

# Christian Ethics Today

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

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# Deliver Us from Evil

By Patrick Anderson

Deadly police actions have dominated recent conversations and have resulted in much political discourse regarding the need for criminal justice reform. In some cases, police actions have led to civil unrest. Such overwhelming public attention and reaction to criminal justice practices are rare. When massive attention to police and prison practices occurred in the 1930s and 1960s, significant policy changes and new laws resulted.<sup>1</sup> This may be another time in which society will make real and welcomed efforts to reform criminal justice issues. It will not be easy.

As a criminologist, police trainer, consultant and expert witness, I have been very involved in attempts to reform, improve and reinvent criminal justice practices since the 1970s. Through the years I have found a great many criminal justice professionals to be outstanding, morally upright and highly motivated good people. Most of us who came into the academic field of criminology in the 1970s were motivated by our personal professional experiences in the field and a deep desire to change the system. We wanted to make the world a better place to live.

We knew from personal experience that although better training of personnel was imperative, the wrong person trained was still the wrong person. Criminal justice attracts some practitioners who are motivated by power, authority and racial or other biases.

Criminal justice education and training have expanded to encompass virtually every aspect of police and corrections work. Many state laws passed in prior decades established mandatory training, minimum standards for police practices and other improvements. Yet the call for more and better training today is loud and appropriate.

Civil liability lawsuits filed against

police and corrections in federal courts resulted in significant improvements and banned egregious behaviors like the fleeing felon rule, dangerous police pursuits and forms of police brutality. Court decisions punished agencies which failed to establish custody suicide prevention, substance abuse screening, proper supervision of prisoners and much more.<sup>2</sup> In general, criminal justice professionals and scholars have consistently called for significant reforms and warned about

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the harmful effects of “get tough on crime” policies and practices of the past decades such as mandatory minimum sentences, policing, aggressive patrol, transferring children to adult courts and especially the war on drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Now those dire predictions and warnings have become painfully realized as video evidence of things that have been going on for a long time have come to the attention of more people. The harmful effects of mass incarceration are becoming increasingly evident. Hence the current flurry of interest in police/community relations and the police use of deadly force and mass incarceration.

For many Americans, primarily white people, criminal justice is out-of-sight and out-of-mind — a subject of interest in novels, movies and television shows, the purview of good people using whatever means necessary to control the behaviors of bad people. Privileged citizens are exposed to the inner workings of criminal justice primarily when a loved one is caught up in the system, which for most white Americans is relatively rare. Then, when one brushes up close and personal to the system, white folk usually raise questions which lead to unsatisfactory answers. For our African American and Hispanic and poor white brothers and sisters, the truth of criminal “justice” has been well known for a long time. If it is true that one should watch neither sausage nor laws being made because one would lose the taste for sausage and lose respect for laws, the same sentiment is often true when one experiences the inner workings of American criminal justice. If you doubt that, spend some evenings at the booking desk of your county jail or some mornings at arraignment court.

But the current attention to police shootings, deaths resulting from choke holds, deadly tactics used to subdue and transport prisoners is beyond anything in recent memory. I had thought decades ago when the grainy images of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King were shown on television, the result would be significant public outrage. But after police investigators, prosecuting attorneys, and finally a jury declared that the actions of the police were “justified” and “appropriate,” my thinking was proved to be misguided. I remember teaching that even if such actions of some criminal justice practitioners are deemed justified and appropriate by another part of the criminal justice system, that does not change the fact

that those actions are *wrong*.

Now, however, the high definition cellphone images of numerous deadly police encounters have dominated social media and television programs giving the lie to previous claims that instances of alleged police brutality and other misconduct have been overstated, manufactured or mischaracterized. Citizens in poor neighborhoods have told stories of similar instances of police actions for decades, but only now with the irrefutable pictures have such stories been widely believed outside those poor neighborhoods. Good police and other criminal justice professionals are embarrassed and dismayed, but not surprised, at the horrible and inexcusable actions of their fellow officers which have come to light.

The result, much like in the 1930s and 1970s, is a loud call for better trained and supervised police officers, a renewed emphasis on rehabilitation, revision of draconian sentencing laws, more pervasive use of video cameras, dismantling the war on drugs, and all sorts of improved social conditions for America's disadvantaged. Each of these things has merit. Americans' reliance on bureaucracies, legislatures, judges and communities to make things better is good, and all the prescriptions to heal the social sickness endemic in criminal justice are necessary and timely.

But where is the *moral* outrage, the sense that whether or not criminal justice practices are deemed "justified" or "legal" is not the issue? Behaviors we have witnessed are *evil* — no matter what the law, or custom or practice call them. *Evil*. Moral judgements have wrongly undergirded criminal justice practices. The war on drugs, the death penalty and mass incarceration have all been justified by moral voices from the church. It is time for a new moral imagination that renders such things unthinkable.<sup>4</sup>

In North Carolina, the Reverend Dr. William Barber, a black pastor, instituted "Moral Mondays" a couple of years ago. These were days which led to hundreds of people gathering at the

state capitol to make the *moral* point that injustices underlie certain legislative actions. He makes a moral argument, not a legal or political one.<sup>5</sup>

Too often, agents of moral values rely on legal arguments, judicial decisions, legislative solutions and social remedies when the real ground on which systemic injustice thrives is moral ground. It is on the moral ground where words like *evil* take root and have weight. Bad police still shoot fleeing felons, despite Supreme Court rulings and lawsuits. Bad police practices still allow persons to die unnecessarily in custody despite laws and policies designed to prevent that. Police departments such as those in Baltimore and Philadelphia have

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***We need to recognize evil when we see it, to call it evil, to make it unprofitable, to render it unthinkable as public policy.***

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learned that it is easier and perhaps cheaper to accept a jury's decision in a wrongful death suit against its police or detention practices, pay the judgement and continue to do wrong than it is to truly reform custom and practice. The courts and legislatures are sometimes ill-suited to remedy the deep issues which undergird injustice.

When a 12-year-old boy playing with a toy pistol is shot and killed by rogue policeman in mere seconds after arriving on his playground, it is *evil*. For a street corner black man, selling single cigarettes to other poor people who cannot afford to purchase a full pack, to be strangled by police officers and killed is *evil*. For more young black males to be incarcerated in America's prisons than matriculated in America's colleges is *evil*. For a man who foolishly chooses to run from a police officer after being pulled over with a busted tail light to be shot eight times in the back and killed by a police officer is *evil*. For hundreds of

innocent persons to be incarcerated in prison, some to be sentenced to death, after faulty investigations, prosecutorial misconduct and mandatory minimum sentencing is *evil*. For children to be left behind while mothers in need of substance abuse treatment are caught up in prisons and locked away from their children for years is *evil*.

Where have we been, we god-fearing Christians? Where is our theological imagination when it comes to issues of justice? How have we permitted the misery of dark-bodied and poor white persons to be used for corporate profit? How have we sat by and watched millions of our fellow citizens be denied housing, employment and the right to vote *forever* because of long-ago crimes for which they have paid their debt to society? What have we done while justice has been meted out unjustly and unequally? We are the church of Jesus Christ who came to bring release to the captives....what are we doing?

Jesus prayed and taught his followers to pray, "Deliver us from evil." We need to recognize evil when we see it, to call it evil, to make it unprofitable, to render it unthinkable as public policy. We need to work where God's moral center is — in the hearts of people. Legislation, policies, judicial rulings all need to change. But the real change that is required is to satisfy the call of Isaiah, to "...let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." This is change that comes from a place of morality. ■

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1 See *Report on Lawlessness in Law Enforcement, 1931 the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968*.

2 See Patrick R. Anderson and L. Thomas Winfree, Jr. *Expert Witnesses: Criminologists in the Courtroom*, State University of New York Press, 1987.

3 See Patrick R. Anderson and Risdon N. Slate, *The Decision-Making Network: An Introduction to Criminal Justice*, Carolina Academic Press, 2011.

4 Dr. Stephen G. Ray, Jr., Neal F. and Ila A. Fisher professor of systematic theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

5 See [www.revwilliambarber.com](http://www.revwilliambarber.com)

# Suggestions for Becoming More Aware of Criminal Justice Issues

Many online editions of local newspapers have a section marked “arrests” or “mug shots.” When you find that section, view the pictures and read the charges against persons arrested and booked into your local jail. Pray for each of them by name. Try to understand what “failure to appear” means considering the following questions. For instance, if your driver’s license has been suspended for a traffic violation or equipment malfunction and you have no other means of transportation, how would you get to a court appearance? If you were employed, what would you tell your boss was the reason you had to be off work on the day of your court appearance? Could you pay both a fine and the costs of repair to your vehicle?

Has anyone in your family served time? Ask members of your circle of friends or your Bible study group if anyone in their families have served time in jail or prison. It may be a sensitive conversation

to begin. Ask how the family has been impacted by that experience. Discuss how we could help a family member or friend in trouble with the law.

Consider the following: The person I first befriended as a police officer was a deacon in the local Baptist church and taught a boys’ Sunday School class. He worked the midnight shift on the San Antonio Police Department. He told me that on Saturday nights he patrolled bars and strip clubs and other all-night businesses, arrested prostitutes and drug dealers, and was otherwise exposed to some of the social conditions most members of his church were unaware of. He said that sometimes when he completed his Saturday night shift, changed clothes and prepared to go to church and teach Sunday School, the transition was almost too much for him. He found it difficult to immediately shift from one role to the next. He never talked about his work experiences while in church. How

can we minister better to police officers?

Imagine yourself at age 24 having just completed a 3-year term in a state prison for drug offenses related to your substance addictions as a teenager. While in prison you successfully completed substance abuse treatment, renewed your commitment to Jesus, completed high school, and otherwise reformed your life. You are now free. Job applications ask if you have a criminal record, which of course you do, and employers are loathe to hire you. Your mother and children have been living in public housing while you were incarcerated, but if you move in with her you must check the box on the housing form which asks if you are a “convicted felon.” You are, and the rules forbid you living there. Therefore if you try to live with your mother and family in the public housing, they will be evicted with no other place to live. What would you do? How could your church help a situation like this? ■

## Some Words of Jesus

*“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me”*  
(Matthew 25:34-36).

# Repentance, Reconciliation and Baptists— A Retrospective and Lessons from Our History

By Wendell Griffen

I am the bivocational Baptist pastor of New Millennium Church, an almost six-year old congregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. Each Lord's Day the people of New Millennium affirm who we are and our purpose with the following words:

We praise and worship God, together.  
We petition God, together.  
We proclaim God, together.  
We welcome all persons in God's love, together.  
We live for God, in every breath and heartbeat, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as followers of Jesus Christ, together.

In that spirit, I was delighted to accept Dean Williford's gracious invitation to be with you and I thank God for the honor you have extended by inviting me. I also am grateful to Dr. Larry Baker and Ms. Peggy Gammill for their assistance in arranging my visit.

Dr. Ray Higgins (coordinator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas) has come from Little Rock to attend these lectures. Ray has been a tremendous blessing to me as a friend and colleague in ministry. I understand that Ray Higgins and Dr. Emmanuel McCall of McAfee School of Theology in Georgia may have somehow influenced you to consider inviting me to be the lecturer this year. I thank God for their gracious recommendation and pray that my observations and comments will not cause the Holy Spirit or them to be ashamed.

Several years ago I met Bill Jones (Chair, Board of Trustees, T.B. Maston Foundation for Christian Ethics) at the Baptist Conference on Sexuality and Covenant that convened at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia. Bill gave me a copy

of *Both-And: A Maston Reader* that is part of my personal library and shows how a white Baptist courageously and humbly confronted societal and global injustice through the lens of the gospel of Jesus. Thank you, Bill, for your work with the Maston Foundation, and I thank your fellow trustees and others whose generosity allows your work to continue.

The title of my remarks this evening is *Repentance, Reconciliation, and Baptists — A Retrospective and Lessons from Our History*. I intend to briefly reflect about the way in which repentance figures in how Baptists understand human salvation. Then I will recall our struggle to apply that understanding of repentance to societal oppression and injustice. Lastly, I will refer to an event from relatively recent history to illustrate how Baptist views about repentance and racism impact our ability to present the gospel of Jesus in ways that are coherent and compelling concerning racism as well as sins of sexism, classism, imperialism, militarism and techno-centrism.

I will also speak about *Repentance, Reconciliation, and Baptists — Re-Imagining and Embracing the Subversive Gospel of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. I will offer suggestions for Baptist engagement — denominationally, academically, congregationally and personally, concerning social ethics, drawing on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call for "a radical revolution of values." And I will suggest that by re-imagining and embracing the gospel of Jesus in that "subversive" way, Baptist followers of Jesus will be inspired to confront racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, militarism and techno-centrism. Although I consider these to be prevalent and entrenched causes of oppression today, I will

conclude by affirming why I agree with my dear friend and brother from South Africa, Dr. Allan Aubrey Boesak, in daring to "speak of hope."<sup>1</sup>

## Repentance, Reconciliation and Baptist Thought

The major religions of the world agree that the practice of repentance is an essential aspect of right fellowship with the Divine and others. Biblical Hebrew expresses the idea of repentance by two verbs: *shuv* (to return) and *nacham* (to feel sorrow). The New Testament uses the Greek word *metanoia*, a compound word that joins the preposition "meta" (after, with) with the verb "noeo" (to perceive, to think, the result of perceiving or observing) to convey the idea of afterthought, often expressed as a change of mind and conduct. The Bible uses the words "repent," "repentance," and "repented" more than 100 times.

Throughout the Bible, repentance is expressed as a call for a radical turn from one way of life to another because of the relationship one has with God. In that sense, repentance is more than sorrow or regret. It is *conversion* from self-worship, self-love, self-trust, and self-righteousness to God-love, God-trust, and righteousness according to God.

Repentance begins with admitting guilt for committing a wrong against God and others (whether by commission or omission) — meaning confession. Beyond that, Scripture shows that repentance involves turning away from the wrongful act or practice. Where the wrongful act or practice is against others, repentance requires attempting to make restitution for the wrong done and any injury caused by it or otherwise acting to reverse the harmful effects of the wrong or omission.

Baptists interpret the Bible, in fact all of life, through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus, like the other Hebrew prophets who lived before him, confronted the people of his time and place concerning the need for repentance. Mark's Gospel reports that "after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15; *see also*, Matthew 4:12-17; Luke 4:14-15). The idea of repentance for Jesus — as was true for the Hebrew prophets before him — involved rejecting idolatry of self and turning to (embracing) God's vision about how we relate to God and others.

Repentance for Jesus and the Hebrew prophets is not optional, morally or ethically. Repentance is an ethical imperative! Any notion of human salvation that omits or disregards the ethical imperative of repentance is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus.

The entire process of repentance is part and parcel of the divine undertaking of salvation. At its essence, salvation involves the process by which humanity is reconciled back to God in faithful love. Like everything else in salvation, repentance is a gift from God that we either accept or reject by faith. We do not repent on our own. Repentance is God-inspired, God-focused and must be God-purposed. In repentance, humans embrace the grace of God to confess, confront, and turn from idolatry of self and to be people of divine love, justice, truth and hope.

Ultimately, repentance inspires us with the mandate for reconciliation. Humans are estranged from God and one another due to sin. But the grace of God that makes repentance possible, no — morally and ethically required, also impels us to perceive that sin produces estrangement. Sin causes us to be estranged from God, our Creator. At the same time, sin causes us to be estranged from ourselves, other persons and the rest of

creation. Through repentance, we are impelled to turn from the ethics of chaos, estrangement and self-righteousness and to embrace reconciliation and community.

### **Repentance is a faithful response to prophetic protest**

The Bible also reveals that persons and societies are called to repentance by prophetic challenge, not internal impulse. In Genesis we read of God confronting Adam and Eve following the Fall and God confronting Cain after the murder of Abel. Then we read of Noah confronting his society before the Deluge. In Exodus, Moses is the prophetic agent sent by God to confront the Egyptian empire with the repentance imperative concerning oppression of the Hebrew population.

The prophetic call to repentance is always an act of protest. It is an observation and objection that the way we live violates the Great Commandment that we love God with our whole being and love others as ourselves. Somehow, people are inspired to recognize that people are not living as God would have us live, meaning that our relationships are not right with God and each other, whether because of actions we take or duties we neglect. Somehow, the Spirit of God inspires people with insight about love, truth and justice (righteousness) who are then impelled to protest conditions and situations that violate the love, truth and justice of God. Without that protest, idolatry of self prevents us from recognizing our sinfulness and confronting the imperative for repentance.

So repentance does not begin with us. Repentance begins with God whose love, truth, and justice define the meaning of right and wrong, good and evil, healthful and harmful, just and unjust. God inspires people to see situations and relationships from the divine perspective. Then God commissions those inspired people to become prophetic protestors with God for love, justice and truth and to confront persons and societies to confess sinfulness, return to God and restore what has been harmed

because of sin.

There is no repentance, personally or societally, without the disturbance of that subversive protest, subversive in that it asserts a different and counter-cultural version about life, love, truth and justice from what is the dominant narrative. God is literally Protestor-in-Chief concerning our actions and attitudes that violate divine love, truth and justice. God summons prophetic protestors to proclaim God's demand that we live according to divine love, truth and justice and to protest our failure and refusal to do so.

And in repentance, we join God in protesting our transgressions and derelictions. We not only agree with God that our transgressions and derelictions are wrong and harmful. We agree to turn back toward God in repentance, to protest our sinfulness with God and, in repentance, to turn away from that sinfulness toward God. With God's help we become protestors of our ways. We not only agree with God that our ways require prophetic protest. In repentance we become God's people of protest, prophetic and subversive agents of divine love, truth and justice. We never become repentant people without somehow becoming prophetic people about God's love, truth and righteousness (justice).

Thus, the Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus and the people who followed Jesus were prophetic subversives of repentance. They were markedly and intentionally inspired to view life and living from the radically different perspective of divine love, truth and justice. That inspiration caused Moses to confront Egyptian unjust treatment of Hebrew workers. Nathan was inspired to protest to David about misusing personal and political power in his relationships with Bathsheba and Uriah. Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were inspired to protest the ways that power was abused to oppress widows, children, immigrants, workers, the weak and people who were poor. Jesus was inspired by the Holy Spirit

to protest the ways power was abused by religious authorities to oppress rather than to liberate, to rupture fellowship rather than nurture reconciliation, and to benefit the wealthy while disregarding the plight of suffering people.

### **Baptist views about repentance and injustice**

Baptists have always viewed repentance as an inseparable aspect of the grace of God leading to salvation. We speak about repentance as a change of heart inspired by the Holy Spirit and the conviction that our sin offends God and violates the conditions by which we are in right relationship with God and others. As far as I can tell, Baptists have held this view across the centuries and Baptists everywhere have created fellowships of believers in the gospel of Jesus.

Yet in doing so, Baptists have stressed repentance as an aspect of personal piety, not an ethical imperative for doing justice. We speak, write, preach and sing about repentance as part of one's personal relationship with God. But we rarely speak of repentance as necessary for healing broken relationships between people who abuse power and others victimized by abuses of power. This pietistic concept of repentance, however sincerely it may be held and practiced, does not square with the way repentance is presented in Scripture.

In other words, there is a marked disconnect between the Biblical approach to repentance and the way most Christian bodies, including Baptist denominations and fellowships, have understood and practiced repentance. The Hebrew writings and the New Testament gospels demonstrate that repentance always requires acts of restitution and restoration that nurture reconciliation and reunion.

In Torah, the sin offering was presented to atone for sin based on acknowledgement of *guilt*. Meanwhile, the trespass offering was presented to atone for sin based on acknowledgement of *injury*. The trespass offering ritual in Torah

reminds us that sin against others always involves more than personal guilt. Sin also causes damage, harm and injury to relationships with others. That damage, harm and injury are not atoned for without voluntary and intentional conduct to repair what has been harmed, damaged or injured. We never repair the harm, damage or injury nor undo the oppression of sin against others by merely making an apology.

Acknowledging guilt is important. But acknowledging guilt does not restore what has been wrongfully taken. Acknowledging guilt does not rebuild what has been destroyed. Acknowledging guilt does not heal what has been wounded. Doing those things requires more than confessing guilt. The work of healing what has been wounded, righting what has been wronged and restoring what has been stolen or destroyed requires doing justice and the ethics of restitution, reparation, restoration and reconciliation. Until we do these things, we have not engaged in Biblical repentance, no matter what else we may have accomplished.

Baptists have emphasized the need to acknowledge guilt and remorse concerning sin, but we have consistently shown less enthusiasm about acknowledging the way sin injures, harms and oppresses others. We often speak of the need for confession, but resist — and some may even say resent! — the Biblical mandate for restitution, reparation and restoration that are the foundation for reconciliation, meaning restoration of community.

Allow me to refer to a famous example from recent memory, 1995 (20 years ago). During the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers in Atlanta, Georgia, adopted an eloquent resolution on racial reconciliation. The resolution admits that slavery played a role in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. It admits that Southern Baptists “defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced

in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery.” The resolution also admits that, Southern Baptists “... later... failed, in many cases to support, and in some cases opposed, legitimate initiatives to secure the civil rights of African-Americans.”

The resolution goes on to admit that racism “has led to discrimination, oppression, injustice, and violence ... throughout the history of our nation.” The resolution laments that racism and that “historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest... has separated us from our African-American brothers and sisters.” Thus, the resolution resolves to apologize to “all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (citing Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (citing Leviticus 4:27).

I do not question the sincerity of the messengers in Atlanta who adopted that eloquent expression of collective guilt and remorse for racism, slavery, discrimination and other oppression related to racism toward African-Americans. Yet, it is striking that the messengers resolved to “ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters, acknowledging *that our own healing is at stake* (emphasis added).” The resolution is conspicuously, and I might add suspiciously, silent about healing the damage, injury and harm suffered by African-Americans because of more than 250 years of slavery, another century of legalized segregation, and continued systemic practices and policies that are the legacy of that tragic history.

Respectfully, let us contrast that resolution with an experience from the life of Jesus that South African theologian Allan Aubrey Boesak addressed in the book titled *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*, which Boesak co-authored with Curtiss Paul DeYoung (Orbis Books, 2012). Allan Boesak draws on the story of

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9), the chief tax collector who lived in Jericho and was both extremely rich and hated because he superintended an oppressive tax collection regime.

Zacchaeus not only received a stipend from the Roman authorities for collecting taxes. He took a percentage of whatever his agents collected. If tax collectors in general were hated by the people, Zacchaeus, as chief tax collector, was hated most of all. Allan Boesak remarks that Zacchaeus chose a tree perch for a chance to see Jesus not merely because he was short in stature, but because being in a tree was the safest spot for him, given how much he was hated and alienated from the people that his tax collection regime oppressed for the Roman government.

As we know, Jesus invited himself to dinner at the home of Zacchaeus, that notoriously oppressive and wealthy man. We have no transcript of their dinner conversation, but whatever transpired between Jesus and Zacchaeus inspired the chief tax collector to divest himself of half his wealth and to add that “if I have defrauded anyone of anything I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:8). Boesak points to Zacchaeus as instructive about 10 things that are required to make repentance and reconciliation genuine, workable and sustainable.

*First*, Zacchaeus acknowledged his personal complicity in and benefit from a system of oppressing others. Boesak writes that Zacchaeus did not “try and defend himself by arguing that he had to make a living, that this was merely his job, or that he had a family to look after. He knew that he unjustly benefited from oppression and suffering.”<sup>2</sup>

*Second*, reconciliation requires both remorse and acknowledging that the victim of oppression has a right to righteous anger. Boesak adds, “...my victim also has a right to restitution — it has nothing to do with my magnanimity, it is all about justice. It is acknowledging my victim’s pain as a result of what I have done, and mak-

ing it right with acts of justice.”<sup>3</sup>

*Third*, reconciliation is not merely spiritual, but produces restitution — meaning real and tangible gains for victims of oppression. Pledging to give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times whatever he had stolen was not a symbolic gesture. It was an act of restitution required in order to make repentance result in justice, rather than merely an assuagement of guilt. Restitution is always substantive, never symbolic. According to Boesak, “Without restitution, reconciliation is not possible.”<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, we are proponents of the cheap grace that Dietrich Bonhoeffer debunked so persuasively in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

*Fourth*, “there can be no reconciliation without equality.”<sup>5</sup> By divesting himself of half his wealth and restoring four times whatever he had stolen from what remained, Zacchaeus removed himself from the exclusive club of the wealthy in Jericho and became a man of the people. Repentance results in reconciliation when we divest ourselves of unjustly obtained privilege and power.

*Fifth*, repentance and reconciliation involve more than restoring our broken relationship with God, but is also about repairing and restoring broken relationships with others. Zacchaeus didn’t merely make a private confession to Jesus that he was wrong. He demonstrated his genuine remorse and conversion by making a public commitment to restitution because he recognized that was necessary to accomplish justice.<sup>6</sup>

*Sixth*, Zacchaeus didn’t treat his sin as between himself and God. Unlike David, who said in Psalm 51:4 “Against you, you alone, have I sinned,” thereby limiting his notion of repentance to a personal relationship with God while expressing no concern for the impact of his sin on Bathsheba and Uriah, Zacchaeus made a public expression of remorse and shame backed by his commitment to restitution and restoration to people harmed by his sin.<sup>7</sup>

*Seventh*, Boesak points out that

when reconciliation (which is the end result of repentance) involves “uncovering the sin, showing remorse, making restitution, and restoring relationships with deeds of compassionate justice, then, and only then, is reconciliation complete, right, sustainable and radical, because it becomes transformational. That is its salvific power.”<sup>8</sup> We are not called to repentance in order to merely experience relief from guilt. The divine imperative of repentance works to transform us from self-worshipping beings into God-glorifying agents of love, truth and justice.

*Eighth*, genuine reconciliation results not only in personal salvation, but “brings salvation for Zacchaeus and his house.” Because of the commitment to repentance and restitution that Zacchaeus demonstrated by divesting himself of half his wealth (wealth derived because Zacchaeus benefited from systemic oppression), Zacchaeus’ household, meaning his entire circle of intimate family relationships, was “released from the generational curse of guilt and shame that comes with exploitative, systematic relationships.”<sup>9</sup>

*Ninth*, Boesak contends that repentance and reconciliation for Zacchaeus as a result of the experience with Jesus impelled Zacchaeus to *confront* his life of oppression and self-aggrandizement as a functionary of Roman imperialism and *convert* to a value system focused on divine justice rather than imperial dictates and personal perks. As Boesak puts it, “Zacchaeus switched sides.”<sup>10</sup> I think this is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he spoke of the need to embrace what he called “a radical revolution of values” in the sermon he delivered at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, to announce his opposition to the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. Repentance is more than personal salvation, privilege and relief from guilt. It involves changing sides and joining God in creating what King and Howard Thurman before him called “the beloved community.”

*Tenth*, and finally, Boesak affirms

that reconciliation — which requires repentance — produces a new identity. Repentance changed Zacchaeus from being known as “a chief tax collector” to being “a son of Abraham.”<sup>11</sup> Repentance involves the kind of faith that not only changes how we feel. Repentance changes us intrinsically so that we are always becoming people of divine love, truth and justice.

Jesus shows us through the encounter with Zacchaeus that Biblical repentance always involves a great deal more than making an apology. Biblical repentance demands action to restore fellowship, to heal injuries, and to recompense for harms sinners inflict that cause unwarranted suffering to others. Repentance requires that the wrongdoer acknowledge the holy anger of victims about what they have suffered, not insist that victims swallow that anger to spare the beneficiaries of oppression from discomfort and inconvenience.

What is conspicuously and suspiciously missing from the 1995 resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention to apologize for slavery, racism and discrimination, is any commitment like that shown by Zacchaeus to make restitution to the historical victims of racism, slavery and discrimination. Instead, the resolution entreats African-Americans for forgiveness by affirming that “our own healing is at stake.” No commitment is affirmed, let alone pledged, to do the healing work of justice for people whose ancestors were enslaved, dehumanized, defrauded, terrorized and marginalized and who continue to suffer from that colossal violation of divine love, truth, and justice.

Respectfully, I contend that the 1995 resolution exposes a fundamental misunderstanding about and misrepresentation of what the gospel of Jesus teaches about repentance and reconciliation. If we are serious about racial reconciliation as followers of the Jesus who encountered Zacchaeus, Baptists and any other followers of Jesus must confront and confess the glaring ethical difference between merely apologizing for

historical oppression and correcting the consequences of that oppression through restitution leading to reconciliation.

Repentance, like grace, is costly — not cheap. When Baptists, who profess to believe in the authority of Scripture and the Lordship of Jesus, treat repentance as was shown by the 1995 Atlanta resolution concerning racism, slavery and discrimination, we are merely being apologetic, not repentant.

In making this observation I do not denounce the 1995 resolution as insincere. However sincere it may be, it is clearly a far cry from what Jesus showed repentance to involve through the example of Zacchaeus. According to that example, the litmus test for repentant sincerity is not defined by how conspicuously one apologizes for transgressions and derelictions that oppress others. It is whether our apology is accompanied by actions that heal wounds, confront and eliminate inequality and honor the righteous anger of the oppressed. Without those things, an apology amounts to mere rhetoric.

Justice is always much more than a rhetorical exercise. Perhaps that is one reason Baptists are not considered prophetic when it comes to social justice concerns involving racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, militarism and techno-centrism. For all its eloquent sincerity, the 1995 resolution represents to Baptists and the wider world that the largest body of Baptists considers repentance to mean little more than apologizing for wrongfulness, and doing no more than the apologizer considers convenient.

Last June, *The Atlantic* magazine published a compelling article by Ta-Nehesi Coates that began with this passage found at Deuteronomy 15:12-15:

If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him

out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; for this reason, I lay this command upon you today.

Coates opened his article, titled “The Case for Reparations,” with that passage. It is remarkable that a journalist of a secular magazine has been more prophetically forthright about the essential relationship between reparations and social justice, using the same Bible Baptists profess to be authoritative for our faith and practice, than has been true for Baptist clergy, laypersons, congregations, denominations and educational institutions.

Until we are prepared to become more than apologists concerning historical transgressions and derelictions, our appeals about repentance to the rest of the world will not only ring hollow. We will enable the world to embrace a “cheap grace” perspective about repentance and salvation that runs contrary to the entire record of Scripture, including the teachings and example of Jesus.

At best, we will be weak witnesses to the transforming and salvific work of repentance in a world ravaged by racism, sexism, classism, militarism and techno-centrism. At worst, we will be considered hypocrites. If the people who follow Jesus are unwilling to practice Biblical repentance as displayed by Zacchaeus concerning past and continuing harms, we should not be surprised when the rest of the world refuses to do so and disregards what we say, sing and preach about the relationship between repentance, salvation and reconciliation.

In sum, the world needs to see us living as prophetic witnesses who proclaim and incarnate the salvation ethic of repentance. God calls us, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, to embrace the radical, revo-

lutionary and subversive repentance that Jesus revealed for us through his encounter with Zacchaeus.

But not only is the world waiting for Baptists to confront that ethical imperative as followers of Jesus in our personal, congregational, associational and wider relationships and witness. God is waiting and hoping that we will live as if we understand what Jesus, the other Hebrew prophets and the rest of Scripture have revealed about the transforming and reconciling power of repentance for God's sin-scarred and broken

humanity and God's wounded creation.

Amen. ■

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1 Allen Aubrey Boesak, *Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics*, (Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 2014).

2 Allen Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), p 68.

3 Ibid. 68.

4 Ibid. 68.

5 Ibid. 68.

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7 Ibid. 69.

8 Ibid. 70.

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10 Ibid. 71.

11 Ibid. 73.

## Love Goes for a Walk in the Park

By Oda Lisa, February 2015

One fine day, February courted Spring,  
But their mild meeting was no summer fling.  
Basking in sunshine, fair was the weather,  
Folk and critters shook off winter's dither.  
Boy, about Eight, plays fetch with his big dog  
And rewards each return with a big hug.  
Two Best Friends Forever skip, arm in arm,  
A sweet sisterhood without any qualms.  
Man passes by, holds his pregnant wife close.  
She, smiling up at him, clutches a rose.  
A mom encourages her little tyke,  
Teaching her daughter how to ride a bike.  
A white-haired couple of a certain age,  
Strolling, held hands, she and cane were his aids.  
Truly, Love went for a walk in the park,  
Blessing these beings, who lighten the dark.

Oda Lisa is a regular contributor to Christian Ethics Today. She has a "poet for hire" service and can be found at [www.poeticpearls.com](http://www.poeticpearls.com)

# Suggested Reading for Adults

By Marion D. Aldridge

“People who have read only one book can be quite dangerous.” Molly Ivins (who illustrated her point with mass murderer Timothy McVeigh—he apparently only read Ayn Rand)

Reading has always been an important part of my life. Dad was a reader. When we went to a used bookstore together, he would buy me something: *Robin Hood* or *Treasure Island*, something age appropriate.

Schoolteachers had us read Charles Dickens, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway and Jane Austen. Trying to improve us, high school teachers also assigned *The Odyssey* and *Julius Caesar*.

I began college as a math major, but after a year I discovered I could get a degree for reading books I wanted to read, so I became an English Literature major. Some stretching continued as I read assigned books that didn't interest me. But I also kept reading for fun. I discovered Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Willa Cather, Agatha Christie, Arthur Conon Doyle, and Dorothy Sayers.

Somewhere along the way, my love for Southern Literature led me to Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, Walker Percy and Clyde Edgerton.

What I mean by “adult reading” has nothing to do with an X-rating. When I was 20, I didn't have enough life experience or knowledge of world history to understand *War and Peace*. I do now. I read it a few years ago at the recommendation of Pat Conroy (*My Reading Life*), and I loved it. I now understand Flannery O'Connor in a way I didn't as a young man. *Moby Dick* and *Zorba the Greek* are great literature because they speak to fundamental issues of life about which most of us are clueless until we reach age 30.

Of course, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Animal Farm* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are easy and good to read at any age. I've enjoyed some books when I was a teenager and again as a mature adult.

Consider the following:

## **Fiction**

*A Prayer for Owen Meany*, John Irving  
*Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain

*Jayber Crow*, Wendell Berry  
*Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry  
*Night*, Elie Wiesel  
*Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw  
*The Good Earth*, Pearl Buck  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood

## **Non-Fiction**

*Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr  
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou  
*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (ghost written—since Malcolm X was dead—by Alex Haley)  
*The Habit of Being, Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Sally Fitzgerald  
*The Prince*, Machiavelli  
*The Seven-Story Mountain*, Thomas Merton  
Happy reading!

*Marion D. Aldridge is a writer, commentator, preacher, friend and regular contributor to Christian Ethics Today. His blog, [Where the Pavement Ends: Exploring Worlds I Know Little About...](#) is a favorite and this was posted on [May 19, 2015](#).*

## Some Words of Jesus

*“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14).*

# Threats to Religious Freedom in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis: Religiously Motivated Terrorism Against Non-Orthodox Denominations

By Mykhailo Cherenkov

Events in Ukraine display political and religious aspects. Long before the annexation of the Crimea and the unproclaimed war in the Donbass region, there was a religious battlefront.<sup>1</sup> Analysts, religious scholars and Ukrainian theologians such as Yuri Chernomorets and Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, repeatedly drew attention to this. But unfortunately, none of the leading Ukrainian and Western politicians foresaw or took into account the growing role of aggressive Moscow Orthodoxy in regional and global politics. As events in Ukraine have shown, Orthodox fundamentalism is no less aggressive than Islamic fundamentalism, and the “Russian Spring” is no less bloody than its Arab counterpart. Because this species of Orthodoxy has government support and aspires to a role in politics, it can be called “political Orthodoxy.” Moreover, recently “political Orthodoxy” has manifested itself in the form of “Orthodox terrorism” on Ukrainian territory occupied by pro-Russian separatists.

While groups of monitors working in Ukraine are collecting and presenting information on violations of religious freedom previously unseen in this region, the blatant need for a conceptual analysis of what is happening is becoming increasingly evident – i.e. why is it happening and what does it mean for the global community. There is no doubt that the persecution of individuals and groups based on religion that we are witnessing is part of a coherent policy aimed at creating a “Russian world,” and therefore represents a threat not only to regional security, but also to the entire global order, posing a challenge to the possibility of “globality,” in particular to the possibility of universal

freedoms, human values, and existing international laws.

The events in Ukraine have alarmed not only neighboring countries and the political figures associated with the conflict, but also the global Christian community. In the broader context of discussions, the talk is not just about the conflict between Ukraine and Russia; it is also about the conflict between Eurasia and Europe, Russia and the West, the orthodox “Russian world” and “secularized Protestant-Catholic civilization,” universal human rights and “orthodox” values, between freedom and “traditional order.”

The Ukrainian pro-European election and “revolution of dignity” on the Maidan (November 2014 - February 2014) was followed by the aggressive response of the “Russian world” – the annexation of Crimea (March 2014), the occupation of the eastern part of Ukraine, and the creation of quasi-local “people’s republics” (April 2014). All denominations except the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in the occupied territories were deemed illegal and experienced atrocities such as abduction, torture, murder and the seizures of churches and their premises.

What is obvious is that for the international community, it is important to analyze and assess the impact of the events in Ukraine for cooperation in the region of Eurasia and the protection of religious freedom, and to take all possible measures to support and assist the victims of religious discrimination.

The facts speak for themselves: Greek Catholics and Kiev Patriarchate Ukrainian Orthodox Churches have become *de facto* illegal entities in the annexed Crimea; in the Donbass

region an “Orthodox army” is active; dozens of Protestant churches have been seized; there have been cases of kidnapping, torture, and killing of pastors; Moscow Patriarchate priests openly bless terrorists and refuse to pray over deceased Ukrainian soldiers; Patriarch Kirill predicts the downfall of Ukraine as a “Kingdom divided against itself.”

Russia’s “hybrid” war against Ukraine united and thereby strengthened a series of international, interethnic and interconfessional conflicts. There was a coarse violation of Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty, the political unity of the Ukrainian nation and confessional identity. And it is the religious aspect of the conflict that may prove to be the most significant, because it is Moscow Orthodoxy that has become what is holding the Russian world together, and thereby the main actor in the bloody Russian Spring.

Russia’s annexation of the Crimea was justified by the sacred significance of the ancient Kherones, while war against Ukraine was seen as a defense of Orthodoxy. As President Putin said in his speech to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, For Russia the Crimea, ancient Korsun, Kherones, and Sevastopol, have immense civilizational and sacred meaning, like Temple Mount in Jerusalem for Jews and Muslims. For our country, for our nation, this event has a special meaning, because our people live in the Crimea, and the territory itself is strategically important, partly because the spiritual source of the formation of the multi-faceted but monolithic Russian nation is here, and the centralized Russian government. It was on this spiritual soil that our ancestors first and forever

recognized their nationhood.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, what is under dispute is the old European principle: Whose realm, his religion (Cuius regio, eius religio). Or, perhaps they are advocating the principle, “Whose religion, his realm.” This is related to the aggressive expansion of the “Russian world” through Moscow Orthodoxy. The Russian Spring began with references to the brotherhood of the three nations and the unity of the Orthodox faith, but continued with the annexation and war against yesterday’s brothers and those of the same faith, who had the gall to live separately and believe differently.

A well-known totalitarian phrase from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “To be Russian is to be Orthodox,” is becoming the main motive for the consolidation of Russians and the defense of the Orthodox. The Declaration of Russian Identity (passed November 11, 2014, at the end of the Global Russian National Assembly and dedicated to the topic of “Unity of History, Unity of the Nation, Unity of Russia”) proclaims:

*In Russian tradition the most important criteria of nationality is the national language (even the word for language in Russia, *yazyk*, is an ancient synonym for the word “nationality”). Every Russian is required to know the Russian language. Claims that every Russian must acknowledge Orthodox Christianity as the basis of their national culture are both justified and fair. Rejection of this fact, and even worse, a search for a different religious basis for the national culture, testifies to a weakened Russian identity, to the point of its loss.*<sup>3</sup>

As events in Ukraine have shown, everywhere there are Russian-speaking Orthodox, “polite people” can appear with machine guns to “protect” them and to unite them into a single Russian Orthodox world.

“We can’t not notice that the conflict in Ukraine has a clear religious underpinning,” wrote Patriarch Kirill to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in a letter, published on the official site of the Department of External Church Affairs of the Moscow

Patriarchate on August 14<sup>th</sup>. By August 15, the letter had disappeared from the site.<sup>4</sup> “Uniates, and schismatics that have joined them, are trying to seize the upper hand over canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine... I ask Your Holiness to do all you can to raise your voice in defense of the Orthodox Christians in Eastern Ukraine who, in a situation of increasing violence on the part of Greek Catholics and schismatics, live in daily fear for themselves and their dear ones, afraid that if their persecutors come to power, Orthodox believers will be forced to reject their faith or be severely discriminated against,” continued Patriarch Kirill’s letter.

The manipulation of “canonicity” is noteworthy. For the Russian

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***While Protestant leaders are participating in government councils and receiving presidential awards, their churches are being mercilessly persecuted.***

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Orthodox Church in Ukraine, there are no other Orthodox churches; they are all impostors and schismatics. Additionally, the Patriarch hides the well-known fact that, even for those who operate by the medieval term “canonical territory,” Ukraine is on disputed canonical territory and more rightly belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate than to the Moscow Patriarchate. This fact should be taken into consideration by those Orthodox sympathizers in the West who mean the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) when they refer to Orthodoxy. At the same time, the ROC and the Global Orthodox Church cannot be compared, either in size or quality.

The identification of Orthodox faith and the Moscow Patriarchate is becoming a mighty propaganda tool. As the “Orthodox militant,” Deputy Minister of Defense of the Donetsk

People’s Republic (DPR) Igor Druz, remarked, “On the Ukrainian side there are no Orthodox at all, because not a single church Orthodox individual would go to fight against New Russia, because they know that the unity of Holy Rus is pleasing to God. All saints who have spoken on this topic are unanimous in saying that Holy Rus must be united. Meanwhile Ukrainian fascists are the real separatists and they want to divide New Russia from Holy Rus and unite it to the decaying warmongering West. Therefore there are no church people on the Ukrainian side at all. Their battalions are made up mainly of uniates, schismatics, neo-pagans, and sectarians.”<sup>5</sup>

On July 31, 2014 the Locum Tenens of the Kiev Cathedra (of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate - UOCMP), Metropolitan Onuphrius, addressed a personal letter to Ukrainian President Poroshenko, in which he was “forced to draw attention to the violation of the rights and freedoms of believers and interference in the work of the parish of the Donetsk diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian military in Eastern Ukraine.”<sup>6</sup> He did not mention the problems of other confessions or abuses by the occupying forces and terrorists. Thereby the UOCMP confirmed that it has not only a spiritual dependence, but also a political dependence on Moscow. In a conflict between an Orthodox supranational empire and a nation, between imperial ideology and civil society, the “Ukrainian” Orthodox Church has turned out to not be Ukrainian at all. It is obvious that this position, taken up by the leading Ukrainian confession, poses a threat to national security and creates a dangerous precedent for other countries in the region.

In one sense, it is no longer Russia as a country, but Russian Orthodoxy as a supranational movement that is becoming a geopolitical factor. It is by claiming defense of “true” traditional canonical Orthodoxy that they justify the actions of the “Orthodox army” in

the Donbass region.

In his article, “Where Does the Threat to Orthodoxy in Ukraine Come From?” published on the separatist site, Russian Spring, the above-mentioned Igor Druz (who signed this time as chairman of the National Assembly of Ukraine) states that “Kiev separatists... are in great need of an ‘ideological justification’ for their lordship over the Euromaidan slaves. They need not only the support of a party and movement, but of religious confessions. Western handlers have long been busy subjugating various confessions, and the US State Department recently created a special division to work with them. In practical terms, this means that the destruction of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine and the formation of an enormous religious political sect from the remaining confessions, will become the ideological foundation of Poroshenko’s regime. These same processes are taking place throughout the world, where, under the leadership of the Western oligarchy, a single world religion is rapidly forming, which the Orthodox rightly consider the religion of the antichrist.”<sup>7</sup>

Through the efforts of Russian Spring ideologues, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, between Moscow Orthodoxy and Ukrainian Uniates, schismatics, and sectarians, is becoming global and is being represented as a conflict between the Russian world and the “decaying West,” between traditional values and “Gay Europe,” saving spirituality and corrupting secularity.

Moreover, as the main unifying force, the Russian Orthodox Church tries to create an alliance with those Protestants, Jews and Muslims who agree with the Orthodox view of Russian history and accept without a murmur their subservient position. As the director of external communications for one of the Protestant denominations in Russia told me (at the “Christian Values in Modern Russia” round table in Moscow on May 25, 2006), “We Protestants understand that all the seats at the government

table are taken; but we don’t object to feeding on crumbs that fall from the table.” (In an allusion to Matthew 15:26-27, “And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’”)

It is clear that such allies to “true Orthodoxy” can be only temporary, and will soon become the next victims. This is already happening – while Protestant leaders are participating in government councils and receiving presidential awards, their churches are being mercilessly persecuted.

Unfortunately, it is not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also

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*There is flagrant religious discrimination against all denominations except the Moscow Patriarchate.*

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Russian Protestants who view Ukraine as their “canonical territory” and who have already begun dividing up Ukrainian churches on occupied territory. For instance, the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith passed a decision creating a separate eparchial division for the Crimea and Sevastopol.<sup>8</sup> The new structure will be headed by Bishop Konstantin Bendas, a faithful follower of the party line of his head bishop, Sergey Ryakhovsky, member of the presidential council and the Civic Chamber of the President of the Russian Federation.

Russian Baptists see the Crimea as their own. Since the spring they have been persistently inviting Crimean churches to move from the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christians — Baptists — to the Russian Union (RUECB). And it is not just a territorial expansion behind this conflict, but a conflict of ideologies. In a resolution passed by the XXXIV Assembly of the RUECB

(May 30, 2014), Russian Baptists condemned the regime change in Ukraine as rebellion: “We declare our loyalty to Biblical teaching, which does not allow forceful overturning of lawful government, nationalism, and the resolution of socio-political conflicts by any means other than through political talks. ‘Do not join with rebellious officials’ (Proverbs 24:21).”<sup>9</sup>

The assembly’s delegates lost no time in separating themselves from their former “brother in the faith,” then interim president of Ukraine Alexander Turchinov, and sent a fawning epistle to President Putin, in which they assured him of their support and prayers: “May the Lord give you strength and courage to remain faithful in the battle against xenophobia and the preservation of interconfessional peace.”<sup>10</sup> To be fair, I should note that many pro-Russian leaders in Eastern Ukrainian churches went even further, demanding the excommunication of the “bloody pastor.” According to some pastors from the Donbass Region, when DPR separatists asked them, “Is Turchinov one of your guys?” they had no problem responding, “No, he’s not.”

It is worth noting that at that same XXXIV Assembly of the RUECB, along with the resolution on Ukraine and the flattering letter to Putin, the Assembly also passed a social charter for the RUECB, which contained the following in black and white: “No nation should dictate its will to another, based on notions of its religious, economic, political, or military superiority. Every nation should focus its efforts not on proving its false exclusivity, but on achieving basic spiritual and moral progress.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to avoid accusing the honorable advocates of the Russian world of a divided consciousness, we have to acknowledge the only remaining option: They truly believe in a “Holy Rus” and its “global mission.”

Most likely, it is only the defense of “purity of faith” for the Orthodox and “achievement of basic spiritual and moral progress” for Protestants

that can justify the horrors of the Russian Spring in Ukraine. Only the defense of mythical traditional values can cover up the imperial ambitions of soul-saving Moscow Orthodoxy and its epic resistance to the decaying Catholic-Protestant West. Only a fanatical faith in itself and its own exclusivity could close its eyes at the commission by Orthodox crusaders of unmentionable crimes against humanity, against Ukraine and the world, against God and their neighbors.

Sooner or later the global community will have to acknowledge the fact of “political Orthodoxy” and the “Orthodox terrorism” connected to it, supported by Russia which is destabilizing the entire Eurasia region. The sooner this happens, the better — for regional and global security, for defense of religious freedoms and civil rights, for the self-determination of individuals and nations. One of the first steps in this direction could be recognizing the “Orthodox” people’s republics which have formed in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk) as terrorist organizations. This honest recognition would bring clarity to the situation, define the sides of the conflict, identify the aggressor and the victim, and also allow non-political and non-aggressive Orthodoxy to separate itself from political and aggressive simulacra.

As a conclusion, I will offer a few key points about the religious dimensions of the Ukrainian crisis, its global significance and how the international community might position itself.

First, the “hybrid war” unleashed by Russia in Ukraine is not so much anti-Ukrainian as it is anti-Western, and it is quite blatantly religiously motivated, to the extent that it may well be called a “holy war” in which the orthodox army is fighting against uniates, believers and sectarians. In the minds of the ideologues of the Russian Spring, the Russian intervention is like a crusade against the West, the reconquest, gathering and reunion of the lands comprising this “Russian world.”

Secondly, everyone connected with

the West by virtue of their origin (foreigners) or by conscious choice (traitors) are automatically added to the list of enemies of the Russian world: Greek Catholics are considered traitors to the Orthodox faith; Uniates, Banderists; Orthodox members of the Kiev Patriarchate are considered schismatics, apostates, nationalists; Protestant sects are considered Westerners and American spies; and Crimean Tatars are considered pro-Ukrainians and non-Orthodox. There is flagrant religious discrimination against all denominations except the Moscow Patriarchate.

Third, interlocked with the state with exclusive access to its resources, and directing its ideological influence on state policies, Russian Orthodoxy

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*Sooner or later the global community will have to acknowledge the fact of “political Orthodoxy” and the “Orthodox terrorism”*

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is increasingly becoming political orthodoxy. In this case, it is difficult to separate religion from politics. It is the complex relationship that explains the hybrid nature of the war in Ukraine. The state was provided with religious justification and sacred sanction by the ROC to conduct a merciless war. Consequently, economic logic and political expediency were subordinate to the religious motive — to return to the Moscow Patriarchate its “canonical territory” and build on it the Orthodox empire of the Russian world.

Fourth, the gradual isolation from international contacts was implemented, along with the forced incorporation of religious associations in Crimea and the Donbass to align them with the structure of the Russian doctrine. (The Pentecostals and Baptists have spoken up about this.) Given the Orthodox-aggressive ideology of the occupying power, religious

denominations have lost the ability to conduct services in their houses of worship. They can no longer carry out missionary work in the community, receive international assistance, or organize charitable activities. Often the conditions for the return of confiscated buildings or the renewal of lease agreements is re-registration and the concomitant procedure of Orthodox expertise. Denominations are left not only without any rights and means to make a living, they are also isolated from the rest of Ukraine and from international support.

Fifth, the spread of the orthodox ideology of the Russian world and the religious persecution of other faiths has already led to a significant change in the religious map of the region. Most religious organizations have ceased their activities, and their parishioners have been forced to move to other regions. The vast majority of refugees do not have access to adequate living conditions for their families, nor do they have any prospects of finding work given the economic crisis in the country. Entire communities have been scattered abroad, and those ministers who remain in the occupied territories are in constant danger. We can talk about decimated religious associations in three regions of Ukraine: Crimea, Lugansk and Donetsk. In the same vein, we must also speak of the many thousands of refugees and victims, and the dead and wounded. The believers in these denominations can be regarded as victims of religious cleansing.

Sixth, while the interfaith community of Ukraine coalesced around the anti-corruption “revolution of dignity,” national unity and opposition to the aggression of the Russian world, Russian denominations united in support of the anti-Western course charted by their president. The title of the book of former President Leonid Kuchma — *Ukraine is not Russia*, beautifully conveys the clear demarcation between the nations, and presents Ukraine to the world as a self-determined phenomenon — “not Russia.” This does not fit into

the usual conception of the Western world, which labels as “Russia” everything that previously fell within the borders of the USSR. But today it is abundantly clear: Ukraine, with its rich diversity of denominations, its East-West synthetic spiritual culture should be perceived as a separate entity and promising subject of relations. Moreover, Ukraine should be seen as the victim of foreign aggression, in which the justification given for aggression is the pro-Western orientation of society and the consensus of most denominations to support the European aspirations of the country.

Seventh, the confrontation in Ukraine should be seen as a clash between universal human rights and freedoms and so-called “traditional values.” Behind the deceptive rhetoric of traditional values are hiding not universal nor even Christian values, but the traditional values of “political orthodoxy,” centered on “orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality” — or in other words, the values of the “Orthodox Empire.” In contrast to this, by upholding the fundamental value of freedom in relation to the individual and the nation, the Ukrainian “revolution of dignity” upholds the possibility of religious freedom and religious diversity. In this clash of the emerging civil society and the monolithic “Orthodox Empire,” Ukraine, like never before, is in urgent need of support from international legal institutions and the solidarity of the multi-faceted and free Christian world.

My eighth and final point, since the expansion of the orthodox Russian world carries with it a threat to the religious distinctiveness of Ukraine, international assistance is needed for the protection of this distinctiveness — including professional monitoring, expert analyses, help from advocates of religious freedom, and the expansion of international relations and integration into the global space.

For the world community, there is only one way to counter the absorption of Ukraine by Russia, and that is to move closer to Ukraine, to connect with her through strong religious, cultural, political and economic ties; to open all the doors to the free movement of Ukrainian believers in need of international advocacy; to use all diplomatic means to ensure the recognition of the separatists’ “people’s republics” as terrorist organizations, their “policies” against religious organizations as discrimination, and their victims as victims of religiously motivated terrorism. ■

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## Some Words of Jesus

*“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).*

# Sioux Suicides

By Martin E. Marty

Sightings of religion-related stories among members of Sioux tribes in South Dakota, one would think, could be beyond the scope of the national media, yet two independent stories win space this week on the front pages of, e.g., *The New York Times*.

One with immediate national political implications is headlined, “Grass-Roots Push in the Plains to Block the Keystone Pipeline’s Path.” Ms. Faith Spotted Eagle, a Yankton Sioux leader, speaks for her tribe. South Dakota had given a Canadian company authority to build the Keystone Pipeline. Spotted Eagle said: “We didn’t know about it; it was real swift and quiet.”

But there is noise now. “We’re so frustrated to the point of breaking,” said a Rosebud Sioux tribal council member. Expect lawsuits; but in Spotted Eagle’s opinion: “I think it’s going to be a spiritual victory.” Economics is involved, so coverage will be headlined.

The other story is more explicitly related to religious concerns, but was getting less attention until NYT reporter Julie Bosman took up the cause. The word “frantic” enters the story headlined “Pine Ridge Indian Reservation Struggles With Suicides Among Its Young.”

Most of us who live far from the reservation can turn the page and move on. But, given the history of the U.S. Government and the citizen record, one seeks “a spiritual victory” without much hope.

Since December, nine people (ages 12 to 24) have committed suicide on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and the federal Indian Health Service reports that between December and March, there were 103 known suicide attempts. Yes, the words “frantic” and “dire” are fitting. (In 2013 only five people committed suicide; so this is an upsurge in tragedies.)

John Yellow Bird Steele, president of the Oglala Sioux tribe, declaring an emergency, is stumped about the “why.” “It is devastating... When you have a good understanding of what’s happening, come back and tell me.”

Many elements are obvious subjects of speculation — cyber-bullying, think some; bad living conditions; sexual abuse; teenager-fad contagion. Stephanie Schweitzer Dixon, the executive director of a suicide prevention group, said: “I know that things seem to be getting worse for kids.”

Ted Hamilton, the superintendent of the Red Cloud Indian School, a Jesuit school, observes: “To be Lakota (Sioux) in this world is a challenge because they want to maintain their own culture, but they’re being told their culture is not successful.”

They live with “the legacy of oppression and forced removals, the lack of jobs,... the high levels of drug and alcohol use around them... The federal government dropped the ball in terms of mental health resources,” and “the system is overwhelmed” on all reservations. It will get worse.

Some patient and creative souls are on the scene, working against all odds. Pastor John Two Bulls works with youths at Pine Ridge. Helping head off a planned group suicide, he listened to the young people: “They were tired of the lives they had at home — no food, with parents all intoxicated, and some being abused, mentally or sexually.”

Toss in a weird element: Like the two Milwaukee girls who, last year, following storytelling websites, attempted to murder a classmate to please “Slender Man,” a weird, ominous, fictional figure. Some of these Sioux call him “Tall Man Spirit.” He recalls the “suicide spirit” in which many Native Americans believe.

Personal note: Nebraska-born, I grew up with white-kids’ lore about the Sioux, and have had special inter-

ests. (There’s even a Marty Mission among them, inspired by namesake missionary, Bishop Martin Marty, O.S.B.). On a visit to Rosebud Indian Reservation, we met a Catholic laywoman who had served there for 18 years. She chronicled what we would have called “hopeless” conditions.

I asked her why she stayed. “They’re such beautiful people,” — beautiful in so many ways. Tribal and other leaders and workers attest to that. They are beautiful people too. ■

*This article appeared in Sightings on May 11, 2015 and is printed by permission.*

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# Understanding Religious Liberty in the Same-Sex Marriage Cases

By Holly Hollman

**O***bergefell v. Hodges*, the same-sex marriage case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court recently, is not a First Amendment case. Its potential impact, however, has increased conversations about religious liberty, particularly the religious liberty implications of same-sex marriage, which is now legally recognized in 36 states and the District of Columbia. Religious voices have been prominent on both sides of the debate because of the significance of marriage in religious traditions. These voices, however, are only a small part of the legal debate which centers on whether the Fourteenth Amendment requires states to issue marriage licenses and/or recognize all lawfully-issued marriage licenses from out-of-state. Of the more than 140 *amicus* briefs filed before the U.S. Supreme Court, fewer than 15 percent were filed by religious groups, and few of those included religious liberty arguments.

While these briefs address only the edges of the primary legal arguments, they are still worth noticing. They reflect the broad diversity of religious thought in America about marriage as a religious and civil institution. The briefs share a common concern with the political and cultural divisions in our society, divisions that were magnified by Indiana's recent legislative session.

The *Obergefell* briefs filed on behalf of religious organizations and individuals raise various religious concerns within the same-sex marriage debate. Some religious groups filed briefs

supporting the petitioners, asking the Court to strike the state bans on same-sex marriage. They assert that, because of their religious belief in full equality before God, the state burdens their religious liberty when it treats marriages differently. Numerous religious groups also filed briefs supporting the respondents, asking the Court to uphold the state same-sex marriage bans. These groups assert that their religious beliefs inform their definition of marriage and that judicial voidance of the state bans will generate religious liberty conflicts.

Religious voices on both sides of

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*I am unaware of any credible public voice seeking marriage equality who is trying to force objecting clergy or houses of worship to perform or host a same-sex marriage ceremony.*

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this debate are concerned about what comes after *Obergefell*. Despite common rhetoric, I am unaware of any credible public voice seeking marriage equality who is trying to force objecting clergy or houses of worship to perform or host a same-sex marriage ceremony. Those who retain a traditional definition of marriage want explicit exemptions or at least the potential of a "RFRA-like" claim to

protect their actions based upon their religious beliefs about marriage. By the same token, supporters of same-sex marriage fear that if the Court's decision makes room for religious exemptions, these exemptions will expand far beyond individual clergy and houses of worship to legalized discrimination in every area of the public square.

In anticipation of a decision striking marriage bans as unconstitutional, several state legislatures are already considering bills designed to grant religious exemptions in a multitude of contexts. Some purport to protect churches and pastors but are written in terms that could extend much farther. Others would permit government employees to opt-out of issuing marriage licenses or performing civil ceremonies based on religious convictions. None are without controversy as those who support same-sex marriage and those who oppose it seem to have difficulty finding common ground when it comes to legal protections. The outcome of these efforts will depend not only on the status of same-sex marriage after the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell*, but on how each state decides to treat the competing liberty interests of same-sex couples and religious objectors. ■

*Holly Hollman is the general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. This column first appeared on the Baptist Joint Committee's website, www.BJConline.org, on April 27, 2015.*

## Some Words of Jesus

*"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).*

# Exploring the Church-State Side of the Same-Sex Marriage Cases

By J. Brent Walker

When the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the same-sex marriage cases, the justices did not invite briefs on religious liberty. In its writ of certiorari granting review, the Court framed the issues to be whether same-sex marriage is constitutionally required under the Fourteenth Amendment and, if not, whether states under Article IV have to recognize same-sex marriages performed in states where it is legal. It did not frame any First Amendment issues.

But clearly, church-state relations pervade this subject, and several justices turned to the topic in their questions to counsel and in their debate with each other on the bench.

Three such areas of inquiry about religious liberty are noteworthy:

First, Justice Antonin Scalia asked the petitioners' attorney, Mary Bonauto, whether ministers and the churches they serve would have to perform and host same-sex weddings if they disagreed with that understanding of marriage. The answer from the attorneys, including Bonauto, and Justice Elena Kagan who chimed in, was an unequivocal "no."

The day before the arguments, the BJC's Holly Hollman wrote that she was "unaware of any credible public voice seeking marriage equality who is trying to force objecting clergy or houses of worship to perform or host a same-sex marriage ceremony." I completely agree. Justice Scalia must not have gotten the memo. Actually, Justice Scalia knows better; I think, as he often does, he was playing devil's advocate (no pun intended). Under the First Amendment's church autonomy doctrine, these decisions on the part of ministers and houses of worship are beyond the ken of govern-

ment to second-guess or regulate.

Second, Chief Justice John Roberts inquired of Solicitor General Donald Verrilli whether, for example, religiously affiliated schools would have to provide housing for same-sex couples.

Verrilli responded that the balance between accommodating religious rights and ensuring civil rights — beyond the local church context — is something that will have to be worked out, probably at the state level. In my view, this would be the case with respect to most non-profit religious affiliates — such as colleges, retreat centers, adoption agencies and the like — and also for-profit wedding vendors providing goods and services who argue they are being required, in some fashion, to participate in the objectionable wedding ceremony.

Third, Justice Samuel Alito asked Verrilli whether a religiously affiliated college or university that objects to same-sex marriages could have its tax exemption threatened under a case called *Bob Jones University v. United States* (1983). In that case, the Supreme Court upheld the government's revocation of Bob Jones University's tax exemption because it banned interracial dating on campus and condemned interracial marriages. The Supreme Court reasoned that "[g]overnment has a fundamental, overriding interest in eradicating racial discrimination in education — discrimination that prevailed, with official approval, for the first 165 years of this Nation's constitutional history." (Full disclosure: the BJC filed an *amicus* brief that, while disclaiming any agreement with Bob Jones' racist policies, supported Bob Jones in its opposition to the gov-

ernment's withdrawal of a generally available benefit like tax exemption because the government disagrees with the taxpayer's religious beliefs and practices.)

Verrilli acknowledged this would be an issue that will have to be dealt with. The solicitor general is right. But one thing is for certain: the *Bob Jones* decision should not threaten the tax-exempt status of houses of worship and other pervasively sectarian organizations. The Supreme Court was meticulously careful in *Bob Jones* to limit its decision to "religious schools — not ... churches or other purely religious institutions; here the governmental interest is in denying public support to racial discrimination in education."

The extent to which *Bob Jones* might apply to sexual orientation instead of race and to other religious affiliates besides education institutions is an issue yet to be resolved. But the tax-exempt status of churches should not be in jeopardy.

The takeaway from the religious liberty discussion before the Court is that many issues remain open and undecided, at least until after the Court rules on the underlying issue of same-sex marriage. Of course, the Court may give guidance on the religious liberty issues in the opinion when it comes down. One thing that is settled is the inviolability of the worship sanctuary and fundamental beliefs and practices in the life of the church. The BJC is poised to continue fighting for that protection. ■

*J. Brent Walker is the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. This column first appeared in the BJC's May 2015 magazine, Report from the Capital.*

## **Three poems 40 years after the end of the War in Vietnam**

by J. Randall O'Brien

February 15, 2015

### **Ode to Nam on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its End**

He came home from Nam  
But never made it back.  
I saw him last just before  
He left for the war.

We celebrated his return  
His presence being our only lack.  
Cheering glasses were raised  
Repeatedly before

We noticed his eyes and long hair were with us  
But not his mind.  
After the party he walked to the Vietnam memorial  
And killed himself real fine. ■

### **On Coming Home From Nam**

She cried as he left, clinging to his Saint Christopher  
Chaining around his neck,  
Eyes kissing his as he pressed his face  
Against the bus window  
For one last embrace.

He cried as he read her letter, clinging to his dreams  
Dying in the important war,  
Eyes watering falling as he pressed his nose  
Against her perfumed envelope  
For one last taste.

She cried when he came home, clinging to her prayers  
That the shrapnel had not been hers,  
Eyes pleading as the soldiers pressed the flag  
Against the box and lowered it  
To its resting place. ■

## **War! What is it Good For?**

Mother, mother, mother, he wailed and I cried too.  
What child should lose his legs because  
Presidents blew  
Their moral responsibility to solve  
Our differences?

Father, father, father of our country, we cursed you.  
What protector, moral, caring wouldn't  
Peace pursue  
Regardless of his enemy's  
Deeds and inferences?

Mother's on her way, I screamed and crawled to  
What brother I could hold as he could  
Cleave to  
Until our bookie presidents could come  
To their senses.

Soldier, son, daughter, what more could I do  
What world so evil that I must  
Sacrifice you  
Of humankind suffer far worse  
Consequences? ■

*J. Randall O'Brien, president of Carson-Newman College in Tennessee following a distinguished career at Baylor University, is a highly respected pastor, scholar, and writer. He served in Vietnam in the 101st Airborne Division and received the Bronze Star and United States Air Medal.*

# This Little Light of Mine: A Plea for Christians to Stop Hitting Children

Victor I. Vieth

The concept of hitting a child as a means of discipline is foreign to me. Although I was raised in a conservative protestant family, my mom and dad never hit me. As a father, I never hit my son or daughter. For a long time, I did not appreciate how unique my upbringing was.

Several studies suggest that conservative Protestants are more inclined to accept and practice corporal punishment. I found this to be true with most of my friends being hit by their parents and many of them growing up to hit their own children. In the years ahead, I came to see how much this costs our church and our children.

When I became a child abuse prosecutor, I saw the potential and actual damage of corporal punishment as cases of physical abuse crossed my desk. Children bruised, bleeding, scarred—with parents often claiming the blows were administered in Christian love.

Although the protestant pastors of these parents would sometimes visit my office and concede a parishioner had gone too far, they were also quick to claim Christian parenting *must* involve some level of violence. Of course, the pastors wouldn't call corporal punishment an act of violence. They would call it smacking, swatting or spanking. I'm not sure any of the injured children who came to my attention understood this distinction. The insistence on hitting children in the name of God also has a spiritual toll. Long after bruises fade and wounds heal, the blows may continue to influence the child's view of God causing some children to struggle, even abandon their faith.

If children truly matter to the church, then we need to speak candidly about the medical, mental health, and spiritual impact of hitting them. This involves more than an

examination of pertinent research on corporal punishment. It involves an examination of the scriptures in an effort to determine whether it is God or man that insists on a practice that has proved so harmful to so many children.

## Protestant writers on corporal punishment

Some Protestant writers, such as Michael and Debi Pearl, have advocated for the switching of children, including infants. In their book, *To Train Up a Child*, the Pearls contend that “when your baby is tired and sleepy enough to become irritable, don't reinforce irritability by allowing the cause and effect to continue.... Get tough. Be firm with him. Never allow him to get up... To get up is to be on the firing line and get switched back down. It will become as easy as putting a rag doll to sleep.”

Other Protestants are more moderate but nonetheless maintain that hitting some children can be effective. In an editorial published in *USA Today*, Jared Pingleton of Focus on the Family writes:

Parents have many tools at their disposal to discourage negative behavior — loss of privileges, time outs, etc. But for younger children (never infants or adolescents), sometimes the most effective means of guiding them toward positive attitudes and actions, specifically when dealing with willful disobedience, can be a mild spanking. The idea is to help them learn to associate that a brief sting on the bottom now can help them avoid severe pain in their life later.

Whether holding extreme or moderate views on corporal punishment, protestant proponents of the practice contend, or at least suggest there is a Biblical basis for their beliefs. Many respected Biblical authorities, including conservative protestant scholars,

beg to differ. According to these scholars the Bible may not authorize and, at the very least, does not require parents to discipline their children by hitting them.

## Corporal punishment and scripture

The Bible was written over the course of 15 centuries. Although the scriptures were penned at times in which extreme acts of corporal punishment was inflicted on adults and children, there are relatively few passages providing instruction on this practice. The verses most often cited in support of the practice are contained in the wisdom literature of King Solomon. These Proverbs include:

“Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them’ (Pr. 13:24).

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline drives it far away” (Pr. 22:15).

“Do not withhold discipline from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod you will save their lives from Sheol [the grave or premature death]” (Pr. 23:13-14).

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by a neglected child” (Pr. 29:15).

Many respected theologians and Bible commentaries, past and present, have noted these phrases to be figures of speech referencing practices common to that era. For example, *The Lutheran Study Bible*, published by the conservative Protestant Missouri Synod includes the following language in their commentaries: “Flogging was a common form of punishment. The ceremonial scepter held by rulers symbolized their authority to judge and discipline.” The commentary goes on to quote Martin Luther's Large

Catechism which finds that children are “best trained with kindness and delight. For children who must be forced with rods and blows will not develop into a good generation.” The NIV Study Bible, which has sold over 7 million copies, notes that parents are “encouraged to apply the rod of punishment to drive out folly” but also contends the rod is “probably just a figure of speech for discipline of any kind.”

This is also consistent with Catholic and Jewish interpretations of the Proverbs. For example, the Catholic Study Bible contends the reference in Proverbs to beating children is an attempt at “sardonic humor” which “means the exhortation is not to be taken literally” or as “an argument for corporal punishment.”

In an article *Corporal Punishment of Children in Jewish Law*, Benjamin Shmueli writes that halakhic sources “reveal that, in practice, recourse to corporal punishment has been subject to a complex system of qualifications that diminish its scope, prevent arbitrariness, and make physical punishment difficult to resort to.”

In his book *Corporal Punishment in the Bible*, seminary professor William Webb contends the Bible requires discipline but not necessarily corporal punishment. In support of this argument, Webb points out that there are many references in the Proverbs to the corporal punishment of adults (i.e. “a rod is for the back of one who lacks sense” Pr. 10:13) but notes we do not have whipping posts in our church basements nor do we insist the criminal justice system utilize corporal punishment.

Instead, we recognize the verses are referencing punishments in place at the time they were written and we strive to apply the wisdom to our era. In other words, while a thief may have been whipped in biblical times, a jail sentence is perfectly fine today. The underlying wisdom of the verses is simply that misdeeds result in consequences.

Since the underlying wisdom in the Proverbs is simply to discipline

our children, Webb argues that parents utilizing disciplinary approaches more effective than corporal punishment are actually operating closer to the heart of the text.

Although Webb argues the Bible does not *require* corporal punishment, some clergy contend the Bible may not even *authorize* hitting children as a means of discipline. In an article published in the *Lutheran Forum*, Eric Andrae analyses the corporal punishment texts in their original languages and concludes the type of “rod” referenced in pertinent proverbs pertains to “shepherding, protecting, guiding and supporting.” According to Andrae, a Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor, “using the Scriptures, and especially Proverbs 13:24, for specific and divine permission to hit one’s child is hermeneutically suspect and exegetically dubious, at best.”

#### **Four reasons to abandon the practice of hitting children**

If it is true the Bible does not authorize or, at the very least, does not require corporal punishment, the church can freely decide whether or not to encourage hitting children as a means of discipline. There are at least four reasons parents, including conservative Protestant parents, should stop hitting their children.

*First, there are medical risks associated with administering blows to a child’s body.* In 2012, CNN aired a series of newscasts detailing the deaths or significant injuries of children hurt at the hands of parents claiming they were administering Christian discipline. These are not isolated events. Each year, as many as 2,000 children die from physical abuse and thousands more are hospitalized or require medical attention. When placed in the hands of dysfunctional or low-functioning parents, or in the hands of a parent who has simply lost control of their emotions, corporal punishment can have significant consequences, including death.

This is one reason the American Academy of Pediatrics discourages parents from venturing down the path of hitting children as a means

of discipline. Members of the clergy who *insist* that parishioners hit their children must understand that this may result in some children severely injured, some children dead, and some parishioners in prison. This is particularly problematic when clergy insist that parents hit babies or preschool children whose bodies can be easily damaged with an excessive blow.

*Second, there are mental health risks associated with corporal punishment.* The large body of research on corporal punishment is often misunderstood. The research does not say if a child receives corporal punishment that the child will grow up to have poor outcomes in life. Instead, the research describes corporal punishment as a risk factor and notes the more a child is hit and the harsher the discipline, the greater the risk factors for poorer mental health including depression, anxiety, anger management and inability to sustain healthy relationships.

It may be best to view the research on corporal punishment as similar to the research on smoking. Although no reputable study concludes that smoking is wise, one cigarette taken as a dare in the back of the school house when a child is still in their teens will not likely result in death or disease.

However, smoking three packs a day for decades will dramatically increase the risk for cancer or death.

Given the risks associated with smoking, many clergy discourage their parishioners from smoking at all. In the same vein, there are documented risks associated with corporal punishment and we should encourage parents to find less risky, more effective means of disciplining their children.

*Third, the law is contracting.* A quarter of a century ago, many parents hit their children with tree branches, belts or other objects and rarely faced prosecution even when injuries resulted. This is no longer the case.

Although the law still allows parents to hit their children, the definition

of reasonable force is contracting and will likely continue to contract in the decades ahead. In 44 countries, all forms of corporal punishment, including parental hitting of children, is now banned.

As the legal definition of acceptable blows to a child's body continues to contract, clergy will be forced to decide whether or not to encourage parishioners to commit unlawful acts. The Apostle Paul encourages Christians to abide by the law, contending that those who rebel against the government are "rebellious against what God has instituted" (Romans 13:11).

This brings to a head the theology of corporal punishment. If, as Webb and others argue, the Bible does not require parents to hit their children as a means of discipline, clergy will urge parents to engage in conduct that does not break the law. In the United States, this means severely limiting the practice of hitting children and, in many countries, it means completely abandoning the practice.

*Fourth, there are spiritual consequences to hitting children.* Martin Luther lamented the beatings he received from parents and teachers and openly worried that harsh discipline would drive children away from the church. As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reformation, Luther's words appear prophetic.

There is a large and growing body of research on the spiritual impact of child abuse. According to 34 major studies, involving more than 19,000 abused children, a great many children are spiritually damaged from

maltreatment. This happens when religion is used in the abuse of a child, when a church ignores the needs of a maltreated child, or simply because a child has unresolved spiritual questions about the abuse. According to this body of research, many of these children grow up to leave their church and, in some instances, to abandon their faith.

I recently spoke to a man who said that if he fidgeted in church, his parents would force him to take a branch from a tree. His parents then used the branch to inflict whippings that scarred his body. The physical pain, though, pales in comparison to the spiritual damage. The man told me he cannot so much as look at a church without having shivers of fear. As a result, he never again set foot inside a house of worship—but he prays daily and hopes that, somehow, God will find him.

For the church, this may be the darkest legacy of hitting children. Intentionally or unwittingly, we have insisted on a practice that does little good and, when exercised harshly, often drives children away from their faith.

Jesus scolded his disciples for keeping children away from Him (Luke 118:15-17). Given the role hitting children has played in sending children away, the church may wish to chart a different course—a course my parents took so many years ago. I don't think my mom and dad view themselves as reformers of the Church and yet their simple decision not to hit me as a means of discipline began a pattern that continues in my fam-

ily. My daughter eventually became a Christian school teacher who models effective discipline of a great many children—without the need to hit any of them.

In many churches this Sunday, children will join in the refrain "this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." As we join our children in this song, let us dedicate ourselves and our church to the proposition we will never run the risk of snuffing out this light through blows to their bodies. The power to implement this reformation rests in the hands of every parent. ■

*Victor Vieth is a former child abuse prosecutor and the director of the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, a program of the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA). He worked with the NDAA and Winona State University in creating the National Child Protection Training Center, which is now a program of Gundersen Health System. Mr. Vieth serves on the board of directors of the Academy on Violence & Abuse (AVA), GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) and on the advisory board to Male Survivor. Through GRACE, he serves on a national committee to develop a model seminary course on child sexual abuse. He is also the author of "From Sticks to Flowers: Guidelines for Child Protection Professionals Working with Parents Using Scripture to Justify Corporal Punishment" published by the William Mitchell Law Review.*

## Some Words of Jesus

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." (Luke 6:20-21).*

# Findley Edge and Racial Reconciliation

by Deena Williams Newman

The late Findley Bartow Edge, professor of religious education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, for more than three decades, was first known for his expertise in local church Sunday School work with the publication of books such as *Teaching for Results* (1956) and *Helping the Teacher* (1959). With his books *A Quest for Vitality in Religion* (1963) and *The Greening of the Church* (1971), Edge charted new waters as he inspired thousands to look inward and search for an authentic faith and he founded Vineyard Conference Center in Louisville. Lesser known are Edge's efforts to promote racial reconciliation during the turbulent 1950's and 1960's.

It is a twist of irony that Edge was born and reared in Albany, Georgia, a city with a history of racial strife and segregationist policies. In 1961 and 1962, the Southwest Georgia city was put on the map when some young college students came to town to conduct a voter registration drive and to challenge the white power structure. Hundreds of protesters were jailed, including Martin Luther King, Jr., who came to speak at a mass meeting. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Taylor Branch even devoted a chapter of his book *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* to the Albany Movement.

Even today in Albany, the city council, local school board, and local businesses are sharply divided along racial lines, and a number of white families have fled to nearby counties to live. Integrated churches are rare, and tension still exists between Albany State University, a historically black university, and Darton State College, which was formed in the early 1960's as an alternative for white community members.

Edge was concerned about many social issues, but it was the racial crisis in the mid 1950's which caused the native Albanian to become disillusioned with the institutional church. He wrote, "In the midst of the moral and spiritual revolution that was taking place in society, instead of the churches becoming involved and giving leadership, they were either reactionary or uninvolved."<sup>1</sup> Edge felt strongly that something was wrong with a religion that, on the one hand was popular and growing, and, on the other hand, refused to get involved with human suffering. He wrote as follows:

The people in our churches, in terms of personal morality, were among the finest people to be found anywhere, yet most of them saw no relationship at all between their Christian faith and the racial crisis all around them.<sup>2</sup>

Edge felt that Southern Baptists, as the largest Protestant group in the South, should take the lead in speaking out against racial discrimination.

Although Edge was reared in the South, he was not a victim of his cultural background. He was deeply concerned about his denomination and its stance on the race issue. He had returned from a sabbatical in the mid 1950's when churches began withholding financial support from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because Martin Luther King, Jr. lectured on campus.

Edge was involved in the race issue in his own situation in Louisville. He wrote the manager of some local cafeterias, "... opening your services to Negroes would have absolutely no effect upon my coming into your place of service."<sup>3</sup> He added, "Therefore, as a Christian, I would encourage you to desegregate these cafeterias at the earliest possible moment."<sup>4</sup> Edge was one of the mem-

bers of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville who signed a letter to the deacons encouraging the church to "... vote that race or color shall not be a consideration in receiving Christians into the fellowship of our church."<sup>5</sup>

At Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Edge was part of the Faculty Social Action Committee. It was Edge who suggested having some conferences with the Negro pastors of Louisville and also with the mayor "... in order to ascertain whether or not the next worthy objectives in the area of integration may not be worked out peaceably."<sup>6</sup>

Edge was especially concerned about the race issue in his home state of Georgia. He preached a controversial sermon on the race issue at a church in his home town of Albany. He wrote the pastor of the church, "I certainly hope the sermon I tried to preach Sunday morning will bear some positive fruit. It may be a good thing that both of us left town."<sup>7</sup> He added, "I would certainly hate to see the name of Albany held in scorn as is Little Rock."<sup>8</sup>

Edge held firm Christian convictions about the race issue and expressed these convictions even in personal letters of sympathy. He wrote the governor of Georgia, "Although I disagree deeply with your views on race, I, like you am a father and I wanted to write to you and express to you my profound sympathy at this time of agony in your life."<sup>9</sup>

Edge voiced his concern for the pastor of First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, when trouble occurred when some black persons requested membership. The pastor wrote Edge informing him of the situation.<sup>10</sup> Edge, in turn, made efforts to find a place of service for the pastor. Edge wrote:

Many of us were both shocked

and thrilled by what happened in the church on Sunday. We were shocked because of the fact that these people's request for membership was declined. We were thrilled that such a large number dared to stand up and be counted.<sup>11</sup>

Edge was supportive of the efforts of Baptist state paper editors who took a stand on the race issue. He wrote to one editor:

Let me congratulate you on the excellent leadership you are giving to Texas Baptists (and others) through your editorials in the *Baptist Standard*. I am sure your decision to write boldly concerning the race issue was not an easy one. It would have been so much easier and more peaceful to remain silent. Yet to remain silent would have been a betrayal of the very Gospel to which you have committed your life.<sup>12</sup>

Edge also was supportive of the effort of national government officials to take a stand on the civil rights issue. In 1963, Edge wrote a letter to a United States senator asking him to “. . . do everything in your power to get the Civil Rights Bill out of the rules committee. Also I am requesting that you do everything possible to secure passage of this bill.”<sup>13</sup> Edge wrote a similar letter to a United States congressman stating:

This is one of the great moral issues of our time and the action taken by Congress will not only affect the Negro who desperately needs help but will also affect the world attitude toward the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Edge was not the only Southern Baptist concerned about the race issue during the 1950's and 1960's. One of Edge's contemporaries was Clarence Jordan, who founded Koinonia Farms,

a community in South Georgia where the poor, both black and white, could learn the basic principles of farming so they could earn a decent living. Henlee Barnette, another of Edge's contemporaries, marched with Martin Luther King and helped to sponsor King's historic visit to Southern Seminary. Carlyle Marney, another Southern Seminary graduate, was an outspoken opponent of segregation long before the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954, a position which added to his controversial reputation among many Southern Baptists.

It is noteworthy that Findley Edge, born a century ago in a city and culture filled with racism, boldly spoke out against segregationist policies. His search for authenticity in the Christian faith undoubtedly led him to take a different path than many around him. ■

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1 Letter from Edge to Harry S. Truman, White House, Washington D.C., November 30, 1951.

2 Letter from Edge to John Sherman Cooper, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., June 4, 1953.

3 Letter from Edge to John F. Kennedy, White House, Washington, D.C., March 29, 1961.

4 Ibid.

5 Letter from Edge to John Sherman Cooper, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., April 15, 1964.

6 Letter from Edge to John M. Robison, Jr., House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., January 5, 1954.

7 Edge, "A Search for Authenticity," Marlene Mayr, ed. *Modern Masters of Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1983), p. 39.

8 Ibid.

9 Letter from Edge to Eugene Johnson, manager of the Blue Boar Cafeterias, Louisville, Kentucky, May 1, 1961.

10 Ibid.

11 Letter from Edge and others to The Deacons, Crescent Hill Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, May 3, 1961

12 Memo from Edge to Willis Bennett, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January 22, 1962.

13 Letter from Edge to Brooks Ramsey, First Baptist Church, Albany, Georgia, January 30, 1962.

14 Ibid.

15 Letter from Edge to Lester Maddox, Governor's Mansion, Atlanta, Georgia, March 23, 1970.

16 Letter to Edge from Herbert Gilmore, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, September 23, 1970.

17 Letter from Edge to Herbert Gilmore, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, October 2, 1970.

18 Letter to E.S. James, *Baptist Standard*, Dallas, Texas, August 12, 1963.

19 Letter from Edge to Senator John Sherman Cooper, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., December 13, 1963.

20 Letter from Edge to Congressman Eugene Snyder, United States House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., December 16, 1963.

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## Some Words of Jesus

*"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matthew 11:5).*

*"Of making many books there is no end. . . "* Ecclesiastes 12:12 NRSV

## If Jesus Isn't the Answer. . . He Sure Asks the Right Questions

by J. Daniel Day (Macon, GA Smyth and Helwys, 2015, 126 pp.)

Reviewed by *Walter B. Shurden*

Faithful readers of *CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY* will find this book by Dan Day theologically provocative, spiritually challenging and relevant to every day Christian ethics. Dan Day lived in the Baptist trenches for over 40 years as pastor of 7 Baptist churches. He stands in the great tradition of "scholarly preachers" who creatively broker the biblical vision and theological concepts for the plumber on the third row. I marveled at his insights, delighted in his nuances, laughed at lines that maybe only long time Baptists will find funny, envied his writing, and chided him for not writing more good stuff for us.

So what does he say? He says that the number of answers offered by the church are more than the answers authorized by the gospel. He says that in the New Testament Jesus is more "the Way" than he is "the Answer," that those two images lead in very different directions, that "the Way" implies a journey while "the Answer" proclaims a destination reached, that "the Way" suggests a guide while "the Answer" announces a winner. He says that the church transformed "the Way" into "the Loop," and made the open-endedness of "the Way" into "a fortress to be defended, a circle within which to fight, a noose used to choke the spirit's breath" (121). He says that

Jesus was never "pushy," never boring, never easily silenced and that he is often more a "problem" for us than he is an "answer."

Day deals with eleven questions that Jesus asked. Here they are, along with Day's understanding of what is at the heart of the question.

"Are you not of more value than they?" A question about VALUE.

"Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but don't notice the log in your own? A question about SELF-UNDERSTANDING.

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*He says that Jesus was never "pushy," never boring, never easily silenced and that he is often more a "problem" for us than he is an "answer."*

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"If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" A question of RELATIONSHIPS.

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" A question about FAITH.

"What did Moses command you?" "What then does this text mean? A question about AUTHORITY

"Why are you afraid?" A question about FEAR.

"If the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" A question about INTEGRITY

"Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth?" A question

about WAR AND PEACE.

"Whose head is this and whose title?" A question about GOVERNMENT.

"But who do you say that I am?" A question about JESUS AND YOU.

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? A question about GOD.

Here is cautious, careful language, respect for the believing, unbelieving, and once-believing, a Bible that is not flat, and a theological mind that writes "for the living of these days." Day civilizes theological barbarism with a quiet faith that seeps clearly through every doubt he raises. This is a call for the church to open the door and let questioning, doubting, struggling half-believers come out of the closet.

I can think of many uses for this book, not the least of which is a meditative reading once a day for 13 days to cover the 13 chapters. It would make superb Sunday School curriculum or seminar study. Thoughtful preachers will find a model here for thoughtful preaching. Many lay people could get set free by a careful reading. And think me not cavalier when I suggest that it would be a smart tool for evangelism, if given gently and kindly in the spirit in which it is written, especially to the Nones (those who have nothing for the church) and the Dones (those who have had enough of the church).

So far, this is my favorite book for 2015. See if you agree. ■

*Walter B. Shurden is Minister at Large at Mercer University.*

# When the World Is Too Much

"Courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world."  
*(John 16:33, NEB)*

A child, hopes dying aborning, is abused,  
And met not with kindness, but only to be used,  
The yearning for caring continually refused.

When the violence of war is commonplace,  
And death reigns daily with a mighty mace,  
How vain to the trapped must seem the claims of grace.

By the millions flows the stream of refugees,  
Beset by cold and hunger and threat of disease,  
Life turned upside down, the proudest brought to their knees.

Swiftly disaster strikes, leaving in its wake  
Souls bereft of loved ones and much of earthly stake;  
Hope may rise by aid for the sufferers' sake.

Singular or systemic, rampant are racial offenses,  
Made more bitter and enduring by our pretenses,  
Must they run, and run still more, through all the tenses?

To be treated without worth is a burden none should bear,  
To rob persons of dignity is an egregious affair,  
It offends the Creator and causes many to despair.

Fleeing poverty and violence, fueled by passion,  
On a dangerous trek, risking all, hoping to fashion  
A new life, will they be shown any compassion?

How reprehensible the depraved  
Treatment of persons in white slavery trade,  
All Heaven revolts at evil so grave.

Waves of terror, cruelty beyond bounds,  
Leave in their wake bitter silence and appalling sounds,  
Prisoned by fear where ruthlessness abounds.

As many endure an abyss of evil,  
And it appears control is given over to the devil,  
Does heaven bring hope from time primeval?

The heart broken, tears without end, or unable to weep,  
Depression unceasing, no sanctuary in the deep,  
With hopes all fled, is life worthy to keep?

There is a Friend, who stays closer than a brother,  
Through all vicissitudes like no other,  
The answer to the deepest prayers of a mother.

As hatred, with a vengeance, rises to fulfill  
Many a hellish scheme, moved by the devil's will,  
The Savior opens a healing flood from Calv'ry's hill.

'Deliver us from evil' should be  
A daily soul cry and fervent plea,  
Exulting for all in Him Christ's victory.

Send the word across the world like a trumpet call,  
To the hurting, grieving, despairing, to all,  
There is hope for the stricken whatever may befall.

Rejoice! divine power is Christ's to wield;  
By love all-surpassing He triumphs the field,  
Evil's doom is set, forever sealed. ■

– James A. Langley

# Liturgy for Undocumented Workers

By Sam Rodriguez

## Scripture Readings from Exodus 22: 21 and from Leviticus 19: 34

"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." (ESV)

"You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." (ESV)

## Confession of Sins

Lord, we are gathered under Your Name to ask forgiveness for our attitude regarding the undocumented workers living in the United States. We have ignored Your commands to love and protect the stranger. We have not been charitable towards them and we have harbored ill will against them. We have not seen their presence here as an opportunity to show them Your Kingdom. Forgive us, Lord. We have done this wicked thing and we repent. For Christ's glory we ask and pray these things. Amen.

## Absolution

Bless the Lord who forgives our sins  
His mercy endures forever

### **Prayer for the Undocumented Worker**

For those who have to work far away from the land they love, we pray

Lord, have mercy

For those who must endure the hardship of being separated from their family, we pray

Lord, have mercy

For their children who endure shame and ridicule simply because they are different from us, we pray

Lord, have mercy

For those who are lost and alone in this nation because they cannot speak the common language, we pray

Lord, have mercy

For those who have no voice as they "...face danger, violence, oppression and degradation," we pray

Lord have mercy

### **Collective Prayer of Reconciliation**

Eternal God, You have forgiven us our sins and You have heard our prayers for those less fortunate than ourselves. Grant, O Lord, that our spirits would be humble and that our hearts would be filled with compassion towards them.

May all our thoughts ever and always be good towards them and may we be called upon by You to alleviate their sufferings.

For it is in Your great Name that we pray, Amen. ■

Sam Rodriguez is a student at Fuller Theological Seminary

# 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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