s, Donna Summer sure sounded like she was in the act of having sex as she moaned out “Love to Love You Baby.” Now even the “censored” versions of the rap songs my daughter sometimes likes to listen to communicate how much the singer would like to make love in the club, or alternatively, that he is into having sex, not into making love. Very little is left to the imagination concerning what the singers would like to do to the women hanging out in the club or the escalade with them, from what angles, and for how much money.

Some raw sociological facts have contributed to the apparent crash and burn of the sex within marriage morality still articulated by most Christian leaders. Probably the most important is that people keep delaying marriage. It

was one thing to tell kids to just say no until they got married, as I did, at 22. That was excruciating enough, and I can tell you that the years between 13 and 22 were more or less insanity producing from the sexual frustration or sexual sin side, as far as I was concerned. But now with average ages of first marriage climbing to the mid to upper 20s, and with many people not marrying at all, our message that sex belongs within marriage is bumping up against hard demographic realities. The data clearly show that the number of people who have Just Said No drops with every year of life. The Christian who refrains from sex till the age of 26 or whatever is definitely in the minority.

Society likes to poke fun at that relatively small demographic of (generally Christian) abstainers. One favorite scenario is film or TV depictions of chastity or celibacy clubs, and then perhaps the hypocrisy and failures of those in them. This happened again this fall on the hilarious new show *Glee*, a family favorite despite its problems, in which the head of the Celibacy Club, Quinn, is now pregnant, and not even with her boyfriend's baby. Great fun for all.

Speaking of unwanted pregnancy, the '60s sexual revolutionaries assured their contemporaries that looser sexual mores would not be a problem because of the magic of birth control, especially the pill. Every woman would just go on the pill, or every man would wear a condom, or both, and after that only those who wanted to get pregnant would ever have to get pregnant. But even now, 40 years later, half of all pregnancies are unintended—partly from birth control failures, and partly from failure to use birth control. And just under half of these unintended pregnancies end in abortion. This is almost universally recognized as bad, even by those who favor our current abortion laws, because of the recognition that an unwanted pregnancy creates a great and terrible crisis in especially a young woman's life, and quite possibly for the man, for both families, and overall, for society.

So here as 2010 dawns America

finds itself in what now feels like a cultural stalemate on these issues. We are not willing as a society to put the genie back in the bottle—we will be a sexually liberated and open society and people will be free to have sex with whoever they want, as long as there is consent and everyone is of age. Meanwhile, we will encourage young people to be responsible with their sexuality and to use birth control rather than risk pregnancy. We also warn young people about disease. Even though AIDS is not quite the problem here that it was a few decades ago, rates of other STDs like syphilis and Chlamydia are on the rise. Many unwanted pregnancies will occur—many of them will be dealt with through legalized abortion, which is ever more deeply entrenched.

People who love each other or even like each other a whole lot will be expected, and expect, to have sex, regardless of marital status. And many sad songs and movies will be written by and about people who got their hearts broken in sexual and romantic relationships that didn't quite work out, as in the funny, sad, romantic comedy tragedy that we most enjoyed at our house this year, "500 Days of Summer." Or for a somewhat older demographic: "He's Just Not That Into You." Sex is assumed; relationships are fragile; hearts are broken; then everyone tries again, scars and all, until they get lucky or give up.

Historic Christian Faith on Sexual Morality

And amidst that culture people will go to church and may hear something like this there. It will strike them as very odd: "*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits is outside his body, but the one who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*" (1 Cor 6:18-20)

For Paul, as for Jesus, as for all writers and teachers in the New Testament, sexual immorality consists of any sexual activity outside of the male-female

marriage relationship. Marriage is the only place where sexual contact is permissible. There it is not just permissible but required, because the spouses in consenting to marriage have renounced total personal autonomy over their own bodies. In marriage, the body is a gift each spouse offers to the other to meet each other's needs for emotional and physical intimacy. It is also the context in which children are to be conceived, born, and raised.

But culture will ask the church, "What about all those broiling sexual desires that we have when we are at the stage of life in which we are not married?" Here Jesus and Paul will simply say: "Deal with it." Either get married, or learn the techniques of "fleeing from sexual immorality." Jesus talked about it under the astonishing language of gouging out the offending eye and cutting off the offending hand. This is hyperbole for running as far away from the source of sexual temptation as possible. Both Jesus and Paul (perhaps Jesus more than Paul) seem convinced that living without sexual intercourse is possible; maybe not easy, but possible. Self-control is one of the gifts of the Spirit and it is self-control that is needed here. In this sense sex outside of God's will is not that different from numerous other appealing things we might like to do but should not, like stealing that nice car that someone left unlocked or giving in to a fit of rage when we are really, really angry.

But why? Why is sex such a big deal? Why not bend a little on this one?

The Bible offers a variety of explanations as to why this is, in fact, a legitimately big deal, at least for those who claim to be followers of Christ.

For Paul, if you look at the longer passage in 1 Corinthians 6, sexual sin violates the integrity not just of the individual's body but of the body of Christ—of which the individual Christian is a member. If I as a Christian use my body for sexual sin, I am sinning against my own body, I am sinning against Christ, and I am also sinning against the body of Christ corporately—that is, my brothers and sisters who believe in Christ.

But this involves a sense of common identity and love for our fellow Christians that is quite elusive in our own individualistic society. It involves the ability to think—in the heat of the moment—that if I do this thing, I am sinning against everyone who bears the name of Christ, to whom I am related as a fellow member of the body of Christ.

That may seem like a stretch. But it fits a bit better with the contemporary scene if we listen to this other instruction from Paul. *“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother [or sister] or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish people for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject people but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.”* (1 Thess 4:3-8)

So here we have the same call for the Christian person to be holy and self-controlled, and the same emphasis on the body being for God and not just for ourselves.

But what’s new is the emphasis on not wronging another person: Employ the gender-specific terms in this sentence that best fit your situation. For me, it would be: “That in this matter no one should wrong his sister or take advantage of her.” This means at least the following: what I do with my body sexually affects not only me, and not only all members of the body of Christ, but the specific human being who I am with. She is my sister (in Christ), and she is not to be wronged by my use of my body. And this really, really matters to Christ, who commands above all that we love people rather than harm them. (Paul goes on to say that directly.)

This is a very realistic warning. Because of the mysterious one-flesh nature of sex, and the self-revealing vulnerability of nakedness and inti-

macy, people become vulnerable to one another here in a way that does not occur anywhere else. Paul here says that to take advantage of someone’s naked vulnerability in sex is a grave wrong. How many movies, TV shows, and songs are about exactly that? Sometimes these are about men who give themselves away only to find that they have been used and abandoned; that was how *500 Days of Summer* worked out. More often it is about women used up and abandoned, which was more often the theme of *He’s Just Not That Into You*, and seems more often like what happens in life.

The Difference Christ Makes

So here we have the first of our three great clashes that we will consider in these three lectures. American culture has abandoned the sexual ethic in which sex belongs only in a lifetime marriage, and has replaced it with either an ethic of sex is for fun, just be safe, or sex is for love, just be sure you really love and are loved. For those keeping score at home I call these the “mutual consent ethic,” and the “loving relationship ethic,” respectively.

Classic Christian sexual morality still teaches that sex belongs in marriage. Some Christian leaders and teachers have abandoned this ethic, but most, at least in our evangelical, Baptist, and official Catholic world—have not.

Christians today—you, personally, my students, my children—have to decide whether you will go with the contemporary American ethic in one of its two forms or the classic Christian sexual ethic.

I do not know what you will choose. I know that I chose the classic Christian sexual ethic. But I can tell you that it wasn’t easy. I struggled mightily. It was indispensable that beginning at 19 I dated and eventually married Jeanie Grant, a woman who was steadfastly committed to this ethic and who resisted me when my resolve on this issue grew weak—and yet with whom I enjoyed plenty of affection and lots of hope of great sexual intimacy later.

It helped a lot that I was in a Christian subculture in which this

ethic was still largely taught and widely attempted, at least. It helped that we didn’t wait forever to get married. And 25 years later, Jeanie and I have only been with each other and enjoy a wonderful marriage. I don’t think it’s coincidental that the same self-control required to abstain from sex before marriage was available and put to good use to abstain from sex with anyone other than each other. Now we are so welded to each other after 25 years that being with anyone else in any way is inconceivable. What a joyful ride.

A pattern becomes visible here that will surface on the other two topics I will address—and on many others:

- Cultural practices in our own nation sometimes stray profoundly from God’s plan.
- We must never assume that just because something is done in our culture that it is okay for Christians to do it.
- Christians must be the kinds of people whose fluency with biblical teaching and values enables us to clearly tell the difference between cultural practices and biblical values.
- Cultural practices that stray from God’s plan end up hurting people a lot, and this hurt is also expressed by the same culture, in media and in, for example, the number of people on antidepressants. We need to pay attention to those cries of pain and learn from them. They can be a bridge that can help us explain Christian beliefs.

On the matter of sexual morality, changing cultural patterns have mainly brought less stable relationships, more sex-related heartbreak, more exploitation of women, more unwanted pregnancy, more abortion, and a weakening of marriage as an institution.

Christians need to develop a counterculture in which we reinforce biblical values with one another and learn to live differently from the world around us where necessary, as in this case. As we embody—not just talk about, but live out—a different way of life, we bear powerful witness to those around us of the difference that Christ makes. ■

Does God Twitter?

By John K. Burk, Professor, Seton Hall University.

On a recent trip to Texas I was traveling the Interstate 35 corridor between San Antonio and Waco and noticed a church sign on the side of the road advertising “30 Minute Worship” and directing passersby to a website for complete details. Curious, I obliged.

The site details the approach of the church to weekly worship services, which is divided into three categories: worship, word, and response. Each of these is allotted a particular amount of time totaling—you guessed it—30 minutes. Worship lasts about 10 minutes in order “to connect you with God.” This is followed by “the most important part of the worship gathering,” the “word” section of the service, during which a sermon is delivered in 12-15 minutes. (One can access an audio file of a sample sermon on the website, which I did, and which lasted 13 minutes and 38 seconds).

Finally, five minutes are offered for people to pray and give in response to what they have experienced in the previous 25 minutes. This got me thinking about a conversation I had recently shared with a friend who is a devoted Catholic Christian about the influence of Greek thought on the Christian tradition and the importance of patience in the modern world of limitless news, entertainment, and other distractions.

There is an instructive line in one of Plato’s early dialogues, *Meno*, in which Socrates inquires of his conversation partner, Anytus, how Anytus can “know whether a thing is good or bad of which [Anytus] is wholly ignorant.”¹ At the risk of offending Socratic sensibilities, I must admit that my knowledge of the church advertised on the side of I-35 is bound to what is written on its website and what I have heard in its audio files.² Nevertheless, as a member of the Christian church, I am mindful of the traditions and theology that inform Christian worship

practices and, consequently, I want to offer some general observations about what I think are potential problems to promoting shortness of a worship service and delineating with such specificity what one ought to expect with regard to his or her worship of God.

Stating the Unstated

Presumably, the purpose in advertising a worship service that lasts 30 minutes is to attract those who believe their lives are too harried to include a service of worship that extends much beyond the length of a typical sitcom. The unstated message of the church in question is, of course, that Sunday worship lasts *only* 30 minutes, not more. It is doubtful that a sign advertising a four hour service every Sunday would be much of a draw for those who might consider attending that particular service (for good reason). To offer a service that lasts half the time of most church services seems an efficient, effective way of getting the message across to people that at this church, you can “get in, get out, get on with your life.” That shibboleth may be true for those hawking fast food, but there are some notable implications for applying a similar ethic to services of Christian worship.

What does the championing of brevity in worship say about how we think of the ways God communicates? Does God “Twitter”? That is, does God communicate with humans in snippets, or 140 character descriptions of nature, sin, commandment, or revelation? It is not my intention to suggest that God is bound only by particular ways of communication, for surely that is not true. But if the witness of the biblical narrative tells us anything about God’s communication with people, it would seem that those with whom God communicated first “waited patiently on the Lord” (Ps 37:7) before hearing from God.

Take, for example, the tortuous

(and tortured) history of the Israelites. The recorded times during which God communicated with the Israelites—through fire, flood, stuttering leaders, talking donkeys, or directly—tend to come at the end of a protracted period of waiting. In the New Testament even Jesus frustrated the earnestness of the disciples who sought an answer to a seemingly simple question: “When will the things you have promised us become reality?” (Mk 13:4, paraphrased). After Jesus held forth in extended peroration on everything from false prophets to the “abomination of desolation,” he confessed to the disciples that he did not actually know the answer to their question with the enigmatic statement that “of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mk 13:32). In other words, Jesus’ advice to the disciples was “to hurry up and wait.” But not only are they admonished to wait; the implicit reminder is that they are to wait according to a timetable that they did not author.

How much more is this true for Christian worship? Tom Schwanda suggests that those who advocate concision in worship (which he amusingly refers to as the “McEucharist”) encounter difficulties when considering that “the Scriptures remind us to slow down (Ps 46:10) and to linger in and enjoy the presence of Jesus Christ (Lk 10:38-42). They call us to wait on the Lord, not to hurry the Almighty so that his appearance can fit into our overpacked schedules....”³ If the purpose of worship is to connect the worshippers to God, it seems plausible that the connection between God and humans must be established on God’s terms, which brings me to my second point.

The “Hidden God”

In his “Theses for Heidelberg Disputation,” Martin Luther sug-

gested that one begins to understand God rightly when that person “perceives what is visible of God, God’s ‘backside’ [Ex 33:23], by beholding the sufferings and the cross.”⁴ This, what is known as Luther’s concept of the “hidden God,” means that it is impossible to understand the majesty of God without looking first to the suffering, cruelty, and death of the cross.⁵ In other words, the relationship between the nature and character of God is paradoxical: God is at once majestic and powerful, and at the same time capable of powerlessness to the point of ignominious execution.

There is, moreover, a paradoxical nature to the ways that God relates to humans. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, the only thing he was granted was a glimpse at the backside of God (Ex 33:18-23). The reason that God is considered “hidden” in this Lutheran sense is that God seems silent, or absconded, in those places where he is most expected.

Consider 9/11. How many pop-culture atheists offered the hackneyed (and philosophically sophomoric) argument that the presence of tragedy necessarily precludes the existence of a benevolent God? And how many well-meaning, though misguided, Christians pointed out “signs” of God’s presence among the wreckage

of the twin towers (e.g., metal beams in the shape of a cross)? Rather than offering apologies for God, the task for Christians should have been one of continuing to affirm the presence and grace of God on a day when he seemed most absent. “Lord we believe, help our unbelief” (Mk 9: 24, paraphrased) should have been, and should continue to be, the collective prayer of the Christian church.

When thinking about the ethics of Christian worship practices, it is helpful to take note of Luther’s wisdom. Delineating a worship service into blocks of time with the promise that one will “personally connect with God” betrays a hubris that is both ignorant of the theology, history, and purpose of Christian worship, and unwilling to accept the fact that there are times in our lives when God seems hidden from our understanding. Far better is the promise to seek God earnestly and to “walk humbly with God” (Mic 6:8), with reverence for the mysterious nature of God.

All worship services are obviously constrained by the limits of time in some way. A service that lasts an hour may not be any more meaningful or reverential than one that lasts only 30 minutes. The point, though, is that worship is meant to be a time for Christians to take a break, disconnect

from the wired world, and collectively to wait upon God. It is not a time to put God “on the clock.” As Schwanda suggests, “While not every person enters a church service with pure motives, from a biblical perspective the purpose of this gathering is to recognize God and respond to him with appropriate joy and gratitude. This implies that the God who is greater than humans who meet together in his name is the one who sets the agenda for worship, and not the reverse.”⁶

Virtuous Patience

Not only is the capacity for patience an important characteristic for everyone involved in a worship service, but the association of patience with honorable intentions has a long history in the Christian tradition and in the Greek philosophy that influenced Christianity.

When Aristotle wrote his *Nicomachean Ethics* almost four centuries before the advent of Christ, he began by asking a question that later became central to Christianity: What is a good life? He suggested that the answer to that question is determined by acknowledging that a good life is constituted by the “highest” of goods, happiness. And that happiness is achieved by obtaining certain virtues; for example, courage and temperance (two of the “cardinal” virtues of Greek philosophy).



When the apostle Paul spoke of those things like faith, hope, and love that make a person virtuous (1 Cor 13), he was continuing in the tradition of the Greek philosophers, but Paul was replacing their virtues with more theologically specific virtues. Thus it was love, not happiness, which was the highest good of human life for Paul.

One aspect crucial to understanding virtues, be they philosophical or theological, is that early thinkers believed that virtues would only become a part of a person's moral nature when they were developed as habits. In the same way that a violinist masters his instrument through practice, a person cannot achieve moral excellence without practicing the virtues. I cannot one day simply decide that I am going to be a more loving person; my desire to be more loving must be met by my attempts to learn what it means to love better, and to put my learning into practice to the degree that the capacity to love well becomes second nature to me.

The reason that Paul pointed to love as the highest virtue is because love is synonymous with God. As a seminary professor of mine once said, "The most basic definition scripture gives of God is that 'God is love.'" Notice that when Paul detailed the characteristics

of love to the Corinthians, the first thing he mentioned was that "love is patient" (1 Cor 13: 4). In other words, we can begin to understand love better when we are patient. While love is the highest good for the Christian, according to Paul, patience is the virtue that enables love. In fact, patience is the virtue by which all other virtues are realized because nothing can be made a habit without first possessing the capacity for patience.

With this in mind, patience becomes that much more important in the practice of Christian worship. If the purpose of worship is to "connect" a person with God, who is love, the first thing a person needs to be capable of is patience. It is difficult, if not impossible, to inculcate the habit of patience in a service where the seats barely have time to get warm before worshippers are dismissed.

The above has been written not to suggest that the efforts of the "30 minute" church in question are in vain, but to suggest that in a world where time is "of the essence," it is less than helpful to rush worshippers through a service that is arguably already too short.

To connect with God, even when seemingly "hidden," we must be willing to disconnect from all that discour-

ages patience in our lives. To live as a Christian means to be willing to accept a life spent in waiting for that which has been promised to us by the one in whom all time begins and ends. ■

- 1 *The Dialogues of Plato*, (Bantam Books: New York, 1986), 220.
- 2 For this reason I have chosen not to disclose the name of the church, but I should note that the church does offer longer worship services at different times, and it clarifies that the shorter service is for those who want an alternative to "traditional" church, have jobs on Sundays, or who have "limited time."
- 3 Tom Schwanda, "McEucharist: The Allure of 'Fast-Food' Worship" in Robert E. Webber (ed.), *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, Vol. 2, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 400.
- 4 Martin Luther, "Theses for Heidelberg Disputation" in John Dillenberger (ed.) *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 502.
- 5 Cf. Alistair E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, (New York: Blackwell, 1985).
- 6 Schwanda, 400.



The Abuse of Scripture and Gender Inequality

By Manfred T. Brauch, President (ret.), Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary.

Editor's Note: In the SBC LIFE magazine series on *Doctrine*, Randy Stinson (dean at Louisville's Southern Seminary) wrote an article (*Male and Female*, 12/11/09, 8-9.), which uses numerous scriptures to support the gender inequality position of the SBC and The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, of which he is president. The following article was published about the same time in the December 11, 2009 issue of *ARISE*, the E-Newsletter of *Christians for Biblical Equality*, and is adapted and reprinted here with the permission of CBE and the author.

To abuse Scripture is to do violence to its message and meaning so that its redemptive truth regarding God's intention for the absolute equality of men and women in all areas of human life is twisted and distorted.

One such abuse is "*the abuse of selectivity*." This abuse does not consist of an outright distortion of the meaning of given texts, but entails ignoring or rejecting other parts or passages of Scripture that support a different teaching, present an alternate perspective, or advocate an opposing view. Thus, supporters of gender inequality claim the authority of biblical passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 or 1 Timothy 2: 11-14, where the voice of women is restricted, but close their minds and hearts to the clear teaching or implication of biblical texts that show women as the first carriers of the good news of Jesus' resurrection to his male disciples (Lk 24:1-11); as active participants in leadership in the early church (Rom 16:1-7); as gifted by the Spirit for the authoritative proclamation of the Word of the Lord (Acts 2:17-18); and as partners with men in the work of the gospel (Phil 4:2-3).

The "*abuse of words*" has contributed significantly to the perpetuation of gender inequality within Christian

communities. This abuse happens when words or expressions in the biblical text are "decoded" in ways that are not faithful to the original "encoding" by the biblical authors.

A clear example is the way in which the designation of the woman as man's "helper" (Gen 2:18, 20) is traditionally understood as "assistant" or servant," designating someone in a secondary, subordinate position. However the Hebrew word for "helper" (*ezer*) does not carry this meaning at all. The term is used throughout the OT *exclusively* as a designation of God who upholds, redeems, strengthens, and rescues Israel. It is clear from these texts that God is not depicted as Israel's "assistant." Thus, the word "helper"—rather than indicating a subordinate status—implies strength. In Genesis, woman is presented to the man redemptively, to save him from "aloneness." She is "fit for him" (his partner). There is no hint of secondary or subordinate status.

"*Theological contexts*" are all too frequently abused in the interpretation of texts and this happens when the larger theological perspective of an extended passage, such as Ephesians 5:22-25, which can be used to require the submission of wives only when the larger theological thrust of the entire chapter is ignored.

Chapter 5 concerns an admonition to "be imitators of God" and to "live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." These passages celebrate Christ's servanthood, which is the larger *theological context* for all human relationships, including that of male-female, husband-wife. That is why 5:22-25 begins with the specific expression in 5:21, where Paul states that one of the evidences of the Spirit's presence in our lives is "subordinating ourselves to one another in awe of Christ." It is this "mutual self-subordination, modeled on Christ's

servanthood, which determines the husband-wife relationship articulated in 5:22-25. It is "in awe of Christ's self-giving," that husbands and wives are to "give themselves over to one another in servant love."

Several other abusive readings which lead to patriarchal (over-under) understanding of the male female relationship are the *abuses of literary, historical, and cultural contexts*. What I seek to show throughout my book¹ is the cumulative weight of these various abuse of Scripture are an offense to the God who created man and woman in his image; called them into equal and complementary partnership; and in Christ came to set them free from the cursed, demeaning, and lessening reality of hierarchical bondage.

The continuing denial of this absolute, essential, and functional equality in large sectors of the Christian community worldwide continues to contribute to abet, and reinforce the widespread abuse of women, and is therefore a major roadblock to the advance of the gospel.

Thus the "abuse of words" often does violence to the meaning and message of Scripture. I now wish to place this insight into the larger literary and theological context of Genesis 1-3. For it is the abuse of this context in Scripture which continues to undergird a patriarchal understanding of the male-female order.

In Gen 1:26-27, human beings, in male-female polarity, are created in the image of God. In that male-female polar complementarity they are, *together*, given the mandate to exercise responsible sovereignty within and over the rest of the created order. These affirmations are powerful theological convictions that stand radically over against the cultural religious environment within which Israel's faith traditions were being shaped. For in that environment, women were largely

held to have been created from inferior material.

This *general* male-female nature and structure of humanity, presented in Genesis 1, is now articulated in Genesis 2 in terms of its particularity in the man-woman relationship (Gen 2:18-23) as the grounding for the covenant relationship of marriage (Gen 2:24-25; cf. Mk 10:5-9). Viewed from the theological perspective of Genesis 1:26-27, the reason why the animals cannot be man's "suitable helper" is because they are not created in the "image of God." They are not the man's equal, cannot correspond to him "face to face" ("fit for him"), cannot be his partners in exercising stewardship over the earth.

Further, the woman's creation from the man (Gen 2:21-22), as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23), signifies that she is made from the same essence and substance, a further confirmation of the Genesis 1:26-27 affirmation of their equality—both before God (as God's co-image bear-

ers) and in relationship with each other.

These literary and theological connections—together with the meaning of "helper" as having redemptive rather than subordinate connotations—make it impossible to interpret the Genesis 2 narrative of man and woman in terms of either essential or functional inequality. The concept of a creationally intended male-female hierarchy (superior-inferior, leader-follower, authority figure-assistant) is the result of the abusive reading of Scripture, and as such contrary to the order of creation.

This literary and theological unity of Genesis 1-2 provides the overarching theological anthropology for our hearing of the male-female relationship that is a result of the Fall in Genesis 3. The "rule of the man over the woman" (Gen 3:16) must be seen as a dramatic departure from the order of creation.

The Creator's good design and intent for the man-woman relationship has become twisted and dis-

torted. The hierarchical over-under condition of the male-female relationship is bondage to sin. It is, therefore, *not prescriptive* (as God's intention for the man-woman relationship) *but descriptive* (the nature of that relationship when marred by sin). It is God's creation design, *not its distortion by sin*, which must function as the normative paradigm for this relationship.

Within the larger literary and theological context of the whole of Scripture, the human condition—in its distorted, cursed existence—is the object of God's redeeming and transforming work. This work culminated in Jesus Christ, whose sacrificial servanthood liberates humanity from its bondage to sin, including the cursedness of male-female hierarchy. ■

1 Manfred T. Brauch, *Abusing Scripture: The Consequences of Misreading the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009).



The New Baptist Covenant and Baptist Ecumenism in North America

By Richard V. Pierard, Prof. of History Emeritus Hendersonville, NC

Although the majority of the world's Baptists reside in the United States, it is a frightfully divided community. Although considerable progress had been made in the twentieth century to bring Baptists into a closer relationship, many chose to remain apart from the larger community. These were essentially conservative groups, distinguished by a strong commitment either to "landmark" principles or some form of separatist fundamentalism, and while others were geographically isolated or committed to historical beliefs and practices that put them outside the "mainstream." This growing sense of unity, however, was dealt a severe blow when the nation's largest Baptist body, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), decided in 2004 to withdraw from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), the principal agency that fostered Baptist cooperation and closer ties and a body that it played a crucial role in forming a century earlier. The reasons for this action are extremely controversial and the subject of intense polemics, and another essay would be required just to address the matter. The intent of this paper is to examine a new effort to try to bring Baptists back together, that arose in the years after the schism and in which the BWA's North American affiliate played a significant role. This is essentially an exercise in *Zeitgeschichte* and a study very much in progress.

Background of the New Baptist Covenant

The precise origins of the movement are shrouded in obscurity. Bruce Prescott, executive director of Oklahoma Mainstream Baptists, whose organization was in on the founding, claims that the initiative came from Mercer University, which had recently severed ties with the Georgia state convention because it had come under conservative control

and wanted to expand its mission in the world. Former president Jimmy Carter was asked for help, and he agreed on the condition that Mercer's incoming new president, William D. (Bill) Underwood, would take the lead in organizing a meeting for this purpose.¹ Accordingly, Underwood and the former president brought 18 Baptist leaders to The Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia on April 10, 2006. The group represented more than 20 million Baptists across North America. Among the dignitaries present were the general secretary of the American Churches USA, the presidents or executive secretaries of four African American Baptist bodies in the country—National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission (a fifth, the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, joined the group later in the year)—the coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the general secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries, and the executive directors of the Baptist General Association of Virginia and Baptist General Convention of Texas, both major SBC state conventions.² Missing from the list was a representative of the SBC itself. Why that is so is unclear, but the SBC has consistently maintained they were not invited.

At the meeting they agreed to a document called "A North American Baptist Covenant," later renamed "A New Baptist Covenant." The text reads as follows:

We Baptists of North America covenant together to: Create an authentic and prophetic Baptist voice for these complex times; Emphasize traditional Baptist values, including sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for public and private morality; and Promote peace with justice, feed

*the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the strangers among us, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.*³

The attendees agreed they should work together toward the common purposes of joining races, cultures, geographies, and "convention affiliations" as a living testament of harmony in action. They also determined that they would try to bring together thousands of Baptists who would embrace the potential of unity around these principles. This was the first time that the New Baptist Covenant concept came to public notice.

During the next year a flurry of activity occurred. The organizers worked to build a broad coalition, recruiting Baptist public and religious figures associated with both political parties who shared these convictions. Former Democratic president Bill Clinton and vice-president Al Gore came on board as did the Republican governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee and senators from Iowa and South Carolina, Charles Grassley and Lindsey Graham. Two prominent blacks, David Satcher, former surgeon general of the United States, and Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, and the best-selling novelist, John Grisham, agreed to be involved in the enterprise and speak at its conclave.

The Rev. Dr. Jimmy R. Allen, a member of the founding group, was named coordinator for the New Baptist Covenant. A distinguished SBC pastor and leader, he had served as president of the Texas Baptist Convention (1972-73), president of the SBC (1978-79), pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Antonio (1968-1980), president of the Radio and Television Commission of the SBC (1980-90), and the first moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF).⁴

Since the initiators were essentially an ad hoc group, they needed to establish a continuing organization, or better yet, find some group that could carry out the functions they envisioned. They found a ready-made structure in the North American Baptist Fellowship, one of the six regional fellowships of the Baptist World Alliance. However, it was essentially moribund and had achieved little in the years since its founding in 1966, other than hold occasional fellowship meetings. Alan Stanford, a former BWA office staff person and currently pastor of a church, was called back into service to take charge of a renewed NABF to which was given the task of coordinating the next round of activity.

Various Baptist agencies that had links to the NABF were recruited for the NBC endeavor, and 80 representatives from 30 denominations and other bodies (now labeled “partner organizations”) as well as some Baptist media bodies assembled at The Carter Center on January 9, 2007 for a second meeting. At the conclusion the announcement was made that a national convocation would take place in Atlanta on January 30-February 1, 2008. The theme of the gathering was to be “Unity in Christ,” and its biblical basis would be Luke 4:18-19, Jesus’ statement in his first sermon in the Nazareth synagogue: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

This call to pursue both evangelism and ministry to the needy was to be the biblical foundation of the Covenant.⁵

Hopes for Unity Dealt a Mortal Blow

The hope for achieving unity was dealt a crushing blow by the SBC leadership. On the following day Baptist Press (the official voice of the SBC) issued a release condemning the New Baptist Covenant. It declared that leaders from the SBC were “not invited to attend” the meeting at

The Carter Center. It further charged that Mercer University President Bill Underwood said in the concluding press conference that the 2008 gathering was meant to draw attention away from “the Baptists who have the microphone,” that is, those who voice conservative views in the media, and that “North America desperately needs a true Baptist witness.”

Frank Page, pastor of FBC, Taylors, South Carolina, and the current president of the SBC, condemned these remarks. He told Baptist Press: “Instead of engaging in a war of words, let’s have a reality check. Word games are fine, but reality says Southern Baptists are presenting a positive life-changing message, impacting our culture with our ministries and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

Morris H. Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, maintained that Jimmy Carter’s contention at the press conference that Baptists have been negative and exclusionary rang hollow. “He has been one of the most vocal critics of Southern Baptists, using ‘fundamentalist’ as a pejorative and drawing a caustic comparison between Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to power in Iran and the resurgence of conservative leadership being elected in the SBC.” Chapman insisted that surveys show that people view Southern Baptists favorably and that the denomination gives millions of dollars annually to help the poor through various initiatives. “The great difference in our approach from liberals is that in ministering to the body, we do not neglect the needs of the soul, and [last year] the Gospel was shared with over 500,000 people with over 32,000 professions of faith resulting.”⁶

In a statement on May 26, 2007 Page declared unequivocally, “I will not be a part of any smokescreen leftwing liberal agenda that seeks to deny the greatest need in our world, that being that the lost be shown the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” He also repeated the claim that “Southern Baptists were not invited to be part of the ini-

tial meetings of this group.”⁷

Various other Southern Baptists hurled the charge that the NBC was a political stunt aimed solely at boosting support among Baptists for the Democratic Party and its policies. Since the SBC leadership had been in bed with the Republican Party for so long that they had developed bed sores, this was not hard to understand. For example, Dr. Richard Land, president of the SBC’s political lobby, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said to *Washington Post* reporter Jacqueline Salmon shortly before the “celebration” in Atlanta opened: “This is a meeting that is being called by two former Democratic presidents—one of whom has a wife who is a major candidate for the Democratic nomination for president. Coincidence? I think not.”⁸

The rising tide of Southern Baptist criticism made Mike Huckabee, now an active candidate for the GOP nomination, increasingly uneasy about the event, and he seized on a negative comment by Jimmy Carter as a pretext for disengaging himself from the NBC. In an interview with an Arkansas newspaper on May 11, 2007 the former president responded to a question asking him to compare George W. Bush’s foreign policy with that of Richard Nixon: “I think as far as the adverse impact on the nation around the world, this administration has been the worst in history.” Huckabee announced in an interview with a Southern Baptist newspaper, the *Florida Baptist Witness*, that he had only “tentatively” agreed to participate in the NBC gathering. But in light of the “very harsh comments toward our president” and the roster of speakers—including the “very, very liberal” Marian Wright Edelman—he felt it would be best if he withdrew. He did not want to “appear to be giving approval to what could be a political, rather than spiritual agenda.”⁹ On the eve of the convocation Republican Senator Lindsey Graham dropped out as well, offering the lame excuse that he needed to be working in John McCain’s presidential campaign. Carter repeatedly affirmed

that this was not a political gathering, but as far as Southern Baptists were concerned, his words fell on deaf ears. The New Baptist Covenant's effort to establish bipartisan credentials had been stymied.

Behind this lay the reality that Carter had tried repeatedly in the 1990s to bring about reconciliation between the SBC moderates and conservatives, but after failing in this he aligned himself with the breakaway Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. That gained for him the undying enmity of the SBC leadership, and the hatred was so deep that Baptist Press would not even acknowledge that he, one of their own, had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Another problem was the role of the NABF, an entity of the Baptist World Alliance. The SBC had dropped out of the BWA in 2004 because of its allegedly "liberal" tendencies, and to cooperate with the BWA now would be an admission that the leaders had been mistaken. For this action they have remained stubbornly unrepentant.

Another threat came from the left—in the form of gay activism. Two gay friendly organizations, the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB) and the Baptist Peace Fellowship, had applied to become affiliates of the NABF. That would have qualified them to be among the 30+ official participating organizations. (The rationalization of non-NABF/BWA affiliation was in fact being used to help explain to an incredulous public why the SBC was not participating in the NBC con-

vocation.) The NABF did not grant the desired membership. In an email to the two groups NABF secretary Alan Stanford explained: "This is not a rejection of either organization nor the people [in them]. It is a recognition that we cannot hold together the large coalition of Baptists needed to create a new Baptist voice in North America and address the issue of sexual orientation at the same time. We ask for your forbearance and understanding." He went on to say that the Atlanta event was designed to unite an ideologically diverse array of Baptists around the common causes of promoting evangelism, fighting poverty, and supporting religious freedom.

The executive director of AWAB, Ken Pennings, retorted that the organizers were ignoring one of the biggest social justice issues by avoiding the controversial topic of sexuality and the church. Stanford explained in an interview that including groups that explicitly upheld gay rights as a justice issue would imply changing the terms of the meeting and could cause an already fragile coalition to unravel. "We agreed that we would focus on those things that there was broad agreement about, and there is not broad agreement on this subject."

As one might expect, the response did not satisfy representatives of the two groups, but they decided to attend as individuals and try to bring up gay issues.¹⁰ They were not allocated a booth in the exhibition hall at the NBC celebration, but a sympathetic body, the Alliance of Baptists, allowed them to display materials and

talk with passers-by at its booth.

The New Baptist Covenant Celebration

Somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 people, depending on whose figures one accepts (Baptist Press claimed only 9,000 at the most, and 8,000 in the last session), streamed into the cavernous Georgia World Congress Center in downtown Atlanta for the three-day conclave. It had been timed to coincide with the Joint Midwinter board meetings of the four black Baptist conventions in Atlanta, and that guaranteed a large turnout of African Americans for the sessions. It received extensive coverage on national television and newspapers. There were five plenary sessions that ran two and one-half hours each, and all speakers and musical performances were held to a tight schedule.

One could speak "as the Lord led" so long as it was within a very fixed time period. Each session centered around the topic of "Baptist Unity In..." with reference to the theme Scripture verse: In Seeking Peace with Justice, In Bringing Good News to the Poor, In Respecting Diversity, In Welcoming the Stranger, and In Setting the Captive Free.

Each session was chaired and a formal prayer offered by a chief executive of a participating body. A seminary student was selected to do the Scripture reading. There were congregational songs at the beginning and end. Three or four individual musicians or musical groups performed in each session, and the music styles were quite diverse (and



multicultural) in character. There was a sermon by a gifted preacher—two blacks, two white men, and a white woman—and a “testimony” by a variety of noted people. Finally there was the “message” by the featured celebrity—Jimmy Carter, Marian Wright Edelman, John Grisham, Sen. Charles Grassley, and Bill Clinton. As an attendee I was struck by the number of African Americans, ethnic minorities, and women that were on the program as well as in the audience. It was the most diverse Baptist gathering I had ever experienced.

On Thursday and Friday afternoons there were special interest breakout sessions (two each day) that involved a wide range of Baptist social activists, academics, missionaries, public officials, pastors, medical personnel, lawyers, and others. Some 75 individuals led or presented at the workshops, which were grouped into sixteen themes. They were: prophetic preaching, engaging the criminal justice system, breaking cycles of poverty, finding common ground with other faiths, youth at a crossroad, evangelism—proclaiming God’s Good News, reaching out to the sick, peacemaking, welcoming a stranger, faith and public policy, the Spirit of the Lord upon me, sexual exploitation, race as a continuing challenge, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, religious liberty and separation of church and state, and responding to natural disasters.

A highlight was a luncheon presentation by former vice president Al Gore on the second day of the convention. Some 2,500 people attended the sold-out luncheon (Baptist Press snidely pointed out its cost of \$35) where the Nobel laureate explained his passion for environmental stewardship was influenced by his Baptist faith. In a gripping audio-visual presentation (which I witnessed) he discussed the research behind his award-winning film on the climate change crisis, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and retooled its message to incorporate Scripture texts and descriptions of how his religious beliefs shaped his message. He made a strong appeal for believers to pro-

tect the world from global warming. “There is a distinct possibility that one of the messages coming out of this gathering and this new covenant is creation care—that we who are Baptists of like mind and attempting in our lives to glorify God, are not going to countenance the continued heaping of contempt on God’s creation.¹¹ With conservatives in America solidly aligned against combating what they feel is a myth of global warning, this was a frontal challenge to the prevailing ideology of the Republican Party.

The organizers struggled as hard as they could to keep the gathering nonpolitical and focused on matters of meeting human needs. In his opening address Jimmy Carter affirmed that unity was the distinctive element of the gathering and pledged: “There will be no criticism of others—let me say again—no criticism of others or exclusion of any Christians who would seek to join this cause.” At a press conference near the end, he told reporters the convocation lived up to his nonpolitical billing. “We have deliberately avoided any identification by politics. It’s been a wonderful mixture of cohesive, different groups. All of us, so far as I know, have been completely unified.”

Bill Clinton sounded like a preacher as he extended an olive branch to the SBC. He suggested that the differences within the Southern Baptist community were due to competing interpretations of the Epistle of James: “that people would know our faith by our works.” Conservatives and progressives defined good works in different ways, but “we all believe we are doing what we can.” The groups just “read the obligations of Scripture in a different way.” Calling for humility and respect, Clinton maintained that “we should not let our response to the people who disagree with us be dictated by what they say about us or even how they treat people we care for. If there is any chance that this covenant can become an embracing one, that there can be a whole community, then there has to be a chance that we can find love.”¹² I listened carefully to the

plenaries and was surprised at how the speakers tried to keep their presentations nonpolitical, even though politics are central to so many issues today.

Of course, few of the plenary speakers were people who would have been welcome at the annual SBC meeting. The frontal challenge to global warming and some of the other social issues dealt with would not have set well with SBC conservatives, especially Richard Land’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The unspoken agenda of the NBC was, as Tony Campolo (a plenary speaker) put it in a post-conference assessment, “to provide a Baptist alternative to the politics and practices of the SBC.” Those who attended represented denominations with a combined membership of more than 20 million other Baptists, and the leaders of the SBC could see their presence “as a kind of ‘in your face’ demonstration that they were tired of being painted by the general public with the same broad brush that has wrongly allied them with many positions taken by the SBC.”¹³ A Baptist Press reporter claimed that plenary speakers frequently criticized the SBC’s conservative leadership but the only specific he gave was novelist John Grisham’s observation that some Christians read the Bible with narrow literalness and that those Baptists who believe Scripture limits some roles in the church to men are intolerant.¹⁴

Space does not allow further discussion of the content of the various presentations, but some commentators observed that the convention tested the limits of “big tent” diversity. How far are Baptists prepared to go to confront the divisive issues of race, theology, and ideology and how much healing can be achieved. Some felt the numbers of African Americans in the audience was too limited. Others wanted to move more quickly to achieve equality of women in ministry. Still others regarded the issue of abortion as paramount. And the whole question of homosexual rights was simply swept under the carpet.

Quo Vadis—New Baptist Covenant?

Where would the NBC enterprise go from here? To promote conciliation with the SBC, Carter declared he was in contact with President Frank Page and had promised him a full report on the conclave and its possible outcomes. Program chair Jimmy Allen believed the practical applications of the unity/service theme advanced in the special interest sessions would provide the backbone of structure for fleshing out what the convocation means and how participants will continue what had begun in Atlanta. In fact, seminary students who attended the celebration and received course credit for this were assigned to take notes in the sessions regarding proposals for cooperation in ministry and to collect the email addresses of participants who wanted to continue collaboration on specific policy issues.¹⁵

Those at the celebration had been invited to provide feedback, and at a follow-up meeting of more than 70 participants at The Carter Center on March 12, the many suggestions were organized into broad categories for consideration by individuals, churches, and groups involved in the project. The published list ran to three pages and included items under the headings of evangelism, criminal justice, poverty, other faiths, youth, peace-making, discrimination, faith and public policy, religious liberty/church and state, environment and global warming, and specific suggestions for enhancing the effective of the New

Baptist Covenant.¹⁶

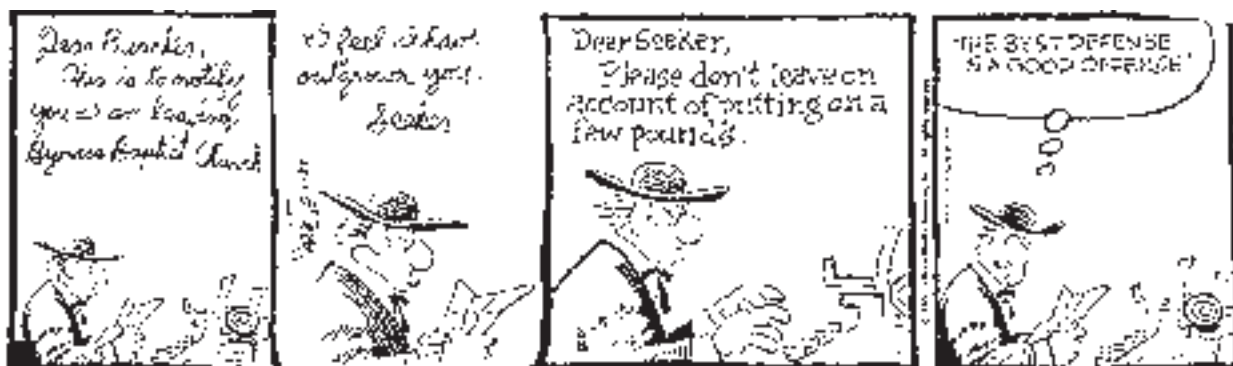
More concretely, it was announced that a second NBC gathering would take place in 2011, and plans were laid for regional gatherings around the country. In 2009 such meetings took place in Birmingham, Alabama; suburban Kansas City, Missouri; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Norman, Oklahoma. Others are forthcoming.

Each meeting was organized by a local committee and the financing was obtained locally as well. Jimmy Carter spoke at each meeting along with other reputable national and local figures, and workshops were held that addressed issues raised at the Atlanta celebration.

Thus, a reasonably firm foundation has been laid for continuing Baptist ecumenism. Its future success depends on how well the NBC coalition can hold together and how much actual social change is achieved. Whether the SBC can be enlisted in the enterprise is up in the air. There is increasing interest in social issues among younger Southern Baptists, and two reputable figures from the denomination were slated to speak at the Oklahoma regional. As President Clinton said in his speech about working with critics of the NBC, "We have to find things we can do together, and we have to treat them with respect and honor. We must approach those who disagree with outstretched hands, not a clenched fist." In other words, all things are possible through Christ,

even Baptist reconciliation and unity. Let us hope and pray that this may come about. ■

- 1 Bruce Prescott, "Painting Elephants," *Religion Dispatches*, February 6, 2008, <http://www.religiondispatches.org>.
- 2 Text of the press release in possession of the author.
- 3 Published in the press release; also printed in the official conference booklet, *Unity in Christ: Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant, Atlanta, Georgia, January 30-February 1, 2008*, p. 4.
- 4 Biographical sketch in <http://www.Day1.org>.
- 5 <http://www.newbaptistcovenant.org>.
- 6 <http://www.bpnews.net>.
- 7 *The Christian Post*, May 31, 2007, <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070531>.
- 8 *Washington Post*, January 26, 2008.
- 9 *The Christian Post*, May 22, 2007; *Right Wing Watch*, May 22, 2007, <http://www.rightwingwatch.org>.
- 10 Associated Baptist Press.
- 11 Hendersonville *Times-News*, February 2, 2008; Baptist Press, February 4, 2008; Associated Baptist Press, February 4, 2008.
- 12 Associated Baptist Press, February 4, 2008.
- 13 *Sojourners*, February 4, 2008.
- 14 Baptist Press, February 4, 2008.
- 15 [Http://newbaptistcelebration.org](http://newbaptistcelebration.org).
- 16 Ibid.



GUNS, POLITICS, AND SCIENCE

Understanding the “Open Carry Celebration”

By Joseph Laycock, PhD Student, Boston University.

On June 27th—one week before the 4th of July—New Bethel Church in Louisville, Kentucky held an “Open Carry Celebration” in which visitors and parishioners were invited to bring their firearms to church. Firearms could not be loaded, but celebrants licensed to carry concealed weapons would not be searched. This celebration of the Second Amendment also included a handgun raffle, patriotic music, and information on firearm safety. The event seemed poorly timed after the assassination of Dr. George Tiller in a Wichita church and James von Brunn’s assault on the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. However, the church’s pastor, former marine and handgun trainer Ken Pagano, had been planning the event prior to these high profile shootings.

The celebration has received wide media coverage. Many find the juxtaposition of firearms and religion perplexing. Even gun owners have questioned the logic of inviting strangers to bring guns to church. Many articles have linked Pagano to gun lobby fears that the Obama administration is planning sweeping anti-gun legislation. However, Pagano’s sermons on Christian self-defense contain no references to current legislation or the reputation of President Barack Obama and Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor as being “gun-grabbers.” Instead, material on the New Bethel Church website indicates two factors behind the Open Carry Celebration. The first was the March 8th shooting of Pastor Fred Winters in First Baptist Church in Maryville, Illinois. In one of his sermons, Pagano read a statement by the Christian Anti-Defamation Commission that attributed Winters’ death to “anti-Christian hostility and a lack of guns in church.” Pagano thought the statement was “over the top” but said he supported

the idea that Christianity is compatible with self-defense.

The second factor is a brand of muscular Christianity supported by a theology that seeks a “synthesis” of the Jesus of the Gospels with the divine wrath found in the Old Testament as well as the Book of Revelations. In his sermons Pagano criticizes the axiom *What would Jesus do?* as “crass commercialism.” He argues that the WWJD approach to life contributes to an overemphasis on the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels, and undermines the doctrine that Jesus is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Pagano states in one of his sermons, “Many of the people who are raising the stink [about the Open Carry Celebration] are people who believe in a maudlin, sentimental view of Jesus Christ that really has nothing to do with the sacred texts of scripture.” He cites Luke 22:36, “He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one” and points out that at least two of Jesus’ disciples carried weapons. In one sermon he states that Jesus is, “not coming back as a limp-wristed, stamp-collecting preacher. He’s coming back as a navy seal, a force recon marine, or a green beret.”

At first blush, the Open Carry Celebration would seem to confirm the gaffe made by Obama during the primaries that a weak economy drives “bitter” working class voters to “cling to guns and religion.” However, it would be dismissive to read the event simply as conservative church supporting a conservative political cause. Within Pagan’s theological framework, the Open Carry Celebration is not simply an affirmation of Second Amendment Rights. The idea that America’s gun culture is compatible with Christianity has become tied to a specific Christology. This is no longer a conflict over gun culture but

over what scripture says about Christ. Pagano is not struggling with anti-gun legislation but with an image of Christ that many conservative Evangelicals see as feminized, commercialized, and inauthentic. Pastors seeking to “restore” a manly image of Christ have already brought us events like Mark Driscoll’s “Fighting with God” where Jesus is discussed by athletes from the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Within this culture, is a church celebration of firearms really so surprising? ■

Resetting the American Faith Dialogue

By Martin Davis, Journalist, Washington, D.C.

After eight years of teeth-gnashing by journalists over President George W. Bush’s evangelical leanings and fears that he will bring his faith into play when making policy decisions, a new evangelist has appeared up the street from Capitol Hill. President Barack Obama.

First, he “threw open the doors” of White House faith-based office to a wide array of spiritual voices and has encouraged them to bring their faith to bear on his administration. As Jim Wallis, publisher of *Sojourners*, noted of a meeting at the White house with him and other spiritual leaders: Obama “said you should feel free to disagree with me when you do, even publicly, because one thing that we can’t lose is your prophetic integrity.”

Now, journalist Eamon Jabers at *Politico* informs us that our new president invokes the name of Jesus more often than our most recently term-limited president. “He’s done it while talking about abortion and the Middle East, even the economy. The references serve at once as an affirmation of his

faith and a rebuke against a rumor that persists for some to this day.

Evangelicals aren't quite sure what to make of this. To them, he sounds like Bush, which makes them suspect his motives are less than sincere. Tony Perkins, head of the conservative Family Research Council, says, "I applaud [the references to Jesus]. It gives people a sense of comfort. But I think it's a veneer, a façade that covers over a lot of policies that are anti-Christian." The same sentiment is apparent in the writings of former *Christianity Today* editor Stan Guthrie in his analysis of Obama's Cairo speech.

But if they're correct, then where's the outcry from the left? The closest one comes is from the mouth of Barry Lynn, head of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, who understands Obama and Bush to be evoking the same Jesus. "I don't need to hear politicians tell me how religious they are," Lynn said, "Obama in a very overt way does what Bush tended to do in a more covert way."

But does he? Javers doesn't seem to think so. "For Obama, Christian rhetoric offers an opportunity to connect with a broader base of supporters in a nation in which 83 percent of Americans believe in God." Just how broad is this base of non-evangelical people of faith that Javers refers to? Potentially huge. As many as eighty percent of people in America who profess to believe in God don't identify as evangelicals, if the numbers at the Pew Forum are to be believed.

What Lynn fails to understand, and what evangelicals largely miss, is that Obama's Jesus is not a more politically correct, dressed-up version of Bush's. On the level of theology, they are one hundred and eighty degrees apart. Behind Bush's faith lay a particular dogma that many feared, rightly or wrongly, was driving administration policies on everything from the War in Iraq to policies over disaster relief and education. Under Bush, to be on the side of faith in any of these discussions wasn't enough. One had to be on the side of Bush's understanding of

faith. Any other opinion leaves one on the outside looking in. It's a hallmark of conservative evangelical thought.

Christianity for Obama is more "civil," in that it invokes Robert Bellah's notion of religion as, at its best, a unifying force that contributes to society's well-being. Obama is less concerned, one may assume, with what one believes than with respecting all beliefs and leveraging them for all the good they can produce. It's a study in maximizing the power of faith that Reinhold Niebuhr, Obama's self-professed favored theologian, would doubtless have appreciated.

In short, Obama is resetting the scales of religious discourse in America. He's making it alright to be a person of faith—or not of faith—and not be evangelical. He understands that religion lies at the heart of what this country is how it sees itself, and that religion is a significant player on the world stage. Success in his grand political agenda requires successfully expanding our understanding of faith and our ability to talk about it.

Whether he's savvy politician or sincere advocate for this more open faith tradition remains to be seen. But this much is sure: Faith didn't leave Washington when Bush moved back to Crawford. It moved into the White House with Obama, and may prove a more powerful player for good on the American scene than it has in some time. ■

The Curious Case of Galileo Galilei

By Karl E. Johnson, Center for Christian Studies, Ithaca, NY

Last week, the Niels Stensen Foundation, a Jesuit study center in Florence, Italy, convened a conference entitled "The Galileo Affair" to show how recent research "might alleviate the 'tension and conflict' still clouding the relationship between the Church and science." Indeed, four hundred years after the Florentine astronomer's extraordinary discov-

eries, we are still assaulted with the message that science and religion are at war. Try telling that, however, to Brother Guy Consolmagno.

Consolmagno is a Jesuit astronomer employed by the Vatican Observatory, where he serves as the curator of an extensive meteorite collection—several specimens of which he has discovered himself. The Vatican began employing astronomers in the nineteenth century, Consolmagno says, "to show the world that the Catholic Church supports science."

Of course, Vatican support for science is partly public relations. According to the conventional wisdom still taught in schools and repeated by many public intellectuals, Galileo bravely spoke truth (science) to power (the Church), and paid dearly for it, spending his dying days in prison. Except that it's not true. Ronald L. Numbers' *Galileo Goes to Jail: And Other Myths About Science and Religion*, just out from Harvard University Press, is only the most recent attempt to set the historical record straight on "Myths," including its Number Eight: That Galileo Was Imprisoned and Tortured for Advocating Copernicanism. Apparently Carl Sagan's quip that Galileo was "in a Catholic dungeon threatened with torture" has all the academic rigor of the Indigo Girls song that begins "Galileo's head was on the block."

Consider: Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, the source of controversy, previously had been read and approved by the Church's censors; and Pope Urban VIII, who presided over the trial, was Galileo's friend and admirer. Consider also: prior to the trial, Galileo stayed in the Tuscan embassy; during the trial, he was put up in a six-room apartment, complete with servant; following the trial, his "house arrest" consisted of being entertained at the palaces of the grand duke of Tuscany and the Archbishop of Siena. Galileo, apparently, was no ordinary heretic.

According to an article by historian David Marshall Miller pub-

lished last year in the journal *History of Science*, recent studies of the Galileo Affair have “exploded this ‘myth’ that Galileo’s condemnation was a conflict between science and faith, novelty and authority, or rationality and irrationality.” The Affair, Miller says, was actually occasioned by the Thirty Years War. Indeed, Galileo’s troubles began somewhat suddenly in 1633—just after the Holy Roman Empire suffered setbacks in the war. To make a long story very short: Pope Urban VIII, who had been elected with support of French Cardinals, was suspected and accused of sympathizing with France, which opposed the Empire in the war. In essence, Spaniards and others were wondering, “Is the Pope Catholic?” The apparent contradiction between Galileo’s widely publicized imprisonment and his actual treatment suggests that his trial and “house arrest” were

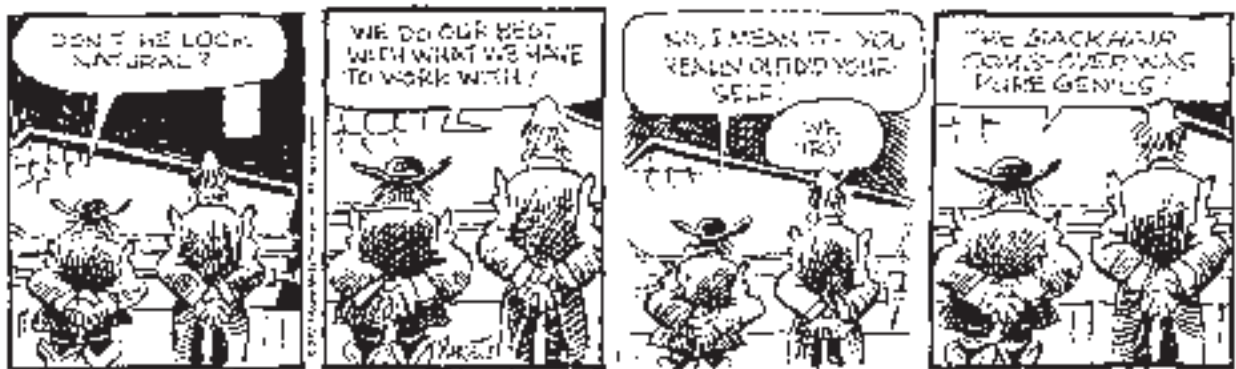
largely symbolic gestures—the Pope’s concession to his political critics, and a way for him to demonstrate his Catholic credentials.

History, like science, teaches us that appearances can be deceiving. Indeed, what appear to be conflicts between science and religion are almost always conflicts over political power and cultural authority. The sin of the Church in the Galileo Affair was not opposing science or free inquiry, but using Galileo as a pawn in what was primarily a political tussle. Perhaps the Stensen Foundation conference will finally put the myth of warfare between science and religion where it belongs—buried alongside the idea that the sun revolves around the earth. Unfortunately, that is not likely. Because the promulgators of the warfare metaphor seem less interested in evidence than in using history

for their political and ideological purposes, I suspect the myth of conflict we will have with us always.

In the meantime, Consolmagno delights in doing science. “The amazing thing about meteorites,” he says, “is that you don’t have to go to outer space in order to experience them. Outer space has come to us?” Consolmagno is only one among many people who believe—without conflict—that what is true of meteorites is also true of God himself. In any case, Consolmagno, no less than Galileo, is living proof that “Catholic Astronomer” is not an oxymoron. ■

These articles originally appeared in Sightings (7/09, 6/25, and 6/04/09), a publication of the Martin Marty Center of the University of Chicago Divinity School.



Baptist Environmentalism: A Plea For Concrete Action

By Aaron D. Weaver, Baylor University, Waco, TX

Baptists as a whole have a mixed track record when it comes to the environment. Some Baptist groups such as the American Baptist Churches USA as well as some moderate Baptists in the South have voiced their concern on environmental issues since the first Earth Day in 1970. Other Baptists, particularly those who are more theologically conservative, have only decided to join the conversation in recent years. In response to the birth and growth of the modern environmental movement, numerous resolutions and policy statements have been made by a wide variety of mostly Anglo Baptist groups in the United States. While many of these official statements are substantive expressions of concerns for the environment, they also embody what has been called “resolutionary Christianity” and point to the need for concrete action that moves beyond reflection.

American Baptist Churches USA

The American Baptist Churches USA (ABC-USA) have taken strong stands on a variety of environmental issues from the outset of the modern environmental movement. In 1977, during the height of the Mideast Oil Crisis, ABC-USA adopted a policy statement which called on American Baptists to exercise responsible stewardship of energy resources through the conservation of fossil fuels in order to avoid contributing to the “pollution of the environment and rape of the earth.”¹ Three years later, American Baptists adopted a resolution on the disposal of hazardous radioactive wastes that championed clean air and clean water.² Two resolutions adopted by American Baptists in the 1980s called upon churches and denominations to reduce pollution through both individual and governmental efforts.³ An extensive policy statement on the environment adopted in 1989 asserted that American Baptists have a duty to

affirm and support programs, legislation and organizations that protect the environment. This statement acknowledged that environmentalism and social justice are inseparable.⁴

In 1991, ABC-USA became one of the first Christian groups to address the issue of global warming. Citing the biblical commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” the resolution put forth over a dozen different ways to “live in harmony with God’s creation” and “address the causes and reverse the consequences of global warming.” Collectively, American Baptists have issued more resolutions and policy statements on environment-related issues than any Baptist body in America.

Southern Baptist Convention

In 1970, the moderate-led Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) passed its first resolution that dealt with the environment. The statement “On the Environment” acknowledged that “man has created a crisis by polluting the air, poisoning the streams, and ravaging the soil.” It called on Christians and churches everywhere to “practice stewardship of the environment and work with government, industry, and others to correct the ravaging of the earth.”⁵ In 1974, Southern Baptists resolved to “ask the forgiveness of God...for the selfish use of God’s creation.” Like the 1970 statement, this resolution concluded with a general plea for Congress as well as individuals and congregations to take action.⁶

When fundamentalists took control of the SBC, resolutions on the environment adopted a decidedly more skeptical and conservative theological/ political outlook. Unlike previous resolutions on environmental stewardship, the 1990 resolution “On Environmental Stewardship” did not accept personal responsibility for the misuse of God’s creation. Before actually calling on Southern Baptists to be

“faithful stewards” and “better stewards,” the resolution strongly warned that Christians are “forbidden to worship the creation.” It also failed to urge any type of governmental action.⁷

Southern Baptists revisited the environment in 2006 with a resolution which warned that environmentalism was “threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community and further distract its members from the priority of the Great Commission.”⁸ The following year they passed a resolution, “On Global Warming,” which according to the Associated Press “questioned the prevailing scientific belief that humans are largely to blame for the phenomenon” of climate change.⁹ The lengthy resolution acknowledged a rise in global temperatures but rejected government-mandated limits on carbon-dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions as “very dangerous” because they could lead to “major economic hardships worldwide.”¹⁰ With this resolution, Southern Baptists adopted a human-centered utilitarian approach towards the environment which tends to emphasize free-market ideology over faith convictions.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Delegates to the annual General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), voted in 2007 to endorse the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and consequently committed themselves to “ensuring environmental sustainability” worldwide. These goals aim to ensure environmental sustainability through the reduction of biodiversity loss and by containing rising greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate climate change.¹¹

Several Baptist churches affiliated with the CBF such as Peachtree Baptist Church in Atlanta and Beacon Hill Baptist Church in Boston have attracted media attention in recent years for

their “green” efforts and environmental activism.¹² However, most CBF-affiliated Baptist churches appear to be apathetic to environmental issues. When asked about the environmental stewardship practices of Fellowship Baptists, one CBF leader explained, based on extensive contact with local churches: “I can honestly say that not a single one of them has struck me as being particularly concerned about environmental issues. I’ve sipped hundreds of cups of coffee in pastors’ offices out of styrofoam cups! And I’ve seen very little evidence of recycling in most churches.”¹³

How effective have all of these resolutions and policy statements from Baptist national organizations been in promoting environmental stewardship? Baptist ethicists Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics and William Tillman Jr. of Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University offer few positive words about “resolutionary Christianity.” Tillman asserts that historical review “demonstrates little motivation, persuasion, and implementation” regarding the issues addressed by resolutions. He describes resolutionary Christianity as the tipping of the hat to social issues through non-binding resolutions. While believing that resolutions are “better than nothing,” Tillman concludes that “there have been too many statements and too few actions on the part of too many Baptists.”¹⁴ Recently, Robert Parham made a similar point when he explained that “Resolutions make us feel good without doing good.”¹⁵

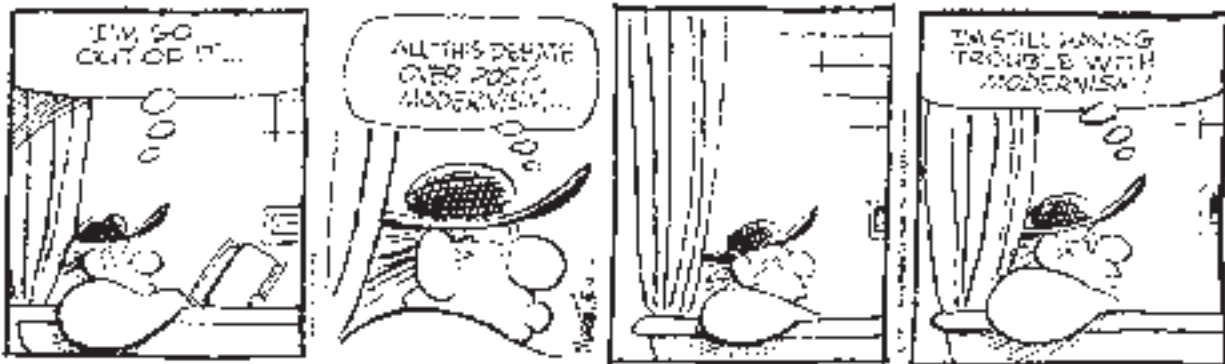
Over the past four decades, Baptist groups have passed multiple resolutions

commending environmental stewardship and urging governmental action. While these resolutions undoubtedly left many of its supporters feeling good, what good have these resolutions actually accomplished? Further, what good is it to urge governmental action without making specific policy recommendations? Perhaps resolutions were a start, but thankfully, several Baptist groups are now offering tangible solutions to the environmental crisis of the 21st century.

Baptist environmentalists must focus their attention and efforts not solely on passing resolutions and policy statements. Instead, Baptist environmentalists must focus on educating local Baptist congregations on how to be better stewards of God’s creation. Some Baptist churches are already involved in this ministry; most are not. In addition to educating local Baptist congregations, Baptist environmentalists must continue to urge governmental action with specific policy recommendations for local, state, and federal levels. Often these policy recommendations will include initial actions as basic and simple as recycling or conducting a church energy audit. If Baptists desire to speak with any sense of credibility on the subject of environmental stewardship, Baptists who have claimed through resolutions to care for God’s creation must start practicing what those resolutions preach. Baptists must make their words meaningful through concrete action. ■

The author is a doctoral student in the Religion, Society & Politics program at Baylor University’s J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and he blogs at www.thebigdaddyweave.com.

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- 2 American Baptist Churches USA, “American Baptist Resolution on Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste,” <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/hazmat.htm>.
- 3 American Baptist Churches USA, “American Baptist Resolution on Environmental Concerns,” <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/environ.htm>. A policy statement adopted the year before in 1982 by the General Board urged American Baptists to educate themselves and the public on the ecological concerns relating to nuclear power. See American Baptist Churches USA, “American Baptist Resolution on Nuclear Power: Seeking Rational Solutions,” <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/nukepowr.htm>.
- 4 American Baptist Churches USA, “American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology: An Ecological Situational Analysis,” <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/ecology.htm>.
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- 6 Southern Baptist Convention, “On Stewardship of God’s Creation,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=453>.
- 7 Southern Baptist Convention, “On Environmental Stewardship,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=997>.
- 8 Southern Baptist Convention, “On Environmentalism and Evangelicals,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amRes->



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- 10 Southern Baptist Convention, "On Global Warming," <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1171>.
- 11 Carla Wynn Davis, "CBF demonstrates commitment to U.N. goals during General Assembly," Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, June 20, 2008, <http://www.thefellowship.info/News/Archive/CBF-demonstrates-commitment-to-U-N--goals-during-G>.
- 12 Molly Harper White, "Boston Congregation Works to be Earth-Friendly," *Associated Baptist Press*, October 11, 2006, http://www.abpnews.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=1538. See also Sierra Club, "Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope for the Planet," <http://www.sierraclub.org/partnerships/faith/report2008/report2008.pdf>.
- 13 Interview with a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship employee, October 27, 2008. Highly regarded Baptist historian Walter Shurden noted that he had contacted twenty-five Baptist preachers in January, 2007 and asked if they could send him a "Green Sermon" for publication in the Baptist Studies Bulletin. Shurden discovered that not one of the twenty-five pastors had devoted a sermon to environmental issues within the past two years. Shurden challenged his Baptist friends to preach an entire sermon on "The Care of Creation." See <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin/2007/january.htm>
- 14 William M. Tillman, Jr., "Resolutionary Christianity: Part One," *Light* (April 1985): 3-4.
- 15 Robert Parham, "Baylor Incidents Must Spark Baptist Honest About Racism," November 11, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/print_popup.cfm?AID=11309.

The Disturbing Galilean

(continued from page 30)

selected from the four Gospels and covering a wide variety of topics and questions we often find ourselves discussing.

What about the unforgivable sin? Faith healing? Marriage and divorce? Whose side is God on? What about those texts and predictions regarding the second coming? Tolbert, never one to shy away from a hard subject or a theological problem, wades thoughtfully and confidently into these matters and causes the reader to ask himself, "Why wasn't this already apparent to me?" This is Malcolm Tolbert's genius, to create a tapestry of rationality and faith, of common sense about life and uncommon trust in the inspiration of Scripture.

This is Tolbert's ninth book, and the obvious fact in this one, as in the previous works, is that he writes as both scholar and pastor. As I read each essay in this collection, I heard the voice of Tolbert, my Professor of New Testament Interpretation when I was a student at Southeastern Seminary thirty years ago. I could also hear Tolbert, the pastor who preceded me at First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Georgia, even before that. Each essay on a specific teaching or episode on the life of Jesus reveals the Greek academician who masterfully relates Jesus' words to the issues believers engage here and now. At eighty-five, Tolbert has done it again. Read this book for enlightenment and enjoyment, but prepare to be disturbed and challenged by the Galilean most insightfully revealed in its pages. ■

Health-Care Ethics: A Comprehensive Christian Resource

James R. Thobaben
InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Sherman Hope, MD

Dr. Thobaben sets the tone of his book in the introduction: "The first task of Christian bioethics is **not** to

enter into extensive ethical discussions with those of the world, but to determine from within the Christian community what relationships define, which virtues inform, and what principles guide any moral analysis" (18). He seems to contend that only the evangelical interpretation of the Bible can serve as a basis of ethics, even in health care.

The author contends that most evangelicals learn their ideas by the analogical method. This means that they read a Bible passage and apply it to contemporary situations. Thus he claims that "Christians acknowledge the final inadequacy of moral constructs based on anything but Jesus Christ" (21).

Chapters 1-3 are devoted to a theological, philosophical, and historical explanation of the assertions stated in the introduction. The tone of the book is carried forward with statements such as, "Learning from and cooperation with those of the world is limited by the foundational claims of the gospel" (29).

Section 2 is composed of 14 chapters, each dealing with a specific topic in bioethics. Each chapter begins with a scripture reading, followed by a discussion of what the author thinks that scripture means. This is followed by a discussion of how this scripture should apply in bioethics and finally how it should apply in the world in general.

Chapter 4 discusses suffering (including diseases) and states: "[S]uffering, including that which is primarily physical, in one way or another is an expression of the fallen-ness of humanity. . . ." (91).

Chapters 5 and 6 emphasize recognizing all beings as individuals, not as groups such as embryos, disabled, terminally ill, etc. Chapter 7 stresses the role of the patient to the caregiver, and Chapter 8 expands this to the family and even society while, Chapter 9 and 10 delineate the ideals of a "Christian" caregiver.

This is expanded to the institutions of health care providers in Chapter (continued on page 27)

Remembering Charles Wellborn

By Britt, Towery, San Angelo, TX

Too soon we forget the terrorism of the 1950s and 1960s. The cross-burnings, obscene telephone calls, character assassination and political intrigue on those who believed in and fought for human rights and dignity, and against bigotry, hate, and indifference.

I was reminded of those years when I read of the passing of a man who stood for equality for all races. Charles Wellborn, a native of Alto, Texas, with degrees from Baylor University and Duke University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and until his retirement in 1992, the director of Florida State University London Study Center, London, England.

Jody, my wife, described Wellborn as one of the best preachers she ever heard and the clearest voice of conscience among that generation of Baptists. Dr. John Wood, long-time pastor of the First Baptist Church of Waco, was mentored in high school by then seminary student Wellborn. (Wellborn's roommate at seminary was Howard E. Butt, Jr., one of this generation's best lay preachers and founder of Laity Lodge.)

Charles Wellborn, 86, was buried October 14, just a few blocks from the church he pastored after leaving Baylor University.

It was during his ten-year pastorate at Waco's Seventh and James Baptist Church, adjacent to the Baylor campus, that the church opened its membership to people of all "races and

colors." It was 1958 and Waco still had the stain of hanging Jessie Washington before a huge white crowd in 1916. (It was one of 500 lynchings recorded in Texas from 1880 to 1930.)

Soon after the news that the church welcomed any and all, Wellborn began to receive threatening phone calls. Then a cross was burned on the lawn of the parsonage. It was fast becoming one of the darkest days in America's church history. It was a time when the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan revived; other civil rights villains became more bold.

It was a time when local blacks were turned away from church doors by self-righteous and self-deluded ushers and deacons. Some preached a Gospel left over from slavery days. Popular Bible interpretations endorsed white supremacy. There were those who simply "did not want to get involved." It was a time when many forgot what Jesus said to the Apostle John, "Behold, I stand at the door: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him" (Rev 3:20).

It was time we should never forget. Hard lessons were learned during those days of turmoil. The experience, bad as it was, made the nation and the churches stronger. But, there are still those who would like to go back to those "good old days." With white Americans fast becoming a minority like their ancestors were at Plymouth

Rock and Jamestown, there is a new uncertainty out there. Keeping folks "in their place" is not as easy as once-upon-a-time.

No one likes to recall such disturbing events as took place in 1916 and 1958. Others, like Wellborn (Presbyterian Robert McNeill; Methodist Dallas Blanchard; Episcopalian rector Duncan Gray; Catholic priest William Warthling; countless Jewish Rabbis), stood there ground against congressmen, senators, governors, mayors and even fellow clergy in a fight against the segregationist's attempts to keep the "coloreds" under their storm-trooper-boots-mentality.

Years later, the city of Waco officially apologized for the 1916 lynching, noting: "When you have a deep enough infection and you just open it up a little bit and let air get to it to heal over, it will come back. It will keep coming back until you open it up and you let it heal from the inside out."

Charles Wellborn continues to speak through his writing. He wrote seven books, two plays, and more than 100 articles in scholarly and popular journals. He was a frequent contributor to the independent journal *Christian Ethics Today*. His was a life of outspoken integrity and service for others. He was a man for his times. We must not forget him and those like him and their contribution to our nation. ■



Torture and America: A Response and a Reply

Editor's Note: *in the interest of promoting civil discussion of controversial topics, this response to a CET article and the author's reply are printed below. The two authors are both friends of CET and have authored articles in past Journals.*

David Gushee, in the Fall 2009 Issue 76, pontificated that torture was an official instrument of United States foreign policy, implying that it was a product of Bush and Cheney without honestly tracing its origin back to prior administrations.¹ He also indicated those policies, which included waterboarding, had been nearly totally repudiated by Barack Obama. He failed to mention that although Obama's Executive Order² prohibited waterboarding for the time being, he reserved the right to reinstate that procedure if warranted in the future. He also failed to mention that Obama has retained the prior Clinton policy of rendition where the U.S. sends prisoners for interrogation to other countries, where torture is a way of life.

Gushee's thought-provoking article raises the central question of where should a Christian stand in relation to torture. The American Heritage Dictionary defines torture as "Infliction of severe physical pain as a means of punishment or coercion."³ The Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as "anguish of body or mind" and "infliction of severe pain especially to punish or coerce"⁴ Such definitions would include waterboarding. Query, however, if such definitions are the ones in the minds of those 62% of white evangelical Protestants who Gushee stated support torture under appropriate circumstances.

Torture, to many white Protestants, references the brutality of the medieval ages which included stretching the human body on the rack, burning at the stake, quarter-

ing a living human, or the beheadings which radical Islamists have utilized in this decade. There is a significant difference between historic torture and the physical abuse which does no permanent physical harm such as waterboarding which was used on only two radical Islamic terrorists and resulted in very significant information which in turn leads to stopping future attacks on American soil and saving additional American lives. Christianity is certainly no stranger to psychological torture. Christ healed many who were suffering from the results of torture.⁵ During the Inquisition one hundred fifty thousand Christians were murdered through various type of torture according to many historic accounts.

To determine the real meaning of the quoted statistic it is necessary to determine the definition of "torture" in the mind of the white Protestants who responded to the survey. If those who answered the survey thought of torture as such things as sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, taser, use of sensory deprivation, subjection to extended interrogations or any number of other things which could be classified as physical abuse, it is understandable these so called "tortures" would be acceptable.

Professor Gushee is categorically correct that a Christian's "grounding in the resources of Scripture and Christian faith, ought to function as the primary source of moral discernment". The first Protestant, Martin Luther, taught a dichotomy where each individual lived in both a spiritual and secular world. Each individual had a spiritual responsibility to live the life of the Christ, but in the secular world had an obligation to uphold the law which was promulgated by rulers ordained by God for their role in history. A basic and fundamental responsibility of any head of state is

to secure and protect the citizens of that state. If the ruler determines danger to the citizens is imminent then a citizen, under Luther's mandate, must support or even carry out the ruler's instructions even though in the spiritual realm of that individual's life a different opinion and different actions would be both indicated and appropriate. When the infliction of brutal abuse is perpetrated against an individual whose principal desire is to eradicate a nation and the Christian principles on which they are founded, what should a Christian's response be?

Luther's dichotomy gives excellent guidance to today's Christian. In his view the individual Christian could not, following the example of the Christ, engage in torture acting on his own. However, if carrying out the instructions of civil authority given in carrying out such authority's responsibility to protect its nation, Luther would require the Christian to obey the civil authority.⁶

Then, the question becomes "can secular authority in good conscience engage in torture for the common good of the country?" Phrasing the question this way elicits an answer of "no" because torture sounds barbaric. If the question was posed as "could a country use sleep deprivation in good conscience in interrogating an enemy combatant?" an opposite response probably would be elicited. Obviously the term "torture" must be defined in order to get a purposeful answer.

Instead of being overly upset by the physical abuse of a very few individuals in the here and now by civil authority, attempting with all the forces at its command to procure and maintain the security of the population entrusted to its rule, the individual Christian's task is to be far more concerned with the everlasting torture unrepentant sinners will face in the hereafter.—*Burton H. Patterson,*

Southlake, TX.

Reply of David P. Gushee:

At the request of my friend, CET editor Joe Trull, and in violation of my customary policy of never commenting on criticisms of my writing, I will offer a few “pontifications” on torture that I hope will at least be “thought provoking,” in response to Burton Patterson.

There is now no longer any doubt that severely abusive treatment of prisoners in our custody was widespread during the Bush-Cheney era. (Or that our nation was complicit with torture during the Cold War.) Whether the treatment meted out in various theaters of the “war on terror” (2001-2009) should be described as “torture” has been a matter of public debate for several years. The Red Cross has described some of what was done as torture; so have a number of well-informed military and security officials. I stand by this summary description—what began as a *secret* policy of torture became a *euphemized* policy of torture and is now an *implicitly acknowledged* policy of torture. It can’t be explicitly acknowledged as torture by those who authorized it because that might deepen their risk of prosecution.

Bush-Cheney defenders have attempted a double-jointed move that I also see in Dr. Patterson’s response. On the one hand, they have sought to narrow the definition of torture so that whatever was done by the last administration will fail to meet the definition they set up, and thus everyone involved will be able to breathe free air. But on the other hand, they have sought to defend the admittedly “brutal abuse” inflicted by the state as legitimate and necessary for national security. So it’s not torture, but if it is torture, it’s still acceptable.

And why is it acceptable? I was disappointed to see any Christian thinker as well-educated as Dr. Patterson go back to an uncritical reading of Martin Luther’s two-realms dichotomy for the answer to that question. Luther dichotomizes the Christian into two selves—private and public, spiritual and secular. He accepts the lordship of Christ—the authority of the actual

teachings of Jesus Christ—only in the private and spiritual realm. In the public and secular realm, the ruler determines what must be done in the interests of the state, and the Christian must simply submit to that determination. *This public/private split is heretical because it confines to the private sphere the lordship of Christ who is in fact Lord of every square inch of creation and every aspect of the believer’s life.* The damage done historically by this particular truncating of Christ’s lordship has been abundant; one need only look at the Nazi era in Germany for all the evidence one might need.

No, Christ is Lord of all. He is certainly Lord of every aspect of the Christian’s life. It was precisely that acknowledged lordship that enabled a number of Christians in our own military, security, intelligence, and law enforcement services to say no to the torture policies they were being asked to become complicit with or directly involved in. Their protests helped to slow and finally stop these policies, especially once the fight spilled into public view.

States themselves have responsibilities to God, whether they acknowledge them or not. God is Lord of the whole world and all are answerable before him. They have God-given public responsibilities and God-given constraints on their exercise of those responsibilities. This is the best reading of Romans 13 and the rest of scripture’s witness on the role of the state, not the “anything goes” security-authoritarianism suggested in Dr. Patterson’s letter.

States also have responsibilities to the rule of law both domestic and international. Even under human law, states and their leaders are not permitted to do just anything in the name of security, unless we accept the reasoning of the worst tyrannies of the world’s history. States that have signed international conventions categorically banning torture (as we have), and to that have added domestic laws categorically banning torture (as we have), are not all of a sudden permitted to abandon these legal commitments when it no longer is felt to be convenient to

uphold them.

Finally, to the last sentence of Burton Patterson’s letter, I can only say: is this really what we want to do with the doctrine of hell? Do we really want to use this difficult, disputed, but probably necessary doctrine as a means to justify turning the lives of human beings here on this earth into a living hell, through torture? I respectfully submit that it is time for that particular rhetorical move to be retired once and for all. ■

- 1 See the United States Code, 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340-2340A, which defines torture as the infliction of severe pain for obtaining a confession or information and was the result of an examination of the American use of “rendition” commended under President Clinton.
- 2 Executive Order 13440, January 22, 2009. The order established a new Special Interagency Taskforce on Interrogation and Transfer Policies which has the authority to reinstate any interrogation techniques deemed advisable under any circumstances presented to it.
- 3 Excerpted from *American Heritage Dictionary*. © 1997 TLC, Inc., Houghton Mifflin Company.
- 4 Excerpted from *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, © 1995, Zane Publishing Company.
- 5 Matthew 4:24 where Jesus in Syria healed many of torments. The word is βασανοις, from βασανιζω, to examine by torture. Forms of this root word appear twelve times in the New Testament. The *Louw-Nida Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, United Bible Society, 1988, defines it as “to punish by physical torture” as does Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, University of Chicago, 2000.
- 6 Martin Luther, *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved*, 1526. Translation by Charles M. Jacobs.

Christian Ethics and the Movies

Reviewed by David A. Thomas, Prof. of Rhetoric, Emeritus, University of Richmond¹

Business Ethics

Up in the Air (2009)

“We Appreciate Your Loyalty”—American Airlines Slogan.

Up in the Air is a profound tone poem on misplaced loyalties in the corporate world, and in marriage and grown-up sexual relationships as well. Disguised as a kind of midlife romantic comedy, starring one of America’s busiest, coolest, suavest, and cleverest leading men, George Clooney, *Up in the Air* neatly slices open the corrosion of the whole concept of loyalty as the term is used today. To mix a metaphor, the title of this story is about flying, but we are all surrounded by sharks.

The Story. Ryan Bingham is employed by an outsourcing company that sends him around the country as the hired “termination specialist” who fires people for big corporations during this period of widespread layoffs. He is good at what he does: he can “take people at their most vulnerable, and set them adrift,” preferring not to follow up on them afterwards because “nothing good can come of that.” He is fanatically loyal to American Airlines, whose motto stands as the epigraph above. He has amassed millions of frequent flyer miles in his job, looking forward to an almost impossible goal, a “number I have in mind but have not reached yet.”

The basic conflict arises when his employer makes a move towards grounding him, by streamlining the firing process through a teleconferencing innovation to be headed up by a fresh young Cornell University *wunderkind* straight out of grad school. In other words, he is about to be axed himself. Pointing out the legal pitfalls in firing loyal employees by impersonal call center contacts, Bingham manages to goad his boss into sending the young whippersnapper on the road

with him to learn what the job actually consists of before she attempts to radically transform the process.

Plot Conflicts. Ryan Bingham lives an airborne nomad’s existence out of a suitcase, or rather, a backpack. He has no home, no wife or children, and no loyalty or commitment to his own family of origin. As a lucrative sideline, at convenient airport hotel conference rooms, he also conducts training seminars to teach company managers how to get rid of everything in their backpacks that weigh them down, like all of their possessions and their anchoring relationships with others.

Then he meets a traveling businesswoman, Alex, (Vera Farmiga) in an airport lounge, who apparently shares his *love who you’re with* philosophy. He says, “Some animals were meant to carry each other to live symbiotically over a lifetime. Star crossed lovers, monogamous swans. *We* are not swans. *We are sharks.*” Ryan and Alex’s lives become interlaced with giggling hotel meetings in cities whenever their busy itineraries overlap. So far, so good, for the sharks.

Juxtaposed against Bingham’s nihilism is the idealistic loyalty of Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick—previously seen as one of the young girls in the popular *Twilight* ‘tween vampire romance movies) This dewy eyed young executive, traveling with him to learn the ropes of their business of firing people, misses no chance to confront him about his juvenile approach to women. Her dialog stands as a running Greek chorus of shock and disgust towards Bingham’s subversion of personal commitment and superficial casualness towards Alex. Natalie is a living example of her values, having taken this job in the first place only because she followed her boyfriend from college to Omaha, where he had also taken his first job. Otherwise, she

would have taken a much better offer in San Francisco.

Bingham’s Character Arc: Two things happen to crack Bingham’s façade of suave, Cary Grant-like charming heel persona. First, he begins to fall hard for Alex. For her part, Alex remains interested in him only as her on-the-road playmate. She keeps him at arm’s length regarding her personal life, whatever it may be. When they first met, she encouraged him to think of her as a person exactly like himself, only with a [female organ]. But she is more than that. She, like him, is nothing but a predatory shark.

The second thing that happens to Bingham is that he is called home to help out with his kid sister’s Julie’s wedding to a guy named Jim. Bingham’s family of origin, understandably, has not been close. But it’s an emergency. His older sister needs his help desperately because, well, her husband and she have chosen this very moment to begin their own trial separation, just as their younger sister is about to be married in their hometown Lutheran Church. More than that, when Ryan and Alex (who attends as Ryan’s “date”) show up, wouldn’t you just know that Jim suddenly gets cold feet the morning of the wedding. So Ryan, for lack of any other alternative, is delegated to be the one to go talk to Jim and see whether he might find his way clear to go through with this wedding and not break Julie’s heart. If you were to look up *irony* in the dictionary, it would show this scene. Ryan admits that he is a poor choice for the job, but he uses his persuasive talent to convince Jim that happiness in life never happens when you are alone; you need a co-pilot.

The final plot twist comes when Ryan decides to change his life by quitting his motivational talk circuit and go all in on his new love relationship with Alex. On a romantic whim, he

hops a flight to Alex's hometown of Chicago and shows up on her doorstep as a romantic surprise, only to be greeted by the fact that she is living there with her husband and kids. Ryan is left in the end with just his job, soaring high overhead in an airliner, *up in the air*.

Real Life Loyalties. One of the truly affecting elements of this excellent satire on loyalties is the use of real people in numerous firing vignettes. These non-actors are people who were actually fired from their jobs, and their lines are transcribed from their actual spontaneous reactions. They are heart-breaking, with searingly authentic outcries in their depths of pain and anger over their companies' lack of loyalty to them after so many years of faithful service. To a person, as they were debriefed later, they all stated that the only thing that kept them going was wife, husband, children, homes—that is the purpose of it all.

In this movie, each and every marriage and every relationship is fractured and fraught with problems: separation, lost trust, cold feet, alienation. Yet even in this risky climate, the shark's life is indelibly posed as the worst of all choices.

The movie also makes clear just how hollow the word "loyalty" rings in the ad copy of corporate propaganda. Nothing against American Airlines *per se*, but all corporate loyalty boils down to the bottom line. Sure, you get an executive credit card as your reward for ten million miles, but it is made clear—you pay for it. ■

Aging

Is Anybody There? (2009)

The Movie. *Is Anybody There?* is a small independent British movie about a kid and a curmudgeon. It is a vehicle for a powerful meditation on dying, and on living as fully as possible as one's aging mind and body begin to decline. The cast features a good number of octogenarian British TV stars from bygone years in small supporting roles. Michael Caine, the headliner,

said that he would never have taken a role in an independent film such as this, for scale wages. However, he rationalized, *Is Anybody There?* is the only script that ever made him cry, so he could not resist it.

The story is set in a seaside hamlet in 1980s England. The plot involves eleven-year old Edward (Bill Milner) who is the only child in his parent's boarding house for the aged. His forty-ish mother works hard at making a go of the business. His father is suffering from midlife crisis, exemplified by his infatuation with their eighteen-year old nurse's aide, who is the only remotely medical staff member on the premises. She's in the story mainly to give the plot some complications.

Enter The Amazing Clarence Parkinson (Caine), a long-retired magician, involuntarily placed in the home by the government. He needs more help than he realizes. Clarence shows clear signs of dementia. His driving is a public menace.

After years of total independence, he resents being told what to do by strangers. He is plagued with guilt because he never got to make amends for a lifetime of regrets, clinging to him "like old bruises," especially his many careless infidelities to his long-dead wife. Now, he realizes, it is too late.

Young Edward is also angry, because he is forced to grow up among all those eccentric old people, as the only child on the premises. Edward's bed is stuck away in an attic dormer window cubbyhole because his own bedroom keeps getting assigned to each new aged client, of whom The Amazing Clarence is merely the latest one. The kid and the curmudgeon exhibit an immediate dislike towards each other.

Edward responds to his unwilling immersion among the senile by cultivating an obsessive curiosity about what happens when people die. In the course of events, some boarders do occasionally die, with Edward closely watching. He also seeks out TV programs about séances and the occult for clues. He quizzes everyone in sight about his or her view of the afterlife. "Not so very different from my life

here," grumps his frustrated Dad.

Whenever one of the boarders seems about ready to die, Edward hides his tape recorder under the bed to capture their final words, if any, or at least their last dying breath. He keeps a journal about his investigations, always concluding, "No manifestation [sic] today." He reports his findings in school during show-and-tell.

One day, when Clarence decides to chuck it all in and gas himself in his clunker magic-mobile, it is little Edward who discovers the old man slumped unconscious behind the wheel, just in the nick of time. At first, Clarence is PO'ed with Edward for saving his life. But he comes to his senses a little, and begins to reach out to Edward. He teaches Edward a simple card trick. In return, Edward takes Clarence on an outing to the local cemetery to help him call forth some ghosts. When Edward asks about reincarnation, Clarence opines, "I'd like to come back as an animal, like a rabbit or a badger. A badger looks good but has a nasty bite."

Gradually, over the next few months, these two intergenerational odd fellows disclose more of their true feelings to each other. By looking beyond his own miseries, Clarence notices Edward's loneliness, as Edward has assuaged his own loneliness. Clarence suggests to the boy's parents that they throw him a birthday party at which he, The Amazing Clarence, will perform his magic show.

Meanwhile, Edward, the snooper, roots around among Clarence's things, and finds Clarence's carelessly saved memorial program for Anna, his late beloved ex-wife. Edward remembers that Clarence had said that he was only notified about Anna's death too late for him to attend her funeral. So, as a surprise, Clarence swipes some money from his Mum's stash in the cupboard, and treats the old doddering, all-but-demented Clarence to a pleasant train ride out to visit Anna's gravesite for the first time. I can't reveal more about the story without ruining more delicious surprises, especially the parts that made Michael Caine, the person, cry when

he first read the script.

What's It All About? This is a redemption movie for everyone concerned. What Clarence most needs is a sense of closure, and better, a sure knowledge that he can experience forgiveness for his past misdeeds. Edward, on the other hand, needs to learn the trick of “joining hands and reaching out to communicate *with the living*” instead of looking for ghosts. Mum and Dad, also, start to work on their marital difficulties, after a bumpy episode when Edward tattles to Mom about Dad's secret silly shenanigans with the young nurse's aide.

As to the real question in the movie, “Is there anybody there?” after death, let's just say that this is a British movie. The only religious character is the local vicar, appearing in a bit part during a newly deceased boarder's wake. One of the boozy codgers tells him a naughty joke; thus the parson (and by extension, the church) is gently ribbed. No spiritual thoughts about life after death are to be found here—unless you consider a couple of mystical moments in which Edward does encounter, inexplicably, a clear “manifestation” from beyond. Note, only the child sees them.

The real question implied in the title is, when we consider the elderly, do we treat them as if they are really there? This is a question for our society in general, and for the church in particular. Yes, the movie is about death and dying, somewhat; but it is mostly about learning to live more fully, however old you are.

Sir Michael Caine is, by his own account, a skilled character actor who claims over 140 credits in movies and TV, and still counting. He has won two Oscars out of six nominations. Out of all of his appearances, he reckons that he succeeded in “disappearing” into a role perhaps three times. *Is Anybody There?* is one of those rare magical moments. ■

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Health-Care Ethics:

(continued from page 21)

11—“Christians should recognize the need to develop and maintain health-care institutions” (237). Chapter 12 discusses the political question of health care being a right. The author states: “There is no clear biblical requirement to support a positive right to health care. There is, likewise, no clear biblical argument against such an entitlement” (251). Chapter 13 discusses public health issues such as smoking, obesity, AIDS, birth control, and public education on health issues.

This same chapter gets to some of the more day-by-day problems in today's practice of medicine. Dr. Thobaben states, “The choice to kill oneself or to facilitate such remains immoral today, though immoral in varying degrees” (296). He discusses medical documents (the Living Will, etc.) that the medical profession uses to render medical care in serious and often terminal diseases, but then goes on to state, “The right to die—an absurd concept as no one needs such a right nor can it be denied as death comes to all—is equated with liberty by those who mistakenly promote the Western notion of hyper-individualism” (310). This leads to his assertion that there is never a justifiable suicide (or its cousin, euthanasia), and rarely a justifiable decision to terminate life support, or even the option not to do everything to keep a body alive regardless of the condition, cost, or desires of the person or family.

Reproduction and Sexuality (Chapter 14) has the author expressing abhorrence to abortion but admits “arguments against abortion are not based on specific exegetical work on biblical passages about abortion because there really are not any” (328). He adds, “evangelicals should oppose all abortions except those that are necessary to save the life of the mother” (334).

Chapter 15 discusses genetic modification in plants, animals, and

humans, and the author warns of the dangers in each field. “Altering nature is acceptable to Christians, but only within constraints of reasonable environmental evaluation. Altering human nature is not acceptable, but genetic change for disease control is” (373). Even a rough definition of what is disease and what is human nature is not given.

Organs and blood donation for research or treatment is discussed in Chapter 16, and Dr. Thobaben states that such donations of these are “near sacramental” (381).

The final chapter (17) discusses death in a theological manner emphasizing an eternal life for the worthy, i.e. the followers of Christ.

Conclusion: This book is a good resource to reinforce philosophical arguments for the ethics which are promoted by a select group of Christians, which he identifies with and refers to as “Evangelicals.” The author seems to consider all other ethical thought and action as inferior, and only something to be tolerated. This book touches on many, but not nearly all of the medical ethical issues faced by the current practice of medicine in today's real world. To serve as a practical resource for physician, medical institutions, the legal system, and the public, this reviewer believes that the book is too steeped in taking just one viewpoint on ethics, and it is too theoretical and vague about many specific medical ethical problems. ■

Book Reviews

"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed." Francis Bacon (d. 1626)w

Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett

Keith E. Durso

Mercer University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX

This book begins, "For Baptist Christians who like George W. Truett, are both Christians and Baptists, and are ashamed of neither." As Baptists celebrate in 2009 the 400th anniversary of their organized church life, here is a timely, well-written, captivating, and balanced biography of one of the best-known preachers and pastors the Baptist tradition has ever produced.

Truett was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, for forty-seven years. He was known for his preaching skills, denominational leadership, and his civic influence.

Truett's prestige was confirmed by the recent naming of the theological school of Baylor University as the George W. Truett Seminary. A part of the massive Baylor Medical Center in Dallas is known as the George W. Truett Hospital, mainly because he was the leading proponent of a Baptist hospital in Dallas early in the twentieth century.

In these days when there are few Baptist heroes, it is refreshing to read about Truett's world-wide influence in that time-frame both in Baptist and ecumenical circles. Constantly there is the refrain in Durso's book that Truett personally wanted to be known simply and primarily as the pastor of a Texas Baptist church.

The author takes us back to Truett's early days in North Carolina and Georgia, with major influences being a godly set of parents and preacher relatives who grounded him in Baptist principles. When he moves to

North Texas there comes a dramatic moment in the First Baptist Church of Whitewright when the church ordained him to the ministry despite his vehement objections. Not many men entered ministry in this fashion, but the obvious principle in Truett's life is that friends and associates saw his potential before he himself did.

And as they say—the rest is Baptist history! Baylor University, the call to the Dallas church, its extraordinary growth, his concepts of stewardship and mission outreach, civic leadership, denominational developments, the incessant demands of revival movements, his chaplaincy in World War I, the eventual presidency of the Baptist World Alliance with preaching missions around the world—all combine to lead the reader through the life of a preacher and pastor almost unparalleled in Southern Baptist (SBC) life.

Add to this list his leadership (along with B.H. Carroll) in both the establishment and growth of the Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. One needs also to mention his involvement in the beginning of the Annuity Board of the SBC. His appeal to the convention to establish one of its boards in the "far west," led to the starting of the Annuity Board right across the street from his church. He served as the chairman of the Annuity Board's Executive Committee for over twenty-five years!

All through these multiple years are the staggering challenges of moral, ethical, and theological issues—two world wars, prohibition, evolution and Darwinism, the great depression—and then there is J. Frank Norris, whose personal opposition to Truett is all but a classic example of hatred and jealousy, grounded in some of the later issues of theological Fundamentalism in the infamous SBC takeover!

Durso's presentation of Truett's most famous address on Religious

Liberty in 1921 is worth the price of the book.

Truett was preeminently a powerful preacher, buttressed by a spiritual dynamic, stemming from a radiant prayer life built around the title, *Thy Will Be Done*. In his time this combination was genuinely successful. Whether or not this approach would work in this multi-cultural and diverse age we currently face is debatable. But this volume is a genuine pleasure to read and mull over. ■

God Is Back

John Micklethwaite and Adrian Wooldridge
Penguin, 2009, \$28.

Reviewed by Darold Morgan,
Richardson, TX.

What a surprising and welcomed book this is! It is jointly written by the editor of *The Economist* (one of the world's preeminent news-magazines) and their editor of the Washington Bureau. The former is a Catholic, and the latter is an atheist. One's attention is immediately guaranteed in the opening chapter as the authors take the reader to Beijing with a fascinating insight into one of the most extraordinary and contemporary developments of the religious growth in history—Protestant Christianity in Communist China. The house church movement there is almost beyond belief!

Woven into the entire book is the contention of a global revival of religious faith; an unexpected revival not just in Christianity world-wide, but a renaissance of Islam and Hinduism as well. This is occurring in spite of the oft-sounded death-knell of religion by the centuries-long warfare between the Enlightenment Forces on one side versus the espousers of religion on the other. Modernism, secularism,

humanism, science, technology, and now post-modernism have also joined in a joint chorus of doom about the “death of God.”

But the global revival of faith is surprisingly challenging this array of opponents. Indeed, *God is back*. And according to these authors who have traveled the world researching their book with innumerable interviews, this renewal of faith is for real! Combine that conclusion with the implications of what this means politically, morally, spiritually, and somehow the sky becomes the limit of possibilities.

A very helpful phase of this book is the ongoing comparison between religion in Europe and America. One comes away from this reading with a genuine insight as to why religion in Europe is minimal in its influence, as contrasted to the USA where it is vibrant and powerful. The accumulated weight of the errors of a state church, Catholic and Protestant, has contributed to this major problem. One of the secrets to religious vibrancy in America comes obviously from the power of choice as well as a keenly honed competent marketing process that seems endless. From the beginning of the American experiment the positive values of the separation of church and state has led to this seemingly endless variety of choice as it pertains to religion.

In this book, we are led to the historical perspectives of religion on the American frontier, the strains and pressures of German rationalism, the initiation of the Pentecostal expansions, the unique role of the mega-churches across the land, and the slow demise of the historical denominational institutions. All of this takes place with political influences, international terrorism, increased pressures from technical and scientific breakthroughs, and the blatant fundamentalism of religious extremism. Yet, still the premise holds—*God is Back!*

Despite the primary focus on American Christianity, the authors include religious renewal on a global scale as they document the revival

of a vibrant Islam as well as a peculiar Hindu fundamentalism in India. Combined with this is an interesting warning and prediction that military and political set backs in these countries not only lead to some deadly conflicts, but as the authors predict, inevitably these factors will sadly influence religious vibrancy.

This book is to be commended for objectivity in areas when it is quite difficult to keep that pose balanced. Whether one is religious or not, this should be mandatory reading because the issues involved touch so many aspects of life. The student of religion and ethics will come away from this reading experience with solid encouragement about spiritual priorities. Granted there is an overwhelming expansion of Pentecostalism and mega-church individuality and Islamic influence, but the place and position of religion is here to stay around the globe. ■

Onward Christian Athletes

Tom Krattenmaker
Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

Reviewed by Dwight A. Moody,

For nearly a decade I served as pastor in the center of Pittsburgh Steelers territory and counted as parishioners and friends more than one professional football player (and family); that, plus my friendship with *USA Today* columnist Tom Krattenmaker made this book one of interest to me.

This book is worthy of interest for many people as it addresses the remarkable success of evangelical sports organizations in the world of professional baseball, football, and basketball. Krattenmaker chronicles the formation and expansion of *Athletes in Action* and *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* and describes carefully their evangelistic orientation as well as their political leanings. Story after story narrates the role of team chaplains, their relationships to owners, and players, and their success in

shaping players, especially but also owners and coaches into public witnesses for Jesus Christ. The resultant emphasis on personal morality has brought a welcome balance to the image for professional athletes as wild and reckless; this helps explain the support of owners, coaches, and wives!

Krattenmaker, associate vice president for public affairs and communications at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, is conversant with evangelical culture in America, having been shaped by a series of ministries as a youth and young adult. He is, quite frankly, irritated at the spreading practice of athletes turning post-game radio and television interviews into witnessing sessions; neither does he like the religious gestures that accompany touchdowns: kneeling to pray, pointing toward the heavens, etc. Sport is a place to put aside things that divide (religion) and focus on less serious things.

Krattenmaker recounts several stories that demonstrate how the narrow theological (often fundamentalist) and political (always republican) orientation of the chaplains and their players fail to do justice to the diversity of players, owners, and fans. I welcome his call for professionalizing the position of sport chaplain in ways similar to the chaplaincy in medical, industrial, and military networks. I am not surprised that this book has received national attention. It deserves to be read and shared. ■

Black Boys Can Make It: How They Overcome the Obstacles to University in the UK and USA

Cheron Byfield
Trentham Books, 2008.

Reviewed by Michael D. Royster,
Houston Graduate School of Theology

One of the greatest problems with education in the United States and the UK is its overall refusal to admit its collective failure as an institution when it comes to the educa-

tion of black boys. Advocates of status quo solutions have denied admitting to being clueless regarding producing equal results in terms of the education of black youth. Black boys also have been accustomed to having lower expectations placed upon them, and have been regarded as inferior in most fields of study. Black male underachievement has received high publicity. However, the most profound statement the author made in the text is “little is known about black boys who do under achieve academic success” (3). The book serves the purpose of exposing a common testament of the black male experience in terms of succeeding academically while navigating through contrary terrains, while dispelling cultural myths that have contributed to their reception of low expectations that are contributing to the negative stereotypical images

Data was gathered and analyzed for the subject’s interest in cultural studies, intergroup relations, education and stratification, teachers, parents of black pupils, clergy, faith based organization staff, and community volunteers such as the Big Brothers program. The author’s perspective is that much of UK and USA society is unaware of the dimensions and the concrete intensity that black pupils endure from a variety of sources and therefore black males must overachieve in order to be equal.

The unique feature of this book is that it demonstrates how unfavorable conditions affecting the black male’s education are an international problem. Therefore the book provides practical solutions that are low in financial cost and also preventive of high liability costs, for which society

pays a high price. The author challenges the false depiction that heavily blames parents due to their lack of visible involvement, by acknowledging that “little research has been carried out into the nature of Black parental involvement and still less on the parents of educationally successful black boys” (59). One would think that current ethnic research would have thoroughly covered this topic.

This book is applicable for all disadvantaged students seeking methods for overcoming the role strain that is experienced by the robust drive for academic success while maintaining acceptance from anti-academic peer groups. Beyond their youth, the author claims that young black men are compelled to learn the etiquette of a leisure class world, balanced with street intelligence. “Playing the game” is a necessary skill for both young black males and for all marginalized people living on the fringes of society.

In line with other studies, the author shows that there is a significant correlation between religion and academic success among black males. Much can be attributed to spiritual disciplines that are transferable to the academic disciplines. The author concluded that, “religion provided a psychological and social framework within which black boys could make sense of their purpose in life, whilst providing them with emotional and social support to maximize their potential” (100). Spiritual formation facilitators are resourceful in contributing towards the black male’s educational progress. In addition, a gross disregard for basic human needs implicitly teaches that God is not concerned about the

additional struggles placed upon black males, the sub-middle class, nor persons who face racism as an obstacle towards fulfilling the greatest human need of self-actualization.

The book is of great value for active and prospective primary and secondary teachers seeking further understanding of the structural concerns and challenges that accompany the teaching profession.

Reversing the underachievement of black boys must be sincere because the transparency of false pretense is bound to nullify any attempts toward leading any human creature toward the path of success. ■

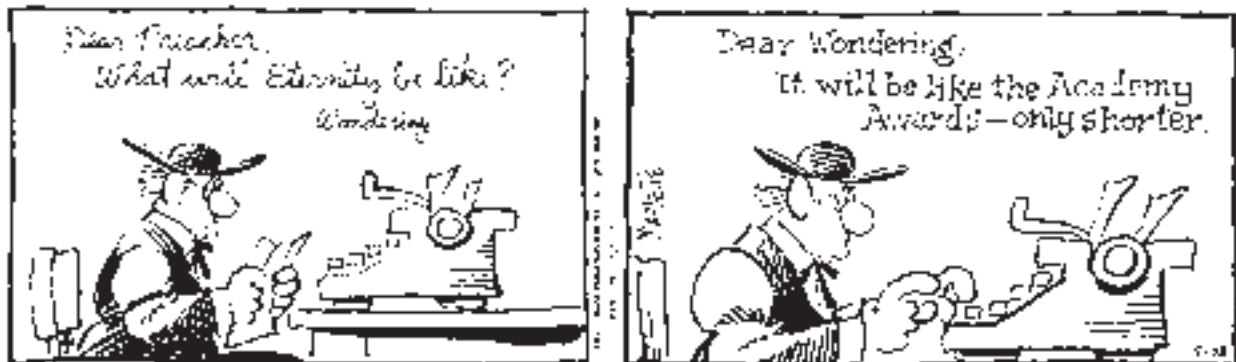
The Disturbing Galilean

Malcolm Tolbert
Smyth & Helwys, 2009.

Reviewed by Bill Coates,
Gainesville, GA

“The greatest faith of all is the faith we have even when the hoped-for and prayed-for miracle does not occur.” This is vintage Tolbert. In this case the reference is to Jesus’ own faith as he cried out in utter loneliness from the cross, and Tolbert is doing what he does best: connecting us with the biblical text. This is what he does for one hundred twenty-four pages in *The Disturbing Galilean*, a collection of essays about Jesus. Ever the master teacher, and sometimes the provocateur, Tolbert helps us see Jesus beneath all the layers of cultural and ecclesiastical condition. These essays are his own personal and passionate reactions to twenty-three vignettes about Jesus

(continued on page 21)



FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2009

The year 2009 has focused on economic uncertainty following the severe economic depression and collapse of major financial institutions at the close of 2008 and the beginning of this year. Now, one year later, the economy seems to be recovering, although all Americans have had to rethink their financial priorities.

We could not help but wonder, “How would this affect *Christian Ethics Today*?”—a Journal totally dependent on the voluntary support of its readers? Despite these concerns, we strongly believed in the conviction of Foy Valentine from our inception in 1995, that the Journal should always be sent free of charge to anyone requesting it “as long as finances and energy allows.”

In 2009, 877 individuals (827 in 2008) gave \$89,484—an increase of 8.3% over the \$82,602 given in 2008, and a marvelous increase in light of the economic depression.

Can you believe that with this Issue 77, over 250,000 copies have been published, mailed, and distributed. (Our Board of Directors decided in 2008 to produce and mail the Journal quarterly—four times each year instead of five as we had done since 2000.) We could never have accomplished this without your personal and financial support.

Every gift is appreciated—whether \$10, \$100, or \$1000—it takes a village of supporters for us to continue! Most gifts ranged from \$25 to \$100. A few who were able—foundations, churches, and individuals—gave \$1000 or more, without which we could not have made our reduced \$90,000 basic budget. Much credit also goes to our capable staff of assistants: Ray Waugh (mailing lists/website) in Austin; Randy Shebek (layout/design) in Des Moines; Etheridge Printing in Dallas; James Kim (mailing) in Lewisville; and Audra Trull (bookkeeping/secretary).

Special Thanks To Major Supporters of the Journal

A special word of gratitude is due to the following supporters who have kept Foy Valentine’s dream alive through their major contributions of \$1000 or more in 2009:

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In 2006, with the encouragement and assistance of Dr. Herbert Reynolds, a submission for a grant from the CIOS/Piper Fund of Waco, Texas, was approved—\$25,000 each year for four years. This grant has allowed *Christian Ethics Today* to sponsor numerous conferences at colleges, seminaries, and churches, as well as fund various projects including providing books, videos, and resources to various conventions, international seminaries, churches, and colleges.

The Journal wishes to thank the Piper family—Katy, Shirley, and Paul Piper—for their generosity in allowing the Christian Ethics Today Foundation to extend its influence and ministry far beyond our dreams and expectations.

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2009

Balance	12/31/08\$	48,749
Gifts/Income 2009		\$89,484
Expenditures 2009		\$82,696
BALANCE:	12/31/09	\$55,537*

*Note: This amount may change slightly due to bookkeeping and reimbursements.

AVAILABLE

The Philippian Fragment (C. Miller); *Why Live the Christian Life?* (T. B. Maston), *Putting Women In Their Place* (A. & J. Trull); *Whatever Things Are Lovely* (F. Valentine); *The Minister & Politics* (Audio or Video CD of 2007 Conference—Boyd, Campolo, Rogers, & Wallis); CD-Rom of Vol. 1-12, Issues 1-59, 1995-2000 of CET.

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Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

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

PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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

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