

# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 23, Number 1 Aggregate Issue 96 Winter 2015

*"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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# Holy/Unholy Alliances: Taking Sides in the Struggle for Justice in Latin America

Raimundo César Barreto Jr.

The intent of this paper is to honor the life and work of Glen Stassen by looking at him as a tactical ally for public ethics in Latin America – more particularly in Brazil. As a white North American evangelical, Glen engaged the world as a Christian ethicist from a particular location. He was faithful to the way of Jesus and careful in his treatment of the biblical witness. He resisted the temptation of the privatization of Christian ethics imposed on it by secularization. And he resisted any authoritarian version of Christian ethics that did not take seriously the plurality of voices in the public sphere.

Glen could be found in the Revolution of Candles that contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall, in the Civil Rights Movement, and in the anti-nuclear movements. As the Director of the Baptist World Alliance's Division on Freedom and Justice, I shared his involvement in peace processes in Burma/Myanmar, Northeast India and other places. He worked in the Baptist World Alliance's Commissions on Peace and on Baptist-Muslim Relations. He presented papers and engaged Baptist peacemakers, pastors and scholars from different parts of the world. His incarnational approach to Christian ethics respected the historical nature of Christian responses to particular challenges. He offered himself as a partner and an ally to Christians seeking to effectively witness in different contexts.

Sadly, Glen's approach to Christian ethics has not been engaged by many Christians in Latin America, particularly in Brazil. In this essay, I want to review some of the responses offered by Latin American Protestants to the question that drove Glen's concern for Christian ethics: "How do we find the solid ground for an ethic that is

neither authoritarian nor merely privatistic?"<sup>1</sup>

In the past four decades, Latin America produced a very influential public theology: liberation theology. Different versions of liberation theology have influenced Christian thought in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and North America, particularly among minority groups.

In addition to some Protestant antecedents, liberation theology

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*It is wrong to make God into an infinite, universal abstraction.*

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was for the most part developed by and among Catholic theologians in Latin American countries. Jose Miguez Bonino, Rubem Alves, Elza Tamez and Julio de Santana represent minority Protestant voices among the leading Latin American liberation theologians. But most Protestant – especially evangelical – Christians still emphasize individualistic and privatistic approaches to Christian theology and ethics.

In the case of Brazil, Paulo de Góes and Rubem Alves denounce the individualistic nature of the dominant kind of Protestantism in that country.<sup>2</sup> That approach to ethics emphasizes rules and norms regarding individual or personal behavior of the believer, and neglects the need for effective Christian witness and response to the social maladies affecting the larger Brazilian society. Those maladies systematically privilege a small elite to the exclusion or marginalization of many on the basis of social class, race, gender and sexual orientation.

Glen Stassen advanced the call for a public Christian ethics which effec-

tively "witness[es] to the sovereignty of God or the Lordship of Christ through all of life."<sup>3</sup> Glen was not satisfied with witness that does not take risks. Instead, he moved beyond an ethic of ideals and found a voice in the midst of many other public voices. He called us to critically engage ideologies in the public arena, making "tactical alliances" with other languages spoken in public discourse in the context where Christian ethics "makes its witness."<sup>4</sup>

In his introduction to Yoder's *The War of the Lamb*, Glen says, "We need to understand and assess society's languages in order to develop antibodies against being manipulated into supporting unjust ideologies of the powers and authorities."<sup>5</sup> In my view, Glen's Christocentric, incarnational ethics can help evangelicals in Brazil critically and faithfully respond to the challenges they are forced to face.

Latin American liberation theologians have long argued for the historicity of God's action in the world. Glen's incarnational ethics, instead of affirming principles or ideals, emphasizes the incarnated work of God in a particular context. Glen advocates that it is wrong to make God into an infinite, universal abstraction. For him, God gets very particular. Thus, for him biblical faith affirms God's disclosure in specific historical drama, particularly in the Exodus and the drama of Jesus. This approach resonates with the historical approach taken by many theologians and ethicists in Latin America.

Glen's approach to Christian ethics, like that of many Christians in Latin America, is one that takes sides with the marginalized and the oppressed against "ideologies of greed and domination." It is in this context that Glen warns us against approaches to public ethics and theology which

actually lead to “unholy alliances” with such ideologies. “Only by showing how a more historically located and realistic understanding of Jesus opposes some ideologies and affirms connecting with some other strands in public ethics, such as covenant, community, common good, and human rights, can we articulate the Lordship of Christ through all of life. But the challenge is to get free from unholy alliances with ideologies of greed and domination.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Luis Rivera-Pagan, the history of Christianity in the Americas began with an act of expropriation, a political and religious conquest, which he properly called “a violent evangelism.”<sup>7</sup> This was one of the initial unholy alliances in the history of Christianity in Latin America. The pain of that suffering is still felt particularly by the native peoples.

Enrique Dussel has shown that the invasion and conquest of the Americas has intensified over the past centuries, taking the form of a hegemonic globalization. According to Dussel, modernity—the first world-system ever in the planet history – was born along with “the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European.”<sup>8</sup> This myth of sacrificial violence, which justifies the suffering of some people on behalf of the happiness of others, can be associated with a certain kind of Christian theology, and has contributed to the marginalization and exclusion of millions in Latin America.

In his analysis of the current global situation, Richard Falk calls attention to the connection between forced poverty and racism as the outcome of a dehumanizing global order: “We live in a world that is one-fifth rich and four-fifths poor; the rich are segregated into the rich countries and the poor into the poor countries; the rich are predominantly lighter skinned and the poor darker skinned; most of the poor live in ‘homelands’ that are physically remote, often separated by oceans and great distances

from the rich. Migration on any great scale is impermissible. There is no systematic redistribution of income. While there is ethnic strife among the well-to-do, the strife is more vicious and destructive among the poor.”<sup>9</sup>

African descendants and the indigenous Latin American peoples are among the poorest among the poor. In Brazil, a study conducted between 1999 and 2001 showed that 63 percent of the poor in Brazil are black and 61.2 percent of the black population is poor or indigent.<sup>10</sup> The authors of the study reached the inescapable conclusion that to be born mulatto or black significantly increases the likelihood of a Brazilian being poor.<sup>11</sup>

The control of oligarchies, disregard for the poor and systemic violation of human rights continue to impact the lives of many in Latin America. In response to this history of more than five centuries, which formed structures that protect the privilege of a few and the exclusion and the suffering of many, in the past two decades, different Latin American countries have made attempts to promote democratic models. They seek to advance popular participation and economic programs with the intent of at least reducing the levels of extreme poverty, infant deaths and other related problems. Brazil has developed one of the most successful initiatives, the Zero Hunger Program. It has also developed programs of affirmative action in the attempt to correct the correlation of race and poverty noted above. On top of that, greater attention to issues such as violence against women and children and equal marriage can be noticed in public debates.

All these things take place at the same time in which Latin America also experiences great religious effervescence. In fact, Latin America has long been a very religious continent. In 1910, 95 percent of the Latin American population was Christian – only one percent of it was non-Catholic. The continent is no less religious these days, but the scenario has become more pluralistic

with the emergence of evangelicals and Pentecostals in the past 50 years. As Wesley Gramberg-Michaelson has noted, “by 2010, Latin America was home to nearly 550 million Christians, and 20 percent were from non-Catholic expressions of Christian faith. These are growing at three times the rate of Catholic growth.”<sup>12</sup>

That considerable growth has led to greater participation of evangelicals and Pentecostals in public life, as sociologists such as Paul Freston have noted.<sup>13</sup> Such a sudden move from the private realm to participation in the public square has provoked some contrasts. Whereas Protestant groups more identified with the cause of the poor seem to be able to ally themselves with other social movements without losing the distinctiveness of their own voices, those groups which have suddenly moved from a previously “apolitical” attitude of non-participation in the public square tend to hold to a perspective of dominance and conquest of the public space.

This has produced a predominant mentality of Christianizing the political realm, which mainly implies the election of evangelical/Pentecostal representatives to political offices and the promotion of particular agendas which are important for these churches on issues such as abortion and equal marriage. An ostensive discourse against the LGBT communities and against people of other religions, particularly Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, has elevated tensions among these communities and evangelical churches.

Brazil is still a young democracy. The Brazilian Republic emerged in 1889 through a military coup d’état against the monarch. It took more than 20 years for Brazil to elect its first civilian president. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the country alternated periods of elected governments with coups and dictatorships. The last military dictatorship lasted 21 years and ended in 1985. Since then, Brazil has had seven consecutive presidential elections, experiencing one of the

most stable periods of its history.

Nevertheless, when tensions are elevated, soon one can hear voices calling for order, which means military intervention. Brazil has just had its tightest presidential election, which led to the reelection of Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party with a little more than 51 percent of the valid votes. In the days following the election, some middle and upper class citizens dissatisfied with the results of the election took the streets of Sao Paulo to call for the President's impeachment. Some of them held signs calling for the return of the military to bring order back. Thus, Brazilian democracy is being tested, and although it is so far showing progress, its progress and success cannot be taken for granted.

Boaventura Sousa Santos has noted that the model of democracy which became hegemonic by the end of the two world wars implied a restriction in the ample forms of participation and of sovereignty, favoring "a consensus about the electoral procedure in the formation of governments."<sup>14</sup>

He also discusses the issue of compatibility or incompatibility between democracy and capitalism. According to him, if the tension between capitalism and democracy bends in favor of democracy, it ends up putting limits to property and results in redistributive gains for the disfavored social sectors.<sup>15</sup> Is not this the democratic model being advanced in countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Ecuador? As Sousa Santos points out, in the context of this debate the discussion turns to democratic alternatives to the liberal model: participative democracy, popular democracy and developmentalist democracy, among others.

"Although neoliberal globalization – the current version of global capitalism – is by far the dominant form of globalization, it is not the only one. Parallel to it and, to a great extent, as a reaction to it, another globalization is emerging. It consists of transnational networks and alliances among social movements, social struggles,

and non-governmental organizations. From the four corners of the globe, all these initiatives have mobilized to fight against the social exclusion, destruction of the environment and biodiversity, unemployment, human rights violations, pandemics, and inter-ethnic hatreds, directly or indirectly caused by neoliberal globalization."<sup>16</sup>

This kind of political project involves popular mobilization and mass movements through consensual social control 'from below' rather than by coercive means 'from above.'<sup>17</sup> If Sousa Santos is correct, in order for the present politico-economic order to be democratized and reach a balance of power that will allow for real competitiveness, grassroots movements that promote alternative models to the current course of capitalist globalization must be strengthened through the creation of larger social networks. Those networks can produce an antithetical force, capable of putting limits to the power of predatory globalization.

The need for deepening the roots and understanding of democracy in the continent calls for Latin American Christians to develop sound public theologies which can equip them to speak in the plural public square, out of the particularity of their own religious traditions.

### **Evangelicals and Public Ethics**

The privatization of faith identified in the 1970s by Rubem Alves no longer seems to be the major challenge faced by Brazilian Protestants. In fact, since the 1950s one can observe a consciousness rising among some Brazilian Protestants concerning their involvement in the social, political and economic problems of Brazilian society. At least since 1955, a small Protestant movement began to take a stand in the struggle against poverty and social injustice in the country. As I have documented elsewhere, the emergence of a dynamic Christian Student Movement among young Brazilian Protestants and the foundation of the Sector of Social Responsibility of the Church played

an important role in this move toward a greater Protestant involvement with the social problems surrounding the Christian communities in Brazil.<sup>18</sup>

Those movements, though, happened at the margins of ecumenical Protestantism, and did not find institutional space to survive the repression faced within the churches, and the crack down from the military regime after the 1964 military coup d'état.

In the 1970s, however, another small group of Protestants, now within evangelical circles, in an attempt to offer an evangelical response to the effervescence of liberation theology, took seriously the challenge of responding to the demands brought by the historical, political and social contexts in which they were inserted. Although Brazilians such as Robinson Cavalcanti and Waldir Steuernagel were among the founders of this movement known as *Teologia de la Mision Integral de la Iglesia*, its main theological articulators were Rene Padilla from Argentina, Orlando Costas from Puerto Rico and Samuel Escobar from Peru.

Padilla diagnosed the situation in Latin American evangelicalism as being the problem of "a church without a theology."<sup>19</sup> For Padilla, Latin American evangelicalism has failed in regard to its responsibility to "reflect, from the perspective of God's revelation, on the meaning that this revelation has here and now, vis-à-vis the obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord in this situation."<sup>20</sup> These emerging evangelical voices called for the contextualization of the gospel in the Latin American context. The theological pillars of this contextual evangelicalism are: (1) The foundation of theology is the Word of God; (2) The context of theology is a concrete historical situation; and (3) The purpose of theology is obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> With an evangelical and incarnational theological agenda, these Latin American evangelicals experienced an awakening concerning their responsibility towards the surrounding society.

In Brazil, military repression, along with the conservative turn in most Protestant denominations in Brazil,<sup>22</sup> created a vacuum concerning the Protestant struggle for social justice in the late 1960s, although progress continued to be made among Catholics. With the dismantling of the progressive initiatives developed by ecumenical Protestants, the struggle for social justice was taken by the emergent liberation theology, mostly a Catholic movement.

The first Latin American Congress of Evangelization, known as CLADE I, took place in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1969.<sup>23</sup> That meeting gave birth to the elaboration of an evangelical response to the Latin American situation.<sup>24</sup> This congress was the bedrock of the Latin American Theological Fellowship (FTL), which would develop a contextual evangelical theology in Latin America.<sup>25</sup>

One of the main Latin American evangelical theologians addressing CLADE I was Samuel Escobar, a Peruvian missionary and scholar who had spent some years in Brazil<sup>26</sup> working among evangelical students. Among the 28 papers read at that congress, his address on the Social Responsibility of the Church received the most enthusiastic attention from the participants.<sup>27</sup> He argued passionately that both evangelization and social action are necessary for the Christian witness to the world. “There is sufficient basis in the history of the Church and in the teaching of the Word of God for us to categorically affirm that the concern with the social aspect of the Christian witness in the world does not imply the abandonment of the fundamental truths of the Gospel; on the contrary, it means to take to the last consequences the teachings regarding God, Jesus Christ, human existence, and the world, which form the basis of this Gospel... We sustain that an evangelization that does not take account of the social problems and that does not announce the salvation and sovereignty of Christ within the context in which those who listen to

it live, is a defective evangelization, which betrays the biblical teaching and does not follow the model purposed by Jesus Christ, who sends the evangelist.”<sup>28</sup> [translation is mine]

Despite its external origins, CLADE I created the opportunity for those Latin American evangelical leaders who were concerned with the relationship between the evangelical faith and the Latin American social reality to come together and share their inquietudes. Thus, as David Stoll affirms, CLADE I was not a complete success for its North American organizers, since the Latin American evangelical leaders “discovered that they were all tired of North Americans telling them how to think.”<sup>29</sup> It issued

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*Both evangelization and social action are necessary for the Christian witness to the world.*

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“a call for Evangelicals to meet their social responsibilities, by contextualizing their faith in the Latin American context of oppression.”<sup>30</sup>

One year later, a group of Latin American evangelical leaders founded the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL), choosing Samuel Escobar as its first president.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of these politically progressive evangelical thinkers was to create a forum where they could encourage a contextualized theological reflection in Latin America from a biblical and mission-oriented perspective. That kind of reflection was an attempt from those Latin American evangelicals – theologically conservative, but politically progressive – to respond to the challenges posed by the Latin American reality of poverty and injustice. Pledging to be both biblical and distinctively Latin American, they declared their intention “to pursue social issues without abandoning evangelism, deal with oppressive structures without endorsing violence, and bring left- and right-wing

Protestants back together again.”<sup>32</sup>

While embracing much from what had been proposed by both liberation theology and ecumenical Protestantism concerning the social responsibility of the church, these radical evangelicals also were critical of both. In order to distinguish themselves from those two movements, they opted for the paradigm of contextualization instead of the paradigm of liberation to speak about their theological action.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of that emphasis on its distinctiveness, forums such as CLADE ended up opening spaces for conversations between different Protestant streams in Latin America. Speaking of CLADE III, Tomás Gutierrez says that it was a forum for all Protestant groups in Latin America, for conservatives and liberals, with more than a thousand representatives from the whole continent.<sup>34</sup> It created discussion groups around the debates that existed within Latin American Protestantism. One of these groups put together representatives of the ecumenical Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and of the conservative Latin American Evangelical Council (CONELA) to discuss face-to-face their proposals and differences.<sup>35</sup>

Progressive evangelicals have reaffirmed the conviction present in both liberation theology and ecumenical Protestantism that praxis is the element by which the validity of any theological reflection is judged. As Samuel Escobar affirms, “The real test of the validity of all theological reflection comes when it has become specific by application, on the ethical level.”<sup>36</sup>

Another leading voice in this evangelical movement, Orlando Costas acknowledged that liberation theology poses a tremendous challenge to contemporary theology. That challenge must be taken seriously in evangelical circles especially due to its “biblical contents.”<sup>37</sup> For Costas, liberation theology’s insistence on engaging the concrete historical situation is the greatest challenge for the

theology of mission, because biblical Christian faith has a historical character, being firmly rooted in a concrete historical situation.<sup>38</sup> According to him, although Jesus was not involved in political parties, he took a political position as he relativized the authority of the Empire.<sup>39</sup> On that basis, Costas criticized the role of the evangelical missionary enterprise as functioning to justify and cover for the domination of Latin American peoples.

“Not only does the theology of liberation challenge missionary theory and praxis to take seriously the political dimension of the missionary situation by evaluating its own political instance (its justification of the *status quo* through the policy of nonpolitical commitment), but also by insisting on the incarnational character of the gospel. If mission is to be faithful to the gospel it purports to communicate, it must be undergirded by a theology grounded on serious commitment to mankind in its many situations.”<sup>40</sup>

Such an incarnational mission-oriented theology must have at least three characteristics: (1) unfeigned love, which means being sincerely and completely committed to others; (2) faith that acts, which means a faith “unconditionally committed in praxis to everything that God is committed to;” and (3) creative hope, which implies that “our work for the kingdom should involve at once our creative involvement in the transformation of life and society and the announcement of a new world as evidence (‘first fruits’) of the new age inaugurated by Jesus and as a guarantee of the promised future.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps there is no other Latin American theologian whose work and wording coincide as much with the emphases and concerns found in Stassen’s Christian ethics and his understanding of incarnational discipleship.

Considering that most Latin American evangelicals have been exposed exclusively to otherworldly oriented theology, holding an escapist missionary praxis, Costas proposes a

radical experience of social conversion to Latin American evangelicalism. Believing that the biblical gospel in its origin was proclaimed and received at the peripheries of the world, Costas was convinced that it is only from that incarnated context that it can become prophetic and apostolic at the same time.

The theology provided by this movement has encouraged some Latin American evangelicals to a greater social commitment and action. However, because of concerns with defining an a priori biblical justification for their praxis, it still keeps many of these evangelicals tied to dogmatism, because they still depend on literalistic interpretations of the

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*The protection of the rights of some individuals and groups have historically antagonized most evangelicals.*

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Scriptures. Too much time is spent on doctrinal quarrels, and praxis ends up becoming secondary.

In spite of their important contributions, these progressive evangelicals have not yet managed to impact the evangelical leadership involved in politics in places like Brazil. This evangelical movement is still searching for a theological language that can free it to realize all the transformative potential implicit in Padilla’s brilliant image of mission as taking places between times.<sup>42</sup> Renewed theological language can enable Brazilian evangelicals to overcome biblical literalism and the doctrinal quandaries that have limited their actions.

Finally, this movement also lacks a broader and more elaborated theology of human rights, which can also enable its participants to fully advocate for the civil liberties of other minorities with whom evangelicals in Latin America have a difficult time relating. Glen Stassen’s emphasis on “historical drama” as a particular

kind of narrative genre for theology might be a helpful resource for Latin American evangelicals to overcome some of the challenges they face in the process of searching for a broader and still distinctive language for a public ethics. Stassen’s transformative initiatives also offer a creative way of moving beyond legalistic approaches to the Bible. Furthermore, Glen’s strong commitment to a narrative of human rights, which strengthens and expands its biblical and experiential grounding can also be a good resource for Brazilian evangelicals engaging debates on human rights laws. The protection of the rights of some individuals and groups have historically antagonized most evangelicals.<sup>43</sup>

**Public Theology**

A more recent development in Brazil has been the emergence of an emphasis on public theology.<sup>44</sup> Since public theology originally emerged in the United States, enculturation and ownership by Brazilian communities are needed in order to be a genuine expression of Brazilian Christianity. This movement intends to develop a broad theological discourse that is accessible simultaneously to many different audiences—church, academy and larger society. It therefore takes the risk of neglecting the particularity and contextuality that are intrinsic to any theology. As Gustavo Gutierrez has put it, “Efforts to understand the faith, which we call theology are inextricably linked to issues that emerge from life and the challenges facing the Christian community as witness the kingdom of God. So theology is connected to the historical moment and the cultural world in which such issues arise (thus say that a theology is ‘contextual’ is strictly tautological: one way or another, all theology is contextual).”<sup>45</sup>

Miguel de la Torre complements this concern by highlighting that “any theological discourse that ignores the peculiarity of minority and marginal voices silenced in the centers of power as well as the ‘struggle’ and the ‘everyday’ of marginalized people loses its

prophetic and transforming dimension.”<sup>46</sup>

The situation in Latin America today is no longer the same as 40 years ago when the first expressions of liberation theologies in Latin America emerged. However, despite the greater diversity and complexity of the Latin American scene, for most of the Latin American people domination and oppression are still terms that characterize the social situation in which they live. Therefore, they remain important for a Christian ethical thinking that seeks to respond to the real situation facing the vast majority of our people. Oppression – whether political, economic or social – is not fortuitous. It results from the operation of a system that pushes millions to the margins of society who come into being under a constant threat of violence in impoverished and often inhumane conditions.

Rudolf Von Sinner has been one of the leading theologians spearheading efforts to update theological language in the Brazilian context in order to strengthen the understanding of the public role of churches and religious communities in light of the significant changes that have occurred in that context in recent decades. Von Sinner proposes a Brazilian public theology that, while taking into account the contributions of liberation theology, seeks a more constructive and positive integration in public areas, going beyond the role of resistance exercised by liberation theology during the times of the Cold War and the military crackdown in order to more effectively engage diverse audiences: civil society, the university, the economy and politics.

In a context of democratic advances and strengthening of civil society that creates more spaces for the involvement of religious actors in the public sphere, von Sinner sees the constructive proposals of public theology as more appropriate to offer tools and language relevant to the issues, institutions and life processes under the current conditions of a global society. He says that liberation theology “has

prepared the foundation for a way of thinking that sustains and makes plausible the fundamental importance of the contextual aspect of theology, especially in view of its economic, political and social dimensions.”<sup>47</sup> Von Sinner demonstrates how the Latin American theology of liberation, classically formulated between the 1960s and 1970s, provided the basis for a significant awareness of the general character of contextual theology in contact with similar movements that originated in this period in various continents.<sup>48</sup> In his attempt to move beyond liberation theology, von Sinner suggests a broad definition of citizenship that includes the real possibility of access to rights and

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an attitude towards the constitutional state as such.<sup>49</sup> Citizenship issues need to be engaged in a concrete and decisive manner, both theologically and practically, inside and outside the churches.

Given the new possibilities for popular participation, von Sinner proposes the use of public theology, qualified as a theology of citizenship, as a terminology which is broader than liberation. This approach is “critical-constructive” rather than “conflicting,” being more dialogical, cooperative and constructive than theologies called particularists.<sup>50</sup>

Rudof sees his theological project in continuity with the contributions made by liberation theology, while trying to overcome other aspects of it. Von Sinner recognizes that the term “public theology” cannot be specific enough to adequately meet the demands of the Brazilian context. However, its description as a theology

of citizenship temporarily solves this problem, leaving open the possibility of new terminology, when the theme of citizenship is not as burning. Von Sinner offers a contribution which is more purposeful and which aims towards a construction process rooted in the Brazilian reality, in contrast to approaches described as “conflicting” which have not produced concrete historical projects in theology.

There are challenges in the choice of citizenship as a key hermeneutical term. Citizenship is a term that does not have adequate strength to challenge the *status-quo*. For some, citizenship is understood as a status granted by the nation-state, usually understood in terms of loyalty and civic responsibility.<sup>51</sup> For others, “citizenship alienates and assimilates, ostracizes and equates.” Citizenship is argued on the basis of its own categories of exclusion. It is a highly complex category, consisting of both negative and positive content; both absence and presence, especially for members of countless people who are undocumented.<sup>52</sup> Thus, this language seems to be insufficient to resolve the dilemmas of modernity’s inherent exclusion and its coloniality of power, which are the basis of the nation-state.”<sup>53</sup>

In some circles, there seems to be a certain disdain for the idea that perhaps the leading public role of the church is to be a witness in solidarity with the oppressed. The dominant discourses in public theology state that it must go beyond the resistance proposed by certain prophetic theologies. On the other hand, there remains a great need for theology to adopt a posture of resistance and solidarity with the poor if it wants to challenge the dominant logic. But to challenge the status quo, theology needs to escape the logic of modern colonialism.

As Walter Mignolo suggests, one of the characteristics of the political and economic expansion of Western civilization is the manipulation and control of all spheres of knowledge. Therefore, rather than fitting the

dominant narrative, public theologies are challenged to propose alternative decolonizing narratives to unveil and show the unfeasibility of hegemony and homogeneity of the modern discourse that Mignolo calls “monoculture of the mind.”<sup>54</sup> The priority of theology is not its communicability to the dominant spheres of the economy, the state, the academy and the church, without challenging their structures. Rather, it is the rescuing of alternative narratives and marginal voices, silenced by the same monoculture, many sometimes with the help of theology itself.<sup>55</sup> This perspective accentuates the tension between witnessing and being effective in the public square which one sees in Glen’s ethics.

Resistance to the colonization of the mind is not simply a negative critical reaction to a process of domination. It also has a creative aspect, which can transform this process by reorganizing the creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire, building new forms of community consciousness and alternatives to the dominant consciousness. A Latin American public theology cannot abdicate their conflicting character. The attempt to seek inclusiveness and responsiveness must not inhibit conflict, difference and tensions of social heterogeneity. No theological task is politically neutral or disengaged. Moving the theological discourse from the margins to the center risks remaining dependent on an epistemic privilege that contributes to mute populations and groups long not recognized.<sup>56</sup>

Von Sinner succeeds in giving his public theology of citizenship a

practical and programmatic character, moving from strictly theological discourse to the demand of rights. But his public theology needs greater clarity on who are the subjects of the theological task and what is their social location in the matrices of power to avoid suppression of voices and interests of those who are made invisible by the dominant order. Public theologies emerging in contexts like Brazil need to prioritize local narratives and alternatives, in opposition to the universalizing discourse. In order to be in continuity with previous advances made in the context of liberation theology, public theology must restate the hermeneuti-

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**No theological task is politically neutral or disengaged.**

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cal privilege of the poor / oppressed / marginalized / subaltern and create new spaces for doing theology. It needs to deal with the issue of the social location of theologians in the context of the matrices of power.

Theologies of liberation have fulfilled the fundamental role of bringing to the fore the theological production of different human groups from specific contexts of oppression. The question does not seem to be overcoming the hermeneutical key of liberation, but expanding it. Contrary to the opinion that liberation theology has died, in Latin America we say that it is not dead. It is being

reshaped as new Christian expressions begin to respond to the challenges of inequality and injustice.

Since most of the fastest growing Christian communities are evangelical, charismatic or Pentecostals, the biblical, narrative, experiential and incarnational spirit of Glen Stassen’s Christian ethics can be an extremely helpful resource for the task of finding appropriate language for public ethics and theology which expands the contributions of liberation theology, radical evangelicalism and public theology in Brazil. ■

*Raimundo César Barreto Jr., assistant professor of world Christianity at Princeton Theological Seminary, is an ordained Baptist minister. Barreto earned his BTh degree from the Northern Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary and from the Superior School of Theology, in Brazil, his MDiv from McAfee School of Theology/Mercer University, and his PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. Prior to coming to Princeton Seminary, he taught at Brazil’s Northeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and at the Brazilian Baptist College. He also served as director of the Division of Freedom and Justice of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). He first met Glen Stassen in 2004, during Glen’s visit to Bahia, Brazil. Glen lectured at a local Baptist seminary and Barreto translated Glen’s lecture on the 14 triads of the Sermon on the Mount. Barreto also worked on the translation of Glen’s book, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, which will be out in 2015.*

Footnotes found online.

Dear Readers: We want to hear from you. Do you enjoy receiving *Christian Ethics Today*? Please use the enclosed envelope to let us know that you wish to continue to read the journal. Also, if you prefer to receive the journal via email, let us know. And, of course your contributions are greatly appreciated.

# Floor Statement by Senator John McCain on Senate Intelligence Committee Report on CIA Interrogation Methods

By John McCain

Mr. President, I rise in support of the release – the long-delayed release – of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s summarized, unclassified review of the so-called ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ that were employed by the previous administration to extract information from captured terrorists. It is a thorough and thoughtful study of practices that I believe not only failed their purpose – to secure actionable intelligence to prevent further attacks on the U.S. and our allies – but actually damaged our security interests, as well as our reputation as a force for good in the world.

I believe the American people have a right – indeed, a responsibility – to know what was done in their name; how these practices did or did not serve our interests; and how they comported with our most important values.

I commend Chairman Feinstein and her staff for their diligence in seeking a truthful accounting of policies I hope we will never resort to again. I thank them for persevering against persistent opposition from many members of the intelligence community, from officials in two administrations, and from some of our colleagues.

The truth is sometimes a hard pill to swallow. It sometimes causes us difficulties at home and abroad. It is sometimes used by our enemies in attempts to hurt us. But the American people are entitled to it, nonetheless.

They must know when the values that define our nation are intentionally disregarded by our security policies, even those policies that are conducted in secret. They must be able to make informed judgments about whether those policies and the personnel who supported them were justified in com-

promising our values; whether they served a greater good; or whether, as I believe, they stained our national honor, did much harm and little practical good.

What were the policies? What was their purpose? Did they achieve it? Did they make us safer? Less safe? Or did they make no difference? What did they gain us? What did they cost us? The American people need the answers to these questions. Yes, some things must be kept from public disclosure to protect clandestine operations, sources and methods, but not the answers to these questions.

By providing them, the Committee has empowered the American people to come to their own decisions about whether we should have employed such practices in the past and whether we should consider permitting them in the future. This report strengthens self-government and, ultimately, I believe, America’s security and stature in the world. I thank the Committee for that valuable public service.

I have long believed some of these practices amounted to torture, as a reasonable person would define it, especially, but not only the practice of waterboarding, which is a mock execution and an exquisite form of torture. Its use was shameful and unnecessary; and, contrary to assertions made by some of its defenders and as the Committee’s report makes clear, it produced little useful intelligence to help us track down the perpetrators of 9/11 or prevent new attacks and atrocities.

I know from personal experience that the abuse of prisoners will produce more bad than good intelligence. I know that victims of torture will offer intentionally misleading information if they think their captors will believe it. I know they will say what-

ever they think their torturers want them to say if they believe it will stop their suffering. Most of all, I know the use of torture compromises that which most distinguishes us from our enemies, our belief that all people, even captured enemies, possess basic human rights, which are protected by international conventions the U.S. not only joined, but for the most part authored.

I know, too, that bad things happen in war. I know in war good people can feel obliged for good reasons to do things they would normally object to and recoil from.

I understand the reasons that governed the decision to resort to these interrogation methods, and I know that those who approved them and those who used them were dedicated to securing justice for the victims of terrorist attacks and to protecting Americans from further harm. I know their responsibilities were grave and urgent, and the strain of their duty was onerous.

I respect their dedication and appreciate their dilemma. But I dispute wholeheartedly that it was right for them to use these methods, which this report makes clear were neither in the best interests of justice nor our security nor the ideals we have sacrificed so much blood and treasure to defend.

The knowledge of torture’s dubious efficacy and my moral objections to the abuse of prisoners motivated my sponsorship of the *Detainee Treatment Act of 2005*, which prohibits ‘cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’ of captured combatants, whether they wear a nation’s uniform or not, and which passed the Senate by a vote of 90-9.

Subsequently, I successfully offered amendments to the *Military Commissions Act of 2006*, which,

among other things, prevented the attempt to weaken Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, and broadened definitions in the *War Crimes Act* to make the future use of waterboarding and other ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ punishable as war crimes.

There was considerable misinformation disseminated then about what was and wasn’t achieved using these methods in an effort to discourage support for the legislation. There was a good amount of misinformation used in 2011 to credit the use of these methods with the death of Osama bin Laden. And there is, I fear, misinformation being used today to prevent the release of this report, disputing its findings and warning about the security consequences of their public disclosure.

Will the report’s release cause outrage that leads to violence in some parts of the Muslim world? Yes, I suppose that’s possible, perhaps likely. Sadly, violence needs little incentive in some quarters of the world today. But that doesn’t mean we will be telling the world something it will be shocked to learn. The entire world already knows that we water-boarded prisoners. It knows we subjected prisoners to various other types of degrading treatment. It knows we used black sites, secret prisons. Those practices haven’t been a secret for a decade.

Terrorists might use the report’s re-identification of the practices as an excuse to attack Americans, but they hardly need an excuse for that. That has been their life’s calling for a while now.

What might come as a surprise, not just to our enemies, but to many Americans, is how little these practices did to aid our efforts to bring 9/11 culprits to justice and to find and prevent terrorist attacks today and tomorrow. That could be a real surprise, since it contradicts the many assurances provided by intelligence officials on the record and in private that enhanced interrogation tech-

niques were indispensable in the war against terrorism. And I suspect the objection of those same officials to the release of this report is really focused on that disclosure – torture’s ineffectiveness – because we gave up much in the expectation that torture would make us safer. Too much.

Obviously, we need intelligence to defeat our enemies; but we need reliable intelligence. Torture produces more misleading information than actionable intelligence. And what the advocates of harsh and cruel interrogation methods have never established is that we couldn’t have gathered as good or more reliable intelligence from using humane methods.

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*I have often said, and will always maintain, that this question isn’t about our enemies; it’s about us. It’s about who we were, who we are and who we aspire to be. It’s about how we represent ourselves to the world.*

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The most important lead we got in the search for bin Laden came from using conventional interrogation methods. I think it is an insult to the many intelligence officers who have acquired good intelligence without hurting or degrading prisoners to assert we can’t win this war without such methods. Yes, we can and we will.

But in the end, torture’s failure to serve its intended purpose isn’t the main reason to oppose its use. I have often said, and will always maintain, that this question isn’t about our enemies; it’s about us. It’s about who we were, who we are and who we aspire to be. It’s about how we represent ourselves to the world.

We have made our way in this often dangerous and cruel world, not by

just strictly pursuing our geopolitical interests, but by exemplifying our political values, and influencing other nations to embrace them. When we fight to defend our security we fight also for an idea, not for a tribe or a twisted interpretation of an ancient religion or for a king, but for an idea that all men are endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights. How much safer the world would be if all nations believed the same. How much more dangerous it can become when we forget it ourselves even momentarily.

Our enemies act without conscience. We must not. This executive summary of the Committee’s report makes clear that not only acting without conscience isn’t necessary, it isn’t even helpful, in winning this strange and long war we’re fighting. We should be grateful to have that truth affirmed.

Now, let us reassert the contrary proposition: that is it essential to our success in this war that we ask those who fight it for us to remember at all times that they are defending a sacred ideal of how nations should be governed and conduct their relations with others – even our enemies.

Those of us who give them this duty are obliged by history, by our nation’s highest ideals and the many terrible sacrifices made to protect them, by our respect for human dignity to make clear we need not risk our national honor to prevail in this or any war. We need only remember in the worst of times, through the chaos and terror of war, when facing cruelty, suffering and loss, that we are always Americans, and different, stronger, and better than those who would destroy us.

Thank you. ■

*U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) delivered this statement on the floor of the U.S. Senate on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report on CIA interrogation methods December 9, 2014.*

# Mary Louise Valentine: Blessed Memories

By Darold Morgan

We note with sorrow, and yet gratitude, that Mrs. Mary Louise Valentine passed away in Dallas on October 9, 2014. She and Foy Valentine, the founder of *Christian Ethics Today*, were married for 58 years before his death in 2006. Memorial services were conducted at her church, Park Cities Baptist Church, on October 16<sup>th</sup> by Darold Morgan, David Sapp, John Scott, and Charles Worley. Burial was beside Foy and a young daughter in a country cemetery near Foy's home territory in Van Zandt County, East Texas. She is survived by three daughters, Jean, Carol and Susan and the great and great grandchildren.

Born in Fort Worth, Mary Louise was a graduate of Rice University. Throughout Foy's world-wide ministry, she supported him with love and understanding far beyond the average. Her family agrees that the homelife she created, her support when so many challenges came Foy's way, and the depth of love in the home was of exceptional dimensions. This was the main emphasis of the memorial service that honored her. The final verses of I Corinthians 13 were used. The New English Bible version of verse 13 says: "There are three great things that last forever....faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

The application was quite simple. Mary Louise had values that grew out of her deep faith in Christ. Added to that is the strong

confidence that hope lies in eternal life, complete with some blessed reunions. And, there is love which is grounded in that faith and hope has produced a beautiful life....that Foy would agree is of major importance to all his work.

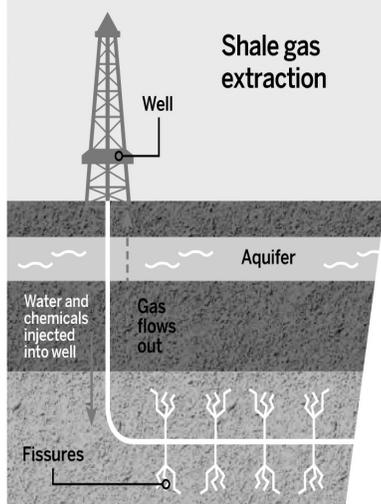
She and Foy retired from the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville in 1988. They moved back to Dallas where their roots were strong. Here was born the concept of the quarterly journal, *Christian Ethics Today*, and the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, Foy's alma mater. In the early years of the quarterly, Mary Louise was the proof reader along with many other tasks involved in the journal's production, mailing list, and other clerical details. She and her daughters continued the task of raising funds for the Valentine Chair of Ethics at Truett Seminary, a part of Baylor University.

Mary Louise traveled far and wide with Foy during his ministry, but of signal importance to her was the keeping of a warm and welcoming home for the family. She welcomed many visitors, served splendid meals, and was always charming. Many of us have fond memories of being in her home. Perhaps a highlight of her memorial service was when a grandson read those memorable words from Proverbs: "Her children rise up and bless her, her husband also, and he praises her, saying, 'many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all'." ■

# A Debate on Fracking

## FRACKING

Hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', is a mining technology in which hydraulically pressurised liquid is used to crack rock, thereby allowing the recovery of hydrocarbons such as gas and oil. Almost no issue of our times has aroused as much heated debate as fracking, to the point where the real issues are almost overwhelmed by Hollywood films, lobbying groups and geo-political arguments.



Hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', is a mining technology in which hydraulically pressurized liquid is used to crack rock, thereby allowing the recovery of hydrocarbons such as gas and oil. Almost no issue of our times has aroused as much heated debate as fracking, to the point where the real issues are almost overwhelmed by Hollywood films, lobbying groups and geo-political arguments.

### Safer than you think

By Dr Joe Cartwright

Fracking has already been used in more than two million boreholes; so it is hardly a new and unproven methodology. For instance, fracking is routinely used to enhance recovery of oil and gas from many conventional reservoirs of sandstone and shale. An example is in Europe's largest onshore oil field in Dorset, Wytch Farm, nestled in the beautiful New Forest. The legitimate concerns relating to fracking are no greater than would apply to any industrial operation, and are addressed by the right regulatory framework. But there is huge public fear and even unrest in many countries and indeed, in the US itself, at the prospect of fracking coming to 'our community.'

Hydraulic fracturing of a shale gas reservoir involves drilling into the reservoir and pumping fluid into it at sufficiently high pressure to overcome the natural tensile strength, plus the confining stress. There is nothing intrinsically dangerous about pumping fluid into the deep subsurface at high pressure, provided the well is monitored carefully throughout. The resulting minor 'earthquakes' are tiny, relative to destructive earthquakes,

and smaller than even those caused by mining operations. Fracking requires large volumes of water, but on a scale comparable to many other industrial activities.

In countries such as the UK and the USA, the regulatory framework for onshore drilling operations is sufficiently tight to allay fears. As we have seen over the years with conventional oil and gas drilling operations, accidents can and do happen. But such accidents are very rare compared to the scale of the activity.

There is another concern: that the

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*'The legitimate concerns are no greater than would apply to any industrial operation'*

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chemicals being incorporated with water and sand into the fracking fluid will eventually penetrate groundwater aquifers. This is a fear that rests on a failure to grasp the scale of fracking. A typical fracture is less than a centimetre across and no more than 200 to 300 metres tall. Because shale gas reservoirs are exploited at depths of only two to three kilometres below the surface, and groundwater aquifers are typically a few hundred metres beneath the surface, the likelihood of fractures propagating anywhere near the water supply is extremely small.

The greatest risk to groundwater comes instead from poor drilling methods, and particularly from poor quality cement lining of the borehole, which is a recognised problem for all drilling operations and for which regulations are already specifically designed. The chemicals used in fracking fluid also amount to about one per cent of the total pumped volume, and are strictly controlled in the US and UK. Methane leakage into the atmosphere is not well quantified at present, partly because of the paucity

of data on natural leakage of methane from the deep subsurface into shallow aquifers and to the surface; but this does need careful monitoring in the future.

Without a doubt, the greatest risk to communities where fracking operations would be undertaken comes not from pollution from drilling, or from induced seismicity, but from the vastly increased road traffic that would be required to supply the drill site. Only local communities can judge whether this disruption is justified by the privileges of living in a highly developed society, fuelled (at least for the time being) in large measure by oil and gas. ■

**Dr Joe Cartwright** (DPhil in rift systems, 1988) was appointed the Shell Professor of Earth Sciences at Oxford in 2012. He worked for Shell International as an exploration geophysicist, was at Imperial College as a Senior Lecturer until 1999, and was appointed Honorary Professor of the Institut Français du Pétrole in 1998.

## Too risky by far

By Dr Jeremy Leggett

I am opposed to fracking in the UK for five main reasons: economic risk, local environmental cost, global environmental cost, social cost and opportunity cost. All the evidence for what follows is in the log of events on my website, [www.jeremyleggett.net](http://www.jeremyleggett.net).

First, the economic risk. The US 'shale boom' looks as though it will turn into a bubble. The oil and gas industry is losing cash by the tens of billions of dollars, because high drilling costs mean most companies are spending more than they are earning from fracked gas and oil. Wider US industry may have benefited from cheap gas in the short term; but pro-

duction from all shale gas regions save the Marcellus has peaked already, and many of us watching the detail see little prospect of the gas industry delivering growing production far into the future.

Second, the local environmental cost. Once Dick Cheney freed fracking from scrutiny under the Safe Water Act (the so-called 'Halliburton Loophole'), bad news about contamination and health impacts should have been predictable. It has been slow to emerge, in part because of widespread use of gagging orders by the industry as part of compensation payments for wrecked farms and impaired health. But now a regular drip of bad news has started and is

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**'Fracked gas may well be worse than coal in greenhouse terms, over the full-life-cycle'**

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soon likely to snowball as ever more people realize the reality behind the industry's insistence that all is well.

Third, the global environmental cost. Gas industry operations can leak methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from wellhead to hob. Early research findings by the rare university teams not cowed by oil-industry funding are very worrying when it comes to fracking. Fracked gas may well prove to be worse than coal, in greenhouse terms, over the full-life-cycle. And British shale basins are far more faulted than US shale basins.

Fourth, the social cost. It is likely that few British people as yet fully appreciate the industrial infrastructure, waste disposal challenges and lorry movements that are required for a typical US shale 'sweet spot', and what the social cost of that

would be if superimposed on rural Britain. Yet already local opposition is severe, even against single vertical unfracked test wells. Planning for the first such was recently rejected by a council in Sussex for the first time, with objectors 'weeping with relief' in the chamber on hearing the decision.

Many such objectors are conservative voters. The prime minister says he wants to deliver sufficient shale gas to drive down the gas price enough for manufacturing to return to the UK. He has little or no chance of getting that past his own voter base without committing political suicide, even if much gas proves extractable by fracking – which the British Geological Survey clearly has doubts about.

Fifth, the opportunity cost. There is a shovel-ready alternative over time that can be developed surprisingly quickly: a power source that is infinite and easy to tap. Politically, the government's own opinion polls show that solar is outstandingly the most popular energy technology with the British public, year after year, miles ahead of fracking – even now, so early in the game. The opportunity cost is that many leaders in the oil and gas industry, and their supporters in government, want actively to suppress this fast-growing global industry, with its fast-falling cost base – along with other clean-energy industries – so as to not put investors in gas off. ■

**Dr Jeremy Leggett** (DPhil in earth sciences, Wolfson, 1978), author of *The Energy of Nations*, is founder and chairman of Solarcentury and founder and chairman of SolarAid, a solar lighting charity set up with 5% of Solarcentury's annual profits, itself parent to a social venture, SunnyMoney, that is the top-selling retailer of solar lights in Africa. He is an Entrepreneur of the Year at the New Energy Awards.

*The feature on fracking was first published in Oxford Today, the official magazine of the University of Oxford, in October 2014, and is reproduced here with the permission of the Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of The University of Oxford.*

# Remembering a More Generous Economy

By Rick Burnette

I was a nosey little boy. Every Friday during the early 1970s, my mom would write a paycheck for the family business's only employee, Ted\*. And I would inspect the check each time that I walked it over to him. As I recall for that period, Ted made around \$70 a week.

My dad opened his auto body repair shop behind our house in 1965. In 1969 he hired Ted, a 20-year old who had been married a couple of years and whose wife stayed at home to take care of their baby boy.

Ted's upbringing was not easy as his dad was killed in a sawmill accident when he was a toddler. After Dad took Ted on as an unskilled worker, he began to learn the basics of repairing dents and preparing cars for paint jobs.

In 1970 the U.S. minimum wage was \$1.60 per hour with a 40-hour wage, excluding social security and other deductions, calculated at \$64. Ted's pay was a little higher than the minimum wage. He also received medical insurance through my parents' business.

Ted had very little church involvement. My dad, a deacon and Sunday School teacher, invited him to attend our church. Not long afterward, Ted made a profession of faith and was baptized in Cartoogechaye Creek along with me and several others.

Except for a brief period when Dad went to work as the body shop foreman at the Ford dealership, Ted worked in the family business up through the 1980s. He and his wife still reside in the house that they built almost 45 years ago after having raised three boys there and they remain involved in a local church.

Would Ted's modest but significant economic accomplishments be possible today? Under the current economic and business climate, it doesn't seem very likely. For one thing, the US minimum wage, currently \$7.25, has not kept pace with the cost of living. According to a July 2014 New York

Times opinion piece by Bill Marsh, through the 1960s, minimum-wage worker earnings were about 50 percent of those of average American production workers. Since then the value of the minimum wage has eroded to the point that minimum-wage workers earn only 37 percent of what the average American wage earner takes home.

The Economic Policy Institute, which lobbies for the economic interests of low- to moderate income American families, has stated that had the minimum wage continued to be adjusted at the same rate as growth in wages for the typical American worker, it would have been \$10.65 in 2013.

On a state-by-state basis, some progress is being made. By early 2015, 21 states will have raised minimum wages higher than the U.S. minimum. According to the Washington Post (December 26, 2014), these raises will range from 12 cents in Florida to \$1.25 in South Dakota. The state of Washington's minimum wage will be the highest at \$9.47 with Oregon's next at \$9.25. Vermont and Connecticut at \$9.15. Massachusetts and Rhode Island at \$9. Unfortunately, these state minimum wage changes will still be considerably lower than the needed \$10.65.

In addition to an inadequate minimum wage, another factor inhibiting low income economic progress is the pervasiveness of businesses minimizing employee benefits by offering part-time employment. Another limitation is the wrongful classification of workers as independent contractors for whom businesses are not required to withhold or pay any taxes on payment for services.

Despite tactics and legal loopholes that secure corporations and businesses a bigger piece of the pie, Biblical expectation for generosity speaks to the contrary. Agricultural abundance

was commanded to be shared with foreigners, the fatherless and widows who might glean after the harvest (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). Stating the case for adequate ministerial compensation, the Apostle Paul references both the welfare of the ox and the worker (1 Timothy 5:18). James 5:4, warns oppressive employers: "Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who plowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty."

What has changed over the past half century? Are economic conditions now so dire that employers cannot possibly support a living wage for their employees or provide health benefits without sinking their businesses?

Or is part of the problem rooted in an unhealthy sense of entitlement among employers? Could it be that corporate officers, managers and business owners generally expect to live larger than before, resulting in less to share with those in their employ?

Today, in order to adequately compensate their workers, how many employers are choosing to live with a little less? Many of these would know that a willingness to share, whether corporately or individually, extends spiritual blessings as well as economic benefits.

Had Mom and Dad been close-fisted employers, it's doubtful that their faith would have been legitimate or attractive to Ted. I think that they understood that spiritual and economic concerns are not exclusive. ■

*Rick Burnette previously served as an agricultural missionary with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Thailand. He and his wife, Ellen, currently serve as Director of Agriculture at ECHO in North Ft. Myers, Florida.*

# Three Lessons for America from Christian Bale's Moses

By Jennifer Danielle Crumpton

I recently sat down with Christian Bale, Joel Edgerton, Ridley Scott and a handful of religion journalists to talk about the New York premiere of *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. You might guess that a bunch of religion writers tried to school the artists on the religious veracity (or lack thereof) of the movie, or criticize the atheist director's reality-based choices. Not so. In fact, I walked away from the earnest conversation feeling I'd just been blessed with something much deeper than a Sunday school lesson.

Only a few men have notably played Moses on the big screen, small screen or stage. Becoming Moses and playing out one of the biggest coups in history surely lends an insight otherwise unattainable at a reader's distance. Listening to Bale talk about his extraordinary opportunity to slip into the skin of Moses and see events from his perspective in order to do the biblical icon justice got me to thinking.

Bale's performance of Moses, and his personal reflections about the care he took in embodying him, made me wonder what would happen to the narrative if he weren't so curious and open about Moses' authentic perception of both his own story and The Greater Story. It reminded me of the greatest danger to our narrative as a nation: our propensity for not caring to truly get inside the head of the other; not stopping to question our version of the story; not bothering to understand or find value in what seems foreign to us; and not acknowledging the surprising truth present in experiences and realities we have not lived ourselves. In other words, usurping universal stories for our own narrow purposes and proofs, and dismissing the lessons that do not match a rigid worldview.

Considering our discussion in light of recent headlines, I came away with three lessons that we can apply to

American ideological polarization, political leadership, foreign diplomacy, the latest report on CIA activity, views of the Ferguson and Staten Island tragedies, and much more. It is up to you to decide how.

## **One person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist.**

Bale told ABC's *Nightline* that Moses in his time was "...absolutely seen as a freedom fighter. A terrorist in terms of the Egyptian empire. What would happen to Moses if he

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*Bale told ABC's Nightline that Moses in his time was "... absolutely seen as a freedom fighter. A terrorist in terms of the Egyptian empire.*

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arrived today? Drones would turn out after him, right?"

He made a quite simple observation about the tumultuous position and brazen actions of his character — raised in the courts of Egypt and then hand-picked by God to turn and go to dramatic, deadly lengths to free the Hebrew slaves. He referred to the situation in applicable modern language we use today. Yet, rather than stopping to really listen, understand and consider his perspective, the media twisted Bale's comments into treachery and *the religious went on the war path*.

But what is so offensive about recognizing that Moses heard God's voice telling him he was going to torture the oppressors with plagues and kill them off in a series of miraculously strategic initiatives — down to innocent animals and first-born babies? And God needed Moses to help make it happen. It's what happened, after all. This statement by Bale is not about whether Moses would or

would not have "been thinking about drones," as Father Jonathan Morris, a guest on Fox and Friends, lamely suggested. It is actually about the most profound mysteries of life and deepest quandaries of humanity. Bale actually gets that.

When it comes to survival, both physical and ideological, right and wrong start to bleed together. 'Thou shalt not kill' becomes a questionable tactical call or a vulnerability, not God's commandment once the Hebrews were out of a blood-soaked Egypt. When interests collide, all bets are off. Does choking to death someone we are trying to subdue make us safer? Does ruthless torture reflect the protection of American values, or make us as bad as our enemies? I'll never forget working on a documentary about international relationships post-9/11, and meeting a teenage girl from Pakistan who knew she would never get married because she lost her leg in a drone strike and was forever marred. I remember the child holding a baby in Tora Bora who looked into the camera and asked why the American king killed their civilian parents, leaving them alone, hungry and penniless.

In the film, we see Bale's Moses simultaneously awe and reel over the violent terror and death God rains down on even the innocent people of the land under imperial rule. He is both in on it and freaked out by it. Unlike other depictions I've seen, the situation in his eyes is not a given for a just or happy ending. We all condemn senseless violence, and today groups like ISIS have certainly taken misguided (pseudo) 'religious' brutality to an unprecedented extreme. We have to fight to save ourselves somehow when everything is at stake. But God help us if we forget that in the day-to-day, there are always multiple experiences of the fighting and the

fighters, the victories and the consequences, and we have all been on both sides. Someone always loses the battle. But everyone ultimately loses their freedom.

**We've been demanding the wrong kinds of heroes.**

Looking to the iconic Great American Hero to lead our fights and protect us, we expect he — and it's always a he — to be consistently stoic and strong, unbreakably confident, decisive and sure. He never makes a mistake, changes his mind or admits he doesn't know what to think or do. We tend to demand perfection, or at least the spin to create the appearance of it. Politicians run and win on their records of never changing their stance on issues, which also means they have not thought critically, sought or learned new information, or grown personally and intellectually. Political parties refuse to relinquish a stance, to compromise or to accept a solution, even when the government is hours from shutting down.

Bale's Moses changes dramatically from a strapping, confident and commanding "prince of Egypt" — the typical hero of brawn and bravado — to a wan, confused, tormented, exhausted servant. He agonizes, questions every move, doubts himself, doubts God and yells. He bounces between realities, gets flustered and flounders. He struggles. This is the only way he could save his people: to be open to learning everything as he goes and to be certain of nothing. This is heroic leadership. And it is not acceptable in our modern mainstream, to our detriment.

**We can't be afraid to look crazy.**

Bale's Moses really loses it. He's no stoic-heroic Charlton Heston, and it is divine. Bale said Moses is "the most intriguing person I've ever come across...He encompasses virtually every single emotion known to man."

On screen, we see this Moses' inner struggle and his shades of grey... the things we always secretly wonder about. Looking crazy was the only

way to get the job done. Both Moses and Jesus seemed insane because they believed the unbelievable, saw the unseeable, and did the unthinkable. After sacrificing any sense of comfort or security in life, and fighting the good fight, Moses missed the Promised Land and Jesus went to the cross.

What if we were brave enough as a world leader to do the counterintuitive thing? What if the example we set was to do the right thing despite what others do to us, and accept what comes. What if our "Christian nation" actually followed Jesus, who said there is no longer such thing as an eye for an eye, which results only in violence and retaliation? Would we die on the

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*Bale's Moses really loses it. He's no stoic-heroic Charlton Heston, and it is divine.*

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cross? Or would we be resurrected into a new life? Will we ever know?

It is ridiculous to accuse unifiers, advocates and peacemakers of making our country seem weak...the attempt at finding common ground and making peace is the utmost display of strength. There is something to this loving our enemies thing, that we are promised will pay dividends for the human race. It's what Jesus did in his protest and activism against imperial oppression in his time. But some American Christians want torture, drones, bombs, boots on the ground, tons of guns, stops and frisks, shows of force and towering electric fences, because they are an oddly frightened, distressed moral majority for people who supposedly believe without doubt in an omnipotent, all-powerful God who will deliver them.

In America, it seems easy to take our privilege too far and smugly smother our perceived enemies with rigid religious assumptions and warring cries of pre-ordained victory. It seems easy to wonder why black people are angry

and tired and have had it, because we are too lazy and self-righteous and certain and distracted and scared shitless to slip into their skin and play out the coup that must happen for justice to reign, for the realm of God to come. What if what we think is God's story is actually another story altogether, from a completely different perspective? What if God is every perspective, all together?

We tend to conduct ourselves in the opposite way of Moses' wrestling humility and Jesus' fearless empathy. We don't listen and understand before we react, and we refuse to turn the other cheek. Yet the ultimate success of this great experiment of ours will require compassion, critical thinking and compromise. It will require having no skin and every skin.

Scott, Edgerton and Bale clearly took the Exodus story seriously, and Scott reiterated that they "chose to play it as if it were historically true." The only way Bible stories remain relevant and approach universal truth is if diverse human beings creatively bring them forward into the light of a new day and the hearts of new generations in new and unique ways. In the end, survival is not about controlling the story's outcome, but having faith in it. ■

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# The Theo-Politics of Near/Far: Homosexuality and Other Divisive Issues

By K. Jason Coker

One of the most endearing and memorable skit on Sesame Street is Grover's epic near/far demonstration. I've never been able to forget it since I was a child, and the skit actually is just a little bit older than me—it first aired in 1975. For the younger among us, the forever young Grover “shows” his viewers what near and far mean. He stands at attention very close to the TV screen and declares, “Near!” Then, he runs away from the screen, getting smaller and smaller, until he stops and says, “Far!” In order to help the viewers, children and adults alike, he repeats this near/far demonstration over and over again until he is out of breath from running back and forth—near to far and back again. By the end of the two and a half minute skit, and to the delight and hilarity of his audience, Grover collapses in exhaustion trying to demonstrate the meaning of near and far. Although Grover never believes that we understood what he was trying to demonstrate, in actuality, we all got it!

Even the smallest child understood, maybe not in these exact words, that there was a major *distance* between the spatial concepts of near and far. Near is something close. Far is something distant. What may not have been so explicit in Grover's skit is that there was a massive *difference* between near and far. In pure spatial terms, this is simply descriptive and carries no political or theological weight. I live far from my hometown. That is a spatial fact—Connecticut is a long way from Mississippi.

Near and far, then, create a binary of opposites, which is indicative of so much of our language and cultural construction of reality—we are “far” from Sesame Street at this point! Western languages are built on binaries such as near/far, white/black, male/female, right/wrong, etc. We define a word either by saying what it is not—by its opposite—or by deferring to other words. This system of binary opposites constructs reality

in profound ways. It shapes the way we think about the world and about each other.

## Theo-Politics of Near/Far

When spatial concepts are used metaphorically, the near/far binary immediately raises ethical questions. What are those things that bring us close, i.e. near, as a community, and what are those things that separate us, i.e. far? These are questions of identity and otherness, and when defining community from the standpoint of faith, we need to consider the “ethics of the other.” Identity is a boundary constructing endeavor, but it does not have to be completely exclusive. The problem is with binary language. To identify or define oneself or one's community usually results in a negative demarcation with another. “I am not that” or “We are not them.” This is quintessential binary thinking, and it is not a modern phenomena.

This is implicitly the problem in the Letter to the Ephesians. In this letter, there is an attempt to find a common ground between two groups of people who were historically at odds with one another: Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles were considered “far” from God and God's covenant. Likewise, Jews were considered “near” to God and God's covenant. In fact, Jews were God's chosen people. The problem in Ephesians, and the primary difficulty addressed by several New Testament writers, was what to do with Gentiles? The Gospel of Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians all specifically address this issue, and other New Testament writers deal generally with internal unity and group cohesiveness (cf. The Gospel of John and the Epistles of John).

The earliest challenge to the Jesus Movement that later became known as Christianity was the issue with Gentiles. This was both a theological and political issue due to the time in which the Jesus Movement was growing and being

shaped. It was theological because there was already a path for Gentiles to become Jewish—circumcision was a primary ritual for inclusion into Judaism for Gentile men. This was also a political act after the destruction of the Temple by Rome because a convert physically demonstrated their allegiance to a territory in revolt against Rome. Circumcision could not be hidden in the public area of the gymnasium, so circumcision was a public act, and it was the primary ritual for Gentiles to become Jewish—and of course, the early Jesus movement was a Jewish movement. It was the more radical factions of the early Jesus movement that reinterpreted the inclusion of the Gentiles. Paul, one of the most vocal of these advocates, clearly argued that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised (cf. Galatians 3).

The Gospel of Matthew mediates this argument by reluctantly accepting Gentiles into the covenant with God by their faith. The story of the healing of the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28) are the best examples of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke's narrative of Peter and Cornelius codifies his theological stand on how Gentiles belong in the covenant, i.e., “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15). All of these biblical authors are trying to mediate a major issue among their constituents: How do we include the Gentiles? The bigger question, however, was not the inclusion of the Gentiles, but the identity of the movement! Who are we?

Ephesians 2:11-22 gives a great assessment of how to think about the theo-politics of near/far in relation to the Gentile problem, and it is worth quoting at length.

<sup>11</sup> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision

made in the flesh by human hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in this world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.<sup>14</sup> For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.<sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace,<sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.<sup>17</sup> So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near;<sup>18</sup> for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.<sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;<sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

From the very beginning, it is obvious that this passage is dealing with the historic difference between Jews and Gentiles. It is also clear that the goal of this passage is to create a sense of belonging for the Gentiles by incorporating them into the covenant of God through Jesus Christ. The theo-politics of near/far play an essential role in the way this process happens. The “far off” Gentiles have been metaphorically brought “near” by Jesus Christ. Space is created for both Jews and Gentiles to coexist in a new community. This is a movement away from the “Gentile problem” and a move toward group identity. The identity markers of Jew and Gentile are not abolished, but this new space offers a new identity for both—not a competing identity. This “one new humanity” problematizes the binary thinking of Jew/Gentile. It disrupts the logic of this binary and offers another way to think about identity, and it does so to create

community cohesion where there was division.

### Theo-Politics of Near/Far in Contemporary Culture

All of these biblical examples show us how our Christian ancestors negotiated the theo-politics of near/far in relation to the major moral issue of their time. The Gentile problem was the issue, but it pushed early Christianity to make very difficult decisions related to identity. What kind of community would it be? Would it allow Gentiles into the community or not? If it did, what ritual would Gentiles have to perform to enter into the community? These were very difficult questions, but the biblical authors did their very best to work with these answers in their writings, and these writings—our sacred Scriptures—are what we use to navigate the waters of our own modern moral issues. For the writer of Ephesians, it is clear that the “one new humanity” was much more important than how to incorporate Gentiles. The “one new humanity” was the overarching identity in which all these early believers, both Jews and Gentiles, were included. This did not abolish their identities as Jews or Gentiles, it just provided a common ground for them to worship and work together for God’s common good.

The issue of homosexuality is one of our modern moral issues and so many are drawing a line in the sand—this is an identity marker more than a theo-political statement. These lines segment and divide our Christian brothers and sisters and churches in ways that prevent us all from working together for other important issues that demand attention and cooperation. The only thing that everyone agrees upon regarding homosexuality is that it is a divisive issue—one of the most divisive in our country. Denominations are being torn to pieces over how to respond to the issue. The judicial systems in our state and federal governments are feverishly working through all sorts of issues related to marriage equality, gay rights, traditional family values, etc. I do not deny the severity of this issue for our time. Those in the LGBTQ community feel ostracized and oppressed. Those who do not agree with homosexuality feel like

they are being choked by the left-wing agenda. Both sides feel victimized; both sides feel like no one is listening to them. All the while we demonize each other as sexual perverts or homophobic bigots, and as we do, we fall prey to the legacy of binary thinking, which has consumed political discourse in American politics. What does the “one new humanity” look like in our contemporary society? This is a question of identity. Do we value cooperation and fellowship more than being right? If someone disagrees with us on this issue, does that mean we can never work together on anything else? If we disagree on the most divisive issue in American society, does that mean we cannot cooperate on anything else?

I believe that the Bible offers us examples of early Christian believers that had strong convictions about cooperation and fellowship, and those convictions guided their capacity for everything else. They genuinely believed that God’s Kingdom was a big house. I strongly believe that these biblical examples can guide us through our modern moral issues together and in cooperation, which means we won’t always agree with each other on the issues. We can, however, agree on how we work through our disagreements so that we can cooperate in other areas where we share strong conviction. If we are constantly policing the line between near and far, we will only run out of energy just like Grover did way back in 1975. ■

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# The Problem of Predatory Lending: Texas Baptists and Usury

by Aaron Weaver

Meet “Rick.” Rick is a Vietnam War veteran who, like a growing number of Americans, is underemployed and has lived paycheck-to-paycheck for a long time. When his daughter got into a bit of financial trouble, Rick took out a \$4,000 title loan against his truck to help out. Not able to pay off the loan in one payment, Rick was charged a \$1,200 penalty fee per month. Rick could have paid \$1,200 each month forever and never paid off the loan. Stephen Reeves, then public policy director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, shared Rick’s story at the 2009 regional meeting of the New Baptist Covenant. According to Reeves, Rick’s story exemplifies what usury looks like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Throughout history, the practice of usury has been almost universally condemned. For centuries, usury has been judged by poets and philosophers and prophets and priests as an especially persistent and pernicious evil.<sup>1</sup> During the United States founding era, interest rates on loans in all 13 colonies were capped between five and eight percent. Usury laws in the colonies and back in England were rooted in historic Christian understandings of acceptable lending practices. Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther held that interest rates of five to six percent were moral with eight percent as a permissible rate in some circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, states began to adjust their usury laws to allow for higher interest rates. The industrial age brought with it more stable household incomes and created a demand for greater access to credit through moderately-priced consumer loans with low double-digit interest rates. Following World War II, all 50 states had interest rate caps ranging from 24 to 42 percent per year on small loans. The median limit was 36 percent.<sup>3</sup>

For more than 300 years in America, usury was considered to be a serious crime and for decades federal law enforcement sought to apprehend and incarcerate usurious lenders. However, in 1978 the U.S. Supreme Court dealt a devastating blow to usury restrictions. In *Marquette National Bank v. First Omaha Service Corp.*, the High Court was asked to decide whether the usury laws of a bank’s home state or the laws of the consumer’s home state applied in a multi-state loan transaction. Relying on the National Bank Act of 1864, the Court ruled against the consumer and issued a decision allowing national banks located in deregulated states, such as Delaware and South Dakota, to export its high interest rates to states with strict usury laws. In response, these states adopted “parity laws” to give their local financial institutions the right to charge the same interest rates that national banks could import into their communities via federal law.<sup>4</sup>

Non-bank lenders, such as finance companies and car dealerships, resented the preferential treatment that banks were receiving. These lenders began to lobby for exemptions from state usury laws and some were successful. Consequently, during the 1980s, predatory lenders began to take advantage of these exemptions and other loopholes to state usury laws. These lenders began to allow a borrower to post-date a personal check for a small amount plus a fee, payable to the lender, in return for cash. The borrower would then be obligated to buy back the uncashed check at his or her next “payday,” generally due 14 days later. In many states, these predatory lenders contended that they were in the “check-cashing” business and not actual lenders.<sup>5</sup>

In other states with traditional usury restrictions, predatory lenders partnered with banks in deregulated states to “rent” their interest rate powers per

the Supreme Court’s *Marquette* ruling. Predatory lenders would pay the out-of-state bank a fee to make the loan in the name of the bank. The FDIC cracked down on these practices in 2005 and ruled that deferred cash checking as well as the “rent-a-bank” model to avoid a state’s usury laws were “unsafe and unsound banking practices.”<sup>6</sup>

The FDIC’s crackdown did little to hinder the efforts of predatory lenders. Starting in the late 1990s, the payday lending industry experienced exponential growth. In the early 1990s, payday lenders comprised a tiny fraction of the financial services industry with just several hundred locations. In 2004, just prior to the FDIC’s intervention, there were 22,000 payday loan storefronts in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Recent data has shown that — not including online lenders — there are more than 24,000 payday loan locations nationwide.<sup>8</sup>

With an average annual interest rate of around 400 percent, the payday loan industry is now a multi-billion dollar industry. A study from The Pew Charitable Trusts reported that payday loan borrowers spend \$7.4 billion annually at more than 20,000 payday storefronts and on hundreds of websites. More than 12 million Americans took out a payday loan in 2010 and 69 percent of borrowers took out the loan to cover the cost of a recurring monthly expense.<sup>9</sup>

In Texas, there are more payday loan storefronts than McDonalds and Whataburger restaurants combined. With more than 3,000 payday stores that handle an estimated \$3 billion in loans annually and take in more than \$400 million in fees each year, Texas is the corporate headquarters for industry giants Ace Cash Express, EZ Money and Cash America International.

When the FDIC cracked down on the “rent-a-bank” model in 2005, payday lenders in Texas discovered a new

way to do business. These lenders were — to the dismay of consumer protection advocates — allowed to register with the state as credit service organizations (CSOs) under Chapter 393 of the Texas Finance Code, a provision originally intended for organizations that aimed to help improve a consumer's credit history or rating.

The payday storefront set up as a CSO, which was separate from the third-party non-bank lender. The CSO would function as the broker between the consumer and the third-party lender, and the lender would loan the money to the consumer at the 10 percent usury cap rate per the Texas state constitution. However, the CSO would charge unregulated fees for its “services” in securing the loan for the consumer. These fees could total to more than a 500 percent annual rate.

In 2010, Texas Baptists began to take notice of the predatory lending problem in their state in a formal and organized way. For more than 60 years, the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas has aimed to “speak to, but not for” Texas Baptists on a host of ethical issues in the political arena. While initially focused on confronting racial inequality and gambling, the CLC came to respond to almost every important issue to trouble American society, from family life issues such as birth control and divorce to religious liberty to economic issues such as poverty and world hunger.

With predatory lending, the CLC became involved to confront a neglected justice issue and an extremely powerful industry — an industry whose members include deacons and active laypersons in some of the convention's 5,500 affiliated congregations. The CLC also became involved after coming to understand the connection between payday lending and gambling, which the CLC has consistently and effectively opposed for decades in the Lone Star State.

CLC leaders have cited the “Thrift or Debt” report of the Institute for American Values as a formative influence that led the agency to address the

problem of predatory lending.

This report called on Texans to “leave behind the debilitating, failed practices of debt and waste and embrace a new ethic of thrift and saving.” According to the report, a two-tier financial system has emerged in recent decades in Texas. The upper tier of this system is comprised of pro-thrift institutions, including savings banks and credit unions, that provide opportunities for higher-earning families to save, invest and build wealth. However, the lower-tier of this system is made up of public and private anti-thrift institutions, such as the state-sponsored lottery, pawn shops, rent-to-own stores, payday lenders and other providers of high-interest loans. These anti-thrift institutions provide numerous ways for lower-earning families to forego savings, borrow at predatory interest rates and fall into a debt trap.<sup>10</sup> With this linkage between the lottery (a public anti-thrift institution) and payday lenders (a private anti-thrift institution), this report provided the CLC a rationale and framework to buttress the ethic agency's lobbying efforts in the Austin Capitol as well as with its fiercely anti-gambling Texas Baptist constituency.

Beginning in January 2010, the CLC sponsored a series of articles on predatory lending in the *Baptist Standard*, the news publication for Texas Baptists. These articles sought to outline a theological foundation for support of payday loan reform and did so relying on the perspectives of notable Bible and ethics scholars in Texas Baptist life. The CLC called on church leaders to preach about the responsible stewardship of resources and how to cultivate a “culture of thrift” through sponsorship of financial seminars to teach congregants and community members how to get and stay out of debt.<sup>11</sup>

At its annual conference in March 2010, the CLC highlighted the connection between gambling expansion and predatory lending through a focus on financial issues in the church. The conference emphasized the need to reclaim the importance of a culture of thrift.<sup>12</sup> The ethics agency also ensured the adoption of a resolution

on fair lending later that year at the convention's annual gathering. Citing the “more than 2,800 unlicensed and unregulated lending storefronts” in the state, the resolution expressed “deep concern over the currently legal, yet unethical, lending practices being used in economically disadvantaged communities throughout the state,” and urged the passage of “just laws that will limit these unfair lending practices.” It also called on churches to consider starting ministries to assist individuals in personal financial management and stewardship.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to educating Texas Baptist churches, the CLC focused on mobilizing other faith-based organizations around the issue of predatory lending. Up until that point, there was no organized faith-based effort to confront the payday loan industry. Partnering with the Texas Catholic Conference and Texas Impact (an interfaith organization), the CLC formed Texas Faith for Fair Lending. This coalition worked to educate the public as well as key stakeholders in Austin about the state's problem of payday lending. The coalition stressed that its purpose was not to set up a new regulatory system, but to force payday lenders to operate under Section 342 of the Texas Finance Code, which already governed small consumer loans with regulations on rates and fees and oversight through the Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner. The coalition's ultimate objective was to have the state legislature close the loophole in the Texas Finance Code that allowed payday and auto-title lenders to register as credit service organizations and avoid usury regulations. Texas Faith for Fair Lending emphasized that its purpose was not to shut down payday storefronts but to require them to operate fairly and openly like other lenders in the state.

In 2011, during the 82<sup>nd</sup> session of the Texas legislature, the CLC and the newly-formed Texas Faith for Fair Lending coalition advocated for and backed legislation to close the CSO loophole and regulate payday lend-

ers. Led by Director Suzii Paynter, the CLC endorsed legislation proposed by Senator Wendy Davis of Fort Worth that proposed to force payday and auto-title lenders to conform to regulations similar to other lenders in the state and cap interest rates and fees.<sup>14</sup> Davis' bill proposed limits on payday loan fees, the elimination of fees on rollover loans and included the requirement that lenders put consumers on a payment plan with no additional fees after a loan had been re-issued three times. Most importantly, Davis' bill proposed to close the CSO loophole in Texas law that allowed predatory lenders to operate without any oversight.<sup>15</sup>

At a press conference on the steps of the Capitol, the coalition voiced their support for meaningful reform of the payday industry. The event featured a diverse group of speakers including a Catholic Bishop, a United Church of Christ minister and a Texas Baptist pastor. Thousands of postcards signed by congregants from across the state were on display at the conference, where speakers called for an "end to the cycle of debt." Charles Singleton, director of African American Ministries for Texas Baptists, declared that the way in which payday and auto title lenders target the poor, minorities, the elderly and the military is "analogous and tantamount to financial slavery."<sup>16</sup>

After payday legislation stalled in both the Texas House and Senate, Rep. Vicki Truitt, the Republican chairwoman of the House Pensions, Investments and Financial Services Committee offered a compromise solution in the form of three bills. Truitt's bills were the product of a mediated negotiation between the payday industry and consumer protection groups. While Truitt's legislation proposed restrictions on lending practices, none of her three bills proposed to limit usurious interest rates and fees.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the bills proposed to limit loans to a percentage of person's annual income, allow only four roll-overs of a loan each year and then require lenders to put a borrower on a payment plan without additional fees, and also require the payday industry to report data on its operations.<sup>18</sup>

Faced with the political reality that serious reform of the payday industry would not be possible during the 82<sup>nd</sup> session, the CLC reluctantly endorsed Truitt's bills. Stephen Reeves, the CLC's public policy director, explained that Truitt's bills represented the session's "best hope of positive change for borrowers."<sup>19</sup> The CLC and other consumer advocates had good reason to be suspicious of Truitt's involvement as during the 2010 election cycle. Truitt received more campaign donations from the payday industry than any other rank and file lawmaker. Their suspicions were more than confirmed the following year when Truitt, after losing her seat in the 2012 Republican primary, joined the payday industry as a lobbyist just 17 days after her defeat.<sup>20</sup>

Two of Truitt's three bills were passed. HB 2592 required payday lenders to provide notice and disclosures for consumers to make informed choices and to more easily compare the actual costs of different loan terms with other short-term loans. The second bill, HB 2594, required payday lenders to report important data each quarter to the Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner. HB 2594 also allowed for enforcement of fair debt collections practices and ensured compliance with the federal Military Lending Act. HB 2593, the lone bill that did not pass, would have capped loan amounts and placed restrictions on how many times short-term loans could be renewed. HB 2593 also would have required lenders to accept partial payment of the amount owed and apply that amount to the principal. After a borrower had paid 25 percent of the principal, the lender would be prevented from charging additional fees.<sup>21</sup>

The CLC called the passage of these two measures "a first step" and expressed their disappointment that HB 2593, the only bill intended to address the "cycle of debt," died in the House. "The legislation does not address these most pressing concerns," Paynter noted. "So, we are looking forward to working on the issue in the interim period and returning next ses-

sion to advocate for bills that would break the cycle of debt perpetuated by these products."<sup>22</sup>

The CLC and the Texas Faith for Fair Lending coalition continued its work during the interim period and during the 83<sup>rd</sup> session in 2013, working again to pass aggressive legislation to put restrictions on payday lending in Texas. These efforts resulted in the passage of a reform bill in the Texas Senate, described by the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* as "tougher than expected." But, this legislation later died in the House Committee on Investments and Financial Services, where hearings on payday reform featured industry executives. According to one report, the payday industry hired 82 lobbyists with contracts totaling \$4.4 million to defeat the reform efforts in 2013.<sup>23</sup>

While progress in the fight against usury in Texas is slow and the victories have been quite modest, Texas Baptists, in coalition with other faith groups, will (hopefully) continue to pursue the payday industry. Through their concerted efforts during the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 83<sup>rd</sup> legislative sessions, Texas Baptists and its coalition partners have discovered the problem of predatory lending to be a moral issue that unites rather than divides, bringing together liberal Protestants and conservative evangelicals, Democrats and Republicans. This still-unfolding story of Texas Baptists vs. the multi-billion dollar payday industry certainly has a David vs. Goliath feel to it.

But of course, the outcome has yet to be written. However, one thing is for certain: Texas Baptists have offered a political engagement model for other faith groups wishing to remind its parishioners of the evil of usury, and lead them to do something about the problem of predatory lending in their communities. ■

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Footnotes found online.

# The Beginnings of the Texas Baptist CLC

By Bill Jones

In 1950, Texas Baptists, with the founding of the Christian Life Commission, became the first state convention to establish an agency dedicated specifically to addressing moral and ethical issues. But we cannot have a full appreciation of the beginnings of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission without first having some understanding of Texas Baptists' efforts with regard to social ethics and moral issues in the first 50 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Texas Baptists and Social Ethics – 1900-1950

In the early 1900s, the battle for prohibition against alcoholic beverages expanded Texas Baptists' grasp of social problems and motivated them to join in the political process, as preachers and laypersons alike embraced political action as a means of achieving moral objectives.

In 1914, Joseph M. Dawson, then pastor of First Baptist Church, Temple, preached what is believed to be the first formal series of sermons by a Texas Baptist on the social applications of the Gospel.

In 1915, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) established two standing committees. The Civic Righteousness Committee initially concerned itself explicitly with prohibition, whereas the Social Service Committee dealt with a broader range of matters. These two committees were eventually combined into one. In 1918, Wallace Bassett, pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas, explained the Social Service Committee's mission as being a natural outgrowth of simply following Jesus. *"We do not need a new theology for social service,"* he said. *"We only need to use his words as he intended we should use them."*

In the 1920s and 1930s, Texas Baptists were generally reluctant to dip into issues involving the ethics of

society. However, through the Social Service Committee, as well as a few BGCT pastors like Dawson, they occasionally addressed matters such as abuse of prisoners by the penal system; the harm caused by predatory profit-seeking; the morality of warfare; and – believe it or not – women riding men's bicycles. Go figure!

The women of the BGCT generally went further than the men in addressing social problems. In 1929, the Woman's Missionary Union singled out industry for special scrutiny to safeguard women and children from long and dangerous hours of toil and to protect the public from disease-causing practices detrimental to community health. They also recommended the creation of local interracial committees to pursue racial justice. In 1927, the WMU had published the first of Southwestern Seminary Professor T. B. Maston's writings on the Bible and race, a pamphlet entitled, *"Racial Revelations."*

**Initial Impetus** – J. Howard Williams, A. C. Miller, & T. B. Maston

The three men who are considered to have provided the key impetus for establishing what became the Christian Life Commission are J. Howard Williams, A. C. Miller, and T. B. Maston. And the key issue driving that impetus was race.

In 1934, J. Howard Williams – who had become executive secretary of the BGCT in 1931 (today his title would be executive director) – recommended that white congregations create a Committee on Colored Work, which would assist black Baptists in Texas with various church-related programs. He also suggested that the BGCT employ someone, white *or* black, to work with black ministers, conducting interracial conferences throughout the state.

In November 1942, Charles T. Alexander – whom Williams had

appointed in 1936 as a liaison to the black community – reported to the BGCT that he had forged meaningful relationships with black leaders and recommended the creation of a Texas Baptist interracial commission. In November 1943, the Convention established the Department of Interracial Cooperation, ultimately appointing A.C. Miller as director, assisted by an advisory council of 12 associates, including T.B. Maston. By the end of 1945, the Department of Interracial Cooperation had established local interracial committees in 47 of the 113 Baptist associations in Texas. In 1949, Foy Valentine, who had recently received his Th.D. in Christian ethics under Maston at Southwestern, was hired to work among black college students. In 1948, Foy had pioneered in an interracial youth revival in Brownwood.

During Miller's tenure leading the Department of Interracial Cooperation, his views evolved, from a stance that might be described as "separate but equal" to, ultimately, a stinging denunciation of racism in the 1949 BGCT annual meeting, urging Texas Baptists to challenge racial discrimination in the areas of education, housing and jobs.

The greatest influence on Miller's racial stance was likely his association with T.B. Maston. In 1946, Maston published *Of One*, a candid and controversial study, which established Maston as the leading spokesman for racial justice among Texas Baptists.

Maston's own social consciousness had been planted within him when he was young. Growing up in poverty, with a father who worked hard and was a loyal member of a labor union, Maston said, *"has explained to some degree what I hope has been a genuine, sincere interest in the underprivileged, the poor, and the disinherited in general in our society."*

In 1933, he wrote a series of lessons for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, including *"The Young Christian and Social Problems," "Christianizing Economic Life," "Improving Society Through Legislation,"* and *"The Christian Attitude Toward Other Races."*

In 1937, the area of ethics was moved at Southwestern from education to theology and, in 1942, Maston began teaching ethics full-time. In 1944, he offered a course entitled *"The Church and the Race Problem."* For this class, Maston took students on field trips through black neighborhoods where they investigated specific aspects of the city's race problem, such as public schooling. He also invited prominent black leaders to address the class.

By the late 1940s, Maston was searching for a way to apply Christian principles to all aspects of daily life. So was J. Howard Williams, who said at the 1949 annual meeting of the BGCT, ". . . *this convention should initiate some plan by which we can help our people to understand the grave issues of our day in terms of Christian faith and practice. . . . the help that we can give to labor, . . . the help that we might give to race, . . . We ought to have some agency by which we could promote this phase of the Christian life.*"

#### **Founding of CLC and reaction to it**

Messengers to that convention appointed a Committee of Seven to study the needs and bring a recommendation as to how to help people to understand and apply the principles of Christian living to issues of daily life.

In 1950, the Committee of Seven reported to the BGCT meeting in Fort Worth that *"the major need of our day is an effective working combination of a conservative theology, an aggressive, constructive evangelism, and a progressive application of the spirit and teachings of Jesus to every area of life."* In his report to the Fort Worth convention, Maston originally referred to the new body as the *Commission on Problems in Christian Living*. That changed, however, the next night. A speaker

from the evangelistic department expressed his fear that any emphasis on social involvement would detract from evangelism and warned the convention *against* appointing a *commission on the Christian life*. In the audience, A.C. Miller turned to T.B. Maston, seated next to him, and whispered, *"That's our name! Why not call it the Christian Life Commission?"*

Maston's influence was evident in the founding committee's declaration in 1950, that *"any program of social change should not only be Christian in its goals but also in the methods it uses to achieve those goals."*

Maston saw social ills as an indication of inequities within the social structure that must be addressed. He urged that the Commission be strategic in dealing with sensitive issues. If one moved too rapidly and aggressively, local churchmen would become alienated and all chance for improvement would be lost. One must *"start where the people are and keep the pressure in the right place,"* Maston insisted, *"pointed in the right direction."* This became the guiding strategy of the Christian Life Commission and its directors.

There was early criticism that the CLC, fashioned by leaders who were ahead of their constituents on social issues, was basically out-of-step with the sentiments of rank-and-file Baptists in Texas. Maston agreed that the CLC was primarily the result of constructive Baptist leadership but saw that as a positive rather than a negative. ". . . *that's not only true of the Christian Life Commission,*" he said, *"but almost everything else."*

At first, the CLC was assigned to work under the State Missions Commission, and heads of the other BGCT departments were members of the CLC. As time went on, the CLC achieved full commission status in *fact* as well as in name.

Arthur B. Rutledge, pastor of First Baptist Church, Marshall – and later the executive secretary of the SBC Home Mission Board – became the first chairman of the new Christian Life Commission, serving from 1951

to 1955. Rutledge had been nudging his congregation toward racial justice since the late 1940s.

Also members during the CLC's formative years were Herbert Howard, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, who had studied under ethicist Jesse B. Weatherspoon at Southern Seminary, and William R. White, president of Baylor University.

In 1953, the CLC addressed head-on the criticism that an emphasis on ethics would detract from a focus on evangelism. Practical Christianity, it declared, was *"boldly proclaimed throughout the Bible,"* from the *Genesis* declaration that Cain was *"his brother's keeper"* to the proclamations of the eighth-century prophets to the ministry of Jesus Himself.

Members of the CLC have been drawn from the ranks of not only pastors, but educators, homemakers, lawyers, state legislators, journalists, physicians and business professionals. T.B. Maston himself served on the commission at various stages for a total of 18 years, attending meetings, helping to write pamphlets, always emphasizing the necessity of a biblical basis for social involvement, and establishing the tradition of having an ethicist serving on the commission.

#### **A. C. Miller**

In 1950, J. Howard Williams named A. C. Miller as the first director (then called executive secretary) of the CLC. Williams and Miller had first met each other in 1919 as students at Southern Seminary in Louisville. Williams believed that Miller's leadership of the Department of Interracial Cooperation – which was by this time called Our Ministry with Minorities – made him the logical choice to direct the new Christian Life Commission.

In Miller's first year, the CLC developed a body of literature entitled *"The Bible Speaks."* Three pamphlets in this series begun before Miller resigned in 1952 were *"The Bible Speaks on Race," "The Bible Speaks on Economics,"* and *"The Bible Speaks on Family."* Maston said that this series, which quoted Scripture verbatim, was largely

responsible for giving *“the Christian Life Commission its good start.”* These brief tracts were distributed by the millions, placed in churches throughout the state, and used as sermon outlines by hundreds of preachers all over the state.

During Miller’s tenure, Christian life committees were organized in many associations throughout the state, and Miller worked to gain slots at the monthly workers’ conferences in the associations for *“the associational committee on the Christian life to bring a brief report . . . followed by a speaker and discussion.”*

In June 1952, Miller announced his resignation as he prepared to move to Nashville in January 1953, to become executive secretary of the Social Service Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the forerunner to the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Foy Valentine

J. Howard Williams considered 29-year-old Foy Valentine, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gonzales, the obvious choice to replace Miller, because of his training, his obvious interest in applied Christianity, and his close ties to prominent denominational leaders.

**Foy Valentine** had grown up in Edgewood, a small rural community in northeast Texas, during the Great Depression. He had seen poverty up close, and believed that government, as exemplified by various New Deal programs, could and should be used to ameliorate human want. He credited his parents for helping him *“to recognize the social imperatives of the Christian faith.”* His parents, faithful members of the local Baptist church, taught him that religion was to be applied to everyday affairs and, specifically, that black people were to be respected.

He originally planned to attend the University of Texas, study law, and enter politics. However, shortly after graduating from high school, Foy

accepted a call to preach and his plans changed.

Instead of UT, he entered Baylor, where he met visiting speaker Clarence Jordan, whom he later called *“one of the great Christians of our time.”* In 1944, following graduation from Baylor, he spent the entire summer at Koinonia Farm, the racially integrated community established by Jordan near Americus, Georgia.

That fall, he enrolled at Southwestern Seminary and was soon taking Christian ethics classes under T.B. Maston. He later said that Maston *“opened up new vistas and new understandings of what the church ought to be doing, and what I as a minister of the Gospel ought to be attempting.”*

In 1947, Foy completed the requirements for his Masters in Theology and two years later obtained his Th.D., writing a dissertation entitled *“A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917 to 1947.”*

From 1947 to 1948, he served the convention as a special representative on race relations, and from 1949 to 1950 he directed Baptist student activities at Houston colleges. After he was called as pastor of First Baptist Church, Gonzales, in 1950, he was elected to serve on the convention’s executive board and soon thereafter was appointed to the nine-member Christian Life Commission.

So, in 1953, J. Howard Williams called to ask Foy to succeed A.C. Miller as executive secretary of the CLC. Foy initially said *“no”* but ultimately relented and, in June 1953, became the second director of the Texas Baptist CLC.

During Foy’s tenure as director of the Texas CLC, he tirelessly traveled the state, attending local associational meetings, conducting seminars, addressing college audiences, and visiting regional Baptist encampments. He built a statewide network of local contacts for the CLC. In 1956, there were

only 14 associational Christian life committees; by 1960, there were 110.

Under Foy’s leadership, the volume and distribution of tract literature grew from 25,000 pieces annually in 1953 to over 1.2 million pieces annually by the time he left in 1960. He continued adding new topics to *“The Bible Speaks”* series, but also introduced new series entitled *“Christian Answers to Family Problems,” “Christian Principles Applied,”* and *“Teen Talk.”* It was in the midst of Foy’s tenure at the Texas CLC, in 1956, that he persuaded Broadman Press, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, to print its first work on social ethics: *Christian Faith in Action*, a compilation of sermons.

In 1957, Foy launched an annual CLC workshop to focus attention on social ethics. This is yet another legacy of Foy’s, of course, that continues today in the annual Christian Life Commission Conference.

In 1960, Foy once again succeeded A.C. Miller, this time at the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville. Before he left, he encouraged fellow Maston grad Jimmy Allen to assume leadership of the Texas CLC. As Foy had been in 1953, Jimmy was reluctant, but he ultimately agreed to become director of the Texas CLC in June 1960. ■

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# An Exploration of Theodicy in Providing Holistic Healthcare

Ryan E. Batson and Howard K. Batson

When the innocent suffer, questions, doubts and controversies are unearthed. Healthcare providers often find themselves in the context of unexplained suffering. Why does God allow the innocent to suffer? Herein lies the paradox: If God is perfect, God must therefore be omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent.<sup>1</sup> This contradiction of an all-powerful, benevolent God and the undeniable existence of innocent suffering leaves both the patient and the physician grasping for an explanation. This question, moreover, has perplexed even the most esteemed thinkers. C.S. Lewis wrote:

If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know, he hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps our own desperate desires lead us to believe that God is, by every standard we can conceive, "all good" and that all things, even evil, eventually work according to God's will. After all, the evidence of evil and innocent suffering in this world suggests that God does not exist or, perhaps worse, calls into question the very essence of God's character. There are many proposals, or theodicies, that seek to explain these contradictions that both patients and caregivers must face.

Among the many attempts to decipher this divine paradox are: the free will theodicy, the punishment theodicy, the natural law theodicy, and the character building theodicy.<sup>3</sup> The explanation based on humanity's moral freedom and the punishment theodicy find a similar solution. This premise argues that if God is good, then humanity must possess free will and exist as morally free agents. Evil, therefore, is explained in regard to the potential for choosing immoral action. God, indeed, is just and, if one suf-

fers, then one must have done evil to deserve suffering. Even the followers of Jesus expressed similar thoughts during his ministry (John 9).

A second perspective interprets suffering as a by-product of natural law. Nature, being impersonal and amoral, has not been "sent" for a purpose other than maintaining environmental homeostasis: Natural disasters equally devastate the just and unjust. Others argue, however, that God's will ultimately guides such disasters towards a future good.

A third approach is taken by a "character building theodicy" or "repentance theodicy."<sup>4</sup> Understanding human suffering as a means by which God guides us toward morality, the adherents to this theodicy see suffering as "God's wake-up call." Beyond the strengthening of one's relationship with God, suffering can be used as an agent for discipleship. The book of Hebrews affirms this notion: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).

Even these varied and thoughtful solutions to innocent suffering fail to fully explain how an all-powerful, benevolent God allows tragedy in our midst. Some suffering remains beyond explanation, and gratuitous evil seems to have no redeeming value. In a final attempt to deal with the dilemma, some theologians argue that the "apparent gratuity" of suffering is a product of the limitations of human reasoning, while others claim that it will all work out in the realm of eternity.

Patients and healthcare providers looking for a single explanation capable of reconciling all innocent suffering will surely be disappointed. We must remember that our minds are finite, thus incapable of fully com-

prehending the God of the cosmos. Our own journey into the question of suffering reminds us that we walk an ancient path. Job, for example, never received a full explanation regarding his unjust trials (Job 42: 1-6). Furthermore, the fruitless search for a full explanation can result in additional anguish. We can, however, affirm what we believe. The God of the Christian tradition redeems suffering for the greater good of creation. God, too, has played the role of an innocent victim. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to suffer and die and, by that suffering and death, secure the salvation for all sinners alike.<sup>5</sup> John Piper argued along these lines:

The death of Christ in supreme suffering is the highest, clearest, surest display of the glory of the grace of God. If that is true, suffering is an essential part of the tapestry of the universe so that the weaving of grace can be seen for what it really is.<sup>6</sup>

The notion of a "suffering God" leads us to the conclusion that affliction is not meaningless and, ultimately, that suffering redeems. This principle alone can be a source of hope during seasons of suffering. God, moreover, never promises to explain the cause of our suffering. Does the Creator of the cosmos have to explain God's self to creation? God does, however, promise to journey with us through our pain. The Psalms of lament reveal that God is concerned with the suffering of God's people (Psalms 12, 44, 79, 126).<sup>7</sup> Through the example of Jesus' crucifixion, we know that we have a God who can empathize with us in every way (Hebrews 2:9-18) and who wants to comfort us in our suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-11).

God's "presence" through our suffering is often found in the presence of people. Healthcare providers have

the unique opportunity to walk with the afflicted in times of suffering. The presence of such suffering should motivate physicians and other healthcare providers alike to bring healing and comfort to those who search for meaning in their anguish. The physician's role, along with that of spiritual caregivers, is not to provide simplistic answers and meaningless platitudes to those who hurt. On the other hand, even when the answers are not completely clear and each patient will come to her own individual resolve, healthcare providers can guide the patient through her journey of pain and suffering. Following the incarnational paradigm, we offer to walk alongside the pilgrims who find

themselves on suffering's journey even when full understanding still eludes both the patient and the physician. Aiding patients on their journey to self-discovery should be a part of every physician's understanding of holistic medicine. ■

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## Voting Rights in Texas: Once Again Fighting a Battle that was Already Won

By Terry Austin

I quit driving a couple of years ago for health reasons – my driving was so bad that the health of others was in jeopardy. (Just kidding, somewhat.) Why I quit doesn't matter. But, I still had a valid driver's license to take care of any identification needs that might arise. Even after the license expired, it was still accepted until one day it wasn't. Apparently two years after the expiration date is considered too long.

I went to the bank to get some cash. Jeremy and I were doing some Craig's List shopping. Before he would hand over the cash, the very courteous teller asked to see my ID. I whipped out the very well-kept driver's license. He swiped it through his computer and informed me it was no longer acceptable.

I had no other photo identification and the bank refused to cash my check. I wasn't sure what to do since I really needed the cash and it was more than the ATM would dispense. After several minutes of talking and several failed attempts at persuasion, an area where I usually excel, I was still without my cash. The bank manager even

tried to override the computer but it didn't work.

The irony is that even though the bank would not cash my check to myself, they did allow me to write out a check to Jeremy. Even though he did not have an account at that bank they cashed it for him because they knew the check was good.

The point of all this is that I finally realized the need to do something about getting an ID card. So I went online to learn about the process and how it is done. That resulted in a trip to the driver's license office, something I always dread having to do. However, Tarrant County has a new building and they have created a process that works. The wait was pretty short.

With my expired driver's license in hand, along with my social security card, which I have had since 1967 when I got my first job, it looked like a very simple task. Not quite! The website explained that I needed two forms of identification which I had. However, the woman said the expired license did not count, and since I did

not have a photographic identification, I would actually need three identifiers. Who has that?

The things she suggested would require a trip back home. Since one of the ways Tarrant County has streamlined the process is to send every county resident to the same place, it works; but it was a 25-mile trip for me. I really didn't want to make the trip home and back so I tried my hand at persuasion once again.

Some of the documents she suggested I could access via my computer, which was at home, of course. The very courteous clerk actually allowed me to use her computer, which only solved half the problem. Now I had to remember my login password to several sites. There was no way that was going to happen with this person who is on the verge of senior citizenship! (I do have an AARP card, but it was not acceptable for this purpose), I requested new passwords be emailed to me so I could reset.

So, now I'm going back and forth from my phone to her computer, reading the emails and resetting the

passwords. Finally, I had the needed documents on the computer screen and the very courteous clerk allowed me to print them on her printer.

When all was said and done, then all was said and done. (I've always wanted to write that sentence for some reason.) I left with a temporary ID and instructions that the official one would arrive in the mail in a few weeks – which it did. Everyone is happy and my new ID card works just fine.

But, this is not really about my experience in getting a state-approved ID card. It is about requiring folks to get identification before they can vote in an election. In order to vote in Texas, a person must have one of these:

Texas driver license issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)

Texas Election Identification Certificate issued by DPS

Texas personal identification card issued by DPS

Texas concealed handgun license issued by DPS

United States military identification card containing the person's photograph

United States citizenship certificate containing the person's photograph

United States passport

As I have already indicated, I don't

have the first one. The second item has the same basic requirements as the third; so why bother? Item four is off the list, since I own no guns. (See above reference to the fact that I quit driving so I wouldn't hurt someone else; so how safe would I be with a gun in my hand?) Since I was never in the military (not drafted because of a medical condition), item five is not available. I was born in Amarillo, Texas in 1950, and have only been out of the country half a dozen times, so why would I need to prove my citizenship. My passport, like my driver's license, is expired. I now have the third item on the above, so I am good to go, meaning I can vote.

I hear a lot of folks defending the voter ID law on the basis that is simple to get a valid ID, so it really does not keep anyone from voting. From my experience, I can attest that it is not that simple.

Take my mother for example. She is about to turn 89 years old. She hasn't driven for several years, so I suspect her license is about as expired as mine. I can't think of anything else on the list of requirements that she possesses. I was able to bail myself out of a bind by accessing utility bills with my name and address, but she doesn't have any of that. She has moved a couple of times since she last voted. I don't think she has any interest in vot-

ing; but what if someone in a similar situation had such a desire? What could they do?

Like many, I am confident that the law discriminates against the poor. I'm thinking of those who can't make the 25-mile trip to the DPS office, or who don't have a home with utility bills in their name. Perhaps we should be a little more hesitant when accusing people of being lazy and undeserving when they complain about the voter ID laws. The right to vote has been fought for since the inception of America. (Remember, "no taxation without representation.") That battle has a rich history including the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement.

It is disheartening that we are having to do this once again. ■

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*O Lord, I do not know what to ask of You. You alone know what are my true needs. You love me more than I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I do not dare to ask either for a cross or for consolation. I can only wait on You. My heart is open to You. Visit and help me, for the sake of Your great mercy. Strike me and heal me; cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Your holy will and Your unsearchable ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice to You. I have no other desire than to fulfill Your will. Teach me to pray. Pray You Yourself in me. Amen.*

*...Prayer of the Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow.*

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

### Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World

By Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel; Downers Grove (IL): InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Reviewed by Justin Phillips

While very few denominations debate whether or not Christians can be involved in social and political issues, many questions remain for precisely *how* Christians can engage their communities and, for this reason, *Faith-Rooted Organizing* is a true gift to churches. Alexia Salvatierra, a pastor and executive director of the Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), along with Peter Heltzel, a theologian and director of New York Theological Seminary’s Micah Institute, bring a wealth of experience in ministry and activism. The 20th century was dominated by Saul Alinsky’s philosophy of organizing, in which constituents are motivated to act by self-interest and ginning up anger “to amass power for power’s sake.” In contrast, faith-rooted organizing is based upon a question: “What kind of community, society and world are we trying to create?” (33). Subsequent chapters detail how faith-rooted organizing is a process marked by listening to the poor and oppressed; discerning (rather than simply *deciding*) the issues in which to be involved; practicing spiritual disciplines to sustain one through the grueling work of organizing; and lastly, making sure substantive roles are found for all willing participants.

The use of power constitutes a central emphasis for the authors, particularly their original exposition of what they term “serpent power” and “dove power” (taken from Matthew 10.16). They debunk the false choice within organizing of either being faithful to biblical principles or succumbing to

lesser means in order to be politically effective. They define serpent power as “people overcoming institutional power. . . by exercising the power they have as members of a community (the power of organized people)” (183). For Christians who want to organize communities, utilizing *serpent power* is permissible in God’s as yet unfulfilled kingdom. It cannot, however, take the place of *dove power*, which means taking “seriously the best in people, the reality of the image of God in each of us and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit” (74).

Simply put, this means faith-rooted organizers do not consider politics a zero-sum game with definitive losers; rather, they acknowledge the humanity of powerful people within whom there might be a deep moral struggle over a particular issue. Organizers, then, must seek genuine friendships with power-brokers so as to also be allies “of the Spirit in its work on the soul of the person in power” (78).

While the authors note there is a thin line between strategic conversation and manipulation, they contend that organizers can combat this real temptation by honoring the concerns of everyone invested in the process.

Two final points reveal the authors’ heart for their work: First, they claim faith-rooted organizers should minister to everyone, even those in positions of power. “When a leader is a believer, this is a form of discipleship. When a leader is not a believer, it is a form of evangelism” (83). Forming genuine friendships with power-brokers often leads them to show courage, to take political risks, and to make sacrifices to yield effective public policies for all people. Second, Salvatierra concludes each chapter with a letter to her daughter and a young minister, offering encouragement in the Word and practical advice for sustained service through

the grueling work of organizing. Salvatierra’s intimate words remind us that faith-rooted organizing is not about political wins or social causes; it’s about transforming lives through transformed communities. ■

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### The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World

By Laura M. Hartman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Ray Higgins

As a Christian, you may wonder at times, “How should I engage with the things of this world—money, food, clothes, cars, homes, technology, art, sports, vacation trips? What kind of food should I eat? What kind of furniture should I buy to decorate my home? What kind of home should I live in? Would it be right for me to own a second home?” And, as Tony Campolo asked in one of his books, “Would Jesus drive a BMW?”

These are the kinds of questions that Laura Hartman has in mind as she writes her book, *The Christian Consumer*, which began as her doctoral dissertation at the University of Virginia. Hartman is an assistant professor of religion at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Her goal is to describe and analyze a Christian ethic of consumption, which she refers to as “conscientious consumption.”

The form and content of the book are dissertation-like. In it, the author

presents the thinking of historic and contemporary theologians, writers and activists from the breadth of Christianity—Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. But she designs the book to include a lay audience, and makes it useful for individuals, groups and congregations as a practical guide for answering the question what does “conscientious consumption” look like for Christians and churches?

In order to arrive at one’s answer to this question, Hartman explains four biblically-based and theologically-developed considerations that inform one’s understanding and use of worldly things: 1) to avoid sin; 2) to embrace creation; 3) to love neighbor; and 4) to envision the future.

Regarding the theme of avoiding sin, Hartman discusses the consumption practices of Francis, John Woolman and Ron Sider. She develops the themes of asceticism, poverty and simplicity, and explains the thinking behind ways to avoid or diminish the sins that often accompany our consumption practices.

Regarding the theme of embracing creation, Hartman develops these topics: the goodness and blessings of creation; the fact that human hungers are not sinful; the nature of consuming with gratitude, savoring and sharing; and the truth that wealth may be virtuous.

Regarding the theme of loving neighbor, Hartman explains an understanding of love – love of self, love of persons close to you, love of others distant from you (in the marketplace, through hospitality and solidarity, through care for the community), love of place, love of faraway others, and love of God. She concludes with a description of envisioning a better life for all neighbors.

In dealing with the theme of envisioning the future, Hartman gives careful attention to two themes: Sabbath keeping, and Eucharist. How does the practice of Sabbath keeping transform us as people, our consumption and the world? What does it mean for our consumption when we take the Eucharist? Her work here is rich with

inspiring applications.

Readers who are familiar with Christian theology and ethics will appreciate the variety of the Christian thinkers whose ideas Hartman includes and evaluates with regard to each theme. Readers who would rather go straight to designing their own approach to the material things of life will be able to draw on these writers’ insights through Hartman’s presentation of them.

This reviewer recommends that this book be used as the primary resource for a congregation-wide study and conversation about what “conscientious consumption” by Christians and churches should look like in our world of extravagant wealth and extreme poverty, and the world in between.

The fact that in the Gospels the moral issue that Jesus speaks most about is economic ethics (wealth/materialism/affluence/poverty) makes this book one of the most relevant books for Christians to read and live out a personal practice of conscientious consumption. ■

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## Memorial Reflections About Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler

By Catherine B. Allen

When Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler was born in 1930, two scientists were studying a phenomenon rarely observed in the Milky Way—a spectacular exploding star which changes the galaxy. She was just one year old when those scientists coined a new word to describe the special star: a “supernova.” Those of us here today would have no trouble believing that Carolyn was our supernova, because a supernova creates new stars and beams radiance to illuminate dark corners of the universe. Many of us here today because her supernova’s radiance beamed into our lives, and we are here to reflect it.

From an early age, she knew that she had a flame within—something brighter than the Florida sunshine. The Weatherfords were a loving family who

took her to church and encouraged her. Others recognized her divine energy and helped her to understand that God was working within her. Like thousands of Baptist girls of her time, she memorized some special Bible verses about stars.

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come,” she learned in GA.

“They who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever,” was the important verse for young women.

Carolyn was one who believed those verses—but how would she arise from the orange groves and shine like the stars forever and ever?

An episode from the last days of Jesus’ earthly ministry is fitting to be remembered at Carolyn’s memorial ser-

vice. It is recorded in some form in all four Gospels, but this reading is from Mark.

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could;

she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memorial of her.” (Mark 14:3-9)

In the pioneering days of the women’s missions movement, some of the women had their own understanding of this passage. Their paraphrase said, “She hath done what she couldn’t.” Often this has been the case for women who are shooting stars into the future.

As Carolyn’s star began to rise beyond Florida, the Baptist establishment often told her what she could NOT do.

She could NOT be a missionary, because her health made her a risk, and she was unmarried.

She could NOT study theology, because she was a woman.

She could NOT preach, because she was a woman.

She could NOT become one the best known missions advocates of the 20th century and beyond because she was a woman.

And she was a woman. Fortunately, her gender proved to be a blessing, not a liability as a beacon to God.

Foolish Baptist bureaucrats. Didn’t they know that a divinely guided star cannot be extinguished? In Carolyn Weatherford’s case, things that were prohibited became the very things at which she would shine. Woman’s Missionary Union first gave her a place to shine.

She served 31 years as a salaried missions promoter within WMU in Alabama, in Florida, and nationally. She managed to help hundreds of thousands of women do most of the things people had said that she couldn’t do. But she wasn’t through yet. After marrying Joe Crumpler in 1989 and retiring from WMU, she then she gave 25 years as a voluntary missions innovator who helped to create new channels of sharing Jesus Christ throughout the world. That is a total of 56 years of pouring out and being poured out as an offering to Jesus Christ.

Her years as a WMU official are well documented; she was the best-known Southern Baptist woman; she will ever

have heroic and iconic status because of what she did through and within WMU. The next 25-year period, she was making history too fast to keep up with her own biography. When historians dig in the roots of post-SBC Baptist life, they will find the imprint of Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler. Probably no Baptist individual engaged in more diversified innovation for the cause of Christ between 1989 and 2014. And nobody at greater sacrifice. She participated in the founding or early survival of at least eleven new entities that now help to carry out the commands of Christ. Each of them assumes that women will be free to serve as God leads.

She often told the charming story from Florida GA camp in 1962. The first transoceanic communications satellite was launched. Appropriately, it was called TelStar. Carolyn was directing a GA camp when the news was first televised in real time across the Atlantic Ocean. A young girl said, “Miss Weatherford, now we can really do it, can’t we?” “What is that?” Carolyn inquired. “Now we really can tell the story of Jesus to everybody.”

This moment was decisive in Carolyn’s understanding of the new era of possibilities which had suddenly opened before her.

Another decisive moment came when she met a renowned scholar of missions from outside the Southern Baptist empire. He informed her that she was in fact a missiologist. And so were her staff at the WMU office. Until this point, WMU had allowed ourselves to be limited to the educational and fundraising segments of missions.

We were to raise support for the SBC mission boards, without having the right to participate in policy. Carolyn’s trajectory lifted substantially when she waked up to the untapped ability and responsibility of WMU to exert leadership in missions strategy. She changed her message and our focus from passive to active.

About one hour after Carolyn became the executive director of WMU, SBC, she stepped into her first press conference. There she learned

that women’s rights and roles would be an underlying controversy of her administration. In the past, WMU officials had managed to skirt the issue by claiming that their task was missions, not women. Carolyn realized that avoidance was no longer was no longer right, wise, or possible. A group of young women told her, “You have to do something. You are our leader.” She considered whether any organization could speak with integrity, if it told females to “arise, shine” but to restrict their radiance to certain limits, if told to hide their light under somebody else’s umbrella. Carolyn approached the question in the only way she knew how: prayer, scriptural study, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Shortly before she achieved national visibility, Frank Stagg had written a book entitled *The Holy Spirit Today*. The book spent several pages proving that the current women’s liberation movement was guided by the Holy Spirit to unhinder the gifts and callings of women in the church. Some have said that Carolyn’s theology was actually Staggology. When she had been told she could not get a degree in theology in seminary, she managed to spend her electives in Dr. Stagg’s theology classes. In 1978, she invited Frank and Evelyn Stagg to teach their book, *Women in the World of Jesus*, to the entire executive and state leadership network of WMU. Thus Carolyn interpreted the changing times for women in the 1970s and later, in light of scripture. And she helped WMU leaders gain a new vocabulary for answering the demands of the day.

Also in 1978, Carolyn put her staff to work to organize the highly controversial Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations. She wanted people to realize that time-honored job descriptions for women in missions and church staff positions were being deliberately erased. Especially in missionary appointments, women had less opportunity for full-time ministry than in the past, even while doors were opening wider for women in secular professions. Carolyn wanted awareness and action. She was not alone in

putting the issue forward; the chief executives of the two mission boards, the seminaries, and all the Southern Baptist agencies stood with her. Within months, a formal declaration was issued towards the conservative takeover of the SBC.

Carolyn was quoted in the press as saying, “The Southern Baptist Convention has a poor record of putting women in leadership roles, and it didn’t start when the conservatives took over.”

In such acts of bold leadership, Carolyn let her light shine before men and women. A light on a high candlestick is a visible target for anger and abuse. Carolyn absorbed endless wounds. She never allowed attacks upon her to distract her or her colleagues from daily work of missions promotion. In fact, it proved to be a fabulous golden age of growth and creativity in WMU and in missions. If she had been in good health, the stress would have killed her on the spot many times. But she had already been told she wasn’t strong enough for mission work, so she kept on pushing missions.

And, she became greatly trusted and beloved. When Daniel Vestal asked her to run a second time for first vice-president of the SBC, she did not win the race, but she did win more votes than any other woman has ever received in a Southern Baptist vote count.

Whereas she had said that it took a staff of 158 to stage her wedding, she found in 1989 that she had no staff but the Crumpler family. They were marvelous supporters, especially Joe, who constantly encouraged her and worked beside her. She had no expense account, no streams of income other than savings—and she was only 59, not old enough for Social Security. The stars in their courses fought for her. Faith, family, and friends found the funds and fortitude to build and nurture new organizations.

Carolyn was living proof that God’s call transcends bureaucracy. In recent years, Carolyn began to wonder—will free and equal people choose the special calling to minister in the most difficult and dangerous places? Will free women

choose to serve through missions, and will they create missions methods for this age?

One of the world’s greatest missiologists, one outside the Baptist fold but very well informed, wrote to me last week and said, “I was so blessed to know her. I can still see Carolyn saying that we must pray and pay.”

Everybody here knows some part of her accomplishments and worked closely with her to make history. Yet most of us are puzzled about where Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler got her star power. She is described in terms of sunny disposition, warmth, honesty, approachability, kindness, friendliness, happiness, and self-confidence, and self-control. Her former employees have said, “She made us feel better, loved, respected.” Closest coworkers marveled at her intelligence. She was a “quick study.” She was always prepared. She answered correspondence speedily and concisely—and email had not yet been invented. At countless junctures of confusion and depletion, she could reach into her knowledge of the Bible to supply a creative word from the Lord.

What I remember about her arrival as my boss in 1974 is this: she said that she had stopped first at the home of an elderly retired missionary out of state, a woman of the Holy Spirit who promised to pray for her. Over time, I realized that she had a considerable cloud of invisible, unidentified spiritual counselors. I suspected and feared that God was totally on her side of any argument. In this she found the fuel to be a supernova.

Like the woman of Mark 14 who anointed Jesus, Carolyn engaged Jesus directly, personally. She showed her devotion directly, personally. She gained his approval directly, personally. She courageously did it in full view of highly placed people who criticized, threatened, and insinuated, yet she did not hesitate.

Carolyn had an inner divine light that often enabled her to look ahead into troubled waters and sense what might be happening. Like the woman who anointed Jesus, Carolyn came out

in public in advance, ahead of times, and did what she could, –or couldn’t– before it was too late to be counted among the righteous, before it was too late to save some.

In placing Jesus first, Carolyn and also the woman of Mark 14 sacrificed their very best—treasure and trove that most people would have kept in reserve for their own protection in hard times. The woman in the Bible brought her treasure out in public and—she broke it –broke it! She broke it, so that its precious contents could run free and accomplish its purpose. Her valuable treasure, every drop of it, could now be used for only one thing: the honor and glory of God. If she had not made the break, her best gift, the finest oil and fragrance, could not have put Jesus in the spotlight, nor could it have been enjoyed by everybody in the house. Yes, even the vilest critics enjoyed the benefits of the fragrance which they denounced.

A sad thing about supernovas—they don’t last long. Their tremendous energy is spent in creation of new stars—new starts. It is up to them to beam light to the places that are stumbling, and maybe they need to burn collectively as a group.

Which thought brings us to a memorial challenge.

The Bible woman’s good deed is her memorial. Any gravestone and any institution bearing her name would have long since been ground into dust, but her unforgettable memorial has been commended by Christ and repeated by his people. Her memorial goes with the preaching of the Gospel throughout the entire world. Maybe missions of the future depends on our retelling her memorial more avidly and loudly.

That’s what the Bible seems to promise. Let us keep on following Carolyn’s star and rejoice greatly as it beams across the ages. ■

*Presented by Catherine B. Allen on January 24, 2015 at Carolyn’s Memorial Service at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio*

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# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

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

## PURPOSES

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

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

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

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