

# Christian Ethics Today

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

<b>Being An Oxymoron: A Liberal Evangelical</b> <i>Tony Campolo</i> .....	2
<b>EthixBytes</b> .....	3
<b>The Foy Valentine Memorial Fund—Still Growing!</b> .....	4
<b>Foy Valentine: A Friend For The Ages</b> <i>Patrick R. Anderson</i> .....	5
<b>Henlee Barnette: Prophetic Practitioner</b> <i>Larry L. McSwain</i> .....	6
<b>The Path of Most Resistance</b> <i>J. Bradley Creed</i> .....	8
<b>Can We Just Talk?</b> <i>L. Dianne King</i> .....	11
<b>Religion and Government: A New Model Needed?</b> <i>David A. Sapp</i> .....	13
<b>Today I Saw A Man</b> <i>Wade McCoy, MD</i> .....	18
<b>Faith, Family, and Finances</b> <i>James E. Carter</i> .....	19
<b>Sunday—Marathon Day</b> <i>Martin E. Marty</i> .....	24
<b>Baptizing Illegal Aliens</b> <i>David F. D'Amico</i> .....	25
<b>The Real Tradition of Women as Church Leaders</b> <i>Sandra Dufield</i> .....	26
<b>CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES</b> <i>David A. Thomas</i> .....	27
<b>Terrorism: <i>Munich</i> (2005) and <i>Syriana</i> (2005)</b>	
<b>War: <i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979)</b>	
<b>POETRY</b>	
<b>Either Way</b> <i>Nathan Brown</i> .....	30
<b>The Religion Show</b> <i>Al Staggs</i> .....	31
<b>KUDZU</b> <i>by Doug Marlette</i> <a href="http://www.dougmarlette.com">www.dougmarlette.com</a>	

# Being An Oxymoron: A Liberal Evangelical

By Tony Campolo, Professor Emeritus Eastern University, St. Davids, PA

A few weeks ago I was a guest on Steven Colbert's popular television show, *The Colbert Report*. He introduced me as an Evangelical who is liberal on social issues. Then he added, "He's a living oxymoron!"

Sadly, his words reflect the way Evangelicals are regularly perceived. Here in the United States, evangelical Christians have become so married to the Right Wing of the Republican Party that it is hard for those outside our faith community to imagine that a significant minority of Evangelicals have socially liberal politics. Yet over its history, evangelical Christianity has championed some of our country's most progressive social movements.

Charles Finney, the dominant evangelist of the nineteenth century, was a major player in the anti-slavery movement, and his revivals provided much of the impetus for the women's suffrage movement of that era. Back in those days, Evangelicals pulled their churches out of mainline denominations not because the denominations were too socially liberal on the race issue, but because they were not liberal enough. William Jennings Bryan of Scopes Trial fame, the darling of early twentieth century Evangelicals, was a pacifist who opposed America's involvement in war. I gladly take my place in his train.

The word *liberal* has become a political label of ill-repute among many Evangelicals. But if by social liberal, you mean someone who believes America should guarantee medical

coverage for all of its citizens; fund the public schools in poor urban and rural communities at the same level as those in rich suburban neighborhoods; be committed to progressive environmental policies; give more than four-tenths of one percent of its federal budget to help the poor of other countries; and give up its militaristic adventurism—then I embrace the label with enthusiasm.

I'm one of those pro-life Christians who is convinced that the outrageous number of abortions each year are more due to right-wing economic policies than to *Roe v. Wade*. In a society where many poor women must work outside the home at a ridiculously low minimum wage just to survive, yet have no access to daycare for their children, we should not be surprised if they seek abortion when faced with an unplanned pregnancy. Yet many of the Religious Right Christians who share my pro-life sentiments tend to oppose enacting legislation that would enable poor women to give birth and keep their children. No wonder one of our critics says, "Evangelicals are people who believe that life begins at conception and ends at birth." Too often it seems like we care about protecting the unborn, but we're not willing to provide for the born.

Recently, an African-American preacher in Philadelphia joined forces with the Religious Right and the White House when he spoke out against the nomination of "activist" judges to the Supreme Court who would interpret the law beyond what the framers of the Constitution intended. I wondered if this preacher thought about all the advances for minority peoples that were the fruit of activist judges. Liberal judges are the ones who integrated public schools with their 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Activist judges are

the ones who obliterated policies that had allowed for racial discrimination in real estate sales, employment, and education. In reality, almost all of the progressive rulings that decimated Jim Crow went well beyond the intentions of the framers of the Constitution, many of whom owned slaves. Oh, how quickly people forget!

There are those on the Religious Right who argue that caring for the poor and needy is solely the responsibility of the church and should not be funded with taxpayers' money. Yet it is clear in Scripture that God holds governments responsible for playing a significant role in providing such care. Consider the words of the prophet Isaiah who warned: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless" (Isa 10:1-2).

Also, Jesus declared that the day would come when nations would be judged by how they cared for the poor: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt 25:31-32).

Allow me to add to my advocacy for certain liberal social policies a commitment to fiscal conservatism. This present government, so supported by most Evangelicals, has mortgaged the future of our children and our children's children. This is a consequence of funding the war in Iraq and giving gigantic tax breaks to the richest people in our country, as well as to huge corporations such as price-gouging oil companies. Our national debt increases by close to \$2 billion each week,

(continued on page 12)

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# EthixBytes

## A Collection of Quotes Comments, Statistics, and News Items

“I pray for a world in which none will be so poor, they have nothing to give, and none so rich they have nothing to receive.”

**Pope John Paul II.**

“The great contribution of Baptists has not been by theologians, but by ethicists.”

**Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, U.S.A..**

“Will [moral] values be used as wedges and weapons to divide and destroy us, or as bridges to bring us together to find common ground by moving to higher ground?”

**Jim Wallis, editor and founder of Sojourners.**

“Folks tend to forget that during our founding, it wasn’t the atheists or the civil libertarians who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment, but persecuted minorities such as Baptists who didn’t want the established churches to impose their views.”

**Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill), quoted by columnist E. J. Dionne.**

“If you are not electing Christians [to public office], then in essence you are going to legislate sin. . . . the separation of church and state is a lie we have been told to keep religious people out of politics.”

**Rep. Katherine Harris (R-Fl), Orlando Sentinel.**

“Our greatest fear is that politicians today are trying to make use of Christianity for their own purposes. . . . They have forgotten Jesus came not to save a country, but to save the entire human race.”

**Lao She, China’s masterful twentieth-century storyteller.**

“The insurance payout to the ben-

eficiaries of an American soldier who dies in the line of duty is \$400,000, while a dead Iraqi civilian is worth up to \$2500 in condolence payments. For all the talk of Iraq being a sovereign nation, foreign occupiers are the ones deciding what an Iraqi life is worth.”

**Andrew J. Bacevich, Boston University.**

“We really need to address the burning of fossil fuels. It is getting hotter, and the icecaps are melting, and there is a buildup of carbon dioxide in the air.”

**Rev. Pat Robertson, The 700 Club (Aug. 3).**

“Why does the oil industry go back 25 years to one week in 1981 to compare today’s gas prices, which have increased 254% in the last 7.5 years?”

**Letter writer James Moffitt.**

“The richest 1% of Americans on average pay only 18% of their income in federal taxes, with many corporate CEOs paying only 3-4%, while the rest of us pay an average of 30% of our income in federal income taxes.”

**Bruce Peterson, Sojourners (March, 2006).**

“The average ‘super-rich’ family has an average annual income of \$9.2 million. They spend each year nearly \$30,000 on alcohol; \$224,000 on hotels and resorts; \$168,000 renting a villa; \$147,000 on watches; \$117,000 on clothes; \$248,000 on jewelry; \$226,000 on cars and boats; \$404,000 on yacht rentals; and \$542,000 on home improvements.”

**Dow Jones “Market Watch” (8/22/06).**

“Agricultural subsidies in the West, which allocate to every cow the equivalent of \$2 per day, could make

Africans living on \$1 a day wish they were cows.”

**Jim Wallis.**

“We have just learned from the news media that 50,000 Iraqis have died in this war—a fact the Bush administration has kept from the public.”

**Chris Matthews interview on NBC Today (6/27/06).**

“Today, tobacco accounts for one in five cancer deaths, or 1.4 million deaths each year. Tobacco alone is predicted to kill a billion people this century, 10 times the toll it took in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

**Tobacco Atlas, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition and the World Health Organization.**

“For every [Iraqi insurgent] that I kill, I create almost 10 more.”

**Army Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, commander of multinational forces in Iraq (Sojourners, 9/06).**

“If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

**Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, about the best response to terrorism..**

“The constitution says the president has two choices: either sign the bill or veto it. And if you sign it you can’t have your hand behind your back with your fingers crossed.”

**Michael Greco, President of the American Bar Association responding to the ABA’s resolution condemning President Bush’s written exceptions to 800 bills, more than all previous presidents combined.**

“I have never heard a sermon from which I have not derived some good, but there have been some near misses.”

**Mark Twain. ■**

# The Foy Valentine Memorial Fund—Still Growing!

On July 24, the *Dallas Morning News* published a one column half-page story titled, “Friends of Foy keeping dream alive.” The article began with a picture of President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn, noting they were among the “Friends of Foy” supporting the effort to fulfill Foy’s dream of “an endowment large enough to guarantee [the Journal’s] future.”

In the weeks that followed, about 20 persons who read the article sent in memorial gifts including three gifts of \$1000, one for \$5000 from a lawyer friend in Dallas, and one for \$2000 from a Baylor classmate now in Sante Fe, NM. In addition, our long-time supporter David Smith of Houston (who made the bell which now rings at Foy’s Red River cabin), sent a magnanimous gift of \$25,000 for which we give thanks.

## The Dream

From the day Foy Valentine founded *Christians Ethics Today* in 1995, he envisioned an “independent prophetic voice for Christian ethics” that would “inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals . . . working for personal morality and public righteousness.”

William Spencer, the editor of *Pricilla Papers* (journal of *Christians for Biblical Equality*), recently wrote to say, “I thoroughly enjoy your journal. I read it from cover to cover the day it arrives . . . I don’t know how you do it! I struggle to get a fraction of the size out four times a year. I think you are in another league.”

## The Cost

For eleven years now, CET has been sent without charge to anyone requesting it—as Foy promised, “as long as money and energy permit!” This month we publish our sixty-first uninterrupted issue! In 1995, the first issues were sent to a few hundred—today over 5000 ministers, college and

seminary professors, church leaders, and concerned laity receive CET! The cost—an unbelievable \$80,000 per year for five issues.

## Financial Support

Each year, through the voluntary contributions of almost 600 readers and supporters, our basic budget is met. Some summers it gets tight. Often in the past, either Foy, or a Board Member, or a loyal supporter would call and ask, “How are the finances?” And, in the moment of need a check for \$1000, \$5,000, or even more would arrive. Without these generous supporters, the Journal would not have been published these eleven years.

## The Endowment Fund

During the past few years preceding his untimely death, Foy often expressed to our Board of Directors that we needed some permanent fund to underwrite the budget of the Journal, probably an endowment.

The initial \$100,000 Memorial Gift from Foy’s long-time friend Harold Simmons, became the basis for our present effort to create this corpus. The purpose of this Foy Valentine Memorial Endowment Fund would be to provide from the interest accrued, financial support for the publishing of the Journal, as needed.

## Initial Gifts Total \$159,325

To date 84 persons have given \$159,325. We are grateful for these initial donors: Jimmy and Linda Allen, Sarah F. Anders, Janis (Henson) Arrant, Patsy and Bob Ayres, Truett Baker, L. B. Berry, Terrell Blodgett, Florence Box, Paul Brewer, Judy Brooks, Mary Burkett, James E. Carter, Rosalynn and President Jimmy Carter, Barbara Chafin, Ross Coggins, Forrest Conklin, Gary Cook, Robert and Margaret Cooper, H. E. Coty, James Crouch, Mary Ann Davis, Phoebe Delamarter,

Juanice DuBose, T. W. and Sue Downing, Aubrey Ducker, Sarah and James Logan, Donald Dunlap, James Dunn, Roland Foster, V. C. Garrett, Jr., Duane Geiss, Edwin S. Gaustad, Glenn Gring, Marvin Harris, Virginia Hendricks, Argye Hillis, Wayne Hodge, Barry and Amanda Howard, Vester Hughes, Martha King, Neal Knighton, Matthew Krauss, James A. Langley, James Miller, Bob Mitchell, Mary Kay Mitchell, Darold H. Morgan, Mrs. Kenneth Moss, Bill Moyers, Charles Murphy, J. Kent Newsome, Oz Osborn, Alton Patton, Samuel and Annie Pearis, Janet Purvis, Herbert Reynolds, Mary Rickenbaker, Bettina Sanderford, Frank G. Schwall, Jr., John Scott, Robert Scrutchins, H. N. Shannon, Elizabeth Sheaf, James Shields, Harold Simmons, Harold Simmons Foundation, Jay Skaggs, David M. Smith, Jerry P. Smith, Joseph Smith, Britt Towery, Joe and Audra Trull, William Turner, Penny Whorton Wells, Wendell Wentz, D.D. Westbrook, Yandall Woodfin, Elizabeth Woolverton, and James Wray.

Our hope and prayer is that this fund may reach \$500,000—interest from this amount would provide almost one-half of our present annual budget of \$80,000. Foy wrote with a fluent pen, a warm heart, and big dreams. The pen is silent, the heart is still, but the dream lives on. Help us fulfill Foy’s dream.

If you have any questions, please call one of our *Friends of Foy Valentine Committee*: Darold Morgan, Co-Chair (West)-Patsy Ayers, Doug Dillard, Buckner Fanning, Bob Feather, Bob Mitchell, or Herbert Reynolds. David Sapp, Co-Chair (East)-Jimmy and Linda Allen, President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn, Ross Coggins, James Dunn, Millard Fuller, Bill Moyers, or John Seigenthaler, Sr. ■



# Foy Valentine: A Friend For The Ages

By Patrick R. Anderson, CET Board Member Lakeland, FL

The first time I met Foy Valentine was on the telephone. I was in my faculty office at Louisiana State University late one afternoon when the call came. When he identified himself I knew the name, remembering his valiant leadership of Southern Baptists during the turbulent Civil Rights Movement era. I could not imagine why he had called a criminologist like me, and I could not imagine how he got my name and number. I was not at all involved in Baptist life at that time, but I remember feeling honored to receive a call from someone so important.

He told me that my pastor, Doug Cheatham, had given him my name with a suggestion that if he ever needed a criminologist at the CLC to give me a call. So, I asked, "What do you need a criminologist for?" He replied, "Do you know anything about gambling?" I said, "Well, I know a full house from a straight. What do you want to know?" We both enjoyed the moment, and I believe from that first conversation we became friends.

Out of that conversation came a grant for me to study the impact of legalized gambling on crime and other social problems. I worked with Larry Braidfoot in the CLC office to use the scientific data to make the case against the expansion of legalized gambling in America. I became a strong opponent of the gambling industry, and Foy Valentine's Christian Life Commission led the fight against the gambling industry's intrusion in our society, a hard-fought fight largely lost. He used to laugh and say, "Doc, you never lost a debate and never won an election!"

Foy was ahead of the curve, ahead of his time. He saw years before the first legalized lottery in America the terrible potential for harm legalized gambling posed. I caught up with his intuitive antipathy for gambling after my study, but I agreed with his pre-

scient knowledge that gambling, especially state-sponsored gambling was bad—it was wrong, it was the antithesis of moral behavior, the opposite of what the government should encourage.

Our friendship lived beyond the gambling fights and his retirement from Southern Baptist life. His retirement marked a terrible transition in Southern Baptist life. He had led the Christian Life Commission to assist Southern Baptists to espouse the very best in moral and ethical behavior, addressing the pressing issues of race, poverty, war, and gambling. He understood Baptist principles, especially the separation of church and state. When he retired, or more accurately when he was pushed out of the way, Southern Baptists watched as the SBC leaders changed the CLC into a partisan, political member of the Religious

Right Movement. An early casualty of that change was opposition to gambling, and we have seen state lotteries, televised poker, casinos, and sports betting spread like wildfire.

The change was tragic for Foy, and for his friends. We talked about it often at various board meetings, CBF gatherings, and on the telephone. I loved to talk with him on the phone. His soft East Texas twang and his rich humor made every conversation a pure delight. I encouraged him to publish in book form his recent writings in the journal he founded, *Christian Ethics Today*, and when that book was produced he was a pleased as punch. If you do not have that book, order one through [www.ChristianEthicsToday.com](http://www.ChristianEthicsToday.com).

I really miss Foy Valentine. I wish I had called him more often, talked longer, laughed more. He was one great man, one great Baptist. ■

## **NOTE:** Foy Valentine's final book, "*Whatever*

*Things Are Lovely*," is available as a gift to new

subscribers or to anyone contributing \$50 to the

budget of *Christian Ethics Today*—Foy printed at

his own expense extra copies to raise funds for the

Journal. Multiple copies may also be ordered.

Previous book offers—*Homely Joys* by Henlee

and Jim Barnette, and *Putting Women in Their Place*

by Audra and Joe Trull (contributors and compilers)

may also be ordered. Contact us for details.

# Henlee Barnette: Prophetic Practitioner

By Larry L. McSwain, Professor of Ethics and Leadership McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia

**Note:** This speech was delivered at the Baptist Center for Ethics luncheon during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship meeting on June 22, 2006, in Atlanta, GA.

Henlee Barnette spent more than seventy of his life seeking to communicate and demonstrate the ethical imperatives of the gospel to parishioners, students, and the larger scholarly world. It did not matter very much where Henlee was—starting a new church in Kannapolis, NC as a new convert; serving rural immigrants in the Haymarket neighborhood of inner city Louisville as pastor/superintendent of the Union Gospel Mission; helping start the first inner-racial pastor's conference in Birmingham, AL in the 1940s; teaching thousands of students in Howard College, Stetson University, and Southern Seminary; or writing understandable books that translated the foundational principles of the biblical story into ideas that would work in the modern world.

Whether it was Communism, basic Christian ethics, ecology, Clarence Jordan, or the dilemmas posed by situation ethics or the technologies of medicine, Henlee had a way of speaking truth to power in ways that were clear and workable. Henlee never lost his Appalachian roots, even when communicating the insights of Luther, Brunner, Fletcher, Tillich, or James Luther Adams.

I first met Henlee Barnette by reading his *Introducing Christian Ethics*<sup>1</sup> as my textbook in the first class in ethics I took with Bill Pinson at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I was captured by the power of his ability to state the prophetic vision of Scripture in ways that made sense in the practicalities of the social agendas of the world in which we lived in the 1960s. Reading it made me want to know him and work with him. So I applied

at Southern Seminary for graduate study to learn more from this prophetic practitioner. But that was never to be. When I arrived at Southern and discovered he had a full contingent of Ph.D. students, providence would lead me to study with Nolan Howington and Willis Bennett instead. But during that first year he asked me to serve as his Garrett Fellow, grading the papers for his M.Div. course in Christian Ethics. So I sat in the course and watched and learned. What emerged was a mentorship in Christian ethics, especially civil rights, for which I shall ever be grateful.

He was not only a teacher. He was an activist. The next year he gave my name to Willie Holmes, president of Simmons University Bible College, who employed me to teach *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, my first venture in teaching. Through that experience I met many wonderful people, including Emmanuel and Marie McCall who walked my wife Sue and me from a Simmons Baccalaureate event during the H. Rap Brown riots in Louisville to our car the month before she would deliver our first child.

When the City Council in Louisville was debating open housing ordinances he asked me to go to the demonstrations outside City Hall and my eyes were opened. I was nervous as the police barricaded us from entering City Hall, only to have the press of the crowd break through the doors. I was certain we would be arrested, but Henlee just laughed. He called one evening in March 1968 to tell me Martin Luther King, Jr. would be preaching at West Chestnut Baptist Church the next evening. I went, listened, was inspired, and marched the streets of Louisville that night as we sang "We Shall Overcome." I shall ever be grateful for his thoughtfulness in making a call to a graduate student that would

change my life.

There is so much to say about this man. He was deceptive. He could sit quietly in a graduate colloquium, seeming to rest his eyes as students presented their papers, only to lift his head at a salient point to interject what Martin Luther, Paul Ramsay, Emilé Brunner, or Paul Tillich might offer on the subject. He was ever the gentle nurturer of scholarly thought in a non-threatening and affirming manner.

His lectures were a mix of thoughtful historical insights from the thinkers of the church to plain stories of action by a North Carolina mill worker, or Clarence Jordan at Koinonia Farms, or a local politician, or a Black pastor in the city. He seemed to know them all. There are two primary values that shaped the man. The first was the prophetic consciousness of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, the bearer of the Kingdom. Henlee had indomitable courage and it led him to study beyond his background, challenge the conventional in church and society, and risk rejection for the cause of truth. He never seemed to me to be bothered in the least by those who disagreed with him. Prophets have to have an inordinate ability to sleep at night and that was true for Henlee. He always responded to his critics who wrote to him, usually in a humorous vein. I remember specifically his letter to the Baptist layman who wrote complaining the use of his Cooperative Program gifts to support Barnette. Henlee promptly looked up the record of his church's giving and responding with a letter offering to refund his investment that year. He enclosed a dime in the letter!

The second value that guided him was a maxim he lived by, a quote by Sir Roger de Coverly he learned in the fifth grade, "There is much to be said on both sides of every question." He was a pragmatic prophet, never living in the ivory tower, but constantly

seeking to apply the prophetic message to the realities and complexities of real life, whether in the corridors of Norton Hospital, the hallways of City Hall, the sanctuary of the church, or the minds of students in a seminary classroom.

John Claypool was Henlee's pastor and loved to tell stories about him around the lunch table at McAfee. He never laughed more than when he described riding with Henlee on the airplane to the Christian Life Commission meeting in Atlanta where Henlee would debate Joseph Fletcher on situation ethics. Ever serious, John said to Henlee, "Henlee, don't you think paradox is probably the most important theological category for making sense of reality?" True to form, remembering his childhood teacher de Coverly, he thought for a moment, smiled with that mill worker's twinkle of his, looked at John and said, "Yes" . . . and "No." Then he roared with laughter. That was Henlee Hulix Barnette.

The last conversation I had with him was about a year before he died. I called on the telephone to see how he was. Henelee had been to a banquet the night before to receive an award at the Union Gospel Mission, where he had served in the Haymarket. He was scheduled that night for another social event.

I inquired about what he was writing. His first response was, "Whatever is making me mad today." Then growing more serious he said, "I am spending most of my time writing my memoirs for my children, but they aren't worth publishing." Well they were worth publishing and we should all be grateful to Walter Shurden, Center for Baptist Studies, and Marc Jolley at Mercer University Press for convincing him to allow the rest of us to read the wonder-

ous story of his life and work.<sup>2</sup> All you have to do to get the rest of the story is read it in his own words.

I want to close today with a question for all of us. "What will happen to the great tradition of twentieth century Baptist social ethics in the Twenty-first Century?<sup>3</sup> When you study this tradition, the great contribution of Baptists to the world has not been our theology. We have had good theologians. But it is the ethicists among us who stand out—after all we are meeting in a state that produced two Baptist Nobel Peace prize winners—Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jimmy Carter.

Look carefully at the Baptists who made a difference, and with one or two exceptions, they were formed in their prophetic consciousness by theological education. Whether Rochester Theological Seminary for Walter Rauschenbusch and Howard Thurman, Crozier Theological Seminary for Martin King and Martin England, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for T. B. Maston, Foy Valentine, Jimmy Allen, James Dunn, Bill Pinson, Bill Moyers, Joe Trull, Bill Tillman and a host of others, or Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for J.B. Weatherspoon, O. T. Binkley, Clarence Jordan, Henlee Barnette, G. Willis Bennett, Paul Simmons, Anne Davis, Glen Stassen and a host of others, it was seminaries that shaped the prophetic consciousness of this generation.

That consciousness can no longer be found in the six seminaries of a denomination more committed to affirming a culture of consumerism, so-called just war, and right wing politics. Unless we build a new tradition of prophetic consciousness that challenges

our culture in institutions supported by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, we risk losing an emerging generation that knows little more than the names of these giants of social consciousness. Some of these institutions of support are non-Baptist settings where there is a strong social consciousness, and Baptist students receive scholarship support. Do they understand their Baptist social tradition? Others are new and relatively small seminaries which cannot yet support full time faculty in ethics. A few do not even require a course in Christian Ethics, a genuine tragedy for the future of our churches.

Our time is short. Our resources are limited. But with resolve and commitment, we must rebuild a tradition that made a difference, not only in America but the world, as a "light set on a hill" that the good news of Jesus Christ is a message that transforms both individuals and the social and political systems of this world with justice, mercy and peace. The best honor we can give these men and women of the past is to build on what they taught with a twenty first century Christian ethic that is shaped by free and faithful Baptists. ■

- 1 Henlee H. Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961). The book has been translated into several languages and is still in print!
- 2 Henlee Hulix Barnette, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: My Story* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004).
- 3 See the forthcoming Larry L. McSwain and W. Loyd Allen, editors, *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008).



# The Path of Most Resistance

By J. Bradley Creed, Provost Samford University, Birmingham, AL

Note: This address was delivered at the Spring Convocation of Samford on January 26, 2006.

The thrust of human ingenuity and innovation is to make life easier, from the wheel to the microchip, from the printing press to penicillin. It is hard to imagine life without air conditioning, microwave ovens, iPods, cellular phones, ATMs, and flush toilets. (Everyone here can remember a time when at least one of those inventions did not exist, and there are even a few people here who can remember a time when none of those inventions existed.) You could do without them, if you had to, but you wouldn't want to, would you?

Fifteen years ago, personal computers were novelties. Now they are necessities, but has the computer really made your life easier? Haven't there been times when you wanted to turn your printer into a boat anchor or use your hard drive for target practice? That's how a Methodist pastor from Florida felt when he was conducting a funeral service for a member of his church. He used his computer in preparing sermons and litanies for the congregation to read during the funeral in order to make the service more personal. The last funeral service he conducted was for a woman named Mary. The upcoming funeral was for a woman named Edna. He gave the computer the command to search for the word "Mary" and replace it with the word "Edna." Spell check never catches all of your mistakes, does it? But during the funeral for Edna, everyone realized the limitations of the computer when the congregation read in unison these words to the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Edna."

The computer, this remarkable

labor-saving device, had suddenly made his life more difficult, not easier. The easy way is not always the best way. Sometimes it is better to travel down the rocky road of most resistance instead of venturing down the path of least resistance.

This was the insight that an Army Psychiatrist achieved after observing and working with his patients over a number of years. He concluded that taking the easy way out was the cause of much mental anguish. He put it this way: "Neurosis is a bad substitute for legitimate suffering." What did he mean by this? We humans invite unnecessary suffering into our lives by avoiding the truth about ourselves, even when that truth is difficult to accept. Denial might temporarily cut you some slack, but in the long run, it is devastating to your health and well-being. Conversely, he also concluded, once we engage the truth about ourselves, as ugly and disturbing as it might be—our phobias, addictions, dysfunctions, and character flaws—and face squarely the inevitability of suffering in this life, that life is hard, then we are on the road back to health. Once we deal with reality, we start to get better. So the way to health and wholeness is a path of most resistance, it is taking a journey down the road less traveled. This Army psychiatrist put his thoughts and findings into a book, and for fifteen years, *The Road Less Traveled* by Scott Peck remained at the top of the New York Times bestseller list.

At the beginning of a new semester and calendar year, I am making an unpopular request of you. Instead of asking you to live your life in a way that will be easier, less problematic, or more comfortable, I am asking you to consider making your life more difficult. That's exactly what you wanted to hear, wasn't it? You freshmen have passed the crucial milestone

of the first semester, you came back to school, and you want things to be a little easier than they were last fall. Some of you seniors are running down the home stretch. You are far enough along in your academic progression to see the light at the end of the tunnel and to realize that the light is not an approaching train. You have worked hard, and, if at all possible, you would like to "enjoy" your last semester with few obstacles and difficulties. So, this is an odd request, but in making it, I offer the possibility that by traveling the path of most resistance, you will experience growth, new awareness, and even a sense of meaning and purpose that you would not know by taking the easy way out.

**Travel the path of most resistance in your educational experience.**

This spring, as you are devising your course schedule for next fall and visit the website [ratemyprofessors.com](http://ratemyprofessors.com), this time choose the professor who has the reputation for being the hardest instead of the one who gets the kudos for being the most popular.

Think about taking a course that really stretches you—one that is outside your major, or a course that you don't think that you would like, or a course that will challenge your viewpoints, or a course covering a subject that you just don't understand. For me, this would be calculus. Sign up for a course that you know will not automatically result in your earning an "easy A."

Take advantage of opportunities to put yourself in a social or cultural setting that is unlike your own or with people who in some way are different than you are. Do study abroad before you leave here. Find a research or service-learning project that takes you to places where people live on the margins of life, whether that is in an urban area with its manifold challenges or in a rural area. It may not be easy, but it



could end up being one of the highlights of your educational experience. Thomas Paine said: "That which we obtain too easily, we esteem too lightly." He stated this concerning liberty and freedom. It is also true of education.

**Travel the path of most resistance in how you deal with others.**

Listen more and speak less, especially if you are a talkative person, and you know who you are. Find someone who holds a contrary position on a controversial subject such as the death penalty. Have as your goal to understand that person's position and engage in active listening. If you don't know how to do that, one of the professors in Communication Studies will be glad to coach you. Listen to that viewpoint. Ask questions that will lead to understanding and prompt the other person to clarify and hone her position, repeat the person's statements in your own words, and when you are through, say "thank you," and walk away without shooting down her position or pasting on her a label. And then, only after you have engaged in active listening, think about your own position, clarify the arguments you would make if given the opportunity that you just gave someone else. The result might be that you aren't so sure about what you believe anymore, or you might discover that you believe in

your position even more firmly. Why do this? Because this is the essence of an education - walking down a path in which you are willing to examine your viewpoints critically and the viewpoints of others openly. You might change your position, but even if you don't, by going through this exercise, you will experience growth and become a more educated person. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

Practice humility and openness. I just finished reading a book that many of you recommended to me, *Blue Like Jazz* by Donald Miller. He subtitles his work *Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*, and they are, and I found them refreshing. The most memorable vignette in the book to me is when Miller set up a confession booth on the campus of Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where he was auditing classes. To put it mildly, Reed College is very different from Samford University. Some accepted patterns of behavior at Reed are called "values violations" on our campus.

Miller's confession booth wasn't what people thought that it was going to be. Instead of encouraging students to fess up, spill their guts, and admit how immoral or spiritually misguided they were, Miller and his friends confessed the sins of the church and Christianity. They apologized and expressed remorse for the historical

missteps of the church, for siding with the rich instead of the poor, for not treating the creation as a good gift from God, for forging compromising political alliances, for the church's episodes of racism and sexism, for speaking out when it should have shut up and for being strangely silent when a prophetic word needed to be heard. Now that's a path of most resistance! The effect was remarkable. On that campus, the Christian faith became a more acceptable topic of conversation. Some were even persuaded that the Christian faith should be their faith.

Work for reconciliation and understanding. To do so will mean that you must learn to forgive those who have wronged you and who have brought injustice and suffering into this world. I have just returned from leading a conference in which I had the privilege of working with some remarkable men who comprise the Canadian band, *Krystaal*. The last few days have been a powerful learning experience for me as I developed a friendship with Michel, Fabian, and Aliston Lwamba and listened to their story.

These three brothers are originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire. They grew up as members of a royal family in the Bangu-Bangu tribe of the Bantu peoples. Their grandfather was a king, their father was a king, and Michel,



the oldest of the brothers, was destined to be the king of his people. Culturally Muslim but not particularly observant, they nevertheless learned from their father the importance of truth, justice, and honor. Michel and Fabian both studied political science at Lubumbashi University and were active in student reform movements that protested the harsh and inhumane policies of President Mobutu Sese Seko. In May of 1989, Mobutu sent his feared personal security force into the university compound at night. These death squad soldiers cut off all of the electricity and locked the gates of the university compound so that no one could escape. What ensued during the night was a massacre so grisly and brutal, it would be inappropriate to describe the carnage that these young men witnessed. Michel and Fabian both escaped but were separated during the melee. Michel made his way home in time to gather his 13-year old brother, Aliston, his 16-year old sister, Gisele, and his 2-year old daughter. He could not find his wife Betty anywhere.

The 1989 student massacre in Lubumbashi for many months was only a rumor to the rest of the world, occasionally mentioned through the BBC and Canadian broadcasting. For Michel, Fabian, and Aliston Lwamba, it was a grim reality that marked the beginning of an incredible saga that changed their lives forever. For the next five years, these brothers, believing the other family members to be dead, struggled to survive the brutalities of refugee camps in Northwestern Kenya along the border of Sudan. There was disease, extreme weather conditions, and daily violence to contend with. Starvation was a constant threat. Twice a month, United Nations trucks brought food to the remote sites. If Michel were able to contend with the fighting that took place in the food lines, he received two cups of beans, 1 cup of rice, and a small portion of salt. That had to last for two weeks. Sometimes the trucks were robbed or hijacked, and the refugees had to live on half of what they nor-

mally received. Having enough water to drink meant walking two miles one way in 110 degree heat each day.

Michel Lwamba was a man who had been destined to be a king. Now, he was struggling to stay alive in one of the most God-forsaken places on earth. But, as the brothers both discovered, God was there, and they found in Christ a reason and will to live. Michel and Aliston started singing every night to bring hope to the inhabitants of the refugee camp. People would sometimes report to them the next day that they had planned to take their own lives during the night until they heard the brothers singing their songs of hope.

Through a miraculous series of events, the Lwambas were reunited in Canada and founded the group, *Krystaal*, for the purpose of singing music that would bring hope, faith, healing, and reconciliation. This past summer, they held a concert in Nairobi singing to an audience of over a hundred thousand people. They have won major music awards in Canada, and this past year performed with Celine Dion and Brian Adams at the Tsunami relief concert. They are bringing attention to a part of the world that is often overlooked because it offers very little political or economic advantage to the West. They are going back to Africa this summer—to Uganda, Barundi, Rwanda, and Kenya—to sing songs of hope with a native beat and indigenous tunes, and to bring light to people who are being destroyed in the darkness of tribal warfare, genocide, poverty, and AIDS. That is what the Swahili word “Krystaal” means—the light of Christ.

#### **Travel the path of most resistance with hope.**

In an age of skepticism, give hope a chance. In many ways, it is easier to be a skeptic and a cynic. It is less of a hassle to criticize others about their naïve beliefs and false optimism than to find a reason to be hopeful. I read the papers and listen to the news, so I'm well aware of what is going on in the world. There is convincing evidence that we are in trouble, and there

are reasons why we should be concerned about the future of our nation, the environment, and the fate of the world.

David Brooks wrote a column in the *New York Times* last December entitled, “The Age of Skepticism,” and then he proceeded to support the theme of the article by morosely surveying the national scene. U.S. citizens' attitudes are down because of the war in Iraq, partisan politics, corrupt lobbyists, lack of confidence in the leadership of this country, lack of faith that we can solve problems, lack of resolve to rebuild New Orleans after Katrina, frustration that we can't seem to forge an alternative energy policy built upon rationality, sustainability, and conservation, and a sense of helplessness ultimately in defending our country against another terrorist attack. And the list of downers goes on. Brooks is predictably conservative in his opinions, but a cursory review of other columns, both left and right, yields the same skeptical and somewhat despairing tone.

Martin Marty of the University of Chicago reports these same findings as he travels far and wide conversing and responding to questions about religion. People are as down about their churches, denominations, and the state of religion as Brooks is about the national scene.

But Marty the historian also sounds a note of encouragement. If the national mood is down, this doesn't mean that we are out. There are reasons for hope. It is way too soon to assert that we might be entering another “Dark Ages,” but even if we concede that as a possibility, we might profit from taking the approach of the Benedictine monks at the beginning of the other “Dark Ages.” Keep the lights on, the prayers ascending, the community a refuge against forces that must be resisted, and the books open so that learning can happen and hope can have a chance. I can think of no better antidote to skepticism.

So, go ahead, travel the path of most resistance. It won't be easy. But if it were easy, anyone could do it. ■

# Can We Just Talk?

By L. Dianne King Bremen, GA

I don't know much about war. And I'm certainly no foreign policy wonk. I don't even have a degree in political science. So maybe I don't have much to contribute to the discussion of American policy toward Iraq, Iran, the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, or North Korea.

I do, however, have some considerable expertise in human relations. With a Ph.D. in Counseling and 25 years of experience working with college students, I dare say that I know a thing or two about people and how they respond to one another. That said, I am going to jump into the discussion about what is going on in the world today, and our government's actions and reactions thereto.

Our leaders (of all stripes) declare that we are at war. We certainly have lots of troops deployed and rattle our sabers quite a bit. And our nation and the nations of our allies have been attacked. However, it is not sovereign nations attacking. The terrorists that struck us most blatantly on 9/11/01 were not sponsored by any nation. They may have been encouraged, supported, and supplied by a state, but they were not acting on behalf of any state.

War used to be solid, something one could wrap one's mind and hands around. A nation attacked us or our allies, and we responded. That made sense in the two world wars. And we

could stretch the point to explain our involvement in Korea and Viet Nam. Even the first Gulf War was an engagement to keep our friend (and oil supplier) safe and free from Saddam.

The terminology of war became fuzzy when one president declared a war on poverty, and another a war on drugs. Fine sentiments, but there was no nation-state against whom to war, just a nebulous social problem that needed to be solved. And to date, we have not made particularly good progress in these wars.

Now we are at war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Afghanistan made sense, since we were certain that the 9/11 terrorists, or at least their ilk, were trained in Afghanistan. The war with Iraq is one we started, because we thought they might have weapons of mass destruction, and besides, we didn't like Saddam Hussein. (No one seems to want to talk about that unfortunate picture of Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands with Saddam when we were encouraging his war with Iran.)

Most recently, British officials thwarted a plan to blow up at least ten jet liners flying into the U.S. And we pussy-foot and supply Israel with weapons so they can destroy much of the nation of Lebanon in their understandable desire to defeat the terrorist organization Hezbollah.

It seems to me that the war on terrorism is more akin to the war on

drugs and the war on poverty, than it is to any of the conventional wars we have fought. The "enemy" is nebulous—he has no government authority, no ambassador to eject from the U.S. Also, this enemy persists in pockets of disaffected young people who may live in most any country in the world, as was the case with the British plot. I hope we don't plan to attack England to try and ferret out those terrorists!

I did have a point when I started this, so let me get to it. The watchword since 9/11 has been that we do not *talk* with terrorists, with nations we believe sponsor terrorism, or with nations who won't do what we tell them to do when we tell them to do it. Interesting strategy, but I believe it is flawed.

At present Kim Jung Il is, we believe, sitting on a few nukes without the capacity to send them very far, though he seems to be working toward that end. In an effort to not "reward" his bad behavior, we have him in an extended international "time out." *No talking until you decide to do what Uncle Sam told you to do.*

We are beside ourselves because Iran insists on developing nuclear capacity. We will send the European Union as our surrogate to try and bully them into obedience, but we won't talk with them, which leaves us in a mess with the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict. We refuse to talk with Iran, who we believe supplies Hezbollah with weap-



ons, and we refuse to talk with Syria, because we believe it backs Hezbollah. We may be entirely right about these two nations encouraging and assisting Hezbollah in its terroristic behavior. But what do we achieve by refusing to talk?

Current events leave one wondering whether there may indeed be an all out conflagration between Muslim and Arab countries, Israel, and the West (I am not predicting Armageddon, just a huge and hurtful war). The president says that the terrorists hate our freedom. I think they hate our heavy-handedness in the affairs of their collective lives over centuries past.

I cannot begin to explicate the reasons for all this turmoil over all these years. And I can only begin to speculate on the current motivation of young men and women to give their own lives for the purpose of hurting Americans and other Westerners. But one thing I know. We will never understand it, and never diffuse this vitriol, unless we LISTEN to the people who are motivating and motivated to do this.

If there are people who believe, as they profess, that their goal is to rid the world of Israel and the United States, how did they get there? Is this what they really want, or would they settle for something less, something we might even be willing to do? What if they just want an apology and for us to keep our nose out of their lives? Regardless, do we really think we can kill them all and then have a peaceful world? If we could, what would that

say about us in terms of morality?

No, I do not want to send the terrorists to therapy. But it strikes me as a strategic as well as a moral advantage to let them have their say. Isn't that what they are trying to do with their bombs?

I am sure that I am quite naïve about world affairs. Certainly we cannot sit by without any response if others harm us. But I cannot see any way to reach peace if we continue to act warlike. I do not suggest that we lay down arms, never to pick them up again (although that would be a wonderful world), but is it really necessary to put up the most basic barrier—the refusal to communicate—between ourselves and those who have a beef with us, and with whom we have a beef? If a husband and wife, or brother and sister, or pair of college roommates, took this approach, we would

rightly label their behavior childish, selfish, and unproductive.

In my years of working with students and experiencing various conflicts, the first question I always asked was, "Have you talked with this person about the problem yet?"

Talking is often difficult, frequently painful, and it doesn't always solve the problem. But failing to talk has no solution and only leads to continued conflict or to a relationship destroyed and replaced by a huge, empty gulf. As someone who has spent her years helping sort out roommate conflicts and parent/student difficulties, I know. Is it possible this also applies to world peace?

If I could, I would say on behalf of the United States to all those involved in conflict in the world, "Can we just talk?" What could it hurt? And what if it helped? ■

## Being An Oxymoron: A Liberal Evangelical

*(continued from page 2)*

with the People's Republic of China being the major party picking up our loans. The communists will not have to bury us, as Khrushchev had hoped. Soon they will own us!

It has been said that the difference between a politician and a statesman is that the politician looks to the next election while the statesman looks to the next generation. Given that assessment, we have an absence of statesmen and stateswomen in Washington, D.C. when it comes to

the national debt.

The Bible speaks more about justice that it does about anything else—except for love. But in the end, justice is nothing more than love turned into social policies. It is my own commitment to justice, inadequate though it might be, that makes me the kind of person I am. To that end this Evangelical is more than willing to be labeled a social liberal, even if it does make me a living oxymoron. ■





# Religion and Government: A New Model Needed?

By David Sapp, Senior Pastor Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia

**Note:** This article is based on a speech delivered on July 6, 2004, at the Oxford Roundtable Conference at Oxford University.

When I wrote my doctoral dissertation on religion and politics thirty years ago, there was in the United States no Moral Majority, no Christian Coalition, no Religious Right, and no sense that Christians could vote only for one particular political party and remain true to their faith. I am not really sure what I wrote about.

Today, the landscape is greatly altered, and there is much to write about. Tensions between religion, government, and education have risen to a fevered pitch.

The tension between the government and the religious establishment, for example, has reached such a point that the Supreme Court of the United States has found its docket filled with church-state matters year after year after year. The issues have been myriad: Is prayer permitted in the schools? Is a display of the Ten Commandments permissible in public buildings? May public funds be used to for private, religious schools? May public funds be used to provide scholarships for students preparing for the clergy? Are prayers at school events such as ball-games or graduations permissible? How far can churches go in their efforts to influence government decisions and still maintain their tax exemption? The list goes on and on.

Or, examine the tensions between religious establishments and the schools. Those tensions also have been on the increase. They have arisen over such issues as evolution, creationism, censorship, the wearing of religious symbols, and race, to name just a few. This very summer there was a serious effort at the Southern Baptist Convention to pass a resolution urging families to remove their children from the public schools.

Tensions between the state and the schools have been high as well. Paranoid U.S. school administrators have often misunderstood and over-administered government policies about religion. Private schools have often been at odds with the government over civil rights issues. A host of constituencies have been rankled by issues relating to government funding of religious education.

The issues have been many; the tensions have been high; and the results have been dramatic. Reactions such as the private school movement and the home-school movement have literally changed the face of American education. Differences of opinion about these matters have sharply divided the population.

What is threatened, of course, is cultural unity. The importance of cultural unity is easily dismissed by many who believe that they are pursuing truth that is so important that it the unity of the culture is a secondary concern, and certainly we must remember that there are times when unity must be sacrificed for the sake of truth, and certainly for the sake of justice.

At the same time, it is true that cultural unity is itself a spiritual value. Even when that unity must be shattered for the reign of justice, it must be re-established after the crisis subsides. Otherwise, there can be no stable society and no ongoing free exercise of religion.

Society of course must resolve these issues that threaten its unity, but before any more attempts are made at resolution, it would be well to make an attempt at understanding. Why have the tensions risen so high in recent years? What has prompted so many in my own Baptist tradition to switch sides in the church-state debate? I believe that a part of the answer lies in the rapid increase in our lifetimes of the interaction between cultures. A bit of

historical reflection might help to clarify what I mean.

## History

Throughout history, there have been only two basic models for the relationship between religious and governmental establishments. These are theocracy and church-state separation. These two models define the parameters of possible church-state relations. Either church and state operate in a unity or they operate separately. A given model may fall between these two extremes, but as long as church and state exist, no model can logically fall outside them.

*Theocracy.* Theocracy has been the dominant model for homogenous, tribal, and insulated societies. It developed in these cultures for a variety of reasons.

First, in homogenous cultures, most people shared a common religious faith. This shared faith provided a strong level of social cohesion and provided a natural foundation on which the earliest governments could be built. Theocracies were logical outgrowths of this arrangement.

Second, governments needed the kind of validation that could only be given by religion. Early on, brute force proved inadequate to sustain a government over time. When Moses descended from a mountain holding commandments from God in his hands, however, he had in his hands the power to establish a government. How could such a government have been anything other than a theocracy?

Third, religion was a key factor that established the social boundaries of groups and made them governable. Remember that we commonly speak of “the Roman gods, the Greek gods, the Hebrew God, the Egyptian gods,” and so on. Early religions belonged to places. From the beginning, religion has been a defining factor for cultures. Religion provided a sense of “us-ness” that differentiated one culture or society from

another to form governable units. This was another factor that made theocracy the logical way to organize a society.

Fourth, government and religion had overlapping areas of concern. This made it only natural for them to grow in the same pot. Both religion and government conveyed values, and in homogeneous societies, there was little conflict about what those values were. Normally, they were defined by the dominant religion and implemented by the government. The union, or near union, of religious and governmental establishments developed easily.

Education posed few problems in such a culture. Normally, it was carried out by the religious establishment. There was no distinction between religious and secular education because there was no distinction between sacred and secular in any realm of life.

Over time, of course, theocracies have tended to go out of style. There are still theocracies in the world, of course, but they are clearly on the wane. The ones that remain tend to exist either in form only (as in the state churches of Europe), or in homogenous and insulated cultures where they serve the very important function of reinforcing efforts to ward off intruding cultures and maintain historic identities (as in much of the Muslim world). The long sweep of history, which breaks down cultural boundaries, would seem to indicate that theocracy has a limited future.

*Separation of Church and State.* Theocracies began to fail when multiple religions came to exist under one government. In other words, increasing cultural diversity rendered theocracy obsolete.

The logical first effort at solving the problem of diversity was syncretism, the effort to blend religions. Often, however, syncretism had disastrous results. The infamous case of Ahab and Jezebel serves well to illustrate. With their own inter-cultural marriage in place in the palace, and with a blended culture emerging in the nation, Ahab and Jezebel sought to unite the disparate groups by incorporating elements of Baal worship into the religious practices of Israel. The result, as we all know, was the ignominious end of their reign.

While one would not normally want to hazard a defense of Jezebel, it is probable that her intention was not evil in her own mind. Most likely, she and her husband were seeking to establish cultural unity and bolster social cohesion. The experiment, however, did not work. It did not work because religion was not merely a cultural force. Religion represents something larger than culture, something that opens the door to an eternal dimension. People do not compromise this for the sake of social unity. For this reason, if for no other, engineering religious change has always been a dangerous and often futile undertaking.

Ultimately, the solution to these problems was found in the separation of church and state. This model for the first time accommodated diverse religions living together under a single government. My own Baptist forebears, as members of a persecuted minority, were among its early champions in both England and the United States. As a matter of fact, church-state separation has frequently been called the single most significant Baptist con-

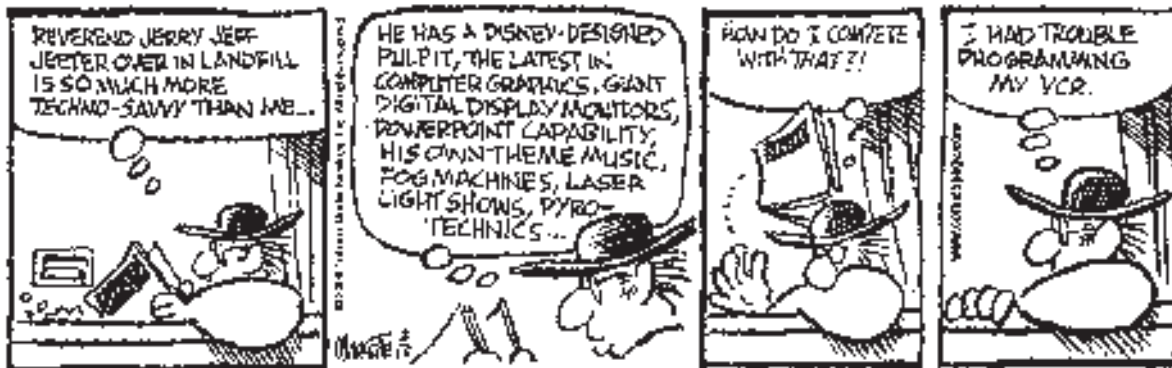
tribution to Western civilization.

The advantages of church-state separation were obvious to the first societies that adopted them. Religious groups did not compete to dominate the government, and so a much higher degree of social harmony became possible. And when government ceased subjugating religion for its own purposes, then faith was set free to grow and to thrive. Church-state separation at last provided a model in which religion and government could coexist amicably without constant wars over religion.

Still, there was a major problem. The societies that adopted church-state separation continued to need the social cohesion that had previously been provided by religion, and they continued to need the validation of their authority that had been provided by religion. The solution to this problem was found in the establishment of what has come to be called "civil religion."

*Civil Religion.* Largely unrecognized until recent decades, civil religion is a loose amalgamation of the commonly agreed upon religious tenets of a given culture. In the United States, civil religion has provided a measure of social cohesion and had to a degree validated the authority of the government.

This is why many Americans desire a strong patriotic element in their Independence Day worship services. They long for the affirmation that their religion can give to their government. Many clergy, on the other hand, are resistant to these patriotic displays. They believe that a religion that endorses government is nothing more than civil religion, and is less than the full Christian faith, which can never be reduced to nationalism.



Many people refer to civil religion disparagingly as a “lowest common denominator faith.” Civil religion is expressed through such means as public prayers, generic references to the divine, and the devotional thoughts offered at public ceremonies. While it certainly has its difficulties, chief among them the tendency to identify faith with nationalism, civil religion does enable many religiously diverse people to share a basic level of religious expression.

The practice of civil religion has become increasingly difficult in our time. Many, if not most, of our church-state tensions revolve around civil religion. The obvious solution to some is to strip culture of every vestige of civil religion. The obvious solution to others is to protect it. This is a highly charged debate because it is about the very nature of who we are as a culture. For many, their very world is at stake in debates about school prayer and displays of the Ten Commandments.

The magnitude of the issue is dramatically illustrated by Southern Baptists (and others like them), who have in a single generation changed sides in the church-state debate. All of a sudden, the time-honored, sacred principle of church-state separation, preached with fervor and frequency in the fundamentalist church of my adolescence, has become anathema. History has now been re-written to claim that separation is a new idea, created and espoused by infidel forces whose sole intention is to destroy the Christian faith.

This opposition to church-state separation is, in my view, sadly misinformed and tragically ill-founded. But advocates of separationism must come to recognize that their opposition is driven by a very real sense of desperation and fear, and that this sense of desperation and fear is rooted in the absolutely correct intuition that the survival of civilization depends upon a basic level of cultural unity. The air that sustains a culture is shared meaning, shared motivation, shared purpose, and shared destiny. Any failure to recognize this will become the Achilles' heel of the separationist movement.

One of the strongest factors influencing the tension over church-state issues in our time is the unprecedented intercultural mix of the 21st century world. Oddly perhaps, it was the mix of cultures that first gave rise to church-state separation, and it is the mix of cultures that is placing stress on it today. Many of us experience this intermingling of cultures most markedly in the presence of heretofore un-experienced religions.

What has changed in the debate about civil religion and church-state separation is that the world has reached a new level of cultural diversity. To this point, the terms society and culture have been used interchangeably in this paper. Here, let us make a distinction. Church-state separation developed as a reaction to merging *societies*. Today, the world is moving rapidly toward merging cultures, i.e., East and West, Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere, Third World and First World. Globalization can be seen in economics, in politics, in education, and in every field of human endeavor.

Still, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington contends that we have relatively little inter-religious mix, at least in the United States. He cites statistics showing that the percentage of Christians in our society has changed very little.<sup>1</sup> Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam still represent miniscule percentages of the U.S. population; Judaism is declining; and, on the other side of the ledger, the huge in-migration of Latin American Christians more than offsets the growth of non-Christian religions.

Yet it is obvious to anyone who is awake that cultural reality, both in the U.S. and beyond, has been dramatically altered in some significant way in just a few years. The numbers represented by non-Christian faiths may be small, but their very presence is a dramatic change. In my personal experience, the erection of a Mosque on I-75 just south of Toledo, Ohio, and the effort of a Hindu group to buy a church I served as pastor a few years ago were dramatic and jolting events. Huntington's observation is obviously true, but it is also true that in much of the West today a Buddhist is no longer a heathen in a faraway, mys-

terious land. She is a neighbor living in the house next door. A Muslim is not a pagan in “far-off Araby,” but a co-worker in the next office. A Hindu is not an emaciated man behind an emaciated cow in a picture from India. He is my classmate. The very perception created by the new presence of these religions is a dramatic new element in our culture.

Furthermore, anyone who is awake has noticed that, in addition to many more religious groups living in proximity to one another, many more cultural groups do as well. When the first Cuban moved into my neighborhood when I was a child, I knew no one else who spoke Spanish. Now, in the city where I live, we have Spanish grocery stores, television stations, ATM machines, and taxis. When I graduated from college, I was impressed that one could hear a vast number of languages spoken on New York City subways. By 1990, the church I served in Atlanta had students from 52 different nations studying in its English as a Second Language program.

This increasing cultural diversity offers many great, enriching advantages, but it is a challenge to social cohesion. Many consider it a challenge to their religion as well.

In this environment, civil religion is breaking down as a unifying and authoritative force. Consensus on church-state matters is no longer easy to attain. The fabric of society is being stretched to the breaking point in some cases. Increased cultural diversity has helped to lead us toward a very unclear future.

### Future

As this unclear future unfolds, there are several developments, or potential developments, that offer clues for cultural unity. Here are a few, offered with no sense of finality, but with a hope that they might be a catalyst that leads to more creative reflection.

*A New Religion.* Could a major new religion be born that would give unity to a world culture? The idea strikes me as profoundly bizarre. The only religions I have known are the ones that are centuries old. Most people have never seriously contemplated the pos-



sibility of a significant new religion. Yet, to be fair, no new religion has ever been anticipated. The fact that the idea sounds strange is not a sufficient argument for dismissing it.

Famed historian Arnold Toynbee observed that new religions sometimes arise out of the clash of cultures,<sup>2</sup> and also that the major event of our time well could be the clash of East and West.<sup>3</sup> If he were correct on both counts, then it would be at least logical to ask whether a new religion could be born.

If a new religion were born and did succeed, it would almost certainly incorporate elements of existing religions, and would serve as a unifying force in the new world it inhabits. Interestingly, this has been the nature of the successful new religions of the past. Nevertheless, in a world where secularism is growing, a major new religion seems unlikely.

*Religious unification.* Since before the Apostle Paul, Christians have dreamed of a time when “every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10-11). We still dream of it, and as a serious Christian, I personally pray for it.

At the same time, I am keenly aware that Muslims dream of the world united in the worship of Allah. I am also keenly aware that many others would establish cultural unity by the conversion of the world to their religions. Ironically, this desire for unity has led to great division as the religions of the world have competed with one another.

Even the Bible, however, never maintains that the whole world will be converted. The hymn cited in Philippians (“every knee shall bow”) alludes to the dream of the faithful, but the Bible’s apocalyptic visions of the end-time depict massive disbelief until the last days. The religious unification of the world would certainly give us cultural unity, but it is not likely to happen.

*A Secular Society.* Another potential development is the elimination of religion from society. Many believe that a process in this direction has already

begun, and that it will contribute to cultural unity by eliminating one of the main points that divides modern societies.

The evidence that is usually cited for rising secularism includes such occurrences as the decline of religion in Europe and the erosion of the main-line churches in the United States. Even the recent rise of fundamentalisms around the world can be interpreted as nothing more than a last gasp surge of reaction against the tidal wave of oncoming secularism.

Still, there is significant reason to believe that secularism is not the path of the future. Humanity really does seem to be incurably religious. The human race really does seem incapable of divorcing itself from religious faith. The rise of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism in much of the world may well provide ample evidence that religion has a future that is every bit as strong as its past.

In addition, cultures and governments will continue to need both validation and social cohesion. Religion has been the only effective source for meeting these needs throughout history. A mere belief in the common good has never held a society together.

Soviet Communism was a prime example. Without any religion at its center, the Soviet system did not survive. Spiritual poverty may well have been one of its fatal flaws.

*A Redefinition of Civil Religion.* Civil religion seems to be undergoing a redefinition that would allow it to accommodate a wider diversity of faiths. Clergy are learning to pronounce public prayers in the name of generic deity. People are learning to exchange generic holiday greetings. Everywhere there are public accommodations to the new “pluralism.” Civil religion clearly seems to be straining toward an expression that embrace people of all religions while respecting their cultural and religious differences.

Such a development is already meeting with resistance where it is occurring, but it seems to be overcoming that resistance. No matter how much Christian clergy complain about

being asked to pray without invoking the name of Jesus, most continue to do it. Perhaps an expanded civil religion could contribute to the unity of a much more diverse culture than we have known in the past.

My guess, however, is that its contribution to unity would be somewhat weaker than the contribution made by civil religion in the past. Still, since civil religion has shown such a marked durability, we cannot discount the possibility that it will evolve into a form that will suit a new situation.

On the other hand, some would contend that civil religion is dying. The current changes would seem to be stretching some people too far. Only time can really tell us whether civil religion will adapt or die. There are too many questions to allow anyone to speak clearly now, but it is time to begin the conversation.

*A Redefinition of Separationism.* A fourth possibility for the future is that the separationist model may be redefined to fit an increasingly diverse world. This would seem to be the most likely scenario simply because separationism is the only model so far that has worked effectively in diverse settings. Today’s dilemma is that theocracy no longer works as a means of establishing cultural unity in most societies, and church-state separation is spitting and sputtering in others.

In this environment, a redefinition of separationism is not only likely, but it is necessary. The stresses on church-state separation are too dangerous to be allowed to continue. One of the chief causes of those stresses is increasing cultural diversity, and that cause cannot be eliminated. Therefore, some form of accommodation must be found.

The church-state separation that was adequate in the past is clearly inadequate for a more diverse future. A clue to the changes that are needed lies in the very fact that we refer to this model as “separation of *church* and state.” The church may have been kept separate from the state, but it retained some special privileges. The church was presumed to be the primary religious establishment. The homogeneity that



made that possible is rapidly breaking down. Separation of church and state in the world of the future must be applied to the full range of religious establishments, not just the church. This is the only chance the world has for cultural unity.

In truth, this change is already well underway. Most people have not been aware of it, nor have most people been at work trying to make it happen. In fact, just the opposite has been the case. Many Christians have resisted this change powerfully, reacting with visceral hostility, sensing that their faith is being challenged, along with their entire world-view. To some degree they are correct.

Several characteristics of the new order have already become obvious, and they are responsible for producing the reaction of fear that has shown itself so often. First, as was indicated above, *Christianity is rapidly losing its special status*. No matter how much we may wax nostalgic for that special status, no matter how angrily former Judge Roy Moore and company protest its loss, that special status for Christianity is simply not possible, nor is it morally right, in a religiously diverse culture. We are rapidly moving into a world where that special status will be a detriment, not an advantage to Christians.

Second, *other religions are being accorded a larger place in the public forum*. Community services of worship are becoming inter-*faith* services. Clergy organizations are sometimes also becoming inter-*faith*. Some religious people have reacted to this change by withdrawing from the public arena, but this is counter-productive. Religious withdrawal from the culture ultimately erodes the foundation of social unity on which religion rests.

Third, *our version of civil religion is changing*. To some extent a redefined civil religion (the third possibility listed above) is a corollary of a redefined separationism. Personally, I believe that civil religion cannot be annihilated. That is because religion, in the final analysis, cannot be extricated from culture. Religion is other than culture, larger than culture, and must never be

captured by culture; but a culture cannot live without religion, no matter how diverse it may become. When religions become diverse, their adherents must still find ways to speak of God, and even to God, together. A common bond of faith, no matter how low the common denominator, simply must be found.

Short of one religion converting the adherents of all the others, this common bond can only be some form of civil religion. Civil religion certainly has clear and present dangers: It sometimes offers itself as a false substitute for real saving faith. It can serve to dilute "real" religion. It sometimes leads to very difficult social tensions. But those dangers are the price that we must pay to gain the help of civil religion in moving our culture toward an ever-elusive unity.

Human beings simply are not likely to give up public religious discourse. The challenge, then, is to shape that discourse so it becomes a unifying, and not a dividing, factor.

#### Conclusion

The urgent task before us, then, is to redefine and safeguard the separation of all religious establishments from the state. While this may be frightening to many, it is important not only to the unity of a diverse world, but also to the health and vitality of religion. Our Baptist forebears were not wrong about this fact.

A host of people fear, understandably, that separation of religion and government will lead to the death of faith. In actuality, however, history has proven just the opposite to be the case. Wherever separation has been practiced, it has provided a fertile environment for religion. This may be even truer in a world where multiple religions are present in a single culture.

From my perspective as a Christian, I am particularly impressed that a more broadly defined separationism may offer unique benefits to Christianity. As the new order challenges religions to un-harness themselves from the cultural restraints of the past, those religions will have the opportunity to find greater relevance in a larger culture. The Christian faith has a historical

identity well-suited to such a challenge. Christianity has a long history of successfully transcending cultures. This ability to transcend cultures was seen when Christianity moved from Asia Minor to the Roman world, then when it moved from the Roman world to the European and Eastern Orthodox worlds, again when it moved from Europe to the Americas, and today as it moves from the developed world to both the Third World and to the Asian world. Christianity is well equipped not only to survive, but also to benefit from the changes that are coming.

True, Christianity is losing the validation of its culture. The faith must now prove, and not assume, its relevance to the life of the community. In the long run, this is a benefit to Christianity, a healthy nudge from the nest of its infancy. A faith that cannot prove its relevance to the life of its culture is already on its deathbed.

Obviously, we live in times of incredible tension. My own country is involved in military conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our Congress is bitterly divided. Our population is at odds as well, especially on matters of religion and politics. Our educational system is a key casualty of this strain. Unfortunately, my nation is not alone. Other nations are experiencing similar stresses. A world divided is a world in desperate need of cultural unity, and many are seeking it in a full retreat toward theocracy.

But God is not in that whirlwind. God is in the still small voice that calls us back to the faith of our forebears, back to the lessons we should have learned long ago, back to one of the noblest ideals our Baptist tradition has given the world: the utter separation of the religious establishment from government. ■

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1 Samuel Huntington, "One Nation, Under God? Numbers Say Yes," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 20, 2004, B1.

2 Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial and The World and the West* (Oxford University Press, 1948), 193.

3 Toynbee, 233.

# Today I Saw A Man

By Wade McCoy, MD Bethany Oklahoma

Today I saw a man. We agreed to meet at the nursing home. His wife, Millie, has Alzheimer's disease. She requires twenty-four hour care. I met him to make a medical visit with her. As we got off the elevator, he bounded toward her room like he was headed to the ice cream counter, moving down the hall at a fast pace on his way to see Millie. At the end of the hall he entered the last door to the left. Today I saw a real man.

Today I saw a man almost bounce into the room of his ill wife. He knelt down beside her chair, more like a grandchild than a husband. He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead and said, "How are you today Millie?" He brushed her hair out of her face and commented on how good she looked. Today I saw a real man.

Today I saw a man go into the bathroom and get a hairbrush. He brushed her hair gently and rubbed the back of her head. He told her how pretty she looked. He looked down at her feet and said, "Millie, your shoe is untied." He then knelt before her and tied her shoe before urging her to get up and go for a walk. Today I saw a real man.

Today I saw a man recognize that his wife's lips were dry. He went to the table and poured her a glass of cold water. He then approached her carefully and placed the straw in her mouth. He patiently urged her to drink because she looked dry. Today I saw a real man.

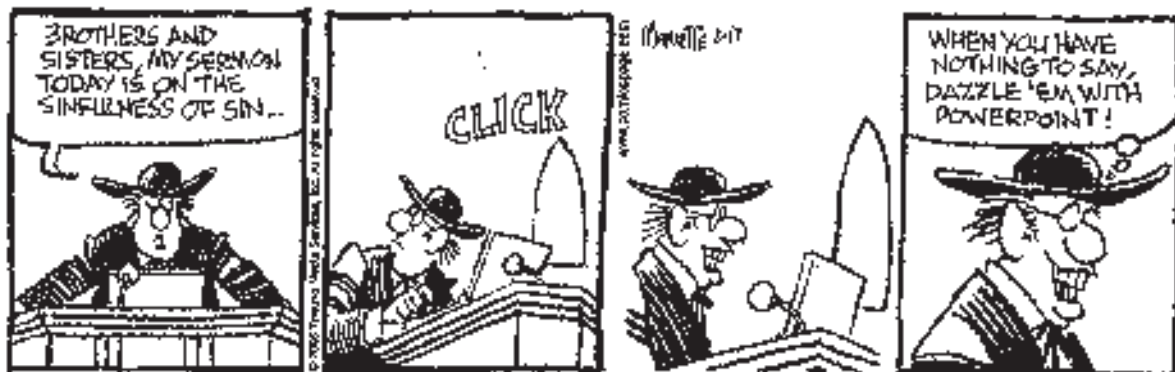
Today I saw a man take the arm of his frail wife and walk to the door. He walked her out into the hall and had her sit down while we reviewed her chart. He sat with me and we looked over her medical data. We visited about her disease and her demise. I watched as his emotions turned to grief. He wept. He didn't sob for himself—on all that he was missing. He didn't sob because of the apparent burden his wife was placing on him. He sobbed when he said, "I looked at some pictures of Millie taken years ago. I remembered how smart and alive and lovely she was." Today I saw a real man.

Today I saw a man lead his wife down the hall to the dining room to feed her. He would give her every bite she took at the meal. She no longer feeds herself. I parted ways with them,

but today I saw a real man.

Today I saw a man, a Christian man—a person that has truly taken on the character of Christ. He is a humble servant, though he's also a successful attorney. I saw a man put his wife's needs before his own. I saw a man sacrificing many hours of his day for his ill wife.

At that moment, I realized that we sometimes do catch a glimpse of how Christ affects people. I realized that in comparison to this scene, many other matters that concern Christians seem petty. It became clear to me that the Christian message is more about servanthood and less about which political party speaks for God. I understood the Christian message is about sacrificial loving more than it's about overcoming the band wagon of moral issues that preoccupy the Christian community cultural war machine. I understood that this message of Christ is always more about being loving than it is about being "right." Today I saw a man, a Christian man that looked more like Christ than I could have ever imagined. ■



# Faith, Family, and Finances

By James E. Carter, Director Church Minister Relations, LA (ret.) Nachitoches, LA

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The pastor proposed an ambitious and far-reaching outreach plan. He presented it first to the deacon body, or the church board, and then to the congregation. Each group, especially the congregation, had some reservations about the plan, but it was adopted.

Why was the plan adopted with these reservations? The plan was adopted because both the board and the church body trusted the pastor. The adoption of the plan was not due to the merits of the plan necessarily, nor the overcoming of the reservations that some members had about the plan, or even because all the questions were satisfactorily answered. The plan was adopted because the people trusted the pastor. They trusted the pastor because they believed that he was a person of integrity.

The personal integrity of the minister is at the heart of both the minister’s personal life and his professional life. When a minister faces ethical issues in his or her life, they directly relate to that minister’s personal integrity.

The word integrity derives from the mathematical term *integer* which has to do with wholeness, one. The person of integrity is the person who has it together, who has a unity or wholeness about life. This type of integrity is built on the minister’s relationship with Jesus Christ as personal Savior and an on-going faith relationship with Christ. Integrity does not just happen; it is intentional. With good reason, people expect

a minister to be a person of integrity. An effective, ethical Christian minister is a person of integrity.

But this integrity is often tested on several fronts. Consider at least three areas in which the minister’s personal integrity is often tested, three vital and essential areas in the minister’s life: faith, family, and finances.<sup>1</sup>

## Faith

Frankly, your faith relationship with God is not just a spiritual matter, or even a religious matter; for a minister it is also an ethical matter. How real is your own faith? How sincere is your faith? How authentic is your faith in God?

The minister is a pilgrim of faith as well as a ministering person. Continual spiritual growth is as important for the minister as it is for the parishioner. The Apostle Paul advised, “Run in such a way as to get the prize. . . . I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24, 27, NIV).

For one thing, this means that a minister’s lifestyle should be consistent with, not contradictory to, the gospel. Preaching restraint and personal discipline while practicing conspicuous consumerism is not consistent. Asking for sacrificial giving and personal commitment from church people while refusing to give sacrificially or to alter personal plans to meet another’s needs is not a convincing testimony of Christlikeness.

In one of my pastorates I would often park next to a white Cadillac with a red leather interior in the minister’s parking area of a denominational hospital in a major Texas city. That luxury car sported a personalized license plate with the Greek word *doulos*, meaning “servant” or “slave.” In a metropolitan area with many pressing human needs, *doulos*

may not be an appropriate insignia for a white Cadillac with a red leather interior.

But this also means that a minister’s faith must be a growing faith. Learning about God, the Bible, and the relationship between God and humankind is a lifelong activity. As life unfolds and you encounter new life experiences your understanding of God and of spiritual matters should grow. Spiritual matters always have a challenge to them and an element of mystery about them. Your faith must always be a growing, developing, deepening faith.

In handling the holy, ministers can become too familiar with spiritual things. The proverb reminds us that “familiarity breeds contempt.” Few ministers will treat the Bible or spiritual disciplines with contempt, but some ministers may treat both the Bible and spiritual disciplines with such familiarity that they lose some of their mystery and wonder.

When David consolidated his kingship over Israel and established the capital at Jerusalem, he moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. The narrative in 2 Samuel 6:6-7 records, “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God because the oxen stumbled. The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died beside the ark of God.” One obvious element in Uzzah’s death was that he showed too much familiarity with the holy.

Ministers can become too familiar with the holy. The spiritual disciplines and exercises they teach others can become perfunctory to them. A serious ethical issue arises when ministers require of others what they do not practice themselves or what they practice so routinely that the act loses all meaning. No matter how often a

minister performs a wedding or baptism, conducts a funeral, preaches a sermon, or offers a prayer, the event must never become a repetitious act with no heart in it.

Your faith impacts how you handle the Bible. For the preacher, the Bible should never become simply the source of sermons and the text for preaching. The minister should read the Bible devotionally. As ministers we should approach the Bible "formatively," that the Bible speaks to my life and forms or reforms my life, rather than just "informationally," so that the Bible simply contains information to be explored and taught or preached. We must allow the Bible to continue to speak to our lives.<sup>2</sup>

Other reading such as classic Christian devotionals, sermons by pulpit masters, or contemporary devotional materials should also be used, of course. The growing minister needs to read theological, biblical, historical, and ethical materials as well as more general works. But the Bible and its message for the minister is foundational to faith.

The common spiritual disciplines that ministers recommend to others must become their practice if their

faith lives are to ring true. You do not have to look for esoteric methods or hidden keys to spiritual growth. For ministers, and all Christians, spiritual growth comes from the regular practice of prayer, Bible study, worship, and witness.

Your faith helps to form your character. God commanded Moses to say to the people of Israel, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2, NIV). Jesus commanded his disciples to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48, NIV). The word translated "perfect" can mean "whole" or "complete" or "perfect for its purpose." Whatever meaning is assigned to the word, the basis of comparison is God, made known in Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter admonished us to "grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18, NIV). To follow the directive of Moses, the command of Christ, and the admonition of Peter, a minister must continue to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a student of the Word of God, and a practitioner of the disciplines of the Christian life.

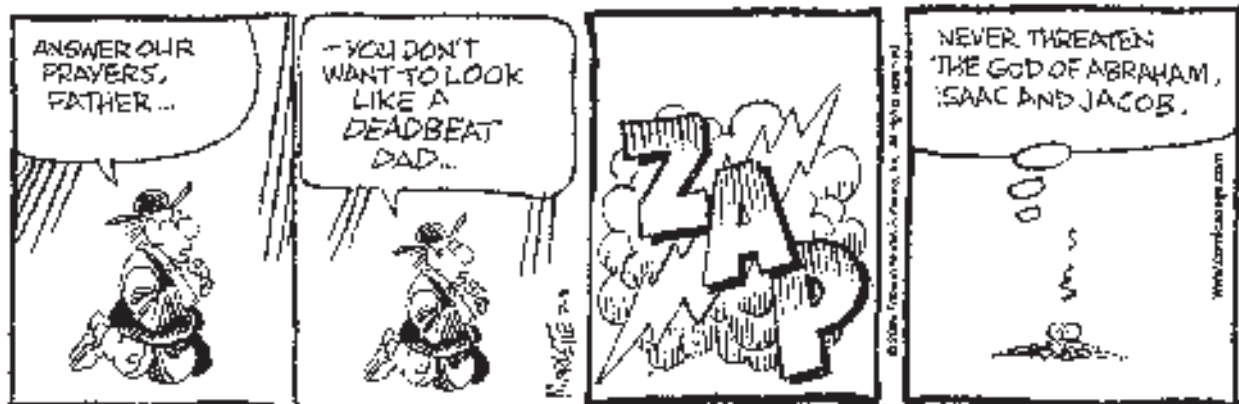
Your faith is essential to your ministry as well as your personal life.

## Family

Family is another area in which the minister's integrity is often a matter of concern. For many years a billboard on Louisiana Highway 1 just north of the city of Natchitoches, Louisiana, exhibited a message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The message proclaimed, "No other success compensates for failure in the home." This quotation should be prominently displayed on every minister's desk and written indelibly in his heart.

In American non-Catholic churches, the general assumption is that the minister will be a married person with a family. That assumption is reinforced by the ministerial qualifications for both pastors and deacons given in the pastoral epistles (1 Tim 3:1-11; Titus 1:6-9). Some church groups even require that ministers be married and have children before they are eligible for ministerial leadership positions. With the median age of seminary students increasingly rising, many ministers have families before they enter the ministry. And, many of their spouses did not intend to marry a minister.

The stress of ministry can create





stress on a marriage. How satisfying is the marriage? What is the quality of the relationship between the minister and spouse?

A Mississippi Southern Baptist pastor conducted research on marital satisfaction among pastor's wives for his doctoral dissertation. He discovered four factors that caused a lack of satisfaction in their marriage. The four factors were: the disruption of time together, the state of anxiety brought on by church expectations, loneliness, and fewer days of dual devotions.<sup>3</sup>

The primary relationship in a clergy family is the relationship between the minister and spouse. That husband-wife bond must be stable and strong before the family can be stable and strong.

Minister's marriages are often considered as models for marriage in the church and the community. Healthy marriages can model to others how a couple can remain in love, stay married, and function as a Christian couple even when dealing with stress, long work hours, inadequate income, and the demands of children. Ministerial marriages can be a positive model of the Christian home.

But what if the model is negative? In a study of ministerial marriages David and Vera Mace wrote: "A Christian minister's task is to proclaim the message of divine love and to help those who respond to it to grow in love for one another. A married minister can therefore be reasonably expected to provide in his own marriage relationship an image and example of how other people, through their united love for God, can grow in the quality of their love for each other. When a minister's marriage does not demonstrate the warmth and tenderness of human love at its best, an observer could justifiably say, 'If his religion doesn't work in this closest of all human relationships, how can we be sure that it is really true?'"<sup>4</sup>

For many years, divorce in a minister's family was unthinkable. Troubled clergy marriages continued

in quiet desperation or armed truce. Today some of those marriages are being terminated. The incidence of divorce among clergy couples is higher now, but it is still not well accepted. The failure of a clergy marriage is considered a tragedy, in many cases a fatal tragedy, as far as continuation of ministry is concerned.

The problems ministers may have with their children also adds to the significance of family. Minister's children are not really a great deal different from other children. They face the same stresses and temptations as others. And they experience the same achievements and accomplishments as others. The incidence of ministerial problem children is not likely any higher than other groups, but may be more apparent due to the high visibility of minister's families, as well as some unreal expectations for these children. Some high achievers whose names are recognizable to all were minister's children. J. Clark Hensley suggested, "*Look at Who's Who* and you will discover more sons and daughters of clergymen than any other profession."<sup>5</sup>

With these things in mind, consider two keys to a successful family life for ministers:

*Time together is a key for successful ministerial family life.* Obviously, time together is a difficult feat for a ministering family. Time together can be reserved for the family by scheduling it and protecting it. Those times are just as important as other appointments a minister may make, and, actually, more important than a lot of the other appointments.

A seminary chapel speaker once said that if a minister were away from home every evening, it would not make any difference to his children whether he was at church or at a bar. He was not home with them. Perhaps this is an overstatement, but it makes a valid point. Time spent with family is necessary for a strong and fulfilling family life. Every preacher has probably sermonized about affluent parents who gave their children everything they needed but themselves--that same

principle applies to the minister.

I preached a sermon one Sunday morning on the Christian home in which I said something like "you may not catch as many fish or get as low a score in golf when you include your children, but the time with the children is important." That night the eight year old son of a university professor asked me if I would preach that sermon again. That afternoon his father had taken him to a park to swing him and to play with him. The time they spent together meant a lot to that child.

Commitment is another key for a successful and satisfying family life for the minister. For each partner, no question should exist about the personal commitment in love that each has made to the other.

*Commitment is also a way of building family solidarity.* Children who see by their parents' actions and attitudes that they love and trust one another grow up with a model of commitment in Christian marriage. However marital love is defined, exclusive commitment to one another must be at the center.

Commitment to one another is both undergirded and strengthened by commitment to Christ. In the Maces' study, 63 percent of the husbands and 65 percent of the wives cited "shared Christian commitment and spiritual resources" as the leading advantage of ministerial marriages.<sup>6</sup>

By the very nature of ministry, ministers are often placed with persons of the opposite sex other than their mates. This calls for a high degree of trust on the part of the spouse. It also calls on the minister to be a person of absolute integrity and one whom a spouse can trust because of his or her commitment.

But what if the minister is not married? Ideally, no difference should exist between a single minister and a married minister. Since we live with the actual rather than the ideal, we know that in many cases a church may hesitate to call a single minister. People may question why that minister is single. Married persons may be

suspicious of an unmarried minister spending time with their spouse in the course of church work. Parents may be hesitant to trust their children with a single minister.

Of course, the church should give consideration to whether the single minister is widowed, divorced, or a young minister still in school or just out of school.

A church should never expect a single minister to spend more time in ministry just because he or she does not have a spouse and a family. And if the minister is widowed or divorced and has children at home, the family responsibilities become even greater. A church should call a person to ministry on the basis of that person's dedication to Christ and the ability to perform the tasks required. Neither should a church attempt to pay an individual less money for the same or similar ministry just because that minister does not have a family to support. And the single minister should be very careful about dating persons in the church family--generally, it is not a good idea.

The same principles of ethical behavior and personal integrity apply to the single minister as to the married minister. In some cases, the single minister will have to be even more certain that he or she has lived ethically and above suspicion for the ministry to be effective.

The effectiveness of ministry is something to be considered in the minister's family life. When the minister has a wholesome and satisfying relationship with spouse and children then that person can be more effective in ministry and more fulfilled as a person. Ministers find it difficult to fight the devil in the world, the deacons at the church, and the darling at home all at the same time. Marital satisfaction adds to the personal peace and satisfaction of the minister.

### **Finances**

A third stress point in ministerial life is finances. My college religion professor, R. H. Whittington, often told his students, "Boys, pay your bills and keep your zippers up." He thus

identified finances as a major problem for ministers and therefore an important issue in ministerial ethics.

The warning was well-deserved. Many ministers have not perfected the ability to manage money. Clergy have become so notorious in financial mismanagement that in some circles people are warned against lending money to the professions that begin with "p": plumbers, painters, prostitutes, and preachers. The low salary level of most ministers could well be a contributing factor.

Although ministerial salaries have risen in recent years, the executive director of the Minister's Financial Services Association in Lubbock, Texas, observed that when a minister's salary is compared to the median income of people across the nation with graduate education, many ministers "could possibly be significantly underpaid."<sup>7</sup>

According to a Church Compensation Report compiled by *Christianity Today*, Christian clergy salaries rose an average of only 7.4 percent during the four-year period under study, which was less than half the inflation rate for that same four-year span. Even when total compensation, which rose 12.6 percent in the same period, was considered, pastor's salaries still lagged behind inflation, which was 16 percent for that period.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Christianity Today* survey only 1 percent of the pastors felt they were overpaid. Sixty-six percent of the senior pastors and 59 percent of the solo pastors thought that they were fairly paid. That means, then, that 34 percent of the senior pastors and 41 percent of the solo pastors felt that they were underpaid. Three follow-up studies by *Christianity Today International* in the decade of the 1990s were consistent with the original survey.<sup>9</sup>

Churches often offer their ministers a pay package in which they designate a lump sum for pastoral compensation in the church budget. The minister is then given the responsibility of dividing total compensa-

tion into personal pay, housing and utility allowances, automobile and other ministry related expenses, and retirement benefits. The danger in this approach is that many ministers, especially younger ones with young families, may opt for the immediate money needed for expenses and neglect to put money aside for retirement, the education of children, or other future needs. A better approach is for the church to divide the compensation into personal income, ministry-related expenses reimbursed to the minister, and expenses for retirement and insurance.

Given the fact that the minister's salary is below average and that his or her family has the same needs as similar families in the community, many ministers have performed nothing short of the financially miraculous in adequately feeding, clothing, and educating their families. However, there are enough examples of ministers who have owed money to many merchants in town, who have been late in paying their bills, or who have expected discounts, gifts, or special favors that the belief persists that ministers cannot manage money.

Church leaders do not appreciate being embarrassed by their minister's financial irresponsibility. The discipline to plan a budget, the ability to live within that budget, and the art of balancing a checkbook are all essential skills for a Christian minister. Handling finances responsibly may even be seen as a spiritual discipline. The failure to handle finances properly has diminished the witness of many ministers.

Richard Foster referred to the "dark side of money" and the "light side of money." The "dark side of money" relates to the way money can be a threat to a relationship with God. The "light side of money" refers to the way in money can be used to enhance a relationship with God and bless humankind.<sup>10</sup>

The misuse of credit is an expression of the dark side of money. Many ministerial families are drowning in an ocean of debt. Well-meaning,

good-intentioned people have often encouraged ministers into more credit than they can service on their ministerial salaries. Businesses may think they are helping by extending easy credit to their minister. But before the church leader knows it, the total amount of money owed may be more than he can handle. The result may not be positive either for the ministry in general or for this minister in particular.

Related to that, the responsible handling of debt is another essential in Christian money management. Taking their cue from Romans 13:8, some think that a Christian should have little or no debt. Some debt, such as the purchase of a home, may be unavoidable. But the overwhelming burden of more debt than can be safely serviced should be avoided.

Ministers are often given professional discounts by health professionals and personal discounts by businesses. While that practice may not be as widespread as it once was, it is still prevalent in many locales. It probably began as an attempt to help the minister. The merchant was favorable to the church and friendly toward the parson. Knowing that the minister's salary was low, he tried to help the preacher by giving a discount. The health professional also recognized the minister as a fellow professional in a caring profession and responded by giving a professional discount. Also, as a non-profit organization that functioned for the general well-being of the community, a church discount to the minister was considered a form of donation.

The minister's insistence on a discount, however, or inquiry about a discount before a purchase, only adds to the perception of the minister as a money-grubber. Some ministers have perfected the art of begging or of making subtle suggestions to the extent that people feel an obligation to do them special favors.

If a person knows that an individual is a minister and voluntarily offers a discount, that is a different situation. Then the minister may feel

free to accept it as a gift and respond accordingly, including a "thank you" note for the kindness. That is different from placing the clergy sign next to the gas tank of the car or of making an issue out of being a minister when the introductions are made. Some people will give gifts to their minister as acts of love, not in response to hints or requests or in an attempt to curry favor. These gifts are graciously accepted for what they are.

The minister should certainly practice the basic principles of Christian money management, beginning with Christian stewardship. By definition, a steward is one who manages the affairs of another. Christian stewardship speaks to a Christian's management of what God has entrusted to that person. Christian stewardship is the total response of an individual to the grace of God. While stewardship is often narrowly defined only in terms of money, it involves more than money. All that a minister is, as well as all that a minister owns, is a trust from God. How that trust is managed is Christian stewardship.

When it comes to money, the personal practice of Christian stewardship is essential. For many ministers, the tithe is considered a biblical standard and a minimum starting point for Christian stewardship. A minister's message on stewardship will hardly ring true if the minister has not practiced as well as taught generous giving. We must practice what we preach.

Faith, family, and finances. These are three areas of major concern for ministers. These three obviously are not the only issues involved in ministerial ethics. But they are each important areas in the minister's personal life, which can hardly be separated from the minister's professional life. In these areas, the person and the profession are closely intertwined. How they are managed will go a long way toward determining the minister's effectiveness. Indeed, they determine the minister's integrity. Handling faith, family, and finances well will allow him or her to be a good minister. ■

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- 1 The basis for this article is found in Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004.
  - 2 Charles B. Bugg, "Professional Ethics Among Ministers," *Review and Expositor* (Fall 1989), 562-653.
  - 3 Glenn R. Putnam, An *Investigation of the Relationship of Marital Pressures to the Marital Satisfaction of the Wives of Southern Baptist Ministers* (Ed. D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1990), 44-46.
  - 4 David and Vera Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Marriages?* Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 24-25.
  - 5 J. Clark Hensley, *Preacher Behave!* (Jackson, Miss.: Dallas Printing Co., 1978), 9.
  - 6 Mace, 33.
  - 7 Helen Parmley, "Pastor's Pay in Area Leads U. S.," *Dallas(TX) Morning News*, October 17, 1987, 15-A.
  - 8 David Briggs, "Clergy Salaries Lag Rate of Inflation," *Alexandria (LA) Daily Town Talk*, March 21, 1992, C-8. For the complete report see the 1992 Church Compensation Report, Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Inc., 1991.
  - 9 James D. Berkley, "What Pastors Are Paid," *Leadership* (Spring, 1992), 89; John C. LaRue, Jr., "Seven Findings about Pastor Pay," *Christianity Today/Your Church* (March/April, 2000), 88.
  - 10 Richard Foster, *Money, Sex, and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 20-23.

# Sunday—Marathon Day

By Martin E. Marty, Martin Marty Center University of Chicago Divinity School

Yesterday, 40,000 atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Jews, and secularists gathered on the lakefront in our city for a sacred tribal rite. And seventy-four days from now, thousands will gather at a huge theater near the lakeshore to celebrate another rite. “You’re just kidding,” you might say. So I’d better explain.

At 8 a.m. on Sunday, 40,000 runners participated in the 28th LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon. They were supported or viewed by thousands, while others watched or listened to a broadcast of the event at 10 a.m.—church time. As for the other event, I learned of it in a story about a Chicagoan who was eager to trade for a ticket to a possible future White Sox play-off game. His offer: “fifth-row passes to a sold-out, Christmas Eve performance of *Wicked*.” My wife assures me that *Wicked* is an enjoyable musical—a nothing wrong with it. But:

You might think that this week’s column should be called not *Sightings* but *Squintings*, because these evidences of “secularization” or “resacralization” on new terms are not headline items. But they occur a) on the Lord’s Day and then b) on the eve of one of the two holiest days on the Christian calendar. And this in a very reli-

gious city—not “Bible Belt Buckle” religious, but still heavily Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and “African American.”

But Chicago is really no different from anywhere else. Sunday morning has simply and triumphantly become Marathon Day in most cities. We can remember when Jewish bartenders in Milwaukee would substitute for Christian bartenders on Christmas Eve so the latter could attend mass or other worship. Will the attendees on Christmas Eve at *Wicked* all be non-Christians? Not likely. Eighty percent of America’s citizens identify with “Christian,” which led to my tongue-in-cheek deduction that the runners and the play-goers had to be non-Christian. Otherwise “Christians” have given away their Holy Day and Holiest Night.

Time to editorialize: Also about 80 percent of the American people when polled are ready to coerce witness to God in public places, on courtroom and public-school walls. They want the state to deliver religion—even Southern Baptists want this!—to mixed captive citizenries. The marathon runners wore shorts without pockets, but when they pulled on slacks, they carried money fortified by the slogan “In God We Trust,” and

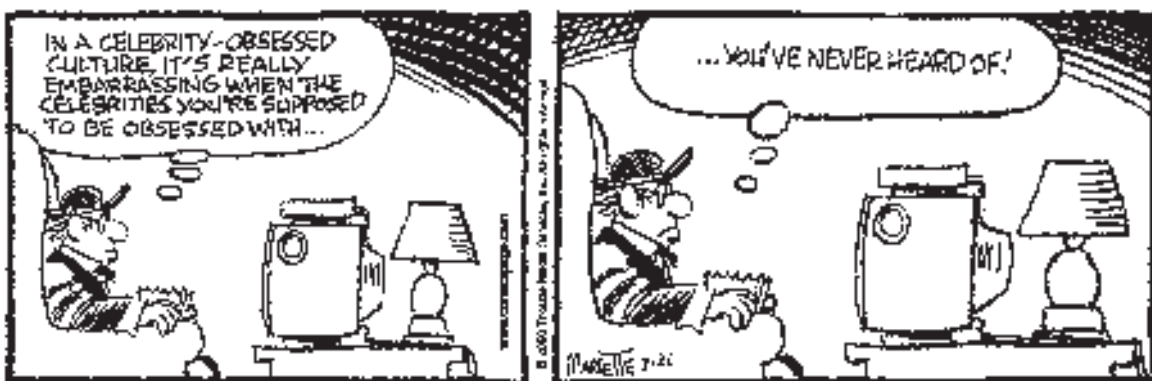
will head later in the week to public high school games where they and their children will sing “God Bless America.”

The question: Why insist on the legal support and not the voluntary? America, most scholars agree, displayed religious vitality because churches and other worshipping communities drew on voluntary support and gathered free congregations. If legally privileged or coerced endorsement and worship of God is supposed to have a good effect on religion, where is the evidence?

Now it’s time to protect myself. I know that marathon running can be very “spiritual.” And the races can raise money for good causes: 6,000 of the participants ran for 43 charities (and generated \$100 million for our local economy).

The single point here is that indifference to worship and the activities of religious communities is a voluntary choice. Support, when it still comes, does not result from putting God in state-backed locales. Secularization results from free choice. ■

*This article originally appeared in Sightings (10/10/05), a publication of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.*





# Baptizing Illegal Aliens

By David F. D'Amico, CBF Missionary for Hispanic Immigrants Carey, NC

During the 1970s I taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana of Fort Worth on the north side of the city was without a pastor. We knew some of the members because when we arrived in Fort Worth from Argentina, we became members of the church and they welcomed us very warmly.

Six of the church leaders came to see me at home to ask me about becoming interim pastor of the church for six months. We discussed my responsibilities and I agreed to serve. The six months stretched into thirty months as the congregation was happy with my leadership and I was happy ministering to them.

During that time there was a lay person from Mexico who was very enthusiastic about evangelizing. His name was Hermano (brother) Caceres. He was a character—a genuine leader and very funny. In his humble ways he would exhort others to become more evangelistic toward visitors.

Caceres invited two Mexican illegal aliens to attend the church—a father and his son, a youth. They were

befriended by the membership and after a few months they made professions of faith and asked for baptism. It was a joyous occasion when I baptized them—Don Pedro and Carlos. They worked in construction without legal papers like millions do these days in the USA. No one in the church made a big deal that they were illegal; they were part of the church family.

One Sunday Brother Caceres came to Bible Study and with sadness told me: “La Migra se llevo a Don Pedro y Carlos.” (“Immigration officers deported Don Pedro and Carlos.”) We all worried about them. My missiological reaction was, “Well, at least we evangelized these new Christians, who will return to their families and become a witness for Christ.”

About two or three months later during the Sunday morning worship service, Brother Caceres came to me with a big smile: “Don Pedro and Carlos are back in Fort Worth.” The church recognized and welcomed them back to the flock.

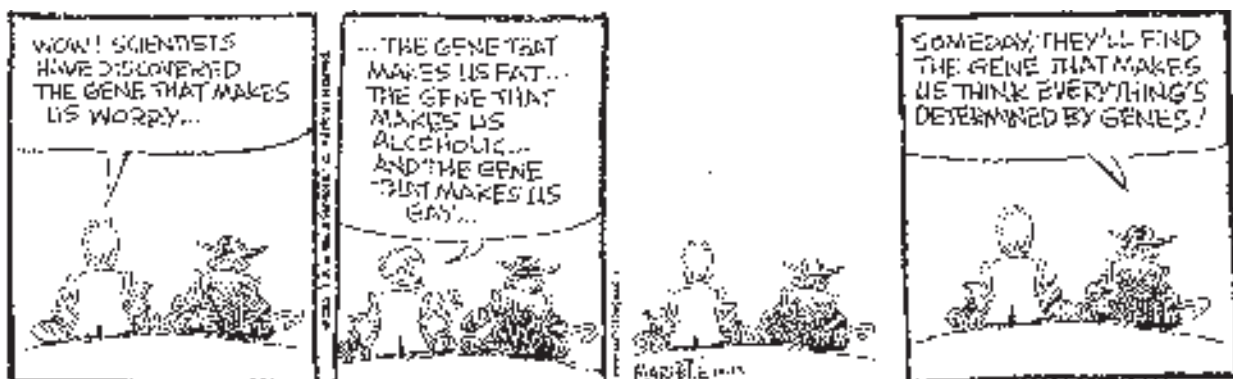
Ever since then, I have kept this story in my heart as a parable of the complexities of illegal aliens in this

country. The pattern of being deported back to Mexico and returning to the U.S. is a recurring theme much alive in the contemporary political, social, and economic landscape of our country.

An American farmer in Yuma Arizona stated on NPR the day President Bush visited the city during his effort to promote legislation related to immigration, “These people work hard in the fields. I pay them \$16 per hour. No National Guard or fences will keep them away. I do not have a way to check whether their papers are legal. They come, work, and then spend their earnings in our city to the tune of \$400,000 per year.”

I wonder if the churches in San Diego, Yuma, El Paso, Laredo, and other border towns between the U.S. and Mexico have the same mission heart and attitude that the Primera Iglesia congregation in Fort Worth did in the 1970s.

In my heart I pray that there will be many illegal aliens baptized and sent back to Mexico as evangelists. Jesus told the demoniac from Gadara, “Go home and tell what great things God has done for you”(Mk 5:19). ■



# The Real Tradition of Women as Church Leaders

By Sandra Dufield, Freelance Writer Bridgeville, PA

In claiming church tradition doesn't allow women to be ordained priests, Vatican and Catholic officials would do well to consider the history of their tradition.

According to Dorothy Irvin, a Catholic theologian and archaeologist, the traditional Christian church had women priests and the archaeological evidence of this is preserved for us to see today.

In the Church of St. Praxedis in Rome there's a mosaic depicting four women leaders. One woman, Theodora (ca. 820 A.D.), has the title *Episcopa* above her head, which means a bishop who is a woman.

In a cathedral at Annaba, in what is now Algeria, is a mosaic covering the tomb of a woman. Along with her name, Guilia Runa, is her title *presbiterissa*, which means female priest. The same title is on women's tombs in Rome. Two read, "Veronica *presbitera* daughter of Josetis" and "Faustina *presbitera*."

Additionally, a fourth-century fresco in Rome's Catacomb of Priscilla shows a woman being ordained. She's wearing an alb under her chasuble, which is first worn at ordination. Only priests and higher church leaders could wear it. Next to her, with his right hand on her shoulder, is a bishop, identified by his chair and his pallium, also worn during ordination.

Although tradition is a key argument used to oppose the ordination

of women, another argument cites the fact the twelve disciples were all male. It contends if Christ wanted women to be church leaders, some of "The Twelve" surely would have been women.

While initially convincing, the rationalization crumbles when another pivotal distinction of the day is considered: ethnicity. The disciples were also all Jewish. Does this mean when we choose church leaders today, only those with primary Jewish ancestry can be considered as candidates?

Every argument the Vatican and other denominational officials give to block women's ordination can be biblically and theologically challenged. Saying "no" to women priests and pastors is nothing more than the "good old boy" system at work in a sacred institution, and the remnant of the survival of sub-Christian thought that leached into the early church, influencing the way men and women were perceived.

Elements of gnostic and ancient pagan thought saw women as flawed, problematic, and more susceptible to malfeasance than men. The early church failed to adequately challenge and eradicate these permeating cultural distortions—in time scripture was interpreted through the contaminated lens of the ontological inferiority of all women.

This attitude is reflected in the statements of prominent early church

leaders such as Thomas Aquinas—"Woman is defective and misbegotten;" Gratian—"Woman is not made in God's image;" and even St. Augustine, who wrote, "What is the difference whither it is in a wife or a mother; it is still Eve the temptress that we must be aware of in any woman. . . I fail to see what use women can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children."

While the inferiority argument is considered heretical in the church today, the unbiblical prejudicial constructs it upheld still exist. They have been replaced and repackaged with expressions like "equal in essence, but unequal in function" and "different roles." The dismissal and diminishment of women has a modern home in the modern church.

Very early church tradition had women serving in all areas of ministry. The restriction of women in the church did not derive from tradition, but from the gradual importation of sub-Christian thought from outside the church, infused into the church.

Until the Vatican and other denominational leaders acknowledge women's call to full discipleship and reinstitute the tradition of women's ordination, they will continue to perpetuate constructs of the heretical thought that diminishes and dismisses half the Christian community based on an innate genetic distinction: femaleness. ■



# CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE MOVIES

*Terrorism: Munich (2005) and Syriana (2005)* By David A. Thomas

These two movies (both rated R) represent Hollywood's first important efforts to engage in a serious discussion about the ethics of terrorism.

Hollywood is "out of touch," actor George Clooney declared at the 2005 Oscar awards ceremony in accepting his statuette for *Syriana*. Referring to civil rights and liberal causes, he went on to praise movie-makers for their history of producing courageous films with bold social and political themes throughout cinematic history. In fact, most mainstream movies are the opposite. Almost all major studio products reflect conservative social values and go to great lengths to avoid being offensive. Movie making is an entertainment industry that necessarily caters to popular tastes and the prevailing winds of public opinion in order to attract the largest audiences in a fiercely competitive market.

That is why most issue-oriented movies are low budget productions by independent producers. They have less to lose.

Some examples of Clooney's "out of touch" movies that are important social texts include the powerful Vietnam War movies, *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now* from the 1980s, a full decade after the U. S. withdrew from Saigon. The Equal Rights Amendment was first proposed in 1921; the one we remember was from 1972. Yet the first breakthrough feminist fable, *Thelma and Louise*, was released in 1991.

This year's *Munich* and *Syriana* represent a couple of Hollywood's preliminary forays into terrorism in the post-9/11 climate. *Syriana* is a product of Participant Productions, a new independent company, which also released *Good Night and Good Luck*, about McCarthyism (another Clooney vehicle). However, *Munich* is a Steven Spielberg movie. For him, to take a controversial stance on a political issue

is a major departure from character. Considering the body of Spielberg's filmography, from *E. T.* through last year's remake of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, no one is more mainstream than he.

Middle Eastern terrorism has been a constant feature of modern history for nearly a century. Zionism was a movement that came into public consciousness in the 1920s. The conflict has been escalating ever since. Israel was recognized in 1948. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964. Western Airlines were hijacked by Arab terrorists in the 1960s. Black September, a PLO terrorist group, kidnapped and murdered eleven Israeli Olympic athletes in 1972.

State sponsored terrorism against the U. S. was initiated by the Hostage Crisis of 1979, when Iranian students held 52 Americans in the U. S. Embassy in Tehran for 444 days. That event influenced the defeat of President Jimmy Carter's re-election bid. Middle Eastern terrorism targeting the U. S., specifically, has been reported increasingly since then. In 1993, a terrorist bomb exploded in the basement of the World Trade Center.

Then came September 11, 2001. President Bush's speech of September 20 identified an individual, Osama bin Laden, as our attacker. From that point forward, the United States has been engaged in a "war against terror," against non-governmental terrorist organizations, as well as so-called "evil" governments. Our tactics include both CIA operations, and the Iraq War that was launched in 2003 and still grinds on today.

Enter Hollywood, getting in touch. *Munich* is not a story about the '72 Olympics tragedy per se. The story line follows the Mossad assassination team which Golda Meir sent after its terrorist perpetrators. Given a list of

nine Black September leaders in the movie, the team manages to complete its mission of cold-blooded revenge against four of them. The drama is about the team members' moral struggles as human beings with the ethics of what they are doing.

*Munich's* underlying theme is that "defending your home is costly." The assassins make up a team of ordinary men selected to be as unremarkable as possible. Their bomb making expert was, in his real life, a toy maker. The team leader's avocation was cooking, and his contact point with his informant was a gourmet kitchen shop. The Palestinian terrorists they pursued were also portrayed as otherwise decent intellectuals and family men.

The movie ends with the team leader, self-retired from the mission, settling into his new home with his young family in a Brooklyn apartment. The movie's final image, ominously, is a shot of the World Trade Center in the middle background.

*Syriana* is set in the present day, in a fictitious Middle Eastern oil country. The plot line is broken down into separate sub-plots that follow the interrelated competing interests of several parties. First, there is a pending merger of two U. S. oil companies with designs on a major Middle East oil field. Next, there is the CIA which sees its mission to be to mastermind the outcome. Next, there is a royal Arab oil family whose two sons have opposite ambitions for their country's future allegiances. One is corrupt, and he wants to stick with America. The CIA, of course, supports him. The other son, more progressive, wants to shift the country's oil exports to China. Embedded within this story line there is a young American energy consultant who sides with the more progressive pretender to the throne, in defiance of the CIA's wishes. George Clooney plays an amoral, entrepreneurial CIA

agent who sells weapons to belligerent parties on the side, one of whom turns out to be a militant Islamic group who plays a big part in what happens next. In the midst of this technodrama, there is that militant Islamic group that is determined to attack the American oil company by means of a young, idealistic suicide bomber.

**Christian Ethical Issues about Terrorism:** These two movies represent Hollywood's first serious efforts to get involved and engage in a serious discussion of the ethics of terrorism. These narratives use stories told by Hollywood's icons to engage both sides in a discussion of such questions as these:

What about state-supported lethal covert assassination teams? What about the CIA's covert warfare? What is the Western piece in the provocation of terrorist responses? What about fundamentalist Islamists carrying their faith through the instrumentality of suicide bombers? What about American dependence on Middle East oil? What about the Iraq War? Is the U. S. now resuming a proactive military role as world cop? Are terrorists merely armed Islamic freedom fighters?

For all of us, where is Christ in our discussion of these issues of global oil politics, war, and terrorism?

## **War: Apocalypse Now** (1979, rated R)

The best movie class I ever attended was conducted by Paul Porterfield, media director at the University of Richmond. I invited Mr. Porterfield, an amateur film buff, to be the guest speaker one day for my class in rhetoric and film. He focused the entire class period on the brief opening montage of *Apocalypse Now*. That introductory sequence packs many images into one continuous pan shot of an air assault team dropping napalm on a Vietnamese jungle. Many of those images are subliminal, as the clip fades several double-exposures in and out of view. It sets the motif for the entire 153-minute movie.

The movie was almost never finished. Francis Ford Coppola began filming without having his production money fully committed. To meet the budget, he set a preliminary six-week filming timeline. Things worked out differently than he hoped. It took sixteen months to make the movie. Unforeseen problems caused major delays. He was constantly scrambling to find new backers while trying to keep the production underway, and he wound up fronting several million dollars out of pocket, literally gambling everything he owned on it.

Much of the Coppola's script was in rough shape as filming began, so he was constantly editing and re-writing it. More than a few scenes were improvised while the cameras rolled, including most famously the hypnotic opening scene. You get drawn into it as if you were watching a poisonous snake loose in your room. We are introduced to Coppola's little-known leading actor, Martin Sheen, as Capt. Willard, reeling about in his underwear in a seedy Saigon hotel room. He broke a bureau mirror with his fist while he flailed about, drunk out of his mind. In fact, he actually lacerated his hand during the take, because the mirror was real glass. And he really was staggering drunk.

For his small but important role as Col. Kurtz, Marlon Brando demanded a million dollar fee in advance. He then pulled one of his trademark artistic diva stunts, showing up late for work and 75 pounds overweight. He had not read the script or the novel on which it was based. Once on the set, Brando fussed obsessively over his super-weird role, demanding line changes and special camera set-ups, further delaying the proceedings.

On top of those problems, Sheen suffered a major heart attack halfway through the production, too late to replace him with Harvey Keitel or another actor. Sheen's brother was flown to the location and used in a few scenes, shown from his back. When filming resumed, a typhoon destroyed the set, causing numerous other delays stretching over several more months.

**The Story.** Based somewhat on Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the plot is structured as a simple journey or quest, much like *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Canterbury Tales*, but with a tragic tone. The protagonist, Captain Willard, is on a mission to locate and "terminate with extreme prejudice" Col. Kurtz, a rogue Army officer turned delusional god-like dictator, who proves to be an elusive quarry. The story consists of numerous episodes of what happens to Capt. Willard and his crew along the way, like stringing pearls on a necklace. Willard's trek up-river is often subjected to enemy ambushes and an occasional Playboy Bunny USO tour. Using such a plot device, countless other quest stories have been made into successful films. That's nothing new.

When Col. Kilgore (Robert Duvall) cranks up the volume on *The Ride of the Valkyries* during his harrowing helicopter assault on the Viet Cong village, he signals the movie's overall operatic qualities. Willard's mission turned into a sprawling, lengthy struggle far beyond killing Kurtz. It became a personal quest to master one's own fate.

**Hitting the Movie Lottery.** One consequence of Coppola's creative technique was that after seeing all the disparate scenes he had "in the can," he could not think of a suitable ending. Three endings were filmed. Coppola shopped an unfinished version of one of his prints at the Cannes Film Festival as a work-in-progress. Much to his surprise, they gave his work the Golden Palm. *Apocalypse Now* subsequently received eight Oscar nominations, and won two. Coppola was nominated as Best Director. The movie, the screenplay, and the editing all were nominated. Among other awards, both Coppola and Duvall received Golden Globes. The American Film Institute has listed *Apocalypse Now* as Number 38 in its list of the Top 250 movies of all time.

*Coppola's Personal Heart of Darkness.* Roger Ebert's original review of the movie predicted that graduate students would be cataloguing the images



and metaphors in *Apocalypse Now* for years to come, but there is only one idea in it – that War is Hell.<sup>1</sup> Coppola thought he was using Conrad’s literary boat trip up the Congo into “the heart of darkness” as a metaphor for the U. S. getting drawn into the Vietnam quagmire. But at that stage in his life, Coppola was using booze, and drugs, and womanizing, to assuage his own psychological and spiritual imbalances. Unfortunately, his problems were not helped by his being the central figure in the middle of an multi-million dollar moviemaking project that was spiraling way out of control. Coppola seriously contemplated suicide on more than one occasion. He lost one hundred pounds before his multifarious ordeal was over.

In the making of the film, Coppola was drawn into a metaphoric descent into his own spiritual darkness, where he encountered his own personal Hell at every turn. The violent, chaotic images that adorned Coppola’s epic were subconscious depictions of his own spiritual disarray. How does a movie that was such a disaster in the making turn into one of the greatest war movies of all time? As a Vietnam

movie, the plot is riddled with holes and historical goofs. But as one man’s symbolic quest for redemption in a world without much meaning, *Apocalypse Now* still speaks to a many viewers.

**Christian Ethical Issues.** What are the Christian ethical issues suggested by *Apocalypse Now*?

First, there is the classic “heart of darkness” motif that constitutes the backbone of both Conrad’s novel and Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Kurtz is Satan incarnate, and Willard is possessed. Kurtz is the Great White Whale; Willard is Ahab. His mission is a mission of self-exorcism.

Second, as an allegory, Coppola intended for Col. Kurtz to represent the megalomaniacal Vietnam war policies of Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. (Remember, *Apocalypse Now* was the first movie to criticize the war. *Platoon* and others came later.) Capt. Willard stands in for the campus antiwar movement, trying to bring them down and turn them around. The crew on Capt. Willard’s river patrol boat for his mission was a miniaturized cross section of San Francisco’s Haight-Asbury scene’s

hippie generation. The Vietnam War, in short, was a story about America’s “heart of darkness,” her demonic possession, during the 1960s and 1970s.

What were the “lessons of Vietnam?” Many conservative politicians and military hardliners would say that the biggest lesson was all about matching the correct tactics to the mission. The war was lost, but it should have been won. *Apocalypse Now* as a social text says the Vietnam War itself was a national psychic episode reflecting our own heart of darkness in the world. Christian ethical analysis of American foreign and military policies and actions since then might argue that we still have to study whether it is the proper business of our country to undertake unilateral military interventions halfway around the world. ■

1 Roger Ebert, *Apocalypse Now*, Chicago Sun-Times, June 1, 1979.

*David A. Thomas is Associate Professor of Rhetoric, Emeritus, from the University of Richmond. He retired in 2004 and now resides in Sarasota, FL. He may be reached at davidthomas1572@comcast.net*



# Either Way

By Nathan Brown

There comes a point  
when one chooses between  
“something” and “nothing.”

If you choose nothing,  
there’s really no need to get  
upset or waste any time  
railing against those who  
have chosen something.

God is there, or he isn’t.  
Something is going on,  
or it isn’t.

If someone chooses nothing,  
I have a hard time understanding  
an ounce of energy expended on  
convincing those who believe  
there’s something, that  
they are woefully misguided,  
because there’s actually nothing.

If there is indeed nothing,  
thinking, or wanting to believe,  
there’s something is really of no consequence.  
One just toys along with his  
or her idea of something  
and eventually dies into  
nothing.

No loss . . .

But if one chooses something,  
I’m afraid there’s work  
to be done—because now,  
reaching, seeking, hoping,  
believing and dying . . .  
and living . . . matter.

And—if there is something,  
how can one who  
believes in nothing blame  
The one who believes in something  
for trying to express to the  
one who believes in nothing  
that there just might be something  
to this something-thing?

Why wouldn’t the something-  
people want to share with  
the nothing-people that there’s  
something more than the  
nothing of 500 cable channels?

Either way . . .  
I think I’ve made  
my choice. ■

*This poem is from Nathan Brown’s new book, “Suffer Little Voices” (Greystone Press, 2005). The book is a finalist for the 2006 Oklahoma Book Award. Nathan is currently an adjunct lecturer in English at the University of Oklahoma and may be reached at [HYPERLINK “mailto:nub@ou.edu” nub@ou.edu](mailto:nub@ou.edu).*

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# The Religion Show

By Al Staggs, Chaplain and Performing Artist Sante Fe, NM

We can keep "In God We Trust" on our coins,  
Retain "One nation under God" in our pledge,  
Place the commandments on every courthouse lawn,  
Pray at every class in our schools

And go to church every Sunday  
To pray for our troops and pledge allegiance to our nation's flag  
Which stands prominently and proudly in the center  
Of our halls of worship,

But it doesn't change the fact  
That we, as a nation, are waging monstrous terror.

It wasn't God that the 50,000 Iraqi victims  
Saw in our impressive campaign of 'shock and awe.'  
It isn't God that the world sees in our readiness  
To spread 'freedom' and 'democracy' at the end of a gun barrel.

It isn't God that the poor of the world sees  
As we wage war solely for corporate interests  
And to prop up our lavish lifestyles.

We can profess Jesus as our Savior  
All we want.

Yet profession without practice is empty,  
Piosity without peacemaking is meaningless.  
Promoting family values without pursuing justice  
Is hypocrisy.  
It's all just words, hollow words.

For the greatest evils are those which are committed in the name of God  
And for that reason, those who advocate war, those who find security  
In their 'profession' of faith in God,  
Suffer from the most acute delusions.

We go to war and victimize thousands  
And say 'Lord, Lord.'  
We send our poorest children to combat  
And we say 'Lord, Lord.'  
We demonize Muslims  
And say 'Lord, Lord.'  
We build our massive temples of worship  
And say 'Lord, Lord.'

Yet our faith is as empty as those temples are  
On Monday morning.

We may have to wait till the judgment  
To hear the Lord answer,  
"Get away from me, I never knew you." ■

# 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 five 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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