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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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*Kudzu*

# Obama, War, and Christianity: The Audacity of Hope and the Violence of Peace

By Jonathan Tran

## Introduction

A discussion of war and Christianity, specifically, certain war policies of the Obama administration, requires a review and critical analysis of that policy from a theological perspective. Being that I am going to be critical, I should qualify what I will express in this essay. My assessment of President Obama, especially as it relates to his war policies, is meant neither to endorse his political rivals, such as the Republicans, nor to stump for any political position as defined in terms of the nation-state. My intention is not to critique one partisan position in favor of another.

Rather, what I hope to do is to help those of us who call ourselves Christians to think through the enormously complex questions of warfare, using the considerable tools of theology. I suppose, if I have a side, I would want to claim the side of the church, not only the church's alternative position on such things as war (including the just war tradition or, closer to my heart, Christian pacifism), but – most importantly – the church itself as an alternative to war. For ultimately, the church is not a series of religious platforms or values but, most directly, God's alternative to the world's violence, an invitation to the world to be *more than world*, a call to the world to more fully understand itself as participating in God's Trinitarian life.

The title of my presentation, "The Audacity of Hope and the Violence of Peace," draws from two books, Barack Obama's well-known *The Audacity of Hope*, where he speaks of hope and its available lights, and *The Violence of Peace*, where Yale Law School Professor Stephen Carter tries to show how Obama's hopeful peace plays out in violence.<sup>1</sup> In putting these two notions together, I am concerned with why our versions of peace tend to look

so much like war. You might say war is peace, *American Style*. I am concerned to show why our peace is so violent, and how violent peace (peace secured through violence, which makes us strangely at home with the violence of our peace) characterizes us as a people. I will be focusing on President Obama's *unmanned aerial vehicles* (UAV) targeted killing program as the centerpiece of his war policy and, probably, the emblem of America's approach to war going forward.

Ultimately, what I will be trying to say is that peace and violence for Americans are not opposite but complementary. In contrast and in conclusion, I will gesture toward a genuine peace that the church as Christ's body brings, a real peace that is participant in, and reflective of, God's life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Juxtaposed against the world's violent peace, Christ's patient peace comes as a sword. I will claim that this peace incarnates itself in the world and dwells among us – fully God, fully human. In light of this realness, the so-called audacity of hope and its violent peace will be *only* audacious and, therefore, a false hope; in Christ and Christ's church, God is not something we hope for, even audaciously, but a *reality* present to us.

## On Droning

The following was reported in a 2009 edition of *The New Yorker* magazine:

*On August 5th, officials at the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia, watched a live video feed relaying close-up footage of one of the most wanted terrorists in Pakistan. Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Taliban in Pakistan [and, by all counts, a really awful dude], could be seen reclining on the rooftop of his father-in-law's house, in Zanghara, a hamlet in South Waziristan. It was a hot summer night, and he was joined*

*outside by his wife and his uncle, a medic; at one point, the remarkably crisp images showed that Mehsud, who suffered from diabetes and a kidney ailment, was receiving an intravenous drip. The video was being captured by the infrared camera of a Predator drone – a remotely controlled, unmanned plane that had been hovering, undetected, two miles or so above the house. . . . The image remained just as stable when the CIA remotely launched two Hellfire missiles from the Predator. Authorities watched the fiery blast in real time. After the dust cloud dissipated, all that remained of Mehsud was a detached torso. Eleven others died: his wife, his father-in-law, his mother-in-law, a lieutenant, and seven bodyguards.<sup>2</sup>*

Numerous similar stories can be told, since the U.S. currently has approximately 7,000 UAVs, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, or drones, flying the skies looking for targets to kill. The development of the UAV program has been a *game changer* in the war on terror, a watershed moment in military ingenuity. There are reports that people in places like Afghanistan and Yemen live in constant terror that death will come from the sky without a moment's notice.<sup>3</sup>

We could spend much time thinking about the ethics of the UAV program of targeted killing. Since I'm interested in discussing the broader cultural issues in which droning takes place – that is, how we Americans think about war and peace in a way that droning becomes a watershed, a game changer – let me offer just a sample of what I see as some of the significant moral issues.

First, when did assassination become an acceptable military practice?<sup>4</sup> The answer is, when we committed to something called "the war on terror," which knows no spatial, temporal, or political boundaries. The strategic

benefit of the war on terror is that anyone, anywhere, anytime can be named an enemy, then targeted and killed in a way that would count as legitimate military action. Within this allowance, we have something called “anticipatory self-defense,” which – when situated within the larger *Bush Doctrine* – grants the right to make preemptive strikes an omnipresent possibility.

The 2011 droning of Amir Khan and Anwar al-Aulaqi, who were American citizens, would – absent the war on terror – be considered violations of due process, except that the expansive allowances of the war on terror put Aulaqi directly, and Khan indirectly, in the “enemy’s” chain of command, rendering them targetable.<sup>5</sup> While this isn’t assassination of the traditional sort, such as slitting the throat of an enemy combatant, it is something similar, leading to certain ethical ironies. As Vicki Divoll, a former CIA lawyer who now teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy, observed, “*People are a lot more comfortable with a Predator strike that kills many people than with a throat-slitting that kills one.*”<sup>6</sup>

Another ethical question: *Why are the procedures and protocols of this program not only secretive but seemingly purposefully convoluted?* There are actually (at least) two programs: one run by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and another run by the CIA; each program possesses its own classified kill list and protocols. Many observers have suggested that this convolution is the government’s intentional attempt to obfuscate, resulting in what an NYU international law expert called “*an accountability vacuum.*”<sup>7</sup> Adding to the muddle, the UAV program is run by – alongside military and intelligence officials – civilian contractors, individuals working for for-profit corporations. Now corporations may or may not be people, but they cannot be held accountable to the standard chain of command.<sup>8</sup>

Third, *is droning acceptable on just war grounds?* The *just war* tradition was established to make sure that war was conducted for the right reasons

and in the right ways.<sup>9</sup> It assumes that, while war is never “good,” it is sometimes necessary and, when necessary, should be conducted only for right, or just, causes, and in right, or just, ways. One of the key guiding rules is that of proportionality in which the use of force would be proportionate to the stated purpose for going to war, that the use of force is commensurate with the end that the use of force is intended to accomplish. This key stems from a code of honor among warriors; *just warriors are virtuous warriors*, who fight only when necessary and in honorable ways.

In the case of droning, a 500-pound bomb that kills everything in sight is neither commensurate with the task of killing one person, nor is it honorable – given that, while one combatant faces grave danger, the other faces *no danger at all.*<sup>10</sup> A former British air chief Marshall referred to such an arrangement as a “virtueless war,” given that droning requires of drone pilots, who are far removed from the field of battle, *neither courage nor heroism*, two traditional marks of the just warrior. A war without virtue sounds a lot like an unjust war. *And if we are not conducting a just war in Afghanistan, what are we conducting?*

Finally, and perhaps most worrisome, *who cares about the targeted killing program?* Americans seem to care very little that their government is running a war based on targeted killing. *Time* magazine, at the end of 2011, ran a story about the newest UAV drones, which would be faster, smarter, and cheaper.<sup>11</sup> Looking at the article, I wasn’t sure if I was reading a description of a weapon of war or an ad for the latest IPad. The story offered *no ethical reflection or questions*, demonstrating how Americans have largely granted President Obama a *moral blank check* to end the war in Afghanistan. One of the darker sides of this reality is the suggestion that we have not asked many questions simply because it has been so successful; namely, it has allowed us to kill many people without having American soldiers put in harm’s way, other than the

post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]-like stress that aviators in Florida experience when remotely controlling drones.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of these troublesome moral questions, President Obama has expanded the drone program far beyond that of the Bush administration. According to the *Washington Post*, “*Other commanders-in-chief have presided over wars with far higher casualty counts. But no president has ever relied so extensively on the secret killing of individuals to advance the nation’s security goals.*”<sup>13</sup>

We are talking about “*a system in which a decentralized apparatus carries out summary executions of people we’re assured are bad and who are sometimes U.S. citizens, and the president knows about this but chooses not to exercise oversight or control of the process.*” We have, in the words of one expert, created “*an unaccountable killing machine operating at an industrial scale.*”<sup>14</sup>

Such is life under the Obama administration . . . the world under America’s super power. While the violence and suffering I just described are sad, even devastating, they are not unique. War is what we do, have been doing, and will be doing for the foreseeable future. War is required of us because of the role we play, or think we play, in the world. The UAV system is only the most technologically advanced version of it.

I think it is instructive to think for a moment about Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush. In *The New American Militarism*, the historian and retired U.S. officer, Andrew Bacevich, describes Bush’s tenure as commander-in-chief accordingly:

. . . well before September 11, 2001, and before the younger Bush’s ascent to the presidency, a militaristic predisposition was already in place both in official circles and among Americans more generally. In this regard, 9/11 deserves to be seen as an event that gave added impetus to *already existing tendencies rather than as a turning point*. For his part, President Bush himself ought to be seen a player reciting his lines rather than as a playwright drafting an entirely new script.<sup>15</sup>

As off-putting as his bravado could

be, Bush was simply acting out the role scripted for him. It was easy to demonize Bush, or Obama for that matter, as if he were an aberration to business as usual, as if before his presidency was a state of perpetual peace. We are a country that has been at war, in one form or another, for most of its history, with Presidents Bush and Obama – and their respective ambitions for peace – just the latest casualties.

We are, after all, a violent people. It is hard to hear that, because we believe we love peace. But our violence is most clearly expressed in the kind of peace we love, a peace secured by violence. We go to war not because we love violence, but because we love peace, and violence is how we imagine peace. Let me repeat myself and be clear here: We as a nation are again at war not because we love war, but because we love peace and war is what we *mean by peace*. If you follow our history, including the history that our drones are presently making, you will come to this conclusion: For Americans, “peace” is not the absence of war, but rather war for certain ends. This is not because we are a bad people; we are a good people, and this is how we practice our goodness.

### Obama’s Realism

Those who do not like Obama’s war policies, exemplified today in his targeted killing program, cannot accuse him of inconsistency. If we thought he promised us a rose garden and, therefore, now feel disappointed, we weren’t listening. What is unique about his presidency is that Obama furnished us with perhaps the most philosophically sophisticated articulation for war and its reasons of any president in recent memory. The fact that this articulation came in the form of his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech shows quite clearly the peculiar American correlation of peace and war. The Peace Prize speech was a statement not only political but, more critically, *theological*, an admonition for war based on a metaphysical (read: theological) description of reality:

*War, in one form or another,*

*appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease -- the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences. . . . The capacity of human beings to think up new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible, as did our capacity to exempt from mercy those who look different or pray to a different God. . . . We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: **We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes.** There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert -- will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. . . . **I face the world as it is**, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.<sup>16</sup>*

One of the things that is revealing about this speech is its allusions to the Christian ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr and its espousal of Niebuhr’s moral universe and its ensuing ethical posture called “Christian realism,” which claims that the way of Jesus, while laudatory, only works as an ideal, not as a reality. That, as Niebuhr believed, **Christ stands only at the edge of history, not in history.** Accordingly, in history, where we must deal with reality, not ideals; with Hitler and Al Qaeda, not Jesus, we must be *realistic* about how much good can be achieved, about how far peace should be pursued. Hitler and al Qaeda are realistic; Jesus and the politics of Jesus that is the *New Testament* church, *not realistic*. **Rejecting** non-violence as an unrealistic possibility, Niebuhr said,

*The perfect love of Christ comes into the world, but it does not maintain itself there; the cross, therefore, stands at the edge of history, and not squarely*

*in history; and Christian faith has quite rightly seen in this cross a revelation of the nature of the divine and eternal as well as of the ultimate historical possibility and impossibility.<sup>17</sup>*

In a 2007 interview with *The New York Times*, Obama was asked, “Have you ever heard of Reinhold Niebuhr?” Obama responded enthusiastically, “I love him. He’s one of my favorite philosophers.” As to what he learned from Niebuhr, he said,

*I take away the compelling idea that there’s serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. I take away . . . the sense that we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naive idealism to realism.<sup>18</sup>*

In some ways, the only difference between Bush, for all of our antipathy toward him and his wars, and Obama, is that Obama said it better. While Bush gave us the *reasons* for war, Obama gave us a *theology* of war. And while Obama has been, wisely, much less willing to associate war with divine fiat and use God to justify his politics, that is only because he was able to identify war as the *natural order of things*. There is no need to appeal to the nature of God when you can appeal to the nature of the world, a world shorn of God, where God stands always outside.

Recently, Obama and the Pentagon announced sweeping cuts in national defense, a drop of \$100 billion and reduction of 80,000 troops. In doing so, he said this:

*Yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats.*

*. . . Over the next 10 years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: It will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership. In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush administration. And I firmly*

*believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong and our nation secure with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined.<sup>19</sup>*

Notice that the argument here is not, “We have been a warring people and now desire peace and so will reduce our armaments.” Nor is it, “After 10 years of two wars, we have grown weary of war and the promises of war, and so we need to rest from warring.” The argument is not one of peacefulness; it is one of *efficiency*. Obama is, as in 2002, not opposed to war, just “dumb” and “rash” ones.<sup>20</sup> After all, in announcing the cuts, he promises:

*We've built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history – and, as commander-in-chief, I'm going to keep it that way.*

We will continue to be the warring country we have been, but for cheaper. None of this is about genuine peace but, rather, financial expediency driven by a crushing deficit and a recessed economy.

### Bombing with Bread

Some of you may be wondering at this point if I think there is an alternative to Obama, and, whoever's in office, whether there is a better option than droning. Those of you wondering about my vote, I'm afraid to say, have *missed the point*. Viewing war as our nature and destiny makes targeted killing not only necessary but inevitable. There will be no alternatives for us so long as we continue to confuse our loves, for war and for peace. If we think war makes for peace, droning, even with all its moral baggage, *will be* our best way forward. But this is where American Christians need to *separate their American from their Christian*. The church not only *gives* us alternatives to drones and war; the church, as Christ's body, is the alternative.<sup>21</sup>

When the towers came down in 2001, when all those people were murdered at the Pentagon, and those poor folks killed on Flight 93, I mourned with everyone else. I mourned for the incredible loss of life, the disregard for human suffering, the terrible viola-

tion of everything we hold dear. I also remember lamenting what would come next. I knew our response to being killed would be to kill. Demonstrating how the propensity to war always short-circuits creativity, we responded the only way we knew how. Someone bombed us, so we were gonna bomb them. The world knew we would do it; *al Qaeda certainly knew we would do it*. Our doing it surprised no one.

But we might have done differently, or at least those people who are both American and Christian could have allowed their faith in Christ to inform how they were going to be citizens of a country at war. We might have suggested an alternative, one that is more than audacious. Instead of bombing them with bombs, we could have, as Stanley Hauerwas once suggested, bombed them with bread.<sup>22</sup> Bombing them with bombs only confirmed to the world that America is a violent nation.

Now if we bombed them with bread, that would be a different story. Imagine, in the weeks and months after 9/11, American C-130s and B-52s, and all of our stealth bombers, flying into Afghanistan and – instead of thousand-pound bombs – we dropped bread, parachuting payloads so that people would be fed. Instead of M1-A Abrams tanks rolling into the wastelands of Kabul, big white Wonder Bread trucks, with their goofy red-and-yellow circles, delivering nourishment to a people endlessly invaded, religiously oppressed, and criminally bullied. And even, in South Waziristan – yes, that place where we dismembered Meshud *by all counts, a really awful dude*, Predator drones would sweep down in the dead of night and – instead of attacking with Hellfire missiles – attack him, his wife, his father- and mother-in-law with bread.

*Isn't such a proposal, “bombing them with bread,” irresponsible?* Wouldn't it make us more vulnerable to further attack? Might America become the laughingstock of the world? Yes, to all three, or probably yes, since we didn't try and hence do not know. How could we suggest such a thing?

Where could such an idea come from? Why would we respond with bread? Simply, “*On the night he was betrayed, he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’*” (*1 Corinthians 11:23-24*).

The church in America might have suggested this. What is the church, after all, other than God's body given to the world, that the world might be nourished on peace and patience rather than war and desperation? We are bread and, insofar as we can live by peace and patience, even in a world of Hitlers and al Qaeda, we let the world know that 9/11 did not change anything; rather, history was changed on a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday when our Lord Christ was crucified, buried, and resurrected.

We might have said, “This is what God did as people were killing him; we as citizens demand we do likewise.” We could have complained that the tax dollars of American Christians shouldn't be used for bombs and, even if we lost that argument, might have mobilized the church to bomb them with bread ourselves, as the Baptist Global Response did in 2010 in Afghanistan and Pakistan, responding to monsoon flooding that killed 1,500 and affected millions.<sup>23</sup>

You might think that such a call on the part of the church, that such an action by American Christians, is not possible. You may suppose, following Obama following Reinhold Niebuhr, such a response unrealistic and, therefore, irresponsible. You may think that Jesus Christ could do such a thing *only* because he, unlike we, is God. You may think, along with Niebuhr, that the church cannot approximate Christ, cannot be his body, because Christ is not real in the way the church is real, is not real in the way Hitler or al Qaeda are real.

And yet the Creed says he was real, in fact “really divine *and* really human.” In the face of the violence done to him, in the face of terror, Christ gave his body as bread because he was God, and this is how God acts toward the

world, and because he was human, and this is what humanness looks like.<sup>24</sup> For those who hold to the Creed, to the scriptural witness the Creed summarizes, the problem with “Christian realism” and its pleas to be “realistic” is that, in light of the realness of Christ’s body, it is not realistic at all. *“This is my body, given for you.”* To deny the realism of bombing with bread is to deny the realness of Christ’s humanity, and to deny that is, following St. Athanasius, to deny our salvation. Bombing with bread when people bomb you with bombs is what a reconstituted humanity, a humanity fully realized, a humanity taken up into the trinitarian life of God, looks like; responding to violence and terror with peace and patience is the life of God, translated into the world, embodied in the church.

Would bombing with bread be effective? It can be no less effective than all those wars that promised us peace. Can God’s love be effective? If not, we are all doomed.

Anyhow, effectiveness is not our cause, but faithfulness. We are not here to be effective, especially since those pushing for effectiveness tend to be drawn toward violence to achieve it. The hope of the church is not effectiveness, as if our task is to change the world. We are not here to change the world, through violence or peace secured by violence; rather, we are here to witness to the fact that the world has been saved in Christ.

The world saved in Christ means we need no longer secure peace by violence, that such measures have been deemed forfeit in the terms of the now reigning Kingdom. This is not the *audacity* of hope, but the *reality* of God, his very body, present in the world.<sup>25</sup> ■

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1Barack Obama, *The Audacity*

*of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage, 2008); and Stephen L. Carter, *The Violence of Peace*.

2Jane Mayer, “The Predator War: What Are the Risks of the CIA’s Covert Drone Program?” (October 26, 2009), <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/09>.

3For a detailed report on targeted killing, see [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secrecy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/gIQAPKNR5O\\_story\\_4.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secrecy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/gIQAPKNR5O_story_4.html). For an analysis of “realpolitik,” including review of arguments that see it as more moral than traditional warfare, see [http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/05/targeted\\_killing](http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/05/targeted_killing).

4Mayer writes, *In July, 2001, two months before al Qaeda’s attacks on New York and Washington profoundly altered America’s mind-set, the U.S. denounced Israel’s use of targeted killing against Palestinian terrorists. The American ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, said at the time, ‘The United States government is very clearly on record as against targeted assassinations. . . . They are extrajudicial killings, and we do not support that.’*

5[http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/strike-on-aulaqi-demonstrates-collaboration-between-cia-and-military/2011/09/30/gIQAD8xHBL\\_story\\_1.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/strike-on-aulaqi-demonstrates-collaboration-between-cia-and-military/2011/09/30/gIQAD8xHBL_story_1.html); and [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/a-proud-traitor-samir-khan-reported-dead-alongside-aulaqi/2011/09/30/gIQAYhcdAL\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/a-proud-traitor-samir-khan-reported-dead-alongside-aulaqi/2011/09/30/gIQAYhcdAL_blog.html). Also see [http://www.salon.com/2012/01/30/leon\\_panetta\\_explicitly\\_authoritarian\\_decree/](http://www.salon.com/2012/01/30/leon_panetta_explicitly_authoritarian_decree/).

6Jane Mayer, “The Predator War: What Are the Risks of the CIA’s Covert Drone Program?” (October 26, 2009), [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/091026fa\\_fact\\_mayer](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/091026fa_fact_mayer). Later, Mayer shows how the collateral damage was much greater, when considering the prior failed attempts to kill the target: *“the recent campaign to kill Baitullah Mehsud offers a sobering case study of the hazards of robotic warfare. It appears to have taken 16 missile strikes, and 14 months, before the CIA succeeded in killing him. During this hunt, between*

*207 and 321 additional people were killed, depending on which news accounts you rely upon.”* (Ibid.) See also <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/02/world/la-fg-drones-civilians-20100502>.

7The phrase comes from U.N. Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, a New York University law professor. See [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secrecy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/gIQAPKNR5O\\_story\\_4.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secrecy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/gIQAPKNR5O_story_4.html). Political theorist Michael Walzer asks this about the CIA’s drone program: *“Under what code does the CIA operate? I don’t know. The military operates under a legal code, and it has judicial mechanisms. . . . There should be a limited, finite group of people who are targets, and that list should be publicly defensible and available. Instead, it’s not being publicly defended. People are being killed, and we generally require some public justification when we go about killing people”* (i.e., we don’t know what to make morally of the drones). See Mayer.

8See <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/29/world/la-fg-drones-civilians-20111230>.

9Michael Walzer argues that the tradition has long evolved from a checklist of criteria to “ordinary language” about war. See his *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Specifically, Walzer writes, *“Just war is not only an argument about war in general; it is also the ordinary language in which we argue about particular wars. It is the way most of us talk when we join political debates about whether to fight and how to fight. Ideas like self-defense and aggression, war as combat between combatants, the immunity of non-combatants, the doctrine of proportionality, the rules of surrender, the rights of prisoners – these are our common heritage, the product of many centuries of arguing about war. Just war’ is nothing more than a theoretical version of all this, designed to help us resolve, or at least to think clearly about, the problems of definitions and application”* (Ibid, x). Also, see Daniel M. Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

10Daniel Bell worries that it is not a proportionate use of force in the other direction, that selective killings of **individuals** may cause the war to drag on indefinitely. See his “On Targeted Killing and

Drones" as a response to Stephen Carter's 2012 Society of Christians Plenary, "The Morality of Targeted Killing."

11<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2103298,00.html>.

12See Marvin Kalb and Deborah Kalb, *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2011); on Vietnam, see my *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory: Time and Eternity in the Far Country* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). On the stressful conditions, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/asia/air-force-drone-operators-show-high-levels-of-stress.html>. It is interesting to consider the dynamics of the stress created for aviators whose daytime job is to attack human targets and, because the bases are on American soil, return home to their families immediately. In the history of the world, this is a unique phenomenon. For further consideration, see David A. Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 1995).

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14Joshua Foust, *The Atlantic*, "Unaccountable Killing Machines: The True Cost of U.S. Drones," Dec. 30, 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/unaccountable-killing-machines-the-true-cost-of-us-drones/250661/#.TwKTt7ialMQ>. email. See also <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/kill-capture/what-is-the-secreetive-us-killca/>.

15Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Bacevich goes on to show how this tendency found philosophical expression and intensification through development and influence of the new-conservatives, according to which, "the beauty of the Bush Doctrine was not that it promised to deny oil weapons to those tempted to discomfit the United States but that it imparted to U.S. policy an 'incandescent moral clarity'" [Ibid., 95]. Also, see

Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

16<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.

17*Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 276.

18David Brooks, *The New York Times*, April 27, 2007. I quote from Richard Harris' introduction to Richard Harris and Stephen Platten, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* (New York: Oxford, 2010). Interestingly, the book is partially dedicated "For Barack Obama as he faces the challenges of wielding power under God."

19<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/05/remarks-president-defense-strategic-review>. Also, see the specifics of President Obama's proposed reductions: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-01-26/panetta-military-defense-cuts/52805056/1>. For analysis of the Obama administration's defense budgeting, see Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Budgeting for Hard Power: Defense and Security Spending Under Barack Obama* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2009). As is evident from the references in this paper, the administration is young enough that most of the literature is not in monograph studies, but Internet sources.

20Recall Obama's opposition to the Iraqi invasion: "Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that, although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances. . . . I don't oppose all wars. . . . What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war. . . . That's what I'm opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war. A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics. Now let me be clear – I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. . . . He's a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him. But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to his neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that – in concert with the international

community – he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history. I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of al Qaeda. I am not opposed to all wars. I'm opposed to dumb wars." <http://www.famous-speeches-and-speech-topics.info/famous-speeches/barack-obama-speech-against-going-to-war-with-iraq.htm>. See also Obama's comments about the speech in *The Audacity of Hope*, 294-95.

21On the ethics of America's response to 9/11, see the exchange between George Weigel and Stanley Hauerwas and Paul J. Griffiths. George Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," *First Things* (January 2003), 20-27; and Stanley Hauerwas and Paul J. Griffiths, "Policy Pollyanna," *First Things* (December 2010), 6-7.

22Neither Hauerwas nor I could remember where he published this thought, though he is certain he did at some point. Either way, I am glad he's allowed me to lift it here.

23<http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue10474.html>.

24John Howard Yoder makes the claim: "The work of Christ is, at its center, obedience (*Philippians 2 et al.*). Christ was exactly what God meant man to be: man in free communion with God, obeying God and loving mankind with God's love. This is the truth which the Nicene Creed seeks to safeguard; this man Christ Jesus was really God working, was man in perfect communion with God. Nicaea affirms the reality of God's working in Christ's obedience." Yoder, "A Study in the Doctrine of the Work of Christ," Unpublished paper presented at the Domburg Seminary, April 27, 1954. Paul Martens' *The Heterodox Yoder* directed me to this text (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 29.

25Many thanks to Professor John Wright for his comments and suggestions, which were, as always, spot on.

# Debt, Deficits, and American Morals

By Gary Moore

John Adams once wrote: "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that if one is to be dogmatic, he should be so in religion rather than politics, because compromise is essential in a democracy. And the great theologian C.S. Lewis said sick society would focus on politics as a sick man focuses on his digestion.

Each year, UCLA conducts a study of incoming freshmen to our universities. Before the late 1960s, when the influence of religion was stronger, most said they were attending college to master a meaningful way of life. Relatively few, the business students perhaps, said they were coming primarily to learn how to make money. The lines representing those percentages crossed during the early 1970s. Today's baby boomer elites, regardless of profession, seem preoccupied with obtaining wealth. They read magazines like *Money* and *Self*, something inconceivable to their grandparents, who read newspapers with religion sections larger than today's business sections. This cultural shift in values is part of what sociologists term postmodernism. Broadly, the term means we no longer believe in a single Truth.

The Judeo-Christian ethic that virtue and altruism are to be valued more highly than material accumulation has largely been replaced by the post-modern belief that there are many truths. A Christian's idea of moderation in all things coexists with the \$10-million-a-year athlete and the CEO's mantra that he should be paid what the market will bear. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, "there is only one ethics, one set of rules of morality, one code, that of individual behavior in which the same rules apply to everyone alike," writes management consultant Peter

Drucker, who once taught theology. "And this fundamental axiom business denies.... Business ethics assumes that for some reason the ordinary rules of ethics do not apply to business." Similarly, the Judeo-Christian ethic mandates the personal care of neighbors, which is in tension with the view of those elites who believe it's government's responsibility.

These multiple truths complicate politics. When held dogmatically, they make it nearly impossible to find common ground, which Tocqueville said is crucial to civility and prosperity in a democracy. As a result, politicians in a post-modern world spend a lot of

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*Today's baby boomer elites, regardless of profession, seem preoccupied with obtaining wealth.*

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time talking past each other.

What's different today is the rise of the tea party on the far right end of the spectrum. Libertarians want radically limited government. One extreme strand of this ideology, in particular, has been gaining influence: the notion that no one needs to care for the poor – and that government definitely shouldn't. This reflects the moral philosophy of Ayn Rand, a dogmatic atheist who thought CEO-types would save us.

As a conservative at heart, I've supported Republican causes much of my life. But Ms. Rand was no conservative. In her words, she was a "radical for capitalism." After three decades on Wall Street, where this pernicious brand of corporate elitism ran amok before the Great Recession, I've grown increasingly worried for the health

of our republic. I now believe her philosophy has been a major factor in America's tax policies, excessive CEO compensation, and increasing concentration of wealth among the affluent.

Very few Americans today know who Rand was, much less the sway her ideas now hold over today's tea party, and by extension the Republican Party, and by further extension, our economy. Rand's tome *Atlas Shrugged* has been cited by the Library of Congress as the second most influential book in America, just after the Bible. The *Economist* magazine has said her individualism and antigovernment philosophy shaped Reaganomics, primarily through former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, who literally sat at Rand's feet for years.

Rep. Paul Ryan (R) of Wisconsin, who has headed the GOP effort to cut entitlement spending, requires his staff to read *Atlas Shrugged*. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is a fan of Rand's thinking. Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck have preached her gospel on right-wing radio and television. Even many leaders of the religious right (Chuck Colson excepted) have tried to integrate her thought with that of Christ, as diametrically opposed as they are.

The irony is that Rand wanted to be remembered as "the greatest enemy of religion ever," which may be why local tea party groups have disbanded rather than support the goals of socially conservative Christians. Her ideas may have shaped Reaganomics, but she fought the Reagan candidacy because she rejected his Calvinistic vision of America being a "city on a hill." She also rejected Nobel laureate economist F.A. Hayek, a champion of libertarians, because he argued that government might help stimulate an economy during a depression.

So today's impasse between the

welfare-statists (who think our government should maintain full care for the boomers, even if it bankrupts the nation) and the tea party activists (who apparently think our needy and elderly should just get jobs) deepens as America sinks into European-style secularism.

In more religious times, the teachings of Christ Jesus helped unite most of us by providing a third way: each of us caring for our neighbors, particularly those in need, in a loving, voluntary manner. Yet should some decline that moral responsibility, as Rand did, Christ suggested the law of Moses would remain a moral necessity, since the poor will be always with us. That law required the affluent to round the corners of square fields and leave the second picking of grapes for the poor.

With the secularization of America, that moderate way -- rendering "to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" -- has nearly disappeared. True, Americans practice more charity than other nationalities. But studies by

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*But studies by Empty Tomb, a Christian service and research group, and others indicate that most religious giving is simply tax-deductible contributions for the upkeep of our churches and other institutions.*

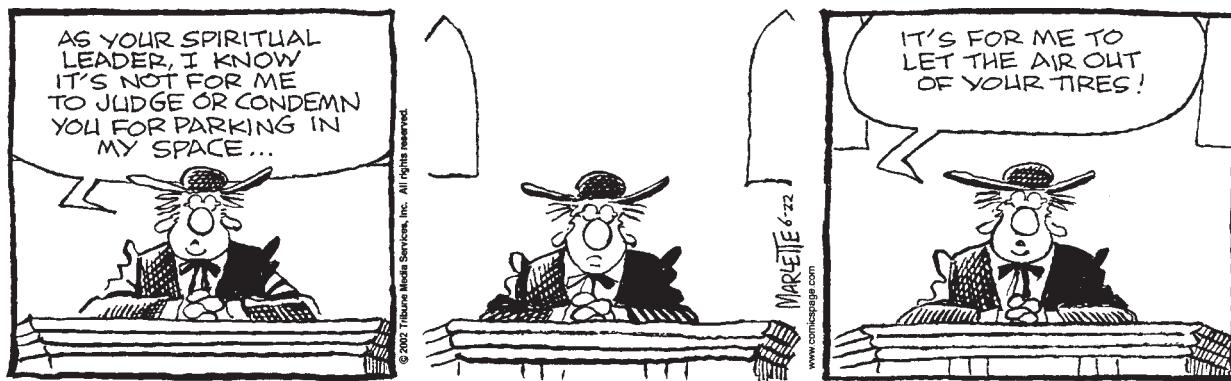
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Empty Tomb, a Christian service and research group, and others indicate that most religious giving is simply tax-deductible contributions for the upkeep of our churches and other institutions. America's official foreign aid is among the very lowest as a percentage of income among the developed nations. So while the needy have a voice among the Democrats and the affluent have a voice among the Republicans, Christ's middle way disappeared as the middle class shrunk.

My hope is that public frustration with both parties during the debt-limit debate will galvanize citizens to consider a third way movement based on a spirituality that transcends political labels and speaks truth to all power, not simply to the other side of the aisle. That's what Tocqueville observed when Americans were happier and had more confidence, even faith, in the future.

I don't pretend to know what God wants for America, and I don't advocate a theocracy. But it might be time for us Christians to think about a return to an ethic where loving one's neighbors, even one's enemies, is the norm. ■

*Gary Moore is the author of five books on the morality of political-economy and the founder of The Financial Seminary, a Sarasota, Fla., ministry aiming to reintegrate moral thought into economics and finance. This essay was first published in the Christian Science Monitor and was revised for Christian Ethics Today and published with permission of the author.*



# David Barton's Jefferson

by Martin E. Marty

Our premier historian of late colonial and early republican America, Gordon Wood, while reviewing a book on Roger Williams warms up readers with references to Thomas Jefferson.

"It's easy to believe in the separation of church and state when one has nothing but scorn for all organized religion. That was the position of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's hatred of the clergy and established churches knew no bounds. He thought that members of the 'priestcraft' were always in alliance with despots against liberty. For him the divine Trinity "was nothing but 'Abracadabra' and 'hocus-pocus'. . . Ridicule, he said, was the only weapon to be used against it."

If you wanted to promote the idea of "a Christian America," one which would privilege one religion, a version of Christianity, and de-privilege all others, and if you want to get back to roots and origins, the last of the "founding fathers" on whom you would concentrate would be Jefferson.

Yet the most ardent public and pop advocate of privilege and virtual establishment, David Barton, cites Jefferson for Barton's own positions which are directly opposite of Jefferson's. Never heard of David Barton? Most of the historians you would ever meet never heard of him, and if you told them about him and his positions, they would yawn or rage about listing him among those who deal honestly with Jefferson.

*Sightings* does not over-do *ad hominem* and sneering references, so we leave to others all the disdaining that Barton so richly merits. Do note, however, that he has invented a case and product which serve his viewpoint and draw him enormous followings among "conservative" factions which oppose separation of

church and state in most cases except those they choose. Listen to Mike Huckabee or Glenn Beck or rightist cable TV and you will find Barton showing up everywhere.

His favorite founder seems to be Jefferson, of all people. How does he work his way around to the prime builder of "a wall of separation between church and state," in the metaphor that would not be my favorite. Sample: Thomas Jefferson, razor in hand snipped all supernatu-

in the *Los Angeles Times* found all that Barton found to be "outrageous fabrication." On TV, Barton even said, with no evidence, that Jefferson gave a copy of his Jesus book to a missionary, to use "as you evangelize the Indians." Had the Indians been converted with that text, their heirs would have had no place to go but to what became the humanist wing of the Unitarian-Universalist church.

Why does any of this matter? One, basic honesty is at issue; do American religionists need to invent such stories in order to prevail? Two, what if they did prevail? Most of the founders thought that religion was most honest and compelling when its leaders and gatherings did not depend upon lies about the state and, of course, upon the state itself. "Separation of church and state" is admittedly a complex issue, dealing as it does with inevitable conflict and messiness in a free and lively republic. May debates over it go on, but with honest references to Jefferson and his colleagues and not on the grounds David Barton proposes. ■

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*If you wanted to promote the idea of "a Christian America," one which would privilege one religion, a version of Christianity, and de-privilege all others, and if you want to get back to roots and origins, the last of the "founding fathers" on whom you would concentrate would be Jefferson.*

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ral references out of his copies of the Gospels (in the four languages he read in White House evenings), to keep Jesus as a pure ethical humanist.

This spring Barton is publishing *The Jefferson Lies*, which most historians would title *Barton's Lies about Jefferson*. Astonishingly, he twists a slight reference to Jefferson's book on Jesus and turns it into a tract which, Barton says, Jefferson would use in order to convert the Indians to Christianity. Reviewer Craig Ferhman

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*Martin E. Marty's biography, publications, and contact information can be found at [www.memarty.com](http://www.memarty.com). This article was first published in Sightings on 4/30/2012 and is reprinted here by permission. Sightings comes from the [Martin Marty Center](#) for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago Divinity School.*

# Show Death Penalty the Door

By Jimmy Carter

For many reasons, it is time for Georgia and other states to abolish the death penalty. A recent poll showed that 61 percent of Americans would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder.

Also, just one percent of police chiefs think that expanding the death penalty would reduce violent crime. This change in public opinion is steadily restricting capital punishment, both in state legislatures and in the federal courts.

As Georgia's chief executive, I competed with other governors to reduce our prison populations. We classified all new inmates to prepare them for a productive time in prison, followed by carefully monitored early-release and work-release programs. We recruited volunteers from service clubs who acted as probation officers and "adopted" one prospective parolee for whom they found a job when parole was granted. At that time, in the 1970s, only one in 1,000 Americans was in prison.

Our nation's focus is now on punishment, not rehabilitation. Although violent crimes have not increased, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with more than 7.43 per 1,000 adults imprisoned at the end of 2010. Our country is almost alone in our fascination with the death penalty. Ninety percent of all executions are carried out in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

One argument for the death penalty is that it is a strong deterrent to murder and other violent crimes. In fact, evidence shows just the opposite.

The homicide rate is at least five times greater in the United States than in any Western European country, all without the death penalty.

Southern states carry out more than eighty percent of the executions but have a higher murder rate than any other region. Texas has by far the most executions, but its homicide rate is twice that of Wisconsin, the first state to abolish the death penalty. Look at similar adjacent states: There are more capital crimes in South Dakota,

Some devout Christians are among the most fervent advocates of the death penalty, contradicting Jesus Christ and misinterpreting Holy Scriptures and numerous examples of mercy. We remember God's forgiveness of Cain, who killed Abel, and the adulterer King David, who had Bathsheba's husband killed. Jesus forgave an adulterous woman sentenced to be stoned to death and explained away the "eye for an eye" scripture.

There is a stark difference between Protestant and Catholic believers. Many Protestant leaders are in the forefront of demanding ultimate punishment. Official Catholic policy condemns the death penalty.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the death penalty is extreme bias against the poor, minorities or those with diminished mental capacity. Although homicide victims are six times more likely to be black rather than white, seventy seven percent of death penalty cases involve white victims. Also, it is hard to imagine a rich white person going to the death chamber after being defended by expensive lawyers. This demonstrates a higher value placed on the lives of white Americans.

It is clear that there are overwhelming ethical, financial, and religious reasons to abolish the death penalty. ■

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*Although violent crimes have not increased, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world,*

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Connecticut and Virginia (with death sentences) than neighboring North Dakota, Massachusetts and West Virginia (without death penalties).

Furthermore, there has never been any evidence that the death penalty reduces capital crimes or that crimes increased when executions stopped. Tragic mistakes are prevalent. DNA testing and other factors have caused 138 death sentences to be reversed since I left the governor's office.

The cost for prosecuting executed criminals is astronomical. Since 1973, California has spent roughly \$4 billion in capital cases leading to only 13 executions, amounting to about \$307 million each.

*Jimmy Carter was the 39th President of the United States and is founder of not-for-profit Carter Center in Atlanta, advancing peace and health worldwide. This article first appeared in Associated Baptist Press on April 27, 2012 and is reprinted by permission.*

# All God's Children are Immigrants

By Angie Wright

The Bible is the story of the people of God. And so it is your story and my story. Those of us who have lived in the same place for most of our lives may have failed to notice that the story of God's people is in many ways a story of immigrants. The people of Israel are often called the People of the Land, but in reality most of their story is about trying to get there or getting kicked out and trying to find their way back. In other words, it is the story of people who were led or forced by circumstances or called by God to migrate from one land to another.

The first human migration recorded in the Bible, like many, was not exactly voluntary. It occurred when Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. These new immigrants had two sons: Cain, who grew up to be a farmer and Abel, who grew up to be a herdsman, which meant that he had to move around a lot. After Cain killed his brother in jealous rage, God cursed him to live the life that his brother had lived, as a wanderer, an immigrant. Yet God also promised to go with him, to protect him in this life as an immigrant.

Noah and his children became migrants when God sent them away from their homeland to build the ark to save creation from the flood.

We all know the story of the tower of Babel, when God saw that men became so full of themselves and their own power that something had to be done. God's answer was to confound them with different languages and to scatter them across the ancient world, migrants all.

God also called Abraham and Sarah to live the lives of immigrants, to leave their home, the land of their ancestors and everything they knew. They were to go to an unknown land where they would prosper, become numerous, be blessed and be a bless-

ing to all the nations.

Then there is the story of Joseph who, after being sold into slavery by his brothers, ended up as an immigrant in Egypt, where he eventually became very successful. After reconciling with his brothers who were starving in Israel due to a drought, Joseph's success enabled him to sponsor their immigration into Egypt where they too prospered and became numerous.

When an immigrant population

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*When an immigrant population prospers and becomes numerous, the native population often begins to feel threatened by their presence. We see this happening in our own country today.*

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prospers and becomes numerous, the native population often begins to feel threatened by their presence. We see this happening in our own country today. In Egypt, the more numerous the Israelite immigrants became, the more threatened the Egyptians felt by their presence. Justifying their actions by raising the threat level to red, the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews, setting ruthless taskmasters over them, and making their lives bitter with hard service. God heard the people's cries and used Moses to help them escape their captors, to cross the Red Sea and to live as migrants on a long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Later in their history, Jerusalem was destroyed and the people of Israel were cast into exile, once again immi-

grants in strange lands.

During the exile, God promised that they would not be an immigrant people forever.

They would return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and become a stable community once again. It was then that God gave them a commandment to ensure that they would never forget from whence they had come. The history and identity as an immigrant people should never fade from the memory of the Jewish people.

The commandment was to give special protection to immigrants in their land:

"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" Lev 19:33-34.

## New Testament

In the gospels, Mary and Joseph are themselves migrants, traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census while Mary is pregnant.

The magi, or wise men, are immigrants who travel long distances to bring gifts to the child.

Jesus and his parents became refugees themselves when they have to flee to Egypt for fear of King Herod's violence.

The Apostle Paul was raised in an immigrant community, Tarsus. He lived the life of an immigrant to spread the Christian faith throughout the ancient world.

## Conclusion

So the story of God's people, our story, is the story of an immigrant people.

God used migration to accomplish God's purposes of restoring the earth

and setting things right with God's people.

We should know these few things:

1. "The earth is God's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

Many of us in the U.S. grew up singing a song, "This land is your land, this land is my land, this land was made for you and me." Immigration battles such as Alabama's over House Bill 56 is based on this presumption. But the land belongs to no man, only to God, and we would do well to remember that.

2. The church has a nasty history of creating boundaries and borders and barriers, deciding who is in and who is out, who is welcome and who is not, reflecting the culture rather than creating a 'Christ-culture' that welcomes the stranger and includes the foreigner as one of us: *The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*"

3. In biblical times, God chose to move God's people to accomplish God's purposes, and gave special protection and blessing to those people on the move. Migration

was by the hand of God. If that is so, surely it is possible that the people now living among us were brought here by the hand of God for the purposes of God and have also been given the blessing and protection of God.

4. Reading the Bible as the story of God's people as an immigrant people moved by force, calamity, or a call by God from one land to another to prosper and multiply, how do we understand what God is doing in our current situation? The truth is God put each and every one of us here, living in Alabama, in this particular moment in time. How can we presume that God was right to put some of us here, and wrong to bring others of us here? How can we presume that some of us are here with God's blessing, and others are not? Who are we to make such judgments? Surely we are all here as a part of God's plan!

5. In fact we are told that it is God's plan to bring us all together as one people! Through the prophet Isaiah, God said:

*Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'*

*and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'*

*Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isaiah 43:5-7).*

Jesus said,

*I came that they may all be one.*  
(John 17:21).

Paul said,

*There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*  
(Galatians 3:28)

This I believe: In the eyes of God, there is no legal or illegal, no documented or undocumented, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Regardless of political or ideological boundaries or borders, from the standpoint of faith there can be no "us" and "them," no insiders or outsiders.

It is the calling of the church to speak this truth to the state of Alabama and to create a climate that brings into being: We are all one. ■

*This sermon was preached at Grace Episcopal Church, Birmingham, Alabama on Sunday, March 18, 2012, by the pastor Reverend Angie Wright.*



# "I Now Realize...Reflections on the Baptist Conference on Sexuality and Covenant"

By Scott Stearman

I teach a couple of university classes which call for an introduction to the science and faith debate of the last few hundred years. In these classes I typically show a schematic that pictures a complicated looping system of the scientific method with its evidence questioning emphasis. Bad theory, throw it out. Good theory, keep it. New evidence? Refine or go back and start over. Etc.

I then show a schematic that demonstrates how some believe religion works. It is drawn in a straight line: Start. Get an idea. Ignore all contradictory evidence. Keep idea forever. End.

Is this fair, I ask? I always get a mixed reaction.

It isn't fair, of course. Science is not nearly so elegantly methodological – at least in practice. And faith, at least healthy faith, is not nearly so rigid. Peter's vision and his "Roman Revelation" in Acts 10 is just one of many examples. Jesus' approach in the Sermon on the Mount would be another ("You have heard it was said unto you, but I say..."). There are countless other examples. The Baptist movement starting 400 years ago is one, I believe.

I like to hope that the Baptist Conference on Sexuality and Covenant was just such a watershed, visionary, transformative moment for this Baptist movement. I dream that over some time we will all come to say with Peter... "I now realize..."

In 2008, we had a very significant racial incident in Kirkwood, Missouri. A black man shot 6 people at city hall. The violence was an evil act, but it was born in a culture of racial tension. With the help of several community leaders, we created a space for grievances to be heard and relationships across town to develop.

Hundreds came for several of these dialogue sessions. A common refrain, said repeatedly in one form or another by good-hearted white people of privilege in our city was this: "I did not know, what I didn't know." I did not know that until just recently blacks were served only in the back of "Spencer's Grill." I did not know the statistics for blacks getting pulled over in our community were so much

met the Roman. His world and ministry were turned upside down. His theology was liberated from excessive ethnocentrism and empowered with the Gospel of God's unconditional love for all. Peter would never be the same after his "realization."

When it comes to a renewed understanding of sexuality, we need to know what we didn't know. And this was beautifully presented at the conference. We need to understand facts, "re-read" the Bible in light of those facts, all the while meeting our "Cornelius" (or just as relevantly, our Ethiopian Eunuch). It really is that simple: science, scripture, stories.

This is not the space to rehearse the science. On the subject of LGBT orientation, mainstream science is clear. It is not a simple choice. If you doubt this, I am sure nothing I say would make a difference. Nor is this the space to rehearse the exegesis on the six passages of the Bible that seem to refer to what we now think of as homosexuality. As Cody Sanders so beautifully put it at the conference (my paraphrase): "there have been decades of scholarship on this. Take and read!" (I encourage you - exhort you - to watch the video of his presentation. You'll find it online).

But possibly this is the space to recognize the power of listening to the lives of others. I will quote the evangelical blogger Kathy Bladock who has been attending Gay Pride events with a t-shirt that reads: "Hurt by the church? Get a straight apology here." She was asked by a man all in leathers, very buff, whip in hand and straps across his chest: "What's the deal with this Jesus? Why does He hate us so much?" She responds: "Now if that does not make a Christian weep, there is no hope for your theology." She may be right about that, but I'm sure about

*We Christians not only need to hear these stories; we need to take corporate responsibility for some of the pain in them. The bullying, the violence, the murders, and the suicides grow out of a culture of dehumanization fertilized by Christians.*

higher than for whites. I did not know that while drug-abuse rates are actually worse for white teens, black teens are much more likely to go to prison for minor drug offenses. All reasons for grievances, but if you don't know... you do not know. And some just don't want to know, of course.

This is Peter's issue. He did not know that God was doing something beyond his imagination – inviting even Gentiles to the table. He did not know that Romans were really human beings; not until he met Cornelius. He had a vision and he

this: our hope does lie in actually meeting and hearing the heart's cry of our LGBT neighbors. Therein is where the change often takes place. We come to see that the Roman does indeed bleed red. We Christians not only need to hear these stories; we need to take corporate responsibility for some of the pain in them. The bullying, the violence, the murders, and the suicides grow out of a culture of dehumanization fertilized by Christians.

Last year Kirkwood Baptist Church in Saint Louis did its own mini conference on human sexuality. We at least had a conversation about aspect of it. There were no "experts," just three successive Sunday nights where heard stories. Nights where we heard the story of a gay man who grew up Southern Baptist in Arkansas. We wept at his pain of being rejected

by family and church. We heard the story of a life-long Southern Baptist, who had a son who came out in early adulthood. She and her husband read, read, and read. They came to embrace their son, now a successful biologist teaching at a university in Ohio. They accepted him, but their former church did not accept their acceptance.

And finally we heard from parents in our congregation who have a transgendered child. That was a hard, but ultimately triumphant story. The parent's love was truly divine. The child has transitioned and is a four-point honor-roll student of 17 years.

I put this together, so I anticipated a backlash; at least anonymous letters if not downright hostility, but not a negative word. What I heard: "Thank you for this... you know I've got a gay uncle." "I'm so glad we're talking about this, my brother is gay and

has had such a struggle with church." And more. All gratitude. I am so glad we are moving beyond our "don't ask don't tell policy" at Kirkwood Baptist. We are not all agreed on the issue, but we all know we must love and that in our context, community trumps ideology.

The German philosopher Schopenhauer said that new ideas go through three phases: first ridicule, then outrage, then, "well it's obvious."

I know that many are still in the "outrage" phase. It is however my hope those conversations as we had in Atlanta will ripple out to congregations around the globe... having an experience something like Peter: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism to anyone." ■

*Scott Stearman is pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in Saint Louis, Missouri.*

#### ETHIXBYTE:

## Ten reasons Why Men Should Not Be Ordained

by Eugene Cho

10. A man's place is in the army.
9. The pastoral duties of men who have children might distract them from the responsibility of being a parent.
8. The physique of men indicates that they are more suited to such tasks as chopping down trees and wrestling mountain lions. It would be "unnatural" for them to do ministerial tasks.
7. Man was created before woman, obviously as a prototype. Thus, they represent an experiment rather than the crowning achievement of creation.
6. Men are too emotional to be priests or pastors. Their conduct at football and basketball games demonstrates this.
5. Some men are handsome, and this will distract women worshipers.
4. Pastors need to nurture their congregations. But this is not a traditional male role. Throughout history, women have been recognized as not only more skilled than men at nurturing, but also more fervently attracted to it. This makes them the obvious choice for ordination.
3. Men are prone to violence. No really masculine man wants to settle disputes except by fighting about them. Thus they would be poor role models as well as dangerously unstable in positions of leadership.
2. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was betrayed by a man. His lack of faith and ensuing punishment remind us of the subordinated position that all men should take.
1. Men can still be involved in church activities, even without being ordained. They can sweep sidewalks, repair the church roof, and perhaps even lead the song service on Father's Day. By confining themselves to such traditional male roles, they can still be vitally important in the life of the church. ■

[original source unknown] Eugene Cho, a second-generation Korean-American, is the founder and lead pastor of Quest Church in Seattle and the executive director of Q Cafe, an innovative nonprofit neighborhood cafe and music venue. This blog post originally appeared on Eugene Cho's blog.

# Child Sex Abuse: A Social Justice Concern From a Biblical and Civil Rights Perspective

By Rigoberto I. Weeks

*"Man can realize his humanity only in community with others."<sup>1</sup>*

From antiquity to present, man has been "caught up in a messed up world... We haven't learned how to be just and honest and kind and true and loving."<sup>2</sup> In the "messed up world" that humans cohabit, God has often had to intervene to bring about parity in human relationships. Both, Scripture and non-canonical writings clearly indicate that social injustice was an ongoing social malady. In the latter, Ben Sira counsels his son against active participation in injustice. However, for Ben Sira, it is not enough to keep oneself from practicing injustice. He enjoins his son to take decisive action to free those who are suffering from injustices by another. Ben Sira writes,

Son...turn not away thy eyes from the poor.  
Afflict not the heart of the needy, and defer not to give to him that is in distress.  
Reject not the petition of the afflicted: and turn not away thy face from the needy.  
Turn not away thy eyes from the poor for fear of anger: and leave not to them that ask of thee to curse thee behind thy back.  
Deliver him that suffereth wrong out of the hand of the proud: and be not fainthearted in thy soul.<sup>3</sup>

The canonical text reveals that God reproved his people for violation of covenantal living because of their lack of compassion and justice, and the rampant abuse of the community's socially disabled: widows, orphans, the poor, and foreigners. God repeatedly spoke out against abuse of vulnerable members of the community

through prophets such as Isaiah. God brought to the forefront of a covenantal life the importance of justice, relieving hunger, providing shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, and clothes for the destitute (cf. Isa 58:5 – 7).

As Isaiah did, the prophet Amos spoke out against social injustices. Amos polemicized "the cows of Bashan," the social elite of Samaria for their excesses by the oppression of the poor and cruelty toward the needy (cf. Am 4:1). Amos' message was clear and concise: "Justice, justice, justice." He was dismayed by the "in your face" injustices that the elite committed against the innocent and defenseless poor—appalling injustices that had become part of daily life.<sup>4</sup>

A dysfunctional society in which man turns against man in an oppressive relationship in which individuals in positions of power and influence, take advantage or abuse the weaker and vulnerable is hardly a condition that the annals of history have relegated to ancient biblical times. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a 20th century social justice prophet was right in stating the incomprehensible paradox that, with all its technological advances, man had made the world much smaller and accessible, a "neighborhood."<sup>5</sup> Yet, with all its scientific and technological advances, Dr. King rightly concludes that man is still "caught up in a messed up world."<sup>6</sup>

While Amos, as other biblical prophets, did not address sexual abuse of children in his day, this does not say that children were not the victims of adult misguided ideations (cf. Jer 7:31; Ezk 16:20). Similarly, while child sex abuse was not at the forefront of societal problems during the Civil Rights Movement era

that cried out for redress, the hideous practice of using children for sexual gratification by adults had already inserted itself into society. Pederasty, the term used to describe the decadent sexual attraction and sexual acts of men with children was a cultural reality in the First Century, when pederasty was normative. In addition to this practice, temple rituals allowed for the use of girls as temple prostitutes.<sup>7</sup>

However, an enlightened society no longer considers pederasty or the use of young girls to satiate the sexual desires of adults as accepted practice, but a deleterious deviant behavior. Moreover, society considers this behavior as abusive and criminal, as substantiated by a firestorm of litigation against members of the clergy and churches who have misused their position of power and influence to coerce children into satisfying their deviant sexual desires.<sup>8</sup> Society's reaction to pedophilia is evident in the numerous sub-orbital judgments reaching into the millions,<sup>9</sup> against churches and clergy who have committed these heinous crimes against defenseless members of society—children.

Indicative that crime against children by illicit sex is a maleficent social malaise with dysgenic properties, Glover shares that, "In 1976, in California, the cases investigated rose from 110,000 to about 475,000 in 1988." Today, authorities investigate more than 300,000 child sexual abuse reports annually in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

While man as a whole has not risen from its innate proclivity to harm each other and form a world "brotherhood," throughout human history, men and women such as St. Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, and Garfield Bromley Oxnam have responded to

the clarion call of Social Justice—and have challenged humanity to do better. The social justice tradition of Christianity is “a life committed to compassion and justice for all peoples.”<sup>11</sup> As such, it calls all followers of the “Way”<sup>12</sup> to advocate for the protection of children from sexual abuse.

During the 1960s, acting in his pastoral role as a “community prophet...against the powers that be,”<sup>13</sup> Dr. King injected into the Social Justice movement in his time the overarching need to love. He saw the Civil Rights Movement as a struggle against oppressive forces. Dr. King contended that the existence of injustice derived from man’s lack of understanding that the *imago Dei*, the image of God, resides in every man, and that when men see God’s image in every person man begins to love his fellowman.<sup>14</sup> King saw that if man came to this understanding, all men would see that “God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man.”<sup>15</sup> The high incidence of child molestation in this country<sup>16</sup> indicates that some members of the clergy do not consider the dignity of children as constitutive of the “dignity of man.”<sup>17</sup>

The problems that this country faced during the years preceding and following the Civil Rights Movement did not include sexual predation of youngsters. Nevertheless, the Social Justice principles of the Civil Rights Movement, mainly that all men have dignity in that man is the bearer of God’s image, are transferable to this burgeoning genre of social injustice. The premise for a new social justice movement in behalf of children finds its basis in that all humanity, to include children, are created in the *imago Dei*, therefore all children have dignity and deserve treatment as fellow human beings, and not sexual objects. Moreover, children represent the closest representation of the image of God in that Jesus declared that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, adults will need to become as children (cf. Mt 18:3).

Moreover, Dr. King sought to show that social justice was in society’s best interest in that he saw all of society intertwined in the same fate—that what was for the good of one man will ultimately serve another, and that which was detrimental to another will in some way negatively affect someone else. Dr. King wrote, “All men are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>18</sup> The sexual abuse of children has a serious dysgenic effect on society in that often, child sex offenders were themselves victims of this crime<sup>19</sup> therefore robbing society from the contributions that these affected individuals may have contributed to society and potentially diverting them to an alternate destiny. Dr. King would support the idea that pedophiles may deprive their victims from contributing to society in that he saw that a victimized segment of society deprives the whole from achieving its ultimate potential. He added, “I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”<sup>20</sup> The subjugation of children to sexual abuse with its corollary deep psychological scarring,<sup>21</sup> and negative outcomes for victims, such as “inability to trust, inability to love, isolation, drug abuse, social withdrawal, depression,”<sup>22</sup> and becoming sexual predators themselves,<sup>23</sup> may rob society from future contributions from these individuals. Unrelated to this topic though instructive, Pannenberg states that, “Man can realize his humanity only in community with others.”<sup>24</sup> However, this is only true when “community” with others has Christian love as the foundation of any “interrelated structure of reality.”<sup>25</sup>

While it is true that many of society’s problems are complex and beyond one individual’s ability to address, when people open themselves “to the possibility that God may want to use them, people will come to real-

ize that there is much that they can do in the cause of Social Justice” on behalf of children.<sup>26</sup> ■

*Rigoberto I. Weekes is a student at Houston Graduate School of Theology*

<sup>1</sup>Woohart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., “Rediscovering Lost Values,” in *A Knock at Midnight*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 6.

<sup>3</sup>Sir 4:1-9 Douay-Rheims. PC Study Bible. Copyright © 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Foster. *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Faith*. 145.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., “Rediscovering Lost Values,” in *A Knock at Midnight*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., “Rediscovering Lost Values,” in *A Knock at Midnight*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 6.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 37.

<sup>8</sup>Fain, Constance and Herbert Fain. “Sexual Abuse and the Church.” *Thurgood Marshall Law Review*. Vol. 31, (Spring 2006): 228.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 209 – 238.

<sup>10</sup>Voyle Glover, *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators*, 13.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Foster. *Streams of Living Water*. 181.

<sup>12</sup>Acts 9:2.

<sup>13</sup>William Willimon. *Pastor: The Theology of and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. 63.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther King Jr. *Loving Your Enemies* in *A Knock at Midnight*. Kindle edition. Location 722.

<sup>15</sup>Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran. *A Knock at Midnight*. Kindle edition. Location 172.

<sup>16</sup>Voyle Glover, *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators*, 13, 16.

<sup>17</sup>Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran. *A Knock at Midnight*. Kindle (continued on page 21)

# A Time to Speak

By J. R. Daniel Kirk

*"Sometimes silence is golden. Sometimes, it's just plain yella'."*

That one-liner is one of my summary takeaways from the recent Christians for Biblical Equality conference in Houston.

The gathering was a multifaceted engagement with God's calling of women into all ministries of the church: There was teaching, digging into scripture, and, perhaps most importantly, a lot of storytelling.

Women in many parts of the church are told, through word and deed, that they are not needed for the church's work. Not only are they in denominations that will not ordain them, they are in worship services where women will never be able to read scripture or preside at the table or, in some places, take the offering.

*Dear everyone: this destroys women.*

Listen to the stories of women who have had to fight to find a calling. Or the stories of those who have given up.

It forces them to live in denial of the calling that God issues in Christ as the Spirit of Christ gifts women to preach and teach and pastor. It is the ear saying to the eye, "I have no need of you."

*Dear everyone: this impoverishes the whole church.*

*Dear men: it is not enough to be supportive in your hearts.* If your church is excluding women from service, you need to be creating opportunities to overturn that practice. You need to speak. You need to ask.

*Dear pastor: it is not enough to huddle*

*with your buddies and talk about what a bunch of sexists your fellow pastors are.*

If you are not working to change what women can do, you are promoting and sustaining the sexism that you deride in private.

If you are not opening up space in your church for women to preach and teach, you are promoting and sustaining the sexism that denies the truth of your women's identity in Christ.

*Dear seminary professor: Your job is*

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*If you are not working to change what women can do, you are promoting and sustaining the sexism that you deride in private.*

---

*to be a change agent.* Your job is to transform the way that your students, and their churches, think about *and act on* issues of gender.

It is not enough to "know" that women should be able to do anything. You need to show your students, from your scripture study or theology, that this is God's intention for the church. It is not enough to theorize about it in the classroom, either, especially if folks at your church listen to you.

Having secret friends who will not

act creates little more than a secret consolation that will not comfort. One of the reasons that Christians for Biblical Equality is so important is that it is reminding those of us whose worlds have "settled" the question that there are still thousands of churches where women are not being treated as equals. We need to continue to speak, we need to continue to agitate for change.

And this means men in positions of authority in particular. If you are a pastor, this means you. If you are a professor this means you. If you are an elder or deacon, this means you.

It is on us, inasmuch as God has entrusted the church to his people and we are called to be faithful in it and act to conform it to God's will.

We must create the kind of church that will receive not just our sons but our daughters, not just our brothers but our sisters, in the fullness of who God is making them to be, in Christ, by the Spirit.

If you believe in women's equality, your calling is to act it out. If you're not, don't convince yourself that you're being "wise" in biding your time while your sisters suffer. Wisdom is a convenient cover for fear, but not all silence is golden. ■

*J. R. Daniel Kirk is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. This article appeared in CBE International's Bible Thoughts April 29, 2012, and is used by permission.*

# Moral Apathy about Organ Donation

By Monty Self

Apathy. All ethicists fear the word. Apathy occurs when an individual cares about an issue – but not enough to take action. We cannot say we are in favor of an issue and fail to support it with action.

Moral debate requires action and change. Without a push for moral action, our sermons, articles and fireside chats simply become mindless complaining or pointless rhetoric filled with apathy.

One area where Christian ethicists have failed to be consistent is organ donation.

We have supported transplant centers in the area of and the development of these life-giving procedures for years. Many of us have prayed with patients and families as they wait for a precious organ. However, we are inconsistent.

We have supported the needs of transplant patients while forgetting to call people to be engaged in the organ donation process.

The life-giving miracle of organ transplantation is powerless without someone being willing to help save a life through the donation process.

Rarely have I read a call for donation in a Christian ethics journal, and I have never heard a sermon calling the faithful to help save a life through donation. We simply have neglected the issue.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), ninety percent of Americans are in favor of organ donation, yet only about one-third have registered as an organ donor.

Therefore, two-thirds of those in favor of donation and transplantation have failed to act in line with their convictions.

With more than 113,000 people on the national transplant waiting list, the need is great. With a new name being added every 14 minutes, there must be a call to more action.

Unfortunately, the need for solid

organs and tissues has far exceeded those available for transplant, resulting in about 18 deaths a day.

Moreover, most patients wait months or even years for an organ to become available. The median time a patient waits for a kidney transplant exceeds 1,200 days, while the wait for a liver or heart is shorter (361 and 113 days, respectively).

No one should have to wait for the gift of life when something can be done.

As preachers, ethicists and goodwill Baptists, we are often involved in discussions about the sacredness of life. Frequently, we speak about abortion, end-of-life care and capital punishment.

A good ethic of life must be more than an argument designed to preserve life at all costs. An ethic of life must also address the need to save lives.

Therefore, the Christian ethics community should actively be involved in discussions regarding organ donation.

We need to take a few steps.

First, we need to be educated about how the organ donation process works. The public is often confused about what can be donated and who is eligible for donation.

Often people do not register because they wrongly assume they are not eligible. Often I work with families and individuals who are shocked to hear about senior citizens donating organs and tissue to help save or enhance someone's life.

Second, we need to call our congregations, students and readers to action, reminding them that being in favor of transplantation is not the same as helping to solve the organ shortage by joining a donor registry.

As with other moral issues, we need to preach, write and teach about these issues. We need to work with our respective audiences and help dispel many of the common myths about organ donation.

Third, we need to facilitate private discussions about donation. Apart from joining a registry, the single most important thing one can do is to inform one's family or health care proxy of the desire to donate.

Organ donation is a personal decision which many people want to discuss with their clergy. We need to be actively engaged in these personal discussions.

As a health care ethicist and hospital chaplain, I always want to respect the desires and wishes of my patients, but this is hard if no one has discussed end-of-life issues prior to an illness or traumatic accident.

In addition, many discussions of organ donation happen after a loved one has died, and clergy are often in the room when the subject of donation arises.

We need to become comfortable being a part of these discussions and helping to support these grieving families.

It is time for the Christian ethics community to take a more active role after supporting the transplant and donation community.

As we enjoy the warmer weather and are amazed by the renewal of life that spring brings, we should also reflect on the need to assist those who are waiting for renewed life.

We need to make a contribution to help reduce the amount of time these patients wait by helping to register more donors and educating our audiences about the needs of the transplant and donor communities.

This one, like many issues, needs us to shake off the chains of apathy and effect change. ■

*Monty M. Self is the oncology chaplain for the Baptist Health Medical Center – Little Rock in Arkansas and an adjunct instructor of ethics at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.*

# Caring for Poor People: Should the Church Do It Alone?

By David Beckmann

When I open my Bible, it isn't hard to find a verse that underscores our responsibility as Christians to care for the least among us. Proverbs 19:17 tells us, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed." Unfortunately, some members of Congress don't buy into this notion. They believe instead that taking care of the most vulnerable people in our society is for the church to do alone.

Recently the U.S. House of Representatives passed a budget resolution for fiscal year 2013 that places a heavy burden on poor Americans who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) to feed their families. The House recommended cutting more than \$169 billion from SNAP. Some representatives even argued that feeding hungry people is really the work of churches, not government.

But churches can't be solely responsible for feeding poor women, children, seniors and disabled people. We also need strong government programs. In fact, all of the food churches and charities provide to hungry and poor people in the United States amounts to only about 6 percent of what the federal government spends on programs such as SNAP and school meals for students.

The Hartford Institute for Religion and Research estimates there are 335,000 religious congregations in the United States. If the House's proposals to cut SNAP by \$133.5 billion and \$36 billion are enacted, each congregation will have to spend about \$50,000 more annually to feed

those who would see a reduction or loss of benefits. Some congressional leaders are essentially saying that every church in America -- big or tiny -- needs to come up with an extra \$50,000 to feed people every year for the next 10 years to make up for these cuts.

In response, Bread for the World asked people to tell members of Congress that churches can't be solely responsible for feeding hungry people. Thousands from around the country answered our call, telling us they just can't afford to do more than they're currently doing. Here are a few of their comments:

"As a small church in the middle of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, we are inundated with needs all around us. The proposed cost is more than we pay our full-time minister for compensation, the only full-time staff we have. We contribute to multiple charities that distribute food to those who are in need in order to ensure the best stewardship of our resources. And, yet, we are still not able to meet all of the needs. These cuts will overwhelm us." --Sarah from Arlington, Texas

"Feeding the hungry is not a choice -- it is a moral imperative. But the food pantries and soup kitchens in this area funded by the generosity of church members already are serving those in need at capacity and beyond in these tough economic times. We are doing our part. We expect that our government will do the same." --Alexandra from Troy, N.Y.

"Addressing the needs of the hungry

and poor is something that requires BOTH local congregation action and ALSO local and national government support. I urge our legislators at all levels to maintain strong support of government programs that help the poor and needy." --Brian from Fond Du Lac, Wis.

"Already we get innumerable calls for emergency assistance. We have no idea how these families are sufficiently getting the necessary nutrients for their children and family. To increase the number of people would be overwhelming and those churches who try to help with their shrinking congregations might totally give up." -Tempe of Jamestown, N.C.

"We fed over 32,000 people last year and we are tapped! We can barely pay our own bills, and if we are pushed any further we won't be able to keep our doors open, thus NOT being able to feed the ones we already are!! PLEASE DON'T cut any feeding programs." -Kirk of Sparks, Nev.

It's time for members of Congress to tell people -- like Brian from Wisconsin, Alexandra from New York, Tempe from North Carolina and Sarah from Texas -- that they're going to do their part and support legislation that creates a circle of protection around programs that are vital to hungry and poor people. ■

*David Beckmann is President of Bread for the World. This article was posted on Huffingtonpost on 05/14/2012 11:31 am and is reprinted her with the permission of the author.*

## Child Sex Abuse

(continued from page 17)

edition. Location 172.

18 Martin Luther King Jr. *The Man Who Was a Fool in Strength to Love*, 69.

19 Voyle Glover, *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators*, 16.

20 Martin Luther King Jr. *The Man Who Was a Fool in Strength to Love*, 69.

21 Fain, Constance and Herbert Fain. "Sexual Abuse and the Church." *Thurgood Marshall Law Review*. Vol. 31, (Spring 2006): 213.

22 Ibid., 216.

23 Voyle Glover, *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators*, 16.

24 Woofhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, 77.

25 Martin Luther King Jr. *The Man Who Was a Fool in Strength to Love*, 69.

26 Richard Foster. *Streams of Living Water*. 181.

## Having the Sisters' Back

(continued from page 23)

defense. I am not Catholic, but many of my best friends and allies are; and some of them are bishops. I am an evangelical convert to Catholic social teaching, but this decision by the Vatican is not consistent with the best of that teaching and certainly not with the spirit behind it.

For what it's worth, I'll support the sisters on this one. I've got their back now. And others will too. ■

**Jim Wallis** is the author of *Rediscovering Values: A Guide for Economic and Moral Recovery*, and CEO of *Sojourners*. Follow Jim on Twitter @JimWallis. This article is printed with permission.

## ETHIXBYTE:

"For years, we dreamed of America, but now that dream is no good. There are no jobs and too many problems. We don't want to go." - Pedro Morales, 18, of Jalisco, Mexico, explaining why immigration to the U.S. has stalled.

**Source: The Guardian**

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# Alive or Just Here?

By Hardy Clemons

**A**t 94 ½, my dad's COPD lung disease had gotten so serious that he was having great difficulty breathing and swallowing. In the last three weeks of his life, we were referred to four new doctors, none of whom knew us nor we them. Each doctor seemed highly competent clinically but less so when it came to care of the person.

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1998, Dad was back in the hospital because of the swallowing problem. Ardelle and I went to see him and fortunately ran into his doctor just as we got there in the hall outside Dad's room.

I introduced myself and Ardelle to the doctor who said rather briskly, it seemed to me, "I'm going to put a peg in your dad's stomach this afternoon."

"I don't think he wants that," I said.

"He doesn't have any choice."

"Sir, you seem to be assuming that I'm the decision-maker here, which is not the case. Let's go in and talk with Dad. He's very clear."

The doctor explained carefully what the situation was and ended by saying, "Mr. Clemons, we've got to install a peg this afternoon in your stomach."

"And how will that help me?"

"It will keep you ALIVE," the doctor said, sort of defensively.

"Will it keep me alive? Or will it just keep me here?"

At that point the doctor finally got it. My dad was ready to die and did not want interventions that might keep him here but not genuinely alive.

"Well, we won't put it in if you don't want it."

"You don't seem to realize," my Dad said, "that I'm ready to move on to

the next thing." Then he asked, "If we don't do that, how long will I last?"

"About a week."

We took Dad back to Rolling Green where he had been living. That week was indeed a sacred space! Our daughter Kay, and her kids, Jon and Lori, flew over and spent a day with him. Son-in-law Tim had a meeting in Spartanburg nearby and came for a visit. Ardelle and I spent lots of time just talking and listening to Dad.

He would say, "Who do you know who's had a better life than I've had?"

## *My Dad didn't want to just be here.*

Then he would take his text in some portion of his life—his two great marriages, his career as a schoolman, his growing up on a farm in Southwest Oklahoma—and expand on that portion of his rich experience. He was enormously grateful for a rich and fulfilling life!

The morning of May 13, Ardelle and I went out to see him. As we walked in the Charge Nurse said, "You're not gonna believe the breakfast your Dad ate this morning. He ate like he was going to work in the field all day." My Dad had eaten hardly anything all that week. Couldn't get it down. Didn't taste good. But that morning he ate two eggs and ham with biscuits and gravy and some pancakes. Then he asked for more, which they brought.

I said to the nurse, "You better watch him! He might make a pass at you."

"O, he's already done that!"

Dad and Ardelle and I visited about an hour and then left to go about our day. On the way home to drop Ardelle off, I said, "He may outlive us all!"

Shortly after four o'clock my cell phone rang. My administrative assistant, Gloria Sargent said, "Hardy, call Rolling Green as soon as you can." Dad had taken a nap and just didn't wake up. He had been talking to the chaplain earlier and they were interrupted. When he came back to pick up the visit, Dad didn't respond. The chaplain said they had been watching the ticker on the stock market and it was still scrolling across the screen.

He said Dad had been hopeful that the market would hit another new high that day. The Chaplain said Dad must have made his exit just as the market closed—at an all time high! What an interesting irony! Dad would have loved that!

When we went back to his room at Rolling Green to get his things later that week, the charge nurse called me over to the side. "Dr. Clemons," she said, "I just want you to know how much respect I have for the decision you all have made. If you ever get to wondering if you made the right choice, come back out here and I'll take you on a tour of the people here that decided the other way—to put the stomach peg in. You can see for yourself how valid it is."

My dad didn't want to just be here. He wanted to be alive! And he is! I wish I could talk with him about the challenges he's experiencing in the next life. I'd bet a lot that he has truly moved on to the next thing! ■

# Having the Sisters' Back

by Jim Wallis

After an official investigation, the Vatican seems pretty upset with the Catholic sisters here in the United States. They have reprimanded the women for not sufficiently upholding the bishops' teachings and doctrines and paying much more attention to issues like poverty and health care than to abortion, homosexuality, and male-only priesthood.

There are concerns with, "a prevalence of certain radical feminist themes," and the sisters have also been taken to task for "occasional public statements" that disagree with the bishops, "who are the church's authentic teachers of faith and morals."

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the largest representative group of all the Catholic sisters' orders, has now been put under the control of some bishops who are to "reform" them, change the group's statutes and programs, and approve who will speak at their events.

The Vatican's approach to its concerns is, to say the least, quite regrettable. Condemnation and control were chosen over conversation and dialogue. Quite honestly, do most of us believe, or do even most Catholics believe, that the bishops are the only "authentic teachers of faith and morals?"

The sisters may be the most positive face of the Catholic Church today, and they are keeping people in the Church who would have given up on the all-male hierarchy long ago. These women are often the ones at the core of Jesus' ministry, building relationships with the poor and vulnerable, and most concretely offering the love of God. If you had a referendum on who the best faith and moral teachers are in many local communities and parishes around the country, it would likely be the women who are now under attack. That is the sad situation here and the serious mistake being made by the Vatican.

Over the years, I've seen how Catholic women formed the heart of Christian ministry around the country in schools, hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, women's clinics, and children's programs—often in the worst urban neighborhoods and rural poverty areas. They were among the most faithful in peace marches and non-violent protest of our nation's endless wars. They were the ones who went to the ends of the earth to be with the most forgotten people on God's planet.

*Sojourners* is grateful that these Catholic women have, from the beginning, been at the core of our subscribers and supporters. I've gotten to know them and their work as they hosted me and others in their monastic communities and for spiritual retreats.

The Church is very concerned about these sisters losing focus on abortion. But most I know still feel abortion is a terrible moral tragedy and do whatever they can to reduce them. Their approach however is to support low-income women, which actually reduces abortion, instead of mostly legislative strategies that could just push abortions into back alleys. And perhaps the sisters would also rather minister to gay and lesbian people with the love of Christ instead of just telling them they are wrong and unacceptable.

When the Vatican said that issues like poverty are more important to the sisters than issues like sexuality, they are probably right. But from a biblical point of view, the sisters may be right and the Vatican wrong. The Bible is much clearer on the Christian imperative to serve the poor and stand for justice than it is on same-sex marriage or exactly when full human life begins. I, for one, miss the leadership of Catholic bishops like the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, who taught a "consistent ethic of life" and a "seamless garment" that defends life and dignity wherever it is threatened: from abortion on

demand to poverty, the death penalty, and nuclear weapons.

Of course, there are important issues to discuss in regard to theology, Catholic teachings, what constitutes the most important issues of "orthodoxy," and how to most wisely and lovingly deal with crucial moral issues like abortion and human sexuality. But couldn't that be done through serious and respectful conversation with women who have earned the respect to be treated differently than they are here?

When I heard about the Vatican's disciplinary action against America's Catholic "women religious," a personal memory came to mind.

I would be traveling to speak at very conservative Christian colleges, often in the Midwest and South, at the height of the popularity of the Religious Right. As I came into the auditorium or chapel, I would see a whole row of Catholic women religious, often still wearing their traditional dress as nuns. And they would all give me big smiles. Curious as to what they were doing at an evangelical college with a constituency so unlike their own, I would walk up to say hello and ask what they were doing there. "We're from around here and came to support you tonight," they would say, "because we know what kind of place this is and thought you might need some people on your side."

The nuns were my bodyguards. I've always been willing to go into lions' dens to speak; but having the nuns with me there, offering very clear local and public support for my message, meant a great deal to me. It always made me feel much more ready and confident knowing the sisters had my back and that, if anybody came after me, they would have the nuns to deal with!

So, given how the sisters have always had my back, I am coming to their

(continued on page 21)

# Stuck in the Six-Point Record System

By Marion D. Aldridge

Making Momma happy is not the goal of the Christian faith. In fact, Jesus did not “focus on the family” at all. Yet week after week, as I attend Sunday school in Baptist churches all over South Carolina, I am exposed to a cultural Christianity that has never advanced past the shibboleths that Mom and Dad taught their children in the home 30, 50 or 70 years ago.

Say “please” and “thank you.”  
Don’t embarrass the family.  
Don’t carry coffee or sodas into the sanctuary.  
Don’t question those in authority.  
Be nice.  
Don’t wiggle or squirm in church.

Someday I intend to make a loooong list of the hundreds of lessons I learned at home and church that were good instructions for a five to 12-year olds child that might not be so important to a maturing Christian adult.

Being nice, for example, is ordinarily an excellent idea and a foundational lesson for getting along with people. But neither the Bible nor Jesus always models niceness. Gentility is more a Southern trait than a biblical characteristic. Remember David, the man after God’s own heart. Remember Esther. Do you think she was a bashful wimp? Remember Jesus who drove the money changers out of the Temple? Remember Ecclesiastes 3? There is a time for one behavior and there is also a time for its polar opposite.

Recently I wrote a book, *Overcoming Adolescence*, half memoir, half self-help, about my own pilgrimage of getting unstuck from selected childhood beliefs and practices. I had a long unlearning curve because I bought the whole cultural and religious package I was being sold as a child, as a teenager, and as a young adult. I was obedient. I was loyal. I was not a wave-maker. I was compliant. I was clueless. Being a good kid kept me out of a lot of trouble and that is the best thing about traditions

and teaching children conservative and careful behavior. I was not going to die young from (my own) drunk driving and I was not going to embarrass my parents by picking fights at school. But I was also unprepared for those occasions when being nice might not be appropriate behavior. Pastoring my first church after seminary required that I reassess old habits. Giving in and giving power to a power-monger or to a bully is like giving alcohol to an alcoholic. It is bad for them and it is bad for the church and it is bad for me.

I began to learn that there is a difference in these two sentences: I want to be like Jesus; and, I want to be like my parents.

My parents were good, decent, kind, church-going Christians. Recently, I found a hand-written sermon my Dad preached at Immanuel Baptist Church in North Augusta, South Carolina, sometime in the 1960’s. It is a perfect reflection of our religious culture. Dad was a layman and a deacon, and the pastor must have asked Dad to “fill the pulpit” one Sunday. Dad’s text was Revelation 3: 14-16, the passage about lukewarmness making God nauseous. Here is the crux of my Dad’s sermon: We have five opportunities every week to show we are “on fire” for God, by attending Sunday school, Sunday morning worship, Training Union, Sunday night worship, Midweek prayer meeting.

There it is, the perfect description of passionate Christian behavior for a Southern Baptist in the 1960’s. Go to church. For those of us who came out of that culture, we could add glory to glory by making 100% in the Six-Point Record System. For those unfamiliar with that device for Christian formation, each person received percentage points for 1) being present, 2) on-time, 3) bringing your bible, 4) studying your lesson, 5)

bringing an offering and 6) staying for preaching (not worship: Preaching!). If you did all of those, and I did, you were 100%, perfect, righteous, at the age of 10 or 12. You got no points for feeding hungry people or providing refuge for homeless people.

Attending midweek prayer service and being on time and bringing an offering are all good disciplines, but they are not adequate measurements for mature Christianity for 40 to 80-year olds. The Bible is a Big Book and has a lot of things in it that are more important than being on time. In our religious culture, we were on time, but we were racist to the core. We were on time, but we would never have considered calling a woman as pastor. We were on time but we assumed that anyone who was different than us was inferior to us—Vietnamese, people in wheelchairs, old people, Catholics. Our brains weren’t big enough even to think about Muslims or lesbians in those days. We wrote off entire populations with shibboleths such as, “God doesn’t hear the prayer of a Jew.”

Telling beautiful Bible stories about Noah and the ark to our children is crucial in faith development. We learn wonderful lessons: God keeps promises. In God we have hope even after the storms of life. But to sit in an adult Sunday school class of middle-aged college graduates, as I once did, and listen to them try to fit all those animals into the finite space of the ark makes no sense, at least to me. Surely that story is about something more than aardvarks and zebras, gnats and mosquitoes.

I cannot find the origin of the phrase “primitive credulity,” but I like it. We are innocent and naïve, clueless as children, appropriately ignorant. I have grown fond of saying, “We don’t know what we don’t know,” and that is true no matter our age. But I am now 65 and I want to know more than I did when I was 15! When we are

kids, we soak it all in—Santa Claus, Superwoman, the Lone Ranger, Jesus, Pocahontas, Roy Rogers, the Tooth Fairy. We believe it all. Our information came from trustworthy people: parents and teachers. Even preachers were part of the conspiracy that kept us confused about who is real and who isn't. What preacher or Sunday school teacher has not told stories on the edge of the truth that made an important point? Parables, after all, are fiction by definition. Then, because it was our favorite preacher or our favorite teacher or our favorite parent who told the story, we defend the campfire story, we defend an illustration, we defend a myth, we defend a metaphor, we defend an anecdote as if it were the inerrant and infallible word of God. Jack and the Beanstalk is not a true story and adults should understand that.

I have been told that religion is the area in which it is most difficult to grow up and my experience bears that out. When the information about our faith came from the ultimate authority, figures of parents and religious teachers and preachers and even seemingly directly from God, then it is difficult for many people to shift gears from childhood credulity to thoughtful maturity and to ask questions befitting an adult. Who wants to be disloyal to what people we love taught us?

Honesty scares people. Change scares people. Mature Christians need to get over their fear. Period. That is the biblical, Christian thing to do. The Bible is clear with its many admonitions to “Fear not,” words spoken by the prophets, by the angels and by Jesus.

Old habits die hard. Recently, I initiated a conversation on Facebook about lessons we learned in our childhood that might be worth challenging as adults. There were some seriously mixed responses. Some of my Facebook friends understood and agreed with my premise that we need to overcome (or at least reconsider, or nuance) our childhood and adolescent scripts, and shared their experiences of behavioral changes. Others responded negatively. One high school friend said, “I think these all are STILL excellent for all

of us, no matter how old we are.” *All excellent for all of us! No matter how old we are!* Wow! No wiggle room there. Speaking of wiggling, I wiggled as a ten-year-old and I fidget still and I think God loves me anyhow. Wiggling is not a cause for guilt or remorse for an adult Christian!

Review the six admonitions with which this article begins. Not a single one comes from Jesus or the Bible. Cultural and religious traditions tend to trump transformational or radical Christianity time after time after time. We were taught well by the church. The system worked! We were spiritually formed, but most of us are still living on the pabulum of our earliest years and missing out on the richer, meatier, more textured and seasoned options that were meant for consumption by adult Christians. Or, to use another illustration from St. Paul, we are still limited to the ABC's of faith when we should be more informed and more skilled in matters of Bible, doctrine, ethics and life.

A lot of Christians and a lot of churches are spiritually stagnant. Other descriptors might be sluggish, lazy, slothful, aimless, purposeless, empty, and dead. How do medical personnel describe a patient with a lack of vital signs? They say that person has “flatlined” or that person is dead.

Christianity (and the world in which we exist) is entering a new era. The church does not have the culture supporting us. When I was growing up, little league baseball leagues did not play on Wednesday night because that was “church night.” Stores were closed on Sunday. Such cultural props are gone nowadays and Christians and churches have for-profit competition—movie theaters, restaurant brunches, college and professional sports. Churches can't plan fall activities until the college football schedules are posted. The senior adult Sunday school classes can complain that church should be a higher priority, but there is a new reality. Several years ago a pastor in a very non-resort city told me his congregation had to learn to function as a resort ministry. He explained that his church had

enough members with mountain and beach houses, with international travel plans, and with commitments to visit grandkids that even his best members were not present in church fifty percent of the time.

New realities in the world, in my family, in my employment, in my age and health should mean that I am constantly updating my faith. I have commitments and responsibilities I did not have when I was 25. I have problems I did not have when I was 25. I have assets and strengths I did not have when I was 25. I have experience I did not have when I was 25. My faith should look different.

When I was a kid, my faith had a lot to do with Allene and Carlton Aldridge, my parents, and Immanuel Baptist Church, my congregation, and North Augusta, South Carolina, my home town and culture. Since old loves die hard, I do not want to be disrespectful to any of those early, wonderful mentors in my life. But the world and I have moved on. I am no longer the electable high school senior class president that I was. That is okay, because I don't think Jesus would have been elected senior class president either. He made people uncomfortable. He challenged them. I am a changed person over the past 40 years, hopefully, transformed by a deeper and more expansive understanding of an unlimited God whose name is not Southern Baptist or Southern Culture or “Quit Squirming,” or “Be Nice,” but whose name is “I Am Who I Am.”

I have discovered in the Holy Bible that there are stories of people who questioned and wrestled with God, and they are not condemned. There are Bible stories of people who embarrassed their families, and they are not condemned. There are people who wandered in the wilderness, and they are not condemned. There are, praise the Lord, even people who danced, and they are not condemned.

I repeat: The Bible is a Big Book and God is a Big God! ■

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## Paul's Letter to the One Percent

By Reta Finger

Each Sunday, in many churches across North America, congregants hear these words preparing them for communion: “The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread ...”

However, few churchgoers kneeling for bread and wine at the altar may know that these words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 are set in a longer section (11:17-34) that begins sharply: “Now in the following instructions, I do *not* commend you, because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse!” Paul continues the attack in verse 20: “When you come together it is not really to eat the *Lord’s* supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your *own* supper, and one goes hungry, and another becomes drunk” (emphasis added).

What Paul describes sounds more like a food fight in a high school cafeteria than our solemn rituals. Have we missed something in this text?

This article isn’t mainly about food. It’s about inequality—the 99 percent versus the one percent. But when you live in the Roman Empire where most inhabitants live at or below subsistence, earning enough daily bread is the main thing you think about.

A longtime friend, George McClain, and I are presently finishing a curriculum simulating a house church planted by Paul in Corinth during the years 50 to 51 C.E. We owe much to the research of biblical and classical scholars and archeologists on power relations in the Roman Empire. This “empire-critical” method examines the sociological, political, religious, and economic structures that underpin first century Rome. Such structures contrast starkly with the “kingdom of God” as proclaimed by Jesus and his apostle Paul.

To begin with, Roman aristocrats

detest democracy. They assume they are superior to all other people and thus have the right to rule over them. Gradations of hierarchy exist everywhere, from emperor to senators to knights to the lesser aristocracy to ordinary citizens to freeborn noncitizens to freedpersons to slaves. There is little upward social mobility; stability and hierarchy are valued more highly. Democracy means chaos.

Such stability and hierarchy are best maintained through a system of inequality called “patronage.” No one survives without a patron in a slightly higher class to provide help—with social connections, economic opportunities, or legal counsel. In return, the client publicly honors the patron. Clients themselves are patrons to persons below them. Throughout the empire, a myriad of such pyramids operate to maintain both inequality and social stability. Priests and temples buttress hierarchy through civil religion. The emperor is the representative of the gods.

To immerse ourselves in the material remains of this culture, several of us visited Greece and the Corinthia in 2009. David Pettegrew, my archeologist colleague and friend, walked us through weeds growing over ancient Corinth to the ruins of a first-century villa, perhaps like one owned by a patron of a house church. We pondered the ruins of the Asklepion, a community healing center where banquets for Corinthian elites would have been held—meals Paul considered “the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19-21). We splashed our feet in the water at the harbor at Cenchreae, where Phoebe led a house church and from where she carried Paul’s letter to Rome (Romans 16:1-2).

Paul names four people in Corinth who probably led house churches:

Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), Crispus and Gaius (1:14), and Stephanas (1:16; 16:17). Unlike his letters to Thessalonika, where no leaders are named, these people may represent patrons who provided a house for the believers to meet and, possibly, food for the daily communal meal.

While in Ephesus, Paul hears about problems in Corinth from “Chloe’s people,” so we chose to simulate her house church. Eighteen characters are divided into the four factions Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12—“those of Paul,” “those of Apollos,” “those of Cephas,” and “those of Christ.”

How did these divisions and quarrels arise? After Paul planted churches in Corinth, he left for more church-planting in Ephesus. Apollos, an eloquent preacher from Alexandria, arrived later and also attracted a following, probably those with more status, wealth, and education. We assume “Chloe’s people” generally supported Paul’s viewpoint, since they appealed to him for help. We don’t know if Cephas (the Apostle Peter) ever came there, but this faction could include Jesus-Jews more conservative than Paul. We characterized “those in Christ” as charismatic slaves, mostly women, who have been transformed from “bodies” without honor to persons of dignity and worth, seeking equality with the other believers.

As we role-played these factions, first in a seminary class and then with laypeople in Sunday school, we saw how issues of social class and status dominate the letter. On almost every issue, Paul tells the privileged “one percent” to share it or give it up for the sake of the entire body of Christ. It is the core of Jesus’ self-emptying gospel. Here are a few examples:

Crazy, Upside-Down Logic  
*1 Corinthians 1:18-3:23*

Paul immediately challenges the “not many” among the believers who are “wise by human standards ... powerful ... and of noble birth” (1:26). He lifts up the less educated and “weak ... low and despised in the world” (1:27-28). Waving a cross, the standard instrument of torture, Paul insists that “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1:23). This is God’s “wisdom”—that God’s son should be so shamed and despised by the “rulers of this age” that they executed him as a terrorist. And these are the rulers the “noble” members are sucking up to!

Apollos may have preached the same message. But he was an orator from Alexandria, perhaps from the school of Philo, the great Jewish wisdom teacher. Apollos’ eloquence may have attracted some lower-level officials hanging onto upper-class privileges by their fingertips. Here was a chance to gain more clients to provide them additional public honor.

Paul insists that he and Apollos agree and are not rivals (3:5-6). But the factions are still spiritual babies, still “of the flesh,” full of quarreling and jealousy (3:1-4).

#### Sex, Lawsuits, and Banquets

*1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20*

Chloe’s people have reported that one man in the church has a sexual relationship with his stepmother—his father’s wife (5:1). Because Paul says this behavior conflicts with Roman practice, one scholar, Bruce Winter, argues that the father is alive—in which case the son is transgressing the law of honor. But the family is wealthy, and the father does not want to call public attention to this shame. Nor do the Corinthian assemblies excommunicate the son; he is their patron and benefactor. Paul connects greed and robbery to sexual immorality three times (5:10, 11; 6:10).

Paul probably discusses lawsuits here (6:1-8) because of this legal mess. But in any case, only elite patrons of the church could file a grievance in a Roman court; persons of lower rank

may not sue a superior. Instead, Paul insists internal problems be brought before “the saints” (6:1-6): “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another?” This is very risky for those with power and privilege. What if the wisest person in a house church is a slave? Patrons cannot allow slaves to think they deserve as much respect as their owners!

Paul then curtails the privileges of all elite men in 6:12-20. They say, “all things are lawful for me.” The context is the elite banquets—the over-eating, over-drinking, and “hook-ups” for dessert. But how can a client in their house church challenge his patron about attending these banquets?

Gender inequality pervades the empire, but Paul argues for equal faithfulness in marriage and for the value of the physical body because God has bodily “raised the Lord and will raise [our bodies] by his power” (6:13b-20). In fact, the greedy, drunkards, or the sexually immoral should not even attend the community’s agape meals! (5:11).

#### The Risk of Eating Idol-Meat

*1 Corinthians 8:10*

Here Paul again addresses elite members of the church. Only they can afford to eat from the top of the food chain, but he issues two instructions that curtail their privileges. Although it’s okay to eat whatever food is offered at a private dinner, if someone there—most likely a Christian slave—tells you it was offered in sacrifice, don’t eat it for her sake (10:27-29).

Second, Paul absolutely forbids public banquets. Temple banquets reinforce hierarchy. Diners are seated according to rank, with better food for the higher-ups. Besides the dessert course mentioned above, these “good old boy” meals are times of networking—strengthening business ties and reinforcing patronage relations. For Paul, this is to sit down at the table of demons (10:14-22), the table of the domination system that God opposes. But by not attending these banquets,

Christian patrons would cut themselves off from their pagan peers and lose honor. They will resist.

For this reason, Paul includes chapter 9—about a privilege he himself gave up for the sake of the gospel. He has refused all financial support from the Corinthians (9:1-7, 12, 15). Paul knows it would come from the church patrons, making him beholden to them rather than to the majority of poor laborers and slaves. He would be co-opted into the unequal patronal system, which opposes Christ’s good news of equal inclusion (9:16-18).

Instead, Paul becomes a lower-class handworker in his rented tent-making shop (Acts 18:1-3). He sees this self-emptying of privilege as the core of Jesus’ gospel. But by offering himself as an example of what Jesus did, he angers his would-be patrons. It would be a public honor to have Teacher Paul as their house-philosopher. In response, some reject his apostleship (a painful situation Paul laments in 2 Corinthians 10-13).

#### NOT a Supper of the Lord!

*1 Corinthians 11:17-34*

The context of chapters 11 to 14 is a worship service. Elite persons do not work for a living, so they arrive at a patron’s house for supper in the late afternoon and recline on couches in the dining room. All laborers must work until sunset. By that time, the food is gone, and the early diners are drunk (11:20-21). This is eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, says Paul. It is not “discerning the body” (11:29). That is why those not getting supper “are weak and ill and some have died” (verse 30).

The text presupposes a full meal that begins with a bread-breaking ritual and ends with a ritual of the cup—in honor of the Lord Jesus. The confusing words “homes” and “at home” in verses 22 and 34 are literally “house” in Greek, here meaning the “house church.”

Paul uses the example of Jesus’ Last Supper to play on the word “body.” Jesus shared bread as a symbol of his own physical body *and* his body of

disciples gathered with him (verses 23-25). The elite members of the house church must remember the “death of the Lord” (verse 26) so they can commit socio-political suicide by waiting to eat a late supper with people they deem inferior. But Paul is adamant. If you are not eating *together*, it is not a Jesus-Supper. You are eating your own suppers and you humiliate those who have nothing (verses 20-22).

From the patchwork evidence of 2 Corinthians, we know that Paul’s letter was not well-received—at least not by patrons or their clients whom Paul

ironically calls “super-apostles” (11:4-6). The “one percent” of Christians in Corinth were no more willing to give up their privileges than most of us today want to give up privileges of wealth, class, race, or education. The secular Occupy movement is calling attention to a staggering economic gap between the 1 percent and the 99 percent in America. Is it possible that, in their struggle to proclaim the moral bankruptcy of such inequality, the Occupiers are partaking of more authentic “suppers of the Lord” than many of us kneeling in the sanctuary? ■

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## Available While Supply Lasts

- ***The Philippian Fragment*** (C. Miller)
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- ***Putting Women In Their Place*** (A. & J. Trull)
- ***Whatsoever Things Are Lovely*** (F. Valentine)
- ***The Minister & Politics*** (Audio or Video CD of 2007 Conference—  
Boyd, Campolo, Rogers, & Wallis)
- **CD-Rom of Vol. 1-12, Issues 1-59, 1995-2000 of CET.**
- ***What Would Bonhoeffer Say?*** (Al Staggs)



## Leading the Small Church by Doran McCarty

By Clark Reichert

Being the pastor of a small church has been a blessing to me and my family. It did, however, take a bit of getting used to. Because of my love for the small church, I can certainly appreciate the obvious love that Dr. McCarty has for this context of ministry. Indeed, the small church is not a scaled-down version of a large church or a baby church waiting to grow, but is a separate entity of its own.

The lessons of this powerful little book may best be related by telling of several impasses that arose between me and my small-church congregation that, before reading Dr. McCarty's book, truly disturbed me. However, after learning the perspective of the small-church culture, it was obvious that they were not impasses at all; rather they were reflections of the power structure and way of thinking and acting that is characteristic of the small church.

In one case, a beloved saint, a pillar of the church died in a nursing facility in a neighboring state. I had never met this lady but she figured large in the church's story. A community person, at the time not a church member, took the liberty of planning a large city-wide funeral in my church bringing in an outside pastor and musician and only informing me, the official pastor, as an afterthought. When I explained my dissatisfaction to the parish council they seemed genuinely puzzled as to how such a minor oversight could possibly upset me.

In another instance, I had used a small discretionary fund for the poor set up years before in a creative way, combining it with the resources of the community's other churches and civic organizations to provide a central clearing house for aid rather than accepting the usual waste and duplication that multiple programs create. My church rewarded my efforts by cutting off support for my activities.

These actions by the church might seem patently unfriendly to the pastor and detrimental to his or her authority. They certainly did to me but I understand better now. I had failed to realize that in small church culture simply being the pastor did not automatically entitle one to authority or leadership.

Small churches, because of their tight budgets and relative lack of prestige attract a less-experienced, more transient clergy therefore power is located in the laity. Pastor Tom is a fine, young preacher and pastoral care provider but in approximately three years, he will be gone and the next pastor will be in place. Since it is the volunteer administrators that must take up the slack during the interim and beyond, this small cadre of leaders never actually relinquish control. The pastor has little invested in the church whereas these persons who have painted the building, repaired the handrail, cleaned the carpet, written the checks, put in new flooring have much invested.

The way that pastors in small churches can break into the monopo-

ly of power held by the old guard is to become the old guard themselves. Dr. McCarty said it well:

*"The minister may be elected pastor, but he doesn't become pastor until after three to five years. Churches do not take a pastor seriously until seven to ten years of tenure. After fifteen years, they own the church as long as they don't act like it."*

This is so because the small church does not function with a top-down hierarchy. Instead, power is recognized through a web of relationships. Sunday School for grades one through three is not the Early elementary class but is Miss Mollie's Class, as it has been for many years. Uncle John has been in charge of the sound system for as long as anyone can remember. Miss Kate has always prepared the communion. The pastor can enter into this leadership web, but must do so as all the others have, through long familiarity and many years of devoted service alongside the sisters and brothers of the church.

Dr. McCarty has lovingly related a lifetime of experience and intimate knowledge of the workings of the small church in his book. While seminary students read many books on leadership during the course of their studies, none may be as relevant to their first appointments as this one. I wish that I had read it earlier. ■

*Clark Reichert is formerly pastor of the Cedar Key United Methodist Church*

## The Prodigal

By James A. Langley

The rebel urge comes freely, legion is its name,  
From common folk to those who run with fame.  
Paths wiser and beneficent are shunned with disdain,  
As offering little pleasure and less personal gain

My hubris troubled him who loved me most purely,  
The love that loves in freedom loves most truly  
A caring sibling might have saved me much folly;  
Instead my brother dealt me a double volley  
Of selfishness and self-righteous, sinister pride,  
Yet the choice was mine, and I brushed all demurs aside.

Little concerned that my youthful and careless leaving  
Was cause for the onset of long and deep bereaving;  
Scant thought of my sire's warm embrace and choked farewell,  
Swept up by license and lust with a hint of hell.  
How blithely did I leave my father's home,  
But how blessedly, ever-loving, did my father not  
Leave me; I sensed his presence when I had come  
Where I found myself amid the sties and noisome rot.

In the far country the will weakens and roots easily sever,  
No bridges are built, and the best are merely clever  
The self-centered, morally loose, are a sorry lot for friends,  
Defrauding the simple and controlling others, their chief ends;  
A life of hedonism is mired in narcissism,  
Alluring yet vacuous, and sliding toward fatalism.

As rich in things and poor in soul I had started,  
Foolish and vain, my inheritance and I were soon parted,  
From a heritage reaching back to a Call divine,  
The nadir for an heir of Abraham is tending swine

So low had I fallen, I saw clearly from my descent  
The only way up, inspired by the Spirit, is to repent;  
Remembrance stirred my mind's awakening  
As my father's son to cease my self-deceiving,  
Even servants in my father's house had honor and bread  
While I had neither, but was treated as the dead.

A sense of my father's enduring love became my anchor,  
A blessed hope that I would be accepted without rancor,  
Tho' I had come to see that my sin was manifold—  
Against heaven and my father, scorning love still not fully told,  
And rehearsed again and again my confession fervent,  
Unworthy to be a son, let me be a servant.  
From the age-old self-made pit of rebellion I arose,  
Unsure of my reception, but determined to leave my woes.

Far off—how often had he scanned the horizon!—  
My father saw me, and running, embraced his errant son  
With a kiss and joy overflowing, cutting short my confession,  
Beyond all blessings is my father's compassion;  
How great is his rejoicing! A lost son is found,  
A son dead is alive—let the celebration resound!

Tho' consequences remain, the record finds  
Forgiveness is offered repentant sinners of all kinds;  
Alleluia for the God of grace who welcomes the prodigal  
Home again, and lavishes his love with a madrigal,  
A ring, a robe and sandals, a royal feast, a high celebration,  
That revels with blest music and dancing!—and unbounded elation,  
Except for my elder brother's refusal to join in,  
Deeply grieving my father with other, unconfessed sin.

Is not this ancient story also a common story,  
Lives often weak and sordid, yet made for glory?  
Do not our hearts reveal the prodigal there?  
So send the good news to all, and everywhere,  
Compassion—glorious assurance!—is blazoned over the race,  
Returning prodigals find mercy with the God of grace! ■

# Oh, The Joy!

By Patrick Anderson, editor

My time with grandchildren during the past few days has given me unmeasured pleasure. They make me smile, often giggle, always swell with hope and pride. They take their place in the world for granted. They worry not at all about marriage equality, debt limits, death penalty, organ donation, or most of the other topics expounded on in *Christian Ethics Today*, or so it seems. They would say they have plenty of problems and issues to contend with, even at ages six through 10. Still, they spend much more time in blissful endeavors than in struggling with life's persistent problems, as Guy Noir would say. Oh, the joy! I love to have them rub off on me.

But I find joy not only in the innocent company of children. For me, the struggle with those persistent problems is also a source of joy each time I compose another issue of the journal. This issue of *Christian Ethics Today* is no different, but somehow today as I review the final draft of the Spring 2012 issue I feel especially happy. The subjects discussed in *Christian Ethics Today* are not neces-

sarily happy topics. Indeed, most of them are quite disturbing. But as a Christian, and as an editor on behalf of readers of this journal, it gives me great joy to read, select, edit, and think about the essays I consider for inclusion in the journal.

We deal in matters of importance, the issues of the day. And if the subject were easy, it would not be an issue. I have been asked if I had "an agenda" as editor of *Christian Ethics Today*. The question usually comes after a particularly difficult and controversial essay was published. No. My only agenda is to fulfill the mission statement of the journal, the one Foy Valentine and Joe Trull developed and followed, that is to "*provide laypersons, educators, and ministers with a resource for understanding and responding in a faithful Christian manner to moral and ethical issues that are of concern to contemporary Christians, to the church, and to society.*"

There is certainly no shortage of moral and ethical issues that are of concern to us all. So, when thoughtful Christians reflect deeply on the issues of the day, we can expect to

understand those issues better, to know how to respond in a faithful Christian manner. I find great pleasure in reading what smart and committed Christian persons think about the issues of the day. Here in this volume we have the best thoughts of Professors Jonathan Tran and Reta Finger, President Jimmy Carter, Martin Marty, Gary Moore, Jim Wallis, pastors Angie Wright and Scott Stearman and Hardy Clemons... Oh, the joy! We have the benefit of a student, Rigoberto Weekes, Chaplain Monty Self, executive David Beckmann, writer Marion Aldridge, poet Jim Langley, and optician/pastor Clark Reichert.

We benefit not only from reading that with which we already agree, but with being challenged by opinions or conclusions with which we do not agree. Again, that is what an issue is, something difficult and thorny and worth wrestling with, not something cut and dried and already figured out.

So dear readers, enjoy another volume of *Christian Ethics Today*. Let me know how we can do a better job of fulfilling our mission. ■

Your financial support of *Christian Ethics Today* is very important. We depend on gifts from our readers. As Bill Moyers says, "Look upon these pages as you would a campfire around which we gather to share our life experiences -- the stories, ideals, and hopes unique to our understanding of faith. **Then imagine what we lose if the fire goes out.**" Please help us keep the fire burning. Gifts to *Christian Ethics Today* are tax-deductible. Please use the envelope provided in this journal.

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# Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

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

—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

### MISSION

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

### PURPOSES

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

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

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

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

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